

“Depart from Me, Ye That Work Iniquity”
What is Wilful Sin (Iniquity) as Opposed to Accidental Sin?

Many Christians don't understand or realise, that there is a distinction between wilful sin (iniquity) and “accidental” sin. Of course, Jesus' sacrifice covers all sin, which is why any person who has committed any sin, no matter how awful, can be forgiven when they come to Jesus.

Eternal security believers will often say, “we are all sinners” to excuse their lack of repentance, and quote **1 John 1:8** “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” to defend themselves. When we first come to Christ we are to repent of wilful sin and make every attempt to walk in holiness from then onwards (see **Hebrews 12:4**, **2 Timothy 2:19**, **1 Peter 1:16**, **Matthew 5:48** and more). Being human, we will sometimes have unplanned slip-ups along the way, and this is the difference, that it is not deliberate, planned sin. It's a consequence of us being imperfect humans, despite our striving against sin (see **Luke 13:24**, **Hebrews 12:4**, **2 Timothy 2:5**, **1 Corinthians 9:24-25** and **Hebrews 12:1**). If you look at the Greek word for iniquity, you will see that it indicates it's deliberate, it's a choice:

Strong's 4189 ponéria

iniquity, wickedness. From ponerōs; depravity, i.e. (specially), malice; plural (concretely) plots, sins – iniquity, wickedness.

I will go into some examples of accidental and wilful sin later, first, I want to give scriptures, to show that God recognises and states, the difference between iniquity and accidental sin. Remember, all sin is sin to God, this isn't saying that God doesn't mind accidental sin, he cannot look on any sin (which is why we need Jesus). But it's showing that there is a difference, due to intent. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us that God is “...a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” You will notice from the following scriptures, that even though their sin is accidental, they are still guilty, but God knows it was not with intent. And that makes a big difference as you will see.

Leviticus 4:1-3 “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering.”

Leviticus 4:13-14 “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Leviticus 4:22-23 “When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish:”

Leviticus 4:27-28 “And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty; Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned.”

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Leviticus 5:14-15 “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul commit a trespass, and sin **through ignorance**, in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering.”

Hebrews 9:6-7 “Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for **the errors** of the people:”

When King Abimelech wanted to have Abraham's wife Sarah, not knowing she was married, the Lord protected him from doing so by a dream, if he had disobeyed God, he was told the Lord would kill him and his family:

Genesis 20:4-6 “But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, LORD, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: **in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me:** therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.”

The law was that killing someone was a crime punishable by death, but if someone killed another person accidentally (manslaughter), God gave them a place of refuge, precisely because there is a difference, in one there is intent and in the other, there is not:

Exodus 21:12-14 “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man **lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand;** then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man **come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile;** thou shalt take him from mine altar, **that he may die.**” (see also Genesis 9:5-6, Exodus 20:13, Exodus 21:22, Exodus 22:2, Joshua 20:19, Deuteronomy 19:1-21 and Numbers 35:22-35)

So even though someone had killed another and had broken the law, it was accidental and God had mercy. In another scripture, God explained that the law was different for accidental and wilful sinners:

Numbers 15:27-31 “And if any soul **sin through ignorance**, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that **sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance** before the LORD, to **make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance**, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that **doeth ought presumptuously**, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, **the same reproacheth the Lord;** and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because **he hath despised the word of the Lord**, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; **his iniquity shall be upon him.**”

The point is, that although we are **not** under the 613 Mosaic laws, God **never changes** (see **Isaiah 40:8**, **Hebrews 13:8**, **Malachi 3:6**, **James 1:17**, **Psalms 102:25-27**) and we are told in the New Testament to follow His commandments, just as they had to under the old covenant (see **John 14:20-21**, **1 John 2:3-6**,

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Luke 6:46, Luke 8:21, Luke 11:28, John 14:23-24, John 14:15, Revelation 22:14, John 15:10, 2 John 1:9, Romans 1:5, 1 John 2:17, James 1:22 and Philippians 2:12), He has eternal laws! So if you are wilfully sinning, you are **despising and reproaching the Lord!** There are consequences for this, if you do not repent you lose salvation.

The apostle Paul talks of past ignorance that led to the Jews crucifying Jesus, in bringing them the gospel, and he tells them to repent of their sins:

Acts 3:17 “And now, brethren, I wot that **through ignorance ye did it**, as did also your rulers.”

When Paul went to Athens he shared the gospel, and again, told them to repent of their sins because God wasn't prepared to allow mankind to continue in wilful sin:

Acts 17:30 “And **the times of this ignorance God winked at**; but now commandeth **all men every where to repent**.”

The church have been given the gospel, which includes all of Jesus' commandments, so they **know** what sin is, and believers are **not** acting in ignorance when they **wilfully** sin. Peter visited the church and reminded them about obedience, and talked of temptations trying their faith. Their faith was **tried** because they **resisted** those temptations. He reminds them that **the end** of their faith is the salvation of their souls and to keep up the good work.

1 Peter 1:14 “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to **the former lusts in your ignorance**.”

Paul reminded the Romans that in the past, before coming to Jesus they were in sin, but they were not to behave that way any more:

Romans 6:19-22 “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as **ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness** and to **iniquity unto iniquity**; even so **now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness**. For when ye **were** the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? **for the end of those things is death**. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, **ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life**.”

2 Timothy 2:19 “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, **let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity**.”

Titus 2:14 “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from **all iniquity**, and **purify** unto himself **a peculiar people, zealous of good works**.”

James 3:6 “And **the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity**: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

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Paul tells the church that they are able to (they have free will), but must not, wilfully sin:

Hebrews 10:26 “For **if we sin wilfully** after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.”

Paul explains in **1 Timothy**, how he himself, before he came to Christ, sinned in ignorance:

1 Timothy 1:13-14 “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but **I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly** in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus criticised the Pharisees and Sadducees for their iniquity:

Matthew 23:28 “Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but **within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.**”

Paul described in Hebrews, how Jesus **hates** iniquity:

Hebrews 1:9 “Thou hast loved righteousness, **and hated iniquity**; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

And Jesus talked of the end times, when wilful sin would be widespread, **including among so-called Christians**:

Matthew 24:12 “And **because iniquity shall abound**, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Jesus Himself tells people that if they remain in iniquity (wilful sin) He will send them to hell:

Matthew 7:23 “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: **depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**” (see also Luke 13:27)

Matthew 13:41 “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, **and them which do iniquity;**”

So finally, what are some examples of wilful and accidental sin by believers, who we must assume know the bible and have read what sinful behaviours are (remember, these are sins in **God's** eyes, no matter what society says, and must be seen from His perspective). These aren't meant to be definitive lists, you will notice that the accidental sin list is much shorter than the wilful sin list, because we must take responsibility for our actions, **we always have free will**:

Wilful Sin – intended/chosen/premeditated
Watching pornography (there are multiple scriptures about uncovering nakedness, the Greek word for fornication is pornea, so this is a form of fornication and it's also lust)
Lying (including bearing false witness and covering up for the dishonesty of others)
Stealing/theft
Murder (including abortion)

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Taking drugs/alcohol
Gossip/slander
Being argumentative/sowing discord
Blasphemy
Fornication (<i>including with a prostitute</i>), defined as sex by unmarried persons
Adultery, defined as sex with someone other than your spouse
Assault
Masturbation
Hatred
Idolatry
Showing partiality
Jealousy/Envy
Covetousness
Worldliness (<i>living to the flesh, loving the world and the things of the world</i>)
Unforgiveness
Lack of mercy
Lack of charity (<i>including not helping members of your own household</i>)
Pride
Witchcraft
Wrath
Revenge

Wilful sins involve pride by default, because we are choosing to do them knowing they are wrong, but doing them anyway, because we have insufficient, or no fear of God. We may be resting self-assured because of an **incomplete view** of God (e.g. *that He is only love and forgetting that He is a judge*) or because of being deceived by a **false** doctrine, such as eternal security (OSAS). Accidental sins are harder to quantify, precisely because we do have so much control over our actions and can choose to abstain from doing almost anything. But things can happen accidentally, unexpectedly, or in the heat of the moment, that we quickly regret and ask forgiveness for. If we had no malice in our heart and weren't making a conscious choice to commit the sin, as we have seen, God has mercy on us. He will of course also have mercy if we have committed wilful sin, providing **we repent** of it with a contrite heart. But He will not be mocked. So you can't ask forgiveness and then continue doing it. If you are struggling with stopping a sin, you can ask the Lord for help, but you have to be **willing** to give it up and have a humble and contrite heart.

Galatians 6:7 “**Be not deceived; God is not mocked:** for **whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.**”

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Accidental Sin – unplanned/unforeseen/unintended
Being under stress and a swear word slipping out without intending it to
Giving someone false information that you had believed to be true at the time
Picking something up that belongs to another accidentally and taking it, without realising you had done so
Killing someone by e.g. them running unexpectedly out into the road in front of your car
Making a poor decision in error (<i>error in judgement</i>), that results in harm to another that you couldn't easily foresee
Being tired/unwell and reacting badly towards another person, under provocation
Failing to show mercy, by genuinely not realising mercy was needed
Failing to show charity, by genuinely not realising charity was needed

God is a judge. He judges **all** sin and He is too holy to look on sin. But He is just and merciful in His judgements. And this is why He understands that there is a difference in intent, He knows our hearts (see **Proverbs 21:2**, **1 Samuel 16:17**, **Jeremiah 17:10**, **Romans 8:27**, **Acts 15:8**, **Psalms 44:21**, **Revelation 2:23**, **John 2:25**, **1 Kings 8:39** and **Proverbs 17:3**). And **Matthew 5:8** tells us that the “...pure in heart...” will see God. The Lord said He would write His laws on our hearts (see **Romans 2:15**, **Hebrews 8:10** and **Hebrews 10:16**). God's laws are of course holiness and righteousness, **not** iniquity! So please understand the difference, in **repenting of wilful sin**, the thing we are commanded to do when we come to Jesus, and accidental sin that happens in our walk. We have corruptible bodies (see **1 Corinthians 15:53-54**), but we have to make **every effort** to walk in obedience to the Lord, and because we cannot be 100% perfect, we have Jesus as our advocate and the gift of confession, so that we can keep our garments white. **1 Peter 1:22-23** tells us that in being born again we have “purified our souls” **in being obedient to the Holy Spirit** and are “born of incorruptible seed”, we cannot live to the flesh as we are not walking in the spirit if we do and are in disobedience. Therefore, let us all make every effort to keep our robes unspotted and unwrinkled, for the return of the Lord. God bless you all. Amen.

Acknowledgements

Almighty God