

MINIMIZING SIN

Joe Slater

Facing reality can hurt, especially when the subject is sin. We deny it, blame someone else, or cover it up. Even when those tactics fail, we attempt to evade responsibility and consequences by minimizing our sin.

Everybody sins, right? (See Romans 3:23.) So, if I can make it look like my sins are no big deal, then, hey, I'm no worse than anyone else, and probably better than most. Therefore, I should not be held accountable; in fact, maybe I should be commended. (NOT!)

Aaron made a golden calf for Israel to worship (Exodus 32). How could you ask for a clearer violation of the first two commandments (Exodus 20:3-6)? But watch him minimize his sin: "You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us . . . ' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out" (32:22-24).

Come on, Moses! He was just doing what the people wanted. And besides, he really didn't exactly design this calf – it just sorta came out that way, ya' know? (Right!)

King Saul, having been commissioned by God to utterly destroy the enemy nation Amalek, chose instead to take the Amalekite king as a captive and the best of the livestock as the spoils of war (1 Samuel 15). Confronted by Samuel, Saul minimized his sin. Like Aaron, he blamed the people; additionally, he whitewashed his sin with a coat of religiosity – he claimed he was going to sacrifice his unlawful spoils to the Lord (15:21). Surely God couldn't object to that, could He?

We still minimize sin. I was going only 5 mph over the limit! It was just a little lie, and it didn't really hurt anybody. I had only one drink, and it was only beer, and I didn't drink it in public (why not, if there's nothing wrong with it?). It was only a Sunday evening service that I skipped. That huge insurance company will never miss the few hundred dollars I falsely claimed.

Yes, we still minimize sin. But hear the word of the Lord: "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).



Israel's Sins of Omission

Psalm 106 states three ways that Israel sinned by omission (see James 4:17, it is sin when you know to do good but fail to do it). These three statements are striking, and they serve as an example for us (see Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Hebrews 4:11)

1. *"They did not wait for His instructions"* (v. 13).
2. *"They did not believe His promise"* (v. 24).
3. *"They did not obey the Lord"* (v. 25).

Check the psalm for how those failures expressed themselves at that moment. See how these failures worked out for them. In a word, badly! (Death in the desert, v. 26).

Note also how all three statements of failure are in relation to God; His instructions, His promise, the Lord. Here is the greatest failure of all: failure to relate properly to the Lord.

Let Israel's sins of omission not be ours!

J. Randal Matheny (Brazil); via fellowshiproom.org

All You Need Is Love

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:36-40).

Simple, yes it is. Yet, the love that Jesus demonstrated and taught is demanding. Our culture has messed up the concept of love to the point that we don't really understand what is involved. The love that Jesus showed requires action.

God's love for humanity caused action on His part to offer reconciliation through the offering of His only begotten Son. My response to God's love is to return love to Him. However, more than saying, "I love You," love requires action on my part. Love involves learning and keeping His commandments (I John 2:3-5). It also means that I strive to behave like my Savior (I John 3:6).

Love doesn't stop there. Love God totally is the greatest commandment. Love your neighbor is just as great. John tells us that if we don't love our brother, our love of God is negated (I John 4:20). Love of God is intertwined with loving our neighbors.

Love for brothers and neighbors requires action on our part. Jesus illustrated love in action with the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). We are to use our resources to help those in need (I John 3:17-18). Love goes beyond meeting physical needs. Spiritual needs must be met as well.

Let us learn to love like our Father and as shown by Jesus while He walked among mankind. We need to make I Corinthians 13:1-7 a part of us.

Remember, Love is Action!

--Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)