

RIGHT or WRONG? Need for forgiveness

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We recently discussed forgiveness in Sunday school. When we talked about seeking God's forgiveness, a longtime member said he never sinned, so there was little application to him. How can we helpfully address this matter?

I imagine your class is a lively bunch! If you would allow me to broaden the task, I think you might be able to help every person in the class. This may be a learning experience for everyone if the discussion is allowed to grow beyond the obvious offender of grace.

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Perhaps your classmate is operating with a rather shallow or narrow understanding of the nature of sin. He is suggesting he does not sin, and in his understanding, he does not. Sin probably means violating the most obvious Ten Commandments. He can rightly proclaim he does not steal, does not kill, does not lie or does not commit adultery. Yes, many people could boast of being sinless if sin were held only as these strongly stated sins. And it is quite possible your friend is able to ignore the challenge of

worshipping only one God. Or he is capable of constricting coveting to matters related only to his next-door neighbor who drives an old pickup truck. If sin means publicly violating these commandments, then most of us could declare ourselves sinless.

But the nature of sin involves more than just a few public sins. Sin is that push within us to rebel against the work of God in our lives. Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder.’ ... But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment. ...” Sin is more than just a few strong outward public actions. Sin is the motivation and the rebellion within us to resist God. Jesus reveals the true nature of our hearts and the need for God’s grace and forgiveness.

I have a hunch that your friend, while stating what appears to be a rather bold position, is not alone in your class. Most of us carve out niches or realms of influence in life where we are comfortable with the sin around us and present within us. We are comfortable with certain attitudes. We grow accustomed to profanity on the television. We are calloused to the hatred spewed forth on talk radio. We are accommodating of sinful attitudes within us. We walk through the routines of our lives, and we develop callousness for sin within us and surrounding us.

Perhaps the best way of helping your classmate would be to take inventory of your own life and confess the areas where sin is quietly hidden away. Your honesty might be the start of growth for everyone in your Sunday school class.

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Right or Wrong? is sponsored by the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to btillman@hsutx.edu.

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