



BIBLE REFLECTIONS

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This Newsletter

The purpose of this Newsletter is to provide you with answers to certain biblical facts which have been misconstrued or misunderstood.

Q: Who are our readers?

A: Anyone interested in matters of faith.

Q: What will our readers want to know?

A: Timely, helpful, problem-solving information regarding the Bible.

When it comes to Christian 'fake news', the driver of such items is a combination of fallacious propositional deductions and established traditions. These are very powerful forces and, when combined with the passage of time, are seen as immutable 'truths'. A fallacious propositional framework is what churches generally refer to as 'doctrines'. The formation of such doctrines is a fascinating process, frequently devoid of genuine biblical basis. The societal climate of the age during which these doctrines are formulated exerts a reciprocal relationship to their formation. Once 'set in stone' and, with sufficient time to maintain their 'validity', tradition is created. During this process the Bible gets reinterpreted to suit this framework and, even when it is biblically untrue, is maintained as essential orthodoxy. Below is one such doctrine.

Fake News: 'Sin is sin.' Here is another maxim popular among churchgoers. The statement assumes that due to sin's pernicious nature, all sins have the same weightage within God's legal system. The impression given is that telling a 'small white lie' is as worthy of hellfire as 'murder'. Does this measure up with Scripture?

Fact Check: I am going to examine primarily data from the Hebrew Bible (HB; OT for Christians). There are four levels of sin in HB represented by different Hebrew words or expressions. (1) *Khattat*, the missing of a mark or ideal, is Level 1 and usually rendered as 'sin' in English Bibles. According to Leviticus, there is sacrifice, forgiveness and atonement for this. (2) *Awon* is Level 2 and pertains to relational sins and is considered more egregious requiring heftier sacrifice. But sacrifice, forgiveness and atonement are available. (3) *Pesha* is Level 3 and concerns open rebellion to God's authority. While forgiveness and atonement are possible, sacrifice is not provided implying that grace appears to be the chief intent. In Ps 51.3-4, David's masterclass penitence prayer, these three sins are listed in reverse order—*pesha*, *awon* and *khattat*. (4) Level 4 is '*yad rom*' (Num 15.30-31), a sin of total defiance and rejection of God for which there is no sacrifice available, and it is unforgivable (see Matt 12.31-32). Furthermore, the sacrifices for *khattat* were determined by social or holiness status (see Lev 4). To say 'sin is sin' is an oversimplification at best. If NT data is included, the oversimplification becomes even more stark. I suggest you explore the four NT definitions of sin—1 John 3.4; Jas 4.17; Rom 14.23; John 16.8-9—for further reflection.

I am drawn to the following assertion of Paul, 'What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with my understanding.' (1 Cor 14.15 HCSB). I suggest this maxim should be our *modus operandi* when we contemplate theological and biblical truths. In a world filled with 'fake news', the Church should be the bearer of real good news not more 'fake news'.

