

#201 “Are Some Sins Worse than Others?”

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The Bible is clear that we all, apart from Christ, deserve to go to hell because we are born with a sin nature and, thus, we sin. As Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The consequences for sin, regardless of its kind, is eternal death and damnation in hell. Luke 12:10 says, “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him” (see also Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-27). The only sin that is not forgivable is sinning against the Holy Spirit. At one point or another in each of our lives we have the chance to respond to God in Christ (Matthew 22:14). Those who reject the call and conviction of the Spirit in their hearts by choosing to blaspheme Him cannot be saved. All other sins could be forgiven no matter their severity because God paid for all when Jesus died on the cross. Even righteous King David committed adultery and murder, and still he will enter heaven. He repented, he was forgiven, and he loved the Lord. All Christians stumble (James 3:2), some more than others and some in more severe ways than others (1 Timothy 1:18-20). However, if our lives are a practice of sin rather than a lifestyle of righteousness (1 John 3:9), we should question our salvation. There should be change, for good trees product good fruit, not evil fruit (Matthew 7:17-20). All sin can be forgiven us if we repent and turn to Christ, but rejecting Him will certainly bring us eternal death and torment.

Though all sins carry with them the same eternal penalty, God does not view them all as being of equal severity. Some sins are more heinous than others. For example, in John 19:11, we read, “Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’” Jesus said that Pilate sinned by allowing Jesus to be sentenced to death. However, those who rejected Him and asked for His death, namely, the Jewish leaders and the crowd whom they swayed, were more guilty because they committed a greater sin. Of all people, the Jews, especially those who studied the Old Testament for a living, should have known and recognized Christ as the Messiah. Yet they called for His death because He convicted them of their sin and challenged their positions of power. They knew better, and, thus, they were more accountable. In other words, our level of accountability is directly proportional to the level of our understanding. James 3:1 says, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” Those who teach God’s Word are more accountable because, of all people, they should know best what it says. Otherwise, they shouldn’t be teaching. Furthermore, they are responsible for leading others in the right way or the wrong way, and thus their greater influence makes them more accountable. Even if Pilate had refused to allow Jesus to be crucified, the Jewish leaders had already swayed the masses against Him. They used their influence to advance evil, and their accountability was great. Some sins are greater than others because of their impact and because of the degree to which a person should know better. In other words, sins of rebellion are worse than sins committed in ignorance. However, all sin is serious and enough to render our prayers unheard by God (Psalm 66:18). We must take all sin seriously as God does.

If we steal a pen from work and we feel guilty, we can easily alleviate our guilt by returning the pen. But if we sleep with another person's husband or wife, we have done irreparable damage to ourselves, to the person we slept with, and to their mate. No amount of words of apology can change the damage that has been done. Surely, it can be forgiven, but the memories, the feelings, the distrust, and much other baggage remains. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." Sexual sin in particular stays with us, and as such, it must be viewed as more serious than some other sins. There is a reason that God instituted civil laws in the Old Testament that had the penalty of death for adultery, incest, and rape, for example, but not for stealing (Leviticus 20:10, 12; Deuteronomy 22:25; Exodus 22:1). Some sins do more damage emotionally, spiritually, mentally, financially, and societally than others. Some sin impacts more people than others, and some sin is more dangerous than others. Drunkenness is one thing, and accidentally killing an innocent person while driving drunk is another. Both sins can be forgiven, but the practical consequences of each are far, far different. This is just the practical reality of sin, and God is fully aware of these things. Thus, He desires that we avoid it at all costs for our own good and for His glory.

The best practice for us is to follow the commands of Romans 12:9, which says, "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." The stronger our feelings against sin and the stronger our desire for righteousness, the better off we will be, now and in eternity.