

SIN: ACT OR ATTITUDE?

Dear Aebi: "Sin is not an act; it is a state of mind,' one said. Is he right?"

Men are not qualified to define sin; only God can do this. What does God say sin is? God's definitions of sin do not align with the statement that sin is a state of mind and not an act. Those who know their Bibles will recall 1 John 3:4, which says that "sin is lawlessness" [NKJV, ASV] or that "sin is the transgression of

the law" [KJV] The law referred to is the law of Christ--the gospel, the New Testament, God's commandments. Do God's commandments include actions or just states of mind? Now we know that God is concerned with our state of mind, for Paul says, ". . .think [meditate--NKJV] on these things" (Philippians 4:8). But verse 9 says, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, **these do**, and the God of peace will be with you" [NKJV]. Commands to not lie, not steal, not kill--these are acts, as is the command to do good to all men or the command to be baptized or the command to sing. Romans 2:23 says sin is dishonoring God by transgressing His law; read Romans 1-6 and notice how often sin is mentioned and how many kinds of things are therein listed as sin or unrighteousness or transgression. At least as many are actions as are attitudes or states of mind.

Those who argue that sin is just a state of mind are like those who argue that God is dead because they think God was never anything but an idea anyway. They want to do away with the whole idea of sin so that they can do anything they want to do without ever feeling guilty. They don't believe in sin any more than they believe in God, whose law they break when they sin. Liberals have long agreed with Freud in saying that people need to get rid of their inhibitions so they can feel good no matter what they do. But right is right, and when people don't do right they should not feel good.

Sin involves a state of mind in that one would not sin (violate God's law) if he had a right attitude toward God or the right state of mind. It is a state of mind that leads to sin, but sin is not just a state of mind. Sadness and happiness are states of mind, but sin is doing wrong rather than right. Jesus did not reject just wrong actions as sin, but he emphasized that wrong actions proceed from a wrong state of mind. He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within [from his state of mind-- CJA] and defile a man" (Mark 7:20-23). His point in the sermon on the mount was that actions like murder and adultery would not occur if a person controlled his state of mind (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28).

We know from observation and experience that one's state of mind, i.e., his thoughts, leads him to act, because we often plan things before we do them. If a thing is a sin-- if it violates God's word or law-- it is wrong to either plan it or do it. In many cases the doing is worse than the planning, because it involves other people as well as one's self. But in most cases the planning is more important, because it is the first step in the sin, and without the state of mind involved in the planning, the execution of the plan in sinful action would not take place.



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