

Sin: "Come into my parlor..."

The top 17 sins. How do you rate sins? How do you count them? Are they listed in the Bible? Kidnapping isn't found in the New Testament. Maybe it's not a big sin. Perhaps we could make two lists, one of "mortal" and another of "venial" sins (I John 5:16-17) and rate sins accordingly.

If there are 17 big sins, are there 17 big good works – free of sin? Listed in the Bible? There are the beatitudes, evangelical counsels, various gospel imperatives. But these lists differ. Is being married with children a good work free of sin? (Stop laughing....)

"Will you come into my parlor," said the spider to the fly. It's a trap to think there are 17 big sins -- or 10 or 23 or whatever. It's a trap to think we can list "sins" and list "good works." Then we're caught in the real sin trap – spiritual pride. **Sin = spiritual pride.** Sin is the reflex of the natural born sinner seeking self-justification. The sinner in us says, "I can see and do God's will. I have good works to balance out my bad ones. I'm not perfect, but I do my best. I can sort sins from good works. I'm not perfect, but I have Jesus in my heart."

Caught in the web of sin, the Bible shows us our need of a savior: "The heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer 17:9). "All our righteous deeds are filthy rags" (Is 64:6). "No one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12). Heart, head, and body. 24/7. Things done and not done. From the cradle to the grave. We're caught in a web of sin. We can only be saved from outside of ourselves in spite of ourselves.

Snatched from the web of sin. The Bible also shows us the Savior we need. God himself has taken care of the horrible problem of sin. He did it on the cross. He did it by himself. He did it without our help. And it is finished (John 19:30). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the holiness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Baptized into his death, we are clothed in his perfect righteousness.

Free from spiritual bookkeeping. Since even our good works are filthy rags, we're free from weighing and measuring our good deeds against bad in order to judge our heavenly bank account. With Paul we say: "I do not even judge myself" (1 Cor 4:3-5). We're free from all that spiritual measuring. Free to confess, "All our *righteous* deeds are filthy rags."

Free for the neighbor. We are free to be ourselves. Free to use common reason to sort out moral dilemmas -- like homosexuality. Following Paul in Romans 13:10, we ask: "What harms the neighbor? What are the damages? We don't run around calling some behaviors "sin" and others "good." Yet out of love we say "No" to many behaviors. We don't let kids play in traffic. We say no to drinking and driving. We discourage gay behavior because of its damages. We say no to same-sex families because they deny children a mom or a dad.

When that old tempter the spider asks you to list "sins" and "good works," remember **the real sin trap is spiritual pride.** Confess your total sinfulness; give thanks that you are clothed in his perfect righteousness. Go back into the world, free to care for the neighbor.

As Luther said, "A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (LW 31:344; *The Freedom of a Christian*).