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Edited by
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SIN

Sin is willful wrongdoing. James indicates that it can also be the willful failure to do right: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (4:17). Sin is transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4), but one is not held responsible for sins against a law that one has not had opportunity to know. Orson F. Whitney, an apostle, explained:

Sin is the transgression of divine law, as made known through the conscience or by revelation. A man sins when he violates his conscience, going contrary to light and knowledge—not the light and knowledge that has come to his neighbor, but that which has come to himself. He sins when he does the opposite of what he knows to be right. Up to that point he only blunders. One may suffer painful consequences for only blundering, but he cannot commit sin unless he knows better than to do the thing in which the sin consists. One must have a conscience before he can violate it [pp. 241–42].

God does not hold one responsible for wrong done in ignorance or harm done to others unintentionally, because such actions do not constitute sin. One's ignorance, immaturity, or even recklessness may injure others, and individuals may be accountable for the consequences they help to bring about. But in such situations, where there is no ill intent, there is no sin. This does not mean that people who do wrong in ignorance do not suffer, perhaps physically or in their relationships with others. Moreover, when one becomes aware of having contributed to problems, it usually would be considered sin to avoid making amends or to refuse to help correct the difficulties created.

The Greek verb used in the New Testament meaning "to sin" is *hamartanein*. This word invokes the imagery of the archer, and can mean "to miss the mark." When people sin, they look "beyond the mark" toward inferior or selfish goals. The scriptures define mankind's high mark or calling as "that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25). God, who experiences a fulness of joy (cf. 3 Ne. 28:10),

may be trusted to know the proper way to bliss. He offers to his children all that he has. He sent his Son to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). To sin knowingly is to transgress or overstep the borders of the way to peace and happiness, and to reject the mission of the Savior.

All mortals inherently possess hearts that can be attuned to depths of love, peace, and purity (cf. Moro. 7:14–18). But through sin (intentionally doing wrong), humans obliterate joy and foster hatred, violence, and misery (see 2 Ne. 2:26–27; Mosiah 3:19; Hel. 14:30–31). Sin wastes, corrupts, saddens, and destroys. It extinguishes the "perfect brightness of hope" offered by Christ (2 Ne. 31:20) and replaces it with despair (Moro. 10:22). Its sting does not enliven or gladden the heart, but awakens "a lively sense of . . . guilt" (Mosiah 2:38), which is an unwished-for but inescapable consequence for the unrepentant.

The first taste of sin is bitter. As children mature, "sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter" (Moses 6:55). However, experimentation with sin is deceptively addictive. Even as a person's spiritual sensitivities dim; the sting may seem to diminish in time. Things are not as they seem to one in sin. It is as though one sleeps. The repetition of sin (known in the scriptures as wickedness) clouds one's view, and the effects of sin are more bitter with the progressive passing of life. Isaiah compares it to "when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty" (Isa. 29:8). And PAUL noted, sinners "being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19).

Sin includes the willful breaking of covenants with God. It ruptures family and social relationships, creates disorder and mistrust, and encourages the selfish pursuit of one's own ends to the detriment of the community. Covenants give a sense of stability and permanence—they signal what to expect from one another. But sin creates uncertainty and instability. It never leads to the happiness expected, but to disappointment. As Jacob testified, breaking covenants creates suffering for the innocent: "Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives . . .; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. . . . Many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds" (Jacob 2:35).

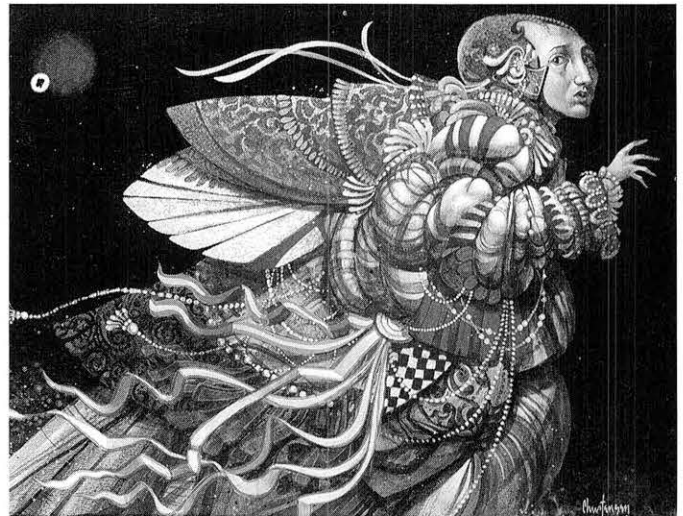
Sins are expressions of living in resistance to God and the things of the spirit. "A man being evil

cannot do that which is good” (Moro. 7:10), because his behavior springs from a hard or bitter heart. One can quit “being” evil only through a change of heart; it is not just a modification or control of external actions (cf. Mosiah 5:2–15). The truth is either received or resisted. When the woman of Samaria who talked with the Savior at the well reported her conversation to others, she said, “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did” (John 4:29). What the Savior told her included her current sins—“and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband” (John 4:18). Yet, she received his declarations; she accepted his testimony that he was the Christ and invited her friends to see for themselves (John 4:25–26, 29). Had she been hard-hearted, or had she clung to her sins, she would not have accepted his statements about her, or his testimony of his own divinity. She would not have come to the road of repentance and forgiveness.

To escape the effects of sin, mankind must both accept the ATONEMENT and repent. AMULEK, a Book of Mormon prophet, explains that the Atonement saves men *from* their sins, not *in* them (Alma 11:37). It is in large measure one’s own sins that produce feelings of affliction and despair, perhaps more than what one suffers from the wrongs received from others. Mortals are punished *by* their sins rather than *for* them. This condition is described in the scriptures as the “bondage of sin” (D&C 84:49–51; Morm. 8:31).

Those in this bondage live in opposition to the two great commandments upon which hang all the law and the prophets: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” and “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37, 39). If these are the greatest of commandments, then perhaps the most debilitating sin is a refusal to love. Selfishness, greed, envy, pride, self-righteousness, resentment, hostility, smugness, self-pity, and lust are all ways of refusing to love. The allowance often asked for by sinners regarding these may contribute more to negative family relationships or even the level of crime in a society than supposed. Discourtesy can escalate to hostility, which in turn can escalate to violence.

Sinners are offended by the truth and find it a burden, as when LAMAN and Lemuel, after having the plan of salvation rehearsed to them by their brother NEPHI₁, complained, “Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to



Sinner Fleeing Judgment (1977, acrylic on masonite, 18" × 24") was painted by LDS artist James Christensen (b. 1942). The fantasy work depicts an anxious figure whose investment in worldly treasure—represented by luxurious clothing—has woven a varicolored trap that slows flight and leaves no escape. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Brigham Young University.

bear” (1 Ne. 16:1). Those refusing to live the truth rationalize and justify their wrongdoing. Cain, already having committed murder, responded to the Lord’s inquiry about Abel’s whereabouts by lying (“I know not”), and then hypocritically challenging God: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9; Moses 5:34).

Sin blinds one to the truth in any given situation. Nathan the prophet told king David a story of a man who possessed many flocks of sheep, but who, nevertheless, slaughtered the pet ewe lamb of a poor family to feed a guest. David was incensed. He judged that such a man should restore to the wronged family fourfold and be executed. Nathan declared: “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7). Spiritually blinded by his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11), David no longer saw himself as he was seen by the prophet or, apparently, by anyone willing to examine the situation on the basis of the Lord’s commandments.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him [Christ], and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: . . . If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:6, 8). When a truth is not lived, it is seen falsely. Even personal guilt for sin is seen by the unrepent-

ant as having been placed on them by someone else, and not as a symptom of their own hardness against the truth. Whether the sin be “great,” such as murder, adultery, or embezzlement, or “small,” as in pride, harshness, or jealousy, its effects are manifest in predictable patterns of behavior. These patterns commonly include being burdened by, blind to, or excusing oneself from, what one knows to be true.

Rarely do the scriptures give a detailed catalog of sins. Usually they give illustrative examples (cf. Alma 1:32; 16:18; Hel. 4:12). President Ezra Taft BENSON described the attitudes associated with the universal sin of pride: “Our enmity toward God takes on many labels, such as rebellion, hard-heartedness, stiff-neckedness, unrepentant, puffed up, easily offended, and sign seekers” (Benson, p. 4). King Benjamin noted, “I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not . . . continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not” (Mosiah 4:29–30).

To be spiritually born of God is to be awakened, to be released from the burdens of sin (*see* FORGIVENESS; NATURAL MAN; REPENTANCE). The Book of Mormon records the history of a people who, for a time, overcame the bondage of sin. Of them it says, “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Ne. 1:15–16).

To overcome sin and be forgiven are to forsake ungodliness, to acknowledge dependence on God, and to seek to do his will. God’s help is indispensable to abandoning sin: “He changed their hearts; . . . he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God” (Alma 5:6). Those who abandon sin have “received his image in [their] countenances” and exercise faith in the redemption of Christ (cf. Alma 5:14–19); they are full of love (Mosiah 3:19; John 13:35; 15:10).

From an eternal perspective, there is no tragedy except in sin. Mortals are not on earth to prove

themselves to one another but to God. This earth life is a probationary time, a test to see whether mankind will “do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25; cf. Alma 34:34). Those whose “hearts are set . . . upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men,” or who cover their sins, gratify their pride, nurture vain ambition, or seek to control and dominate others “in any degree of unrighteousness” grieve the Spirit of the Lord (D&C 121:35, 37).

Escaping sin is a simple but not an easy matter. Repentance requires deep suffering, the uttermost farthing, all that one is capable of doing: “none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24; cf. D&C 19). “We are saved [by grace] after all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23). Those who abandon sin are characterized by going “forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” (2 Ne. 31:20).

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SINGLE ADULTS

The Church is generally perceived to be a family church; but for various reasons many Church members become or remain single adults. Thirty percent of North American Latter-day Saint adults are currently widowed, divorced, separated, or have never married (1981 Church Membership Survey). Because of concern for their welfare, the Church has focused attention on the needs of single members and has organized activities and programs targeted to meet these needs.

Results of a demographic study indicated that among LDS single adults, 23 percent were divorced or separated, 13 percent were widowed, and 63 percent had never married. Children were present in 16 percent of single-adult households.