

Doing and Not Doing

Ponder: What constitutes sin?

Scripture: "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son" (Ezek. 18:20, NKJV).

Little Johnny asked his teacher, "Can I be punished for something I didn't do?" The teacher answered, "Of course not. That wouldn't be fair!" Johnny replied, "That's good, because I didn't do my homework."

All joking aside, we empathize with the teacher who assumed Johnny was asking about a bad thing he didn't do. And we certainly agree that punishing someone for a wrong they didn't commit is terribly unfair! Hardcore Calvinists say God holds babies accountable for Adam's sin. But God's own law under Moses forbade punishing children for their parents' sins (Deut. 24:16). Fairness is part of God's nature!

Brethren in bygone days called the doing of something God had forbidden (such as murder or stealing) a "sin of commission." But God also holds us accountable for not obeying what He has commanded us in His word. These were commonly called "sins of omission" (i.e. omitting, or leaving out, what God told us to do).

In Matthew 21 Jesus told the parable of the two sons. Their father commanded both, "Go work today in my vineyard." The first son initially refused, but later "regretted it and went." The second "answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go" (vv. 28-30). That second son committed a sin of omission. Jesus applied that parable to the chief priests and elders who claimed to be faithful to God but rejected Jesus and had turned up their noses at John the Immerser.

We don't hear much nowadays about "sins of commission" and "sins of omission." But regardless of terminology, both are treacherous. Take heed, that you may not be ensnared by either!

Hymn: "Yield Not To Temptation"

Prayer: Righteous Father, help us to scrupulously avoid what you have forbidden while carefully obeying what Your word has told us to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.