

Introduction

I'd like to raise a question that many people have asked me over the years, **"Are there big sins and little sins?"** Let's get specific in asking that. The Eighth Commandment reveals that stealing is a sin. A high school classmate of mine shoplifted a pack of cigarettes from a store. In contrast, Bernie Madoff defrauded investors of \$18 billion. Let me ask you. Is the young man's sin a little one and Madoff's a big one? Or to ask it another way, are there any little sins? Isaiah 53:4-6 answers that.

All of Us Have Sinned

In verse 5, Isaiah mentions **"transgressions"** and **"iniquities."** Both of those words are synonyms for sins. Sins are attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to God's nature. So, a man in front of me in the checkout line at Marcs was rude to the clerk because he had to wait so long. His attitude and behavior were contrary to an attribute of God, His patience. That means he sinned. Or as verse 6 says it, he **"went astray"** or **"turned to his own way."**

But he isn't the only one. Notice in that same verse who it is that has **"gone astray."** It's **"all of us."** Or notice who it is that **"has turned to his own way."** It's **"each of us."** Paul reiterates it well in Romans 3:23, **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** That **"all"** of course includes Christians. It includes you and me.

Little Sins

But let's think about the sins of Christians. Observation – many don't lose any sleep over them. They don't take them very seriously. They gossip, get angry, grumble, or seek praise, for instance, and don't

feel guilty they did? They take those sins and others lightly.

There's a reason they do. Consider this. Almost no Christians would physically assault you for criticizing them. But many would verbally assault you. What's the difference? It's the harm that's done. They perceive that the harm is great in the first (physical assault) but slight in the second (verbal assault). That's the gist of the matter.

Christians take many sins lightly because they think it doesn't matter that much that they committed them. That's the idea behind the term we use, "**a little white lie**" and I emphasize the word "**little.**" Christians distinguish between little sins and big ones, determined by the harm that's done. Sins are little when the harm is slight.

Big Sins

But that's wrong. The fact is there are no little sins.

The language in our text teaches us that. Notice what it says about our sins in relation to Jesus. Verse 4 – He "**bore**" them. Verse 5 – He was "**pierced through**" and "**crushed**" for them and they "**fell upon Him.**" And verse 6 – Yahweh "**caused**" them "**to fall on Him.**"

That language conveys that Jesus was our substitute on the cross. That means two things. First, He took all of our sins into Himself. And second, He paid the penalty for those sins that we should have paid. Grasp what that means. Your sins and mine put Jesus on the cross. I don't mean in some metaphorical sense but literally.

Let's go back to my classmate's sin, shoplifting the cigarettes. That's a little sin. Right? Wrong! Suppose that is the only sin that ever has been committed and ever will be. Jesus would still have died on the cross – for that particular sin of his. The same is true of every sin of ours no matter how little it seems, like a word of gossip.

That reality puts all our sins in their larger unseen context, which is the cross. And in that context, there are no little sins. Each and every sin is a big one. Why? It's because it caused the ultimate harm – the death of God's perfect and innocent son, Jesus.

We need to come to grips with this truth that there are no little sins. We need to understand and believe it. It dramatically impacts us, in two ways, when we do.

Humbles Us

First, it humbles us.

Many people in our culture and even our churches are proud. I mean by that, they rely on their own goodness to be saved.

Years ago, a law clerk and I began a conversation about spiritual things. At one point during it, he said he was going to heaven and explained why, "**I work hard, stay out of trouble, and am a good husband and father.**" Notice something. He didn't mention Jesus.

So many people are like that. Using one standard or another to measure it, they think that they can rely on their own goodness to be saved. For him and many others, that standard is the big sins of others. Sure he gossiped, sought praise, and told people off here and there. But he wasn't a druggie, adulterer, or thief, which makes him a good person.

What he still to this day doesn't realize is that there are no little sins. He has something in common with the druggie, adulterer, and thief. His so-called little sins, as much as their big ones, killed Jesus. He isn't good enough to deserve salvation and neither is anyone else.

Heartens Us

The truth that there are no little sins does a second thing. It heartens us.

I once counseled a 25 year-old man who had committed adultery with his sister-in-law. He was wracked with guilt and believed that God would never forgive him. **"Betraying my wife with her brother's wife,"** he said. **"You can't get any worse than that."**

But the fact is you can. Suppose he had murdered his wife in order to marry his sister-in-law. Most of us would agree that would be worse. But there's something even worse than that. It's what Pilate did. He killed the only person in history who was utterly innocent and good. He killed Jesus. That's absolutely the very worst thing a person could do.

But Pilate isn't the only one who did it. As I explained, so did we. Our sins put Jesus on the cross as surely as Pilate did. As Martin Luther said it, we carry around the nails of Jesus in our pockets. And **"you can't get any worse than that."** We've done the worst thing a human being can possibly do. We inflicted suffering and death on Jesus.

But notice the great irony in Isaiah 53:5. It's by that very suffering and death we inflicted that **"we are healed."** That healing of ours has several aspects one of which is forgiveness. Father God forgives us for killing His Son. And if He can forgive us for that, which is the worst thing a human being can do, He can forgive us for anything else – even committing adultery with a sister-in-law.

Conclusion

And He will “**if . . .**” Forgiveness is predicated upon a condition. That condition is that we apprentice ourselves to Jesus. It’s that we arrange all of our day-to-day affairs around Him and His words. It’s that we make Him primary and everyone and everything else secondary.

When we do that, Father God forgives all of our sins. He regards us in practice as if we never even committed them. He views and treats us as if we’re as perfectly righteous as Jesus is.

You recognize of course what that means. I said that there are no little sins, only big ones. But that changes if we’re apprentice ourselves to Jesus. Why? It’s because there are “**no sins**” when we do.