

FUNDAMENTAL LIST – 3 of 7
Jesus Defined Sin as Anything That Harms You or Others
August 18, 2024

INTRODUCTION Today I want to begin with a question: What makes a sin a sin?

Did Jesus ever clarify what's a sin and what's not?

Today we're in part three of our series **The Fundamental List**. And in this series, we are attempting to answer the question,

WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE IN ORDER TO BE A FAITHFUL FOLLOWER OF JESUS?

Not what must a person ❶ **do**? What must a person actually ❷ **believe** in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

So far, we've discovered two fundamentals.

NUMBER ONE: JESUS IS GOD'S SON AND OUR KING.

And the reason we said this is because this is what Jesus said about himself. And if we're going to follow Jesus, we at least have to acknowledge who he claimed to be.

Then as God's final king, fundamental number two.

NUMBER TWO: JESUS CAME TO ILLUSTRATE AND DEMONSTRATE WHAT GOD IS LIKE.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John document what Jesus lived out and what he taught about what his Father is like. That Jesus came to reveal the Father to mankind, to close the gap between human beings and God the Father.

Today we're going to talk about number three, which is simply this: In order to be a faithful follower of Jesus, we all have to acknowledge and embrace Jesus' characterization of sin.

Or Jesus definition of sin. In other words, what made a sin a sin to Jesus, our king, the Son of God, who came to reveal what God is like. I mean, if he's the king, this is fundamental.

Jesus actually prioritized some things in his own scripture over others. In fact, Matthew records an incident where he did exactly that.

A lawyer, an expert in the law, came to Jesus and had a question about the law. The lawyer asks a question, Jesus answers the question. And you may be familiar with both the question and the answer.

But the reason we're going to camp out on this for just a moment, the implications of the lawyer's questions and Jesus' response, not his answer, but just his response to the questions are so loaded with implications,

that our tendency when we read this piece of narrative, is to jump to the answer Jesus gave and misunderstand or skip over the implications of the fact that Jesus even was willing to answer the question.

In Matthew 22:36, the Pharisee comes to Jesus and says, ³⁶*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"*

He's talking about the law of Moses, 600-plus commands, including the top ten, right? And this is interesting. He says, **"Which is the greatest?"** The Greek term here means the mega commandment.

What's the mega commandment? What's the most important commandment in the law? There's 600-plus.

And Jesus doesn't question the question. He actually affirms the significance and the importance of the question.

Verse 37-38 says, ³⁷*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* ³⁸*This is the first and greatest commandment.*

He's quoting from Deuteronomy when Moses reminded the people what was most important. It was a different way of saying at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, have no other gods before me.

I'm your god. Don't drift to these other pagan gods. If you do, you're going to get in trouble. This was just another way of saying, love God so much, that you live your life to please God with all your heart, soul, mind.

And then Jesus says, this is the first commandment. This is the one that organizes all the rest.

Jesus is about to reveal what's most important to him and to your heavenly Father. And the second is like it, the second in sequence, not the second in importance. The second in sequence, not the second in, of importance.

In fact, the second commandment he's about to give is evidence. The second is evidence of how well a person is keeping the first. If you're not keeping the second, you're not keeping the first.

How do you know how you're doing? Jesus says, I'm about to tell you how you know how you're doing. Some of you, again, can quote this.

Verse 39-40 says, ³⁹*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* ⁴⁰*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Then this next statement is so prioritizing. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. In other words, this is the thing that brings them together.

These two define all the rest. If you get lost in the details of all the other 600-plus, you just come back to these two, that love God and love your neighbor. In other words, your love for God is demonstrated and authenticated by your practical everyday love for others.

Then if you take this idea and use this as a filter for everything Jesus teaches, suddenly so much of his teaching becomes so clear. In the book of Mark, Mark got his information about Jesus from Peter. So this is kind of Peter through Mark.

Mark records another narrative where Jesus illustrates this and teaches this in a different kind of way. Jesus and his disciples are traveling and they're moving, through some grain fields.

And it was on the Sabbath. And of course, you're not allowed to work on the Sabbath, and this was a great law that God gave his people. And there's certainly implications for us today.

Here's what he said in Mark 2:23-24, ²³*One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.*

So there's these stalks of grain on the top of the little heads that are coming ripe, and they're picking them off and they're eating them as they move through the grain field, which was legal. They were sort of doing a minor harvest, but it was okay for people to do this.

So, they're walking through the grain fields, they're picking these heads, they're having a conversation, and they're eating the grains off the top of the stalks.

And the Pharisees, who seem to be everywhere, say, did you see that? Write that down. Because later when they arrest Jesus, they have all this evidence. So they're walking along through the grain fields and they're thinking, I'm hungry too, but we got rules.

Verse 24 continues, ²⁴*The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*

Well, the law said you can't harvest grain because that's work. You can't harvest grain on the Sabbath. That was prohibited.

So, Jesus, in his characteristic way, just ignores the absurdity of this application of the law to make a broader point.

But he is about to make a statement about the entire law of God that goes right back to what he said to the lawyer that day.

Here's what Jesus did in verse 27, ²⁷*Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

In other words, you teachers of the law, you got it all backwards. God did not create people so there would be someone to keep his laws.

In other words, in the beginning, God was up in heaven with all these rules and commandments, and he's like, **"Wow, these are so good."**

But there's nobody to keep these laws. I think I'm going to create human beings, so there will be someone to keep my laws." This was the religious atmosphere that Jesus showed up in.

Jesus says, **"No, God issued his laws for the sake of the people he loves."** Parents don't have children so there will be someone to play with the toys. The toys are for the children.

Parents don't have children because they have a bunch of rules for kids, so there will be somebody to keep the kid rules. That's not how it works. But that is the gravitational pull of all, almost all religious systems.

And unfortunately, through the centuries, it's become the gravitational pull of Christian traditions and the Christian faith. The implication, the people are the priority, not the rules, not the laws.

If someone applies the law of God in a way that harms people, they aren't applying it correctly.

In fact, this is what angered Jesus the most, experts in the law would justify their mistreatment of people by pointing to the fact that they were upholding the law of God.

Consequently, the laws are preeminent, and the people are secondary. So, one day, these teachers of the law come to him and they ask a question.

Matthew 19:3 says, ³*Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"*

Can a man divorce his wife for any and every reason? Obviously, that's the wrong question. This is the question you ask when you are more concerned about a view than a you.

Jesus had no patience for people who weren't good to people.

Matthew 23:23 says, ²³*"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. (which was required by the law.)*

But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness."

Here's what Jesus is saying. The intent of God's law is more important than the laws themselves.

And Jesus says, "I'll tell you what I'm talking about. Justice, mercy, faithfulness to those to whom you have pledged faithfulness.

That is what matters to our Father in heaven." That's what matters to Jesus, and that's what supposed to matter to you and to me.

So, Jesus, what made a sin, a sin, and what does it look like for us? So, I have four suggestions.

❶ **Number one.** If it's not good for him, it's sin.

That's it. Is it good for him? No. Then don't do that, it's a sin. But it's legal. But yeah, is it good for him? No. Then don't do that, don't treat him that way. It's a sin.

❷ **Number two.** If it's not good for her defer.

If it's not good for her, defer. In other words, if this is not good for her. No, no, just no.

❸ **Number three.** If it's not good for you, no can do.

It's that simple. You know why? Because your Heavenly Father loves you, and if it's bad for you, it's a sin, you're sinning against yourself.

And God isn't just concerned about how you treat others. God is concerned about how you treat yourself, your body, your future, anything that has anything to do with you, your character, your reputation, because God loves you. It's a sin.

❹ **Number four.** If it's not good for them, it should be condemned.

Because what God values most is not his rules, what God values most are people. And behind the rules, is his love for justice.

And his love for mercy, kindness, and forgiveness. And what elevates the status and wellbeing of people.

Do you know why Jesus characterized and defined sin this way? It's because this is how his Father in heaven does. And do you know why your Heavenly Father is against sin? Because he's for you.

When Jesus showed up in the 1st century, the temple was absolutely corrupt. And John the Baptist shows up at the Jordan River, doing at the Jordan River what they're supposed to be doing at the temple.

"Come on down here with me and I'm going to show you what forgiveness and repentance looks like. Don't go up there to the temple, it is corrupt, it is full of snakes and vipers."

And the people from the temple came to see John the Baptist, and he's like, **"You're going to be so sorry you came down here to listen to me. Because I am offering what you should be offering up there, but it's corrupt."**

When Jesus showed up, the temple model was this, **"When you sin, you break God's law."** The Jesus model sounded like this, **"When you sin, you break yourself and others. Which breaks God's heart."**

In AA, they say, **"All addiction start off as umagical, then they become vmedicinal, and then you become wmiserable. It starts off as magical, it's the best. Medicinal, I need it. Then miserable. How do I get out of it?"**

That's sin. It always starts off as magical, and then you need it, and then eventually you realize what you've lost as a consequence. It numbs the conscience, it harms our relationships, it destroys our self-respect, it erodes our self-control.

A little Baptist Church had a sign out. Here's what it said. **"Sin is expensive. Who is paying for yours?"** Of course, God is anti-sin because he is for you.

And at the epicenter of how Jesus defines sin and how your Heavenly Father define sin, it's how your behavior and mine impacts other people.

So, this is essential, it's fundamental that we view sin the way our savior view sin.

So, here's our list.

NUMBER ONE: JESUS IS GOD'S SON AND OUR KING.

Which means he's the rule maker.

NUMBER TWO: JESUS CAME TO ILLUSTRATE AND DEMONSTRATE WHAT GOD IS LIKE.

There's no space between Jesus and God.

NUMBER THREE: JESUS DEFINED SIN AS ANYTHING THAT HARMS YOU OR OTHERS.

So, I want to ask you a terrifying question. Are you harming you or others? Is there a habit, or relationship that if the people who are depending on you and love you found out about, it would harm them and undermine their confidence in you and your fidelity in that relationship?

Would you be willing to acknowledge that?

Would you be willing to accept Jesus' invitation to walk away from that?

This is His invitation, because He loves you. Would you be willing to leave your sin?

Not because God's going to get you, because sin will break you, it's already breaking you, and has the potential to break the hearts of the people you care about the most.

Would you be willing to walk away from your sin? This is what it means to follow Jesus.

PRAYER Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace and your mercy, for your forgiveness, so give us the courage now to take the next step, whatever that is. Give us eyes to see you the way that you want to be seen through the eyes of Jesus, the life of Jesus.

And give us the courage to walk away, put it behind us, trusting your Spirit to empower us through that.

Because we've already tried, and we failed. So have your way. If none go with us, still we will follow, in Jesus' name, amen.

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