



"Love takes up where knowledge leaves off."
—Thomas Aquinas

20-Jul-18

Missing the Mark (Part One)

Way back in the third century, a Jewish rabbi named Simlai mentioned in a sermon that the commandments (*mitzvot*, "commands," "orders," "precepts") found in the [Old Testament](#) number 613. If we sat down with that list and discovered that we kept every one of them perfectly, according to our Savior, we would still be unprofitable servants: "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" ([Luke 17:10](#)).

It is advisable to note what happens to unprofitable servants: "And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" ([Matthew 25:30](#)).

[I John 3:4](#) instructs, "Whoever commits [sin](#) also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." This verse is familiar ground for us, right? Years ago, I was discussing an aspect of sin with a Christian from India, when a friend of his walked up. My interlocutor remarked that his friend was a Bible scholar and would set me straight. The scholar's argument was so radical to me at the time that I scarcely knew how to reply. He said that John meant that sin is "missing the mark." Returning home, I whipped out my reference works and found that he was right!

Hamartia, the Greek word for "sin," is an archer's term describing missing the target. It is not necessarily meant to convey "the breaking of a commandment" but a failure to reach a goal or standard. One could say it is missing the point of God's way of life! Spiros Zodhiates writes in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*: "Sin [is] missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is [God](#)."

How, though, could a person keep all 613 commandments and still come up short? Clearly, there is more to be done. In his meeting with God on Mount Sinai, [Moses](#) received only part of the law. Fifteen hundred years later, [Jesus Christ](#) came with the other part: its spiritual intent. He says in [Matthew 5:17](#), "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." *Fulfill* means "to fill out," "complete," "make perfect." God's law was not abolished, as so many seem to believe, but enhanced.

So what is this elusive mark that we so often miss? Most of the time, it is this newly revealed half, the spiritual intent of the law, the standard that God set for us and that Christ and His apostles endeavored to explain more fully. These explanations were given to the church without adding many new commandments. In fact, the "new commandment" of the New Testament deals with loving our brethren ([John 13:34](#); [1 John 2:7-11](#)), a major facet of the spirit of the law.

Sometimes, the apostles expound on a point of the law for which no specific commandment had been written, as in [Romans 14:23](#): "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from [faith](#); for whatever is not from faith is sin." The rule is that, if we are unsure about whether an act is sinful or not, but in our unsure state we go against our conscience and do it, it becomes a sin to us. We have not acted in faith.

The Old Testament contains a great many dos and don'ts, but in the New Testament, Christ expands our understanding of the law. That understanding is the mark or goal for which we are aiming. We receive a summary of God's understanding of the law in [Matthew 22:37-39](#): "'You shall [love](#) the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You

shall love your neighbor as yourself." If we boil this down, the law is substantially about our attitude toward God and our treatment of our brethren. We will concentrate on the latter.

In His [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus explains the law's spiritual intent, that even our *attitude* toward a brother can provide a cause for [repentance](#). Notice, for example, [Matthew 5:21-22](#):

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of [hell](#) fire."

We will combine this with [I John 3:14-15](#), which is similar in subject matter:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Hate is among the strongest of emotions, along with anger and jealousy, any of which can deliver catastrophic results to relationships. "Hate" here is *mise*? (*Strong's* #3404), which denotes "active ill will in words and conduct, a persecuting spirit" (Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*). This definition does not square completely with the everyday definition of "hate" or with the attitude of a murderer, yet it is the gold standard for our understanding of God's law on this point. So, according to Jesus and the apostle John, even though no one ends up in the hospital, no blood is spilled, no one loses his life, a murder has been committed. The sixth commandment has been transgressed.

Those of us who have God's Spirit can be pretty thin-skinned at times, take [offense](#) where none is intended, and begin treating the offending brother differently. We have been known to become rude and insulting in speech, contemptuous, and perhaps even begin gossiping about him, ostracizing him from our circle of friends, and avoiding any kind of fellowship or hospitality

toward him. When the attitude changed from friendly to snippy and worse, the brother who took offense became a murderer in God's eyes.

God, being [merciful](#), provides a solution in [Matthew 5:23-24](#): "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Notice that God will not accept the gift, which is left unoffered near the altar. A serious sin, murder, is in view here, and true, heartfelt repentance must take place before God will accept the gift. Consider that, if those involved do not repent, the blood of Christ's sacrifice will not cover that sin. This murder will have to be covered at Christ's judgment seat by the life of the unrepentant sinner, and the opportunity for salvation and eternal life ends. These kinds of sins, which we tend to take so lightly, are far more grave than many care to admit. They should not be brushed off with lackadaisical [carelessness](#).

Next time, we will continue to explore how we often miss the mark in our relationships within the church.

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Dealing With a Sinning Brother](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

In the incident of the blatant sinner in I Corinthians 5, Paul's administrative decision was to disfellowship the offender pending his repentance, lest he contaminate the entire Corinthian congregation. Corinth may have been the wickedest city in the entire empire, having tolerance for the most abominable perversions imaginable. Because Paul took swift action, the situation ended positively with the entire congregation repenting—the sinner and the individuals who tolerated the sin. This particular example constitutes the most extreme example of dealing with a sinning brother in the entire Bible,

but it is the exception rather than the rule. Disfellowshipping is only used for the most extreme, blatant forms of perversion, in which the safety of the entire congregation is threatened. We must treat the lower order offenses in a more sensitive fashion, dealing with the sinning brothers and sisters as brothers and sisters rather than sinners, loving them as Christ loved us, a standard often beyond our grasp. We need to esteem others more than ourselves, humbly considering them better than we are. Avoid judging others, but if we must, we must be careful, for it will come back on us; judgment is reciprocal. The Father has committed all judgment to the Son, not to us. We are to proactively forgive others as our Father has forgiven us; our own forgiveness is in jeopardy if we forget this. The extremely rare Matthew 18:15-17 instructions must be followed precisely and delicately, leaving nothing out. We deal with our brother as though we were dealing with Jesus Christ. When following through on Matthew 18, (1) the matter under discussion should be a sin; (2) the sin should be against us personally; (3) we should tell the offender his fault; (4) we must consider whether we want to take it to the next level; (5) If the offender

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Sin Is](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Over the last half-century, sin has gone out of vogue. In the secular public's mind, it is a religious matter and not something of much consequence. But it matters a great deal to God because it is not only the cause of all the misery in the world but also the reason humanity is so far from Him. John Ritenbaugh explains the basics of sin and what God wants us to do about it.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G.
Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email](#)

[Subscriptions page.](#)
