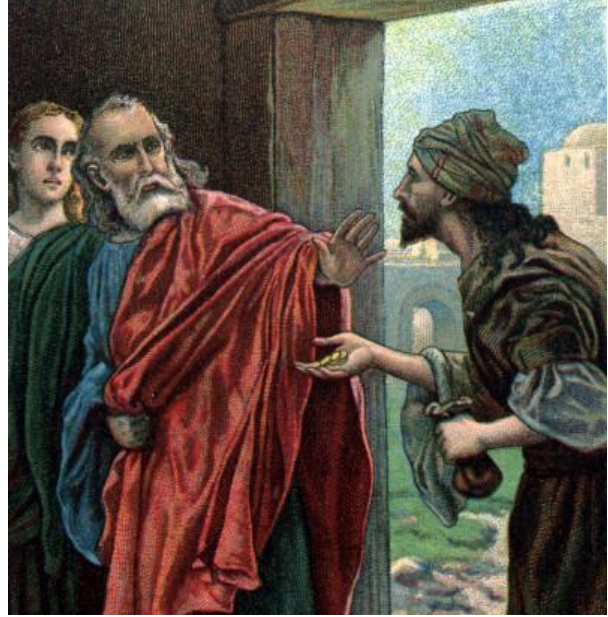


SINS BY CHRISTIANS AND NON-CHRISTIANS

Dear Aebi: *"What should a Christian do if he sins? How is this different from a non-Christian doing the same sin?"*

For an answer to the first question, turn to Acts 8:13-24. Simon the sorcerer (magician) was a big wheel in Samaria when he heard Philip preaching there. He believed and was baptized (v. 13) thus becoming a Christian. Then he saw Peter and John passing on the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to enable others to perform miracles. Simon's love of power over others got the best of him, and he offered the apostles money to give him the ability to pass on Spiritual gifts, which would give him the power he craved. Thus he sinned after becoming a Christian. Peter told him to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22), and he asked Peter to pray for him.



Similar instruction is given in James 5:14-20, where confession of sins to one another and prayer for one another is urged. In James 5 it is especially the elders of the church to whom the confession is made and who pray for both the forgiveness and the physical healing of the sick sinner who is told to call for the elders to come to his sick bed. Whether there is a connection between the sin and the sickness of the erring Christian is not stated, but both are under consideration in the passage. But it is clear that he is talking about Christians who err and need restored or converted again. Galatians 6:1 calls this re-conversion process being "restored." Even though James 5:19-20 calls this a "conversion," it is not initial conversion to Christianity. They are already "brethren" and they "err from the truth." Initial conversion involves faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism. Restoration involves faith, repentance, confession of sins, and prayer. Note that the confession in the first conversion is confessing one's faith in Jesus as God's Son and Messiah, while the confession made in re-conversion (restoration) is confession of one's sins.

When a Christian sins--and we all do--he/she repents and prays, confessing his sin to God if it is a private matter and to the church if it is public, in which case he should also ask for the prayers of the church. There is no difference in who commits a given sin. For example, take lying or stealing. Is it worse for a Christian to lie or steal than it is for a worldling? Most would say, "Yes," because the Christian should know better. But what if he is a babe in Christ? Sin is transgression of God's law regardless of who does it or when, but the Christian gets forgiveness in a different way than the non-Christian. The non-Christian must get into Christ (by baptism, Gal. 3:27), while the Christian is already in Christ and has God as his Father to whom he can appeal directly.

Charles J. Aebi