



From Coping to Cure

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LESSON 5: SIN HAS NOT BEEN ELIMINATED AS OF THE DATE OF PUBLICATION OF THIS COURSE

THOUGHT STARTER:

If you don't know what sin is, you will inevitably suffer from its effects and probably wonder why!

The wages of sin is death.

Romans 6:23, NKJV

He will save His people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21, NKJV

One day I walked out to the plant with another engineer named Al. He said, "You seem to be happier lately, and you don't enter into the gripe sessions about the boss any more. What happened?" He took me by surprise. I had no idea there was any noticeable change since I had asked Christ to take away my anger. I made a feeble effort to explain my quest for help, but as a young Christian, I didn't understand what had happened very clearly myself.

"Can you help my wife and me? We are two miserable people," he said.

Well, my struggle had been very personal to me. I had no interest in getting involved in other people's lives. But his question was a challenge. Since I did research routinely as part of my work, I asked him to give me some time to study and research what had happened to me.

TELLING OTHERS ABOUT THE CHANGE IN ME

Finally, I had worked up a presentation and told him I was ready. My wife Eva and I invited Al and his wife to come to our house for one evening. When we sat down together, I reminded them that this "change" in my life only happened a few weeks ago.

I had no idea how long it would last. Briefly, I told them that several years ago I had asked Jesus to come into my life and save me from my sins. Lately, I had asked Him to cleanse the anger and hate out of my heart, and as I understood it, He gave me the strength to be kind and tenderhearted on a daily basis.

I told them, "To tell the truth, I feel rather foolish telling you this. It seems as if I should be able to manage my own life, but I can't."

They both had tears in their eyes. They thought it was a wonderful story. I didn't want to get sidetracked from my presentation, so I said, "Let's look at what I have prepared."

I started out in the Garden of Eden. I took them through Moses' problems and the kings and the prophets (I wanted to be thorough). I touched on a few psalms. This took a couple of hours and pretty soon I moved into the New Testament and the gospel. I explained to them that Christ came into this world, and He loved the world so much that He died for us. And then I very generally asked them if they were ready to receive Christ. He said, "You know, I was ready an hour ago."

We all prayed rather awkwardly.

I have boiled my presentation down a little bit since then, but Al and Goldie became children of God and the first people I ever introduced to Jesus. Their marriage was healed. They became active in a church and never turned back. I still see Al occasionally. Goldie and Eva are with the Lord.

This experience with Al and Goldie opened up a whole new vista of opportunity for my wife and me that we never knew existed. We developed a hunger to know the Bible and share with other people. We had been going to church regularly and went to Sunday school, but in making preparation to talk with Al, I became aware of huge gaps in my biblical knowledge. The biggest gap was that I didn't know the meaning of sin.

My wife and I began to do research into what is the nature of sin. We found the definition of sin in the dictionary: an offense against God. But we quickly discovered the subject was broader and deeper than we ever dreamed it would be. In just five scriptures in the Bible we found over fifty sins listed. (See Appendix for a more complete list of sins and related scriptures.)

THE NATURE OF SIN

We grouped the sins against God into four categories in order to understand them (see table 2). The more we studied these lists, the more excited we became! We discovered that if we could eliminate our sins, we would solve most of our own problems and most of the ills of society, including the breakdown of the family, domestic violence, child abuse, rape, murder, violence, political deception, and personal misery.

Table 2: Four Categories of Sins	
1. Sins of the Mind	evil thoughts unforgiveness unthankfulness selfish ambition pride deceitfulness covetousness greed lust
2. Sinful Emotions	jealousy anger malice envy bad temper unloving attitude hatred rebelliousness bitterness
3. Sins of the Mouth	lying backbiting complaining contentiousness disputing blaspheming slandering yelling boasting quarreling
4. Sins of Behavior	disobedience to parents brutality lack of self-control stealing adultery murder fornication violence drunkenness revelry

Evil thoughts, lust, and covetousness can lead to premarital sex and adultery. Lying, backbiting, quarreling, anger, and rebellion can lead to brutal violent behavior and even murder. Clearly someone with a brilliant mind who is consumed by greed, selfish ambition, and deception can devise ways to misuse the stock market or government funds.

I looked at these lists as a huge mirror and stepped up to it to see what it would reflect in me. Considering my past problems with my boss, my wife, and my child, it was hard to accept what I saw: evil thoughts, unthankfulness, pride, unforgiveness, deceitfulness, anger, bitterness, rebellion, lying, complaining, yelling, and quarreling. Imagine anyone walking around with all that inside. The simple yet profound statement that the blood of Jesus Christ can wash it all away is exciting! Is it really that simple? It is so easy that it insults our secular intelligence. Everyone, except those who try it, says: "That is much too simple." But the good news about these lists is that we are just a prayer away from help!

One Sunday morning I arrived early at the church where I was to speak. There was only one person in the auditorium. She was in front of the platform, arranging flowers in a basket. Perhaps a dozen varieties of flowers were masterfully arranged so that each flower was displayed at its best; colorful and delicate. The arrangement couldn't have been more beautiful.

My mind raced back to my boyhood. I could see my mother in her flower gardens. She just loved to raise many, many varieties of flowers. In those days, all I could see was flowerbeds that needed weeding. My mother could see magnificent baskets of masterfully arranged flowers gracing the platform of our church. Every Sunday during flower season, I had to share the back seat of the car with these bouquets. Mom was so excited at the chance to display God's magnificent creation for the praise and adoration of the Creator.

With my mother in mind, I approached the platform and said to the lady, "You sure have done a beautiful job arranging these flowers."

She turned around. I saw an angry-looking woman who growled, "I do it every Sunday. I am stuck with this job. No one else will do it. I'm sick and tired of getting up early enough to be the first one here." She wasn't really talking to me. She was venting an angry, rebellious spirit. She sputtered on to remark that no one appreciated her work.

"Who are you?" she asked, suddenly realizing that she was talking to a stranger. "I'm the visiting speaker," I replied. "Oh," she gasped. "Oh. Welcome to our church." It was an awkward, embarrassing moment for both of us. The mood of the moment didn't fit the beauty of the flowers and the fragrance in the air.

Later, from the platform, I noticed the same lady. She seemed radiant and cheerful; a note in the bulletin gave her credit for the flowers. Even though she was deceptively charming, she was still suffering from the consequences of sin and didn't know it.

If she were to stand before the list of sins, she would need to check off anger, rebellion, and deception. If she would repent and ask God to clean up her heart, she would be able to rejoice and enjoy the privilege of meeting with the Lord alone on Sunday morning as she worships in His presence by working with the beautiful, fragrant flowers He created.

What a pity to let sin steal away such a privilege when cleansing of the heart is just a prayer away.

The Bible cautioned us not to kid ourselves:

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13, NKJV)

If you aren't going to call the list in this chapter sin, then you will look to the world around you for the cause and the solution for items on the list. But if it is sin, then you are looking at the simplest problem in the world to solve. You have the resources of the Creator of the world to help you. There is a supernatural cure for everyone. We don't have to avoid the problem or run away to try to get relief:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9, NKJV)

Lesson: We tend to deny or ignore the existence of sin.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Review the thought starter at the beginning of the chapter. What thoughts were started?
 - Review the lead Bible verse. What does it say to you? Did you observe yourself in relation to the verse? Did you observe others in relation to the verse? Did you find any additional verses?
 - What is your response to the lesson at the end of the chapter?
1. Review each category of sin (based on Mark 7:21-23, Romans 1:28-31, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:25-31, and 2 Timothy 3:1-5).
 2. How do we deal with sin when we see it in our life?
 3. Can you add to each category, with support from the Bible?

4. Check your newspaper and note sinful behavior reported that day.

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