

“Acceptable” Sins

Introduction. I was at home because of a snow day on January 28, 1986 in Tennessee the first time I watched the tragic explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger. The first question everyone wanted to know was, “What happened?”

After months of investigation, the Rogers Commission (the group commissioned to investigate the explosion) discovered that an o-ring seal in the right solid rocket booster failed at take-off. An o-ring is a very small, seemingly insignificant device relative to the size of a space shuttle.

There is a lesson here for Christians. What if the big sins — the ones you try hardest to avoid — are not the greatest threat to you going to Heaven? Maybe it is the sins lying underneath, the ones considered normal or acceptable, the ones going undetected, that are affecting us the most. David cried in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” To that end, we will investigate six of these “under the radar” sins.

I. Fear

- A. The phrases “do not fear” and “do not be afraid” appear 365 times in the Bible. Ironic? I think not. And here’s what I think Christians miss about fear.
 - 1. Let me pose this as a question. What is the opposite of fear? Fearlessness? Courage? Bravery?
 - 2. The opposite of fear is love. Add to this the reality that God is love. So, according to the Transitive property of mathematics, the opposite of fear is God. If you are a child of God, the one sin that should not plague you is fear (1 John 4:18).
- B. But sadly, Christians are some of the most fearful people on earth. God’s people throughout time were way too full of fear (Joshua 7:5; Isaiah 51:12-13; 2 Timothy 4:16). The church is scared to make decisions because of fear. Christians are hesitant to step into unknown, uncertain situations because of fear. Where is the love of brethren and of lost sinners?
- C. Maybe I need to remove the “fear,” “scared,” and “terrified” from my vocabulary, and maybe you should too. It could change how we see the world and God.

II. Apathy

- A. There is nothing mediocre or normal about God. The psalms declare that His power is beyond comprehension; His beauty is beyond description; His love is beyond measure. The same God who created the universe and formed stars wants you to be in a relationship with Him through obedience to Christ.
- B. Yet, the attitude is often, “Okay, God loves me. That’s great. What’s for lunch?” People in scripture struggled in one way or the other with apathy (Amos 6:1; Revelation 2:14-16, 20-24; 3:1-3, 14-16). And our apathetic approach to God explains a lot about why people in America are not eager to become Christians.
- C. How many Christians have you met that left you thinking, “Wow, I want to be like them?” But this should be the norm! You should be so transformed by God that people want to ask about your life, even if they never really thought about God. In Scripture, when men and women come to know God, everything changes.

They pledge allegiance to the kingdom of Christ and never turn back to wickedness (Luke 11:23; Romans 6:7; cp. Luke 9:62).

III. Worry

- A. The philosopher Van Wilder said, “Worrying is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere.” It is true, but Van Wilder is not the only one who talked about worry. Jesus said you should not worry about anything (Matthew 6:25-34).
- B. But Jesus was not serious was He? He was serious! You see, worrying is symptomatic of a larger issue — a lack of faith (Psalm 37:5; 55:22; Hebrews 13:5). And for followers of Jesus whose primary mission is to show the glory and nature of God to the world (1 Peter 2:9), worrying is a problem.
- C. My greatest concern is that we do not want to need God. We are Americans and we are independent. Americans will do anything to maintain the illusion of control and responsibility, so no wonder worry plagues us. Worry is the by-product of bearing a weight that God intended to bear.
- D. Do you see the irony here? The more independence you desire, the more worry you will experience. So why not trust God, follow Him, and let His peace reign over your life (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6-7)?

IV. Flattery

- A. There is nothing wrong with the spotlight, but there is a lot wrong with making yourself the center of it. If your identity is tied to man’s praise, you will be constantly discontent (2 Corinthians 10:12). People are fickle. They are here today and gone tomorrow. They are for you one day, against you the next. They love you when you agree with them, dislike you when you do not. Be honest, it is hard to point people to Jesus if you need their approval.
- B. Yet, we love human praise. Exhibit A: Instagram, SnapChat, and Facebook. While I like social media, they are also platforms that perpetuate flattery and selfishness. You post pictures about your life hoping the world will “like” it. Who cares if it is not the real you? You need the approval. So, even if you need 30 minutes to find that perfect selfie, it is worth the time.
- C. Jesus, however, did not need the praise and glory of men. He did not care what they thought. His only concern was doing the will of God (John 8:29) and giving Himself for the benefit of mankind (Matthew 20:28). This attitude is what the world desperately needs to see, not flattery (1 Corinthians 10:24, 33; cp. Psalm 12:2-4; Proverbs 5:3; 7:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6).

V. Lying

- A. Lying is so socially acceptable, even among Christians, that it often goes undetected. We are desensitized to it. And here is why this is dangerous for Christians.
 - 1. There is a rarely-discussed passage in Matthew 5:33-37 where Jesus confronts the Pharisees about oaths. Most Americans only hear the word “oath” when a celebrity lies while under oath.

2. But Jesus is not talking about oaths in this passage. He is talking about integrity. You should live with such high integrity that your word does not need attachments to make it real. So, typical phrases like, “I promise,” “I swear,” and “I put it on my mom’s grave” should never come from your mouth.
 3. How serious is this? Jesus says anything more than our word is from the evil one, Satan (cp. John 8:44).
- B. People lie to make themselves sound better. People lie to stay out of trouble. People lie to get ahead. Lying was a problem the prophets had to address (Hosea 7:13; Micah 6:12). If you are like me, you innocently say words all the time and never follow through.
 - C. Jesus says there is no place for that if you are a Christian. Your word matters. If you say something, God expects you to do it. It is better to tell the truth and lose your job than lie and keep it (Psalm 119:163; Proverbs 12:22; 13:5).

VI. Self-Righteousness

- A. Pride is insidious because it invades every facet of a person’s life. It takes glory away from God, and leads inevitably to a downfall (Proverbs 16:18-19). Arrogance is the first step (Proverbs 12:15; 28:26; Luke 15:11-13).
- B. Pride destroys a kind and caring spirit (cp. Proverbs 31:26; Luke 6:30), which leads to abasement (Proverbs 29:23; Luke 14:11; 18:14). Pride furthermore creates an ugly, egotistical, holier-than-thou, arrogant, superior spirit. This is the kind of spirit that looks down at the sinner instead of being sick over their sin (Luke 18:9-12).

Conclusion. Sometimes the undetected sins are the most toxic. My hope is you will see this as an opportunity to repent and grow. Shun the “big” ones, and stay away from the “small” ones too.