

Two Types of Sin

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #14)

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”

(1 John 3:4)

In yesterday's devotional we saw how Adam and Eve failed to fulfill the Covenant of Works by committing an act of cosmic insurrection. They did the one thing that God had commanded them not to do. In an attempt to usurp God's position, and become the sovereigns of their own lives, Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though the Lord had warned them that in doing so they would bring misery and death to all mankind. You can imagine how this action broke the heart of our Holy God as He watched the crown of His creation, those that had been created in His image, reject His authority and break covenant with the One who created them and loved them. It's in Genesis chapter 3 that we find the very first occurrence of sin.

The word “*sin*” is very familiar to us. If you grew up going to church, chances are you've heard the word “*sin*” literally hundreds of times. In fact, the word “*sin*” is used approximately 500 times throughout the Old and New Testaments. From Genesis all the way to the end of the Bible, sin is found all over the place! But what is “*sin*” exactly? Our catechism gives us a very helpful definition by saying that “*sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way*”. We'll take a look at this definition piece by piece so that we can understand it more fully.

First of all, we learn that “*sin is disobeying...God's Law in any way*”. As we know all too well, to disobey is the opposite of obedience. The word “*obey*” comes from the Latin word “*oboedire*” which is a combination of two different words. The word “*ob*” means “*to move in the direction of*” and the word “*audire*” means “*to hear*”. In other words, to “*obey*” is to “*pay attention to*” or to “*listen to someone*”. If we add the prefix “*dis*” (meaning “*to refuse*”) to the word obey, we see that to disobey is to refuse to listen. This is the first type of sin that we commit as human beings. First and foremost, we as human beings can be guilty of *disobeying or refusing to listen to*, God's law. This is what we call sins of “*commission*”. A sin of *commission* is when we know that God has commanded us to do something in

His Word, and instead of endeavoring to follow God's command, we shut our ears and close our eyes, willfully deciding to refuse to walk in obedience. God's moral law (*found in sections of the Bible such as the Ten commandments or Jesus' sermon on the mount*) tells us that we are to honor the Sabbath day (*4th commandment*), be honest in all our dealings (*9th commandment*) and be content with the things God has given us (*10th commandment*). When we refuse to obey these commands we are guilty of sins of commission.

But our catechism gives us yet another description of what sin is by stating, "*sin is...not conforming to God's law in any way.*" In other words, not only do we sin when we disobey God's laws explicitly, we are also guilty of sin when we fail to do that which we know God would want us to do. We call these types of sins, sins of *omission*. For example, a sin of commission would include committing the act of murder (*a direct violation of the 6th commandment*), but a sin of omission would include not helping someone when you know they are in trouble. Think about Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. In this parable Jesus tells a story about a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and on the way was attacked by a group of thieves who beat him up, and left him naked and at the brink of death on the side of the road. And what happens next in Jesus' story? Jesus tells of a priest and a Levite who pass by the man lying on the side of the road but fail to help him. These two men were guilty of the sin of omission. Sure they hadn't hurt the man and left him for dead, but by failing to help someone in need, they were guilty of "*not conforming to God's law*" by loving their neighbor.

Take some time today to take an inventory of your life to discern where you seem to struggle the most with sin. In what ways are you currently struggling with sins of commission? With sins of omission? Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you the power and the zeal to fight your sin and become more obedient to God's laws.

Dig Even Deeper into God's Word!

Leviticus 5:17

James 4:17

Luke 10:25-37