Acts 3: 16-17 "What is Sin Anyway" Jerry Arnold July 1, 2006

It was supposed to be a simple process. Karen graduated, the school would send her transcripts to the licensing agency, they would send a letter of recommendation, she had filled out the application, and she took her tests for the boards, and she had passed. And so we waited patiently for her license as an occupational therapist to come. This was two years ago, and we were anxious because 4 years ago, she decided that it was time to go back to school. And actually we both agreed. She had a degree in elementary education, she had taught for number of years, and we have moved to the area, didn't get the job in education, and long and short of it, our daughter had become an occupational therapist, Karen liked the work, liked the sound of it, and so we decided to go back to school. It was a big decision because we still had two of our children at home; one in college and one in high school. So we were going to go from two incomes down to one, actually, ¾ because I am a pastor. And we would still have to educate our children and make it, and about the time that we were making this decision, the house that we had down in Montgomery AL, sold. And we had enough money; we figured we had enough money for 18 months. Not quiet two years, but it would get us close enough were we felt it was kind of step out in faith. And so she made it through school, graduated with honors, yeah, we were so excited for her. And then, we came to this point this summer, she was hired by a company, she had a job, she was going to begin working in just a couple of weeks, and our checking account had 4 cents in it. That's it! We had made it, 4 cents.

The Employer notified her that they need indication from the state of Tennessee that her license had been accepted, or she needed her license. So, Karen wondered what was taking so long, and began to call up to Nashville to find out, to inquire. She got the run around, tried again, got the runaround, eventually; she was able to talk to somebody. And they said they couldn't volunteer any information, and so she kept asking questions. And little by little, phone call after phone call, she learned that school indeed had sent a transcript, the school had indeed sent the letter of recommendation that her application was all filled out, but they weren't on the desk of the woman who needed to have them on her desk. And Karen said, so where are they and she said: "I don't know." And so phone calls, back and forth, it should have been a simple process, but it wasn't. And it's getting more complicated because Karen found out that there is a committee that meets to approve all the licenses, they were going to meet in about a week, and then they wouldn't meet again for two months. And those 4 cents were looking pretty desperate. And we needed to get her working, and so she says, "well were could these things be?" And the lady said, "They are probably down in the mail room, in the building." "Great," Karen says, "go get them!" Lady says, "The government doesn't work that way, they have to bring it to us." So they could be down there lost. So Karen thinking, she says well, can I just bring stuff personally? I'll go get another sat of transcripts; in fact, she had the school resend everything, I think I mentioned that. She said, I'll go, and I'll get everything, and I'll come. Can I come? "No, you are not allowed in the building!"

Well, my wife is pretty sharp. She got thinking. So she called the receptionist of the building, and said: "Do you allow flower delivery to employees there?" "Yes, we do!" So

she said okay good, contacted the florist in Nashville who would work with us, went and got all the papers, all the documents, the sealed transcripts, all that, put it in the envelope, overnight it to this florist, the florist took it to the receptionist, it was sent up in a matter of minutes up to the lady, with the beautiful bouquet of flowers, and all the information, it arrived on the lady's desk there; there it was, pretty sharp!

Now the lady called. And the impression that Karen got from this lady all along this journey was Karen was being a bother to her. She wouldn't answer any question; she didn't offer any information, it was just kind of, she was sighing and going through her job. So she calls and she says: "Oh, you didn't have to do that, it was so wonderful," and Karen kind of going like this: "Well, I just wanted to thank you." She said, "Well, we'll process it right a way." Thank you so much.

Well, it got processed, and she got employed, and our 4 cents got increased, and we praise God for that. But how many of you have ever had an experience, it should have been a simple process. It could have been a trip you were going on. In fact, just today one of church members, one of our ladies identified to me that she got a flat tire on the way to here and had to hitch hike on the way to church. And I said, "no you didn't really hitch hike," and she said: "no, but I really called someone and they picked me up." Should have been a simple process, should have been a simple trip. Have you had experiences like that? I had one this week, regarding the sermon. It should have been a simple process, but it's gotten very complicated, as you shell see.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts, chapter 3. Acts chapter 3! This will be our third story on the man who was healed by Peter and John. This is the lame man who sat by the Beautiful Gate. And when he was healed, he went walking, and leaping, and praising God. We are reading verses 16 and 17 this morning. Peter is preaching to the crowed that is gathered around. He says in verse 16: "And His name" that's referring to Jesus, "through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also you rulers."

Well, the first question that comes to mind is, did it? Did what? If you back up the verses to 14 and 15 you get the gist of what Peter is saying. "But you deny the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised form the dead, of which we are witnesses." That's the "it" that he was talking about. He says, "You did in ignorance as did also your rulers." Now, what's going to happen is that Peter and John will be arrested, and the next day they will appear in front of the rulers. The rulers are named, or they are mentioned and identified in chapter 4 verse 5. Chapter 4, verse 5: "And it came to pass, on the next day that their rulers, elders, and scribes as well as Annas the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem."

So, the rulers were the rulers; the high priests, the family of the high priest. Earlier in chapter 4 had mentioned the Sadducees, and the ruler of a captain of the temple and other priests, so you know, the leaders, the rulers. Peter says, "You did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers." I found that rather intriguing, in ignorance? I looked up the word

"ignorance" and it means: lacking knowledge or comprehension. It means, not aware of what you are doing. How could it be that those vary people that are mentioned were not aware of what they were doing? Did they not know that they were turning a Life Giver, over to Pilot to be crucified? Did they not know that, did they not understand?

Well, it even gets a little more complicated because in chapter 3, go back there a verse 18 and 19, Peter says: "But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that you sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." So they are told to repent, be converted, your sins will be blotted out, and times of refreshing will come. Now, that's kind of interesting because on one hand he said, what you did, you did in ignorance; however, you got to repent. Well that got my attention what does this mean? And repent is talking about sin, be converted and your sins will be blotted out. So three questions just jumped out from this passage to me, number one, how could the rulers be considered ignorant? Number two, if you don't understand how could you be held accountable, and then number three, what is sin anyways?

Well the first two questions I am going to just kind of blow off, to be honest with you. How could the rulers be considered ignorant, we'll just say it was a dumb thing to do, and they were ignorant to do it. And that's not really deep answer, but you dig around, you'll find one. The second question, if you don't understand how could you be held accountable? Well, they are being brought to conviction by what Peter is saying. Peter is saying, you are accountable, and I am giving understanding to you. Well, that kind of makes sense, but what bothers me is, when I beginning to study this, ignorance, sin, accountability, repent, be converted, sins blotted out, all that kind of stuff; all of a sudden I realize I have fallen into a trap, a trap that many of you have fallen into. As a Christian you have heard phrases, you have heard terms, you have used words so often that those words have a meaning to you and to us, and many times that's a folklore theology. It's something raw accept, but it is not Biblical, and here is what I discovered.

I didn't understand what the Bible's definition of sin was. Oh, I know what we say it is, but I am going to tell you what we say it is, isn't necessarily so. I began to think about this thing about sin. And the more I studied about sin, the more complex it became. The more contradictory statements were in the scriptures. And the more I realized, I don't even know what sin is, and I came home and I told Karen: "I am going to have to do the whole series of sermons just on sin, or we can't even move forward." So welcome to our Summer of Sin.

Today the journey is beginning. We are going to look at what the Bible teaches about sin. And in the process I want to help to teach you how to study the Bible, I want to help you to learn how to have your opinions and your ideas come straight from the Bible. So here is what I did. If I want to know something that's talked about in the New Testament, I think the primary authority will be Jesus Himself. Are you with me? So all right, I take a Bible concordance. If you don't have a Bible concordance you may want to get one. It will help enhance your Bible study. I took a Bible concordance and I turned to the word

sin. And I found every place that Jesus uses the word, sin. Surely, He will give us a definition of what sin is. Let's look at those references. Please turn to Matthew chapter 12 verse 31 Jesus uses the word, sin. Mathew 12 verse 31 Jesus is speaking, He says: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men" and when I read that, I was delighted. I am excited about that, I am happy. But Jesus continues, He says: "but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men." And then I got thinking, well, I know what that means, and then I thought do I really know what that means? Because of so much that I believe have been things I just accepted and I never really study them in the Word of God. And so I said to my self, well we need to study that text. How do we know what blaspheming the Holy Spirit really means? So we are going to study that.

Let's go to John 5 verse 14. Mark and Luke do not record Jesus using the word "sin." We have to go all the way to John chapter 5. John chapter 5 Jesus is going to heal a man by the pool of Bethesda, the man has been laying for 38 years, he's been afflicted for 38 years and Jesus is going to heal him. And He tells the man to take up his bed and walk, and in John 5 verse 14 Jesus found the man in the temple and said: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest the worse thing come upon you." Well that troubles me. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you? I though to myself, oh we have to study that. What does it mean? How does that work? How does that all fit together? What kind of hope is there in that because though I might not have a Biblical definition of sin, I know I am a sinner. So what does it mean, lest a worse thing come upon you?

We go to John 8 you have a story of a woman who is thrown at the feet of Jesus, she is caught in adultery. Her accusers are trying to get Jesus to say something against her in accusation, and we come to verse 7. John 8 verse 7: "So when they continued asking Him He raised himself up and said to them, He who is without sin let him throw a stone at her first." I love that story, I love that demeanor and picture of Jesus but it doesn't define for us what sin is. In verse 11 He uses the word sin again. He's asked her where her accusers are, and she says they are not there, and He says: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Well, there is that phrase again. Sin no more! To the other guy He says lest the worse thing happen, now He is saying sin no more. What does it all mean, how does it all fit together? John 8 verse 34: "Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a salve of sin." I believe I understand that concept. But I am still not convinced I understand what sin is? Because as you will see when we begin to study in the Word of God, you'll discover that in the Old Testament sin is personified sometimes, and that's where we are going to go next week. How, what is this sin that lays waiting to take over Cain's life? And as you travel down through the Scriptures, you'll discover that sin has all kinds of dimensions and ramifications. And I think that we have made a convenient, little definition to prove a doctrinal point that is eliminating for us a deeper understanding of our Savior. Because brothers and sisters the truth is this: if I understand the Biblical definition of what sin is, I will have a better understanding of what a Savior does, you see.

Let's go to another text, John 8 verse 46 Jesus is speaking. "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" Jesus will not give a working

definition of sin in any of His recorded sermons. He will not preach about it. But one thing is clear, He knows He doesn't sin, and He doesn't allow people to accuse Him of sinning. He is above sin. We come to John 9 verses 1, 2, and 3 it says: "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

Now the word sin is not used there, although word sinned is, but I read that to you so you have a back drop of where it is used. And that's found in verse 41, same chapter. The whole chapter is about the story of Jesus healing the blind man. We come to verse 41, "Jesus said to them," that's the Pharisees "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains." What is sin? John 15 Jesus speaks, or He uses the word sin. John 15 verse 22 he says: "If I had not come and spoken to them they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin." Who is He talking about? "He who hates Me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father."

Is He talking about the vary people that Peter says they did it in ignorance? And Jesus is saying look if I hadn't come, they wouldn't be held accountable. And if they didn't know, they wouldn't' be held at that standard, and so we begin to think. Is it possible then that it's true that ignorance is a bliss, and that it would be better not to know anything, and just kind of stumble through life and let things happen the way they do, that doesn't make sense, especially when Peter says what you did you did ignorantly, now you better repent. We are held accountable. So what is sin, how does it all work together?

I become very confused what should have been a simple sermon. A simple process is causing me to think. I know less than I thought I did. Look at John 16 verse 8 Jesus uses the word sin; He is talking about the Holy Spirit. He says: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." I believe that, I experienced it in my own life, but I still don't have a definition from Jesus about sin. Let's go to John 19 verse 11 the last reference Jesus uses to the word sin. John 19 verse 11 Jesus says: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." Greater sin? How many of you have heard sermons or read something that says there are no levels of sin with God, sin is sin that's it. All are bad. How many of you have heard that? I heard that. Jesus says there is a greater sin. In fact, when we go through the wisdom literature looking through Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and the writings of Solomon about sin you discover God has a list of sin and the things that God says are bad. We kind of accept as normal. And the things we say is bad God said aren't as bad as those other things. So what is sin? What is God's concept of sin? You begin to understand why we are beginning a journey.

Well that's it for sin. What about sinful? That's the next word you come to in the concordance. Jesus uses that word twice. Mark 8 verse 38 He calls it adulterous and sinful nation; Luke 24 verse 7 He says He will be delivered into the hand of sinful men.

But He doesn't say what that is. So we actually come to the word sinned. John 9, 3 we read that one earlier. Which one sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind? Come to the words sinner, sinners, sins, no definition of sin by Jesus. It's kind of fascinating isn't it? So, I know, I know, you've been saying. You know the definition of sin. What is the definition of sin? First John 3 verse 4. Let's go there. I suppose you suspect I have been here, and I have looked at this. By the way, if you would like to enjoy a little confusion today, take a pencil and read First John. Read all of it, and every time you come to the word sin, circle it. And you are going to find that we need to study this. Because John says some of the strangest things; he says, "Any one in Christ, doesn't sin." And then he says, "Hey, anyone who says he doesn't sin is a liar." And then he says, you know, if you confess to God, your sins, they will be forgiven. And then, he says the strangest thing, in fact this I was pulling my hair our trying to understand this one.

Let's look at 1st John 5 verse 16. And if any one of you comes up later and says, I know what it means, I am not going to believe you. 1st John 5 verse 16 says: "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I don not say that he should pray about that." What in the world is that? There is a sin that leads to death and if you see your brother doing that, don't pray for him. But then there is a sin that doesn't lead to death and if you see you brother doing that, well you can pray for him and God will hear that. What is that all about? I am telling you right now, I read everything I could on that and I am more confused now than I was last week when I even tried to understand it.

So you begin to realize, we are beginning a journey. What does the Bible really teach about sin? What does it mean? All right, let's go to something familiar. 1st John 3 verse 4; a little oases in the desert perhaps, but maybe not? 1st John 3 verse 4: "Who ever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." There, see Pastor Arnold, it wasn't that hard. In the Old King James Version which most of us cut our teeth on, sin is transgression of the law, right? How many of you heard that? That's the definition of sin; sin is transgression of the law. Well, that's not the definition, that's not what its saying. Now, I will tell you, sin does transgress the law, but it's really more convenient to use it as a doctrinal tool to demonstrate our need to keep the Sabbath. But notice, if you say the definition of sin it's the transgression of the law you don't understand in English, and you certainly don't understand it in Greek.

I was going to read it to you in Greek, but I thought "poi" and all that stuff doesn't mean anything; doesn't mean anything to me, and I read it. But verse 4: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness." Who ever commits sin, what word is used for sin? "Harmatia?" All through the New Testament "Harmatia" is used. It's spelled with an "a" in the Greek, but we put an "h" in front of it to angle it. Harmatia! What does harmatia mean? It has a meaning already. Harmatia means "missing the mark." It's simply used back in Greek times for an archer who shoots and misses the mark. Harmatia - missed the mark. So there is already a definition: whoever commits, missing the mark, also commits "anomia" means, against the law.

Now, if you read this in the New American Standard Bible, it says: "Everyone who practices sin, also practices lawlessness and sin is lawlessness." Now, it's not saying that that's all sin is, in fact hold your hand here. Look at Romans chapter 14 and verse 23, Paul, writing his great theological letter to the church at Rome. He says, "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." Do you want a definition of sin, there is one! How come we don't use that one around here? What ever is not of faith is sin! So, if someone were to ask you give me working definition of sin, there is one. What ever is not of faith, that's sin, that's what Paul says. Well, how does that match then with 1st John 3 verse 4? Turn back there, 1st John 3 verse 4, remember we have to study everything in its context. Who is John writing to? What's the situation, what is going on? What did it mean to those people, what does it mean to us? That's what we have to do!

John is writing to the church. Who is in the church? The church is primarily Jewish. Even though they have gone out to the Gentiles, the Gentiles were becoming Jewish in a way. And that's the flavor of the New Testament Church, it's a Jewish background. The Jews had a concept of sin that was very, very sinful, very, very concrete! They say that about us, we are concrete thinkers. That means we are all mixed up and set in our ways. Here is what Jews believed: they believed that all sin was breaking the "Torah." Now, what is the torah? The law of God, or the 5 books of Moses which is called the law! So that was their definition of sin. If it's in the Torah, we do it! And by the time, you know 1400 years later, after Moses gave those and you come to the days of Jesus not only do they have the torah, but they have the oil traditions as well, and those are just as strong; and you discover that the main conflict that Jesus has with the people in His day, is over what is sin? Jesus heals people on the Sabbath, and they say that's a sin!

They didn't really understand what sin was, but John understood who his audience was when he was writing. And he is trying to wretched sin up to a level where it gets their attention, and he says basically, all sin is breaking the law, all! But what is he specifically talking about? Look at chapter 2 verse 18. "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that is the last hour." John is talking about the Antichrist, and antichrists that are coming. What is the problem with antichrists? They are unbelievers, they do not believe God, and because they don't believe God, they get in rebellion to God, and they deceive others to do the same. That's what he is talking about, and he is trying to demonstrate that that attitude of unbelief is sin, that is like breaking the law. That's what he is saying. And unfortunately, we have come at this and said, the Biblical definition for sin is breaking the law. That's not what its saying, there is more to it. We've began the journey today.

Now, I want to give you some good news, would you like some good news? Look at Mark chapter 2 we are going to begin with verse 16 and read verse 17 along with it. It says: "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." I am telling you today brothers and sisters, it's good to be a sinner. No, I am

not asking you to sin, but it says Jesus loves sinners. I am not even convinced I know what sin is, but I know I am a sinner. And Jesus came to heal me, and He's come to heal you. I'll tell you a strange thing about sin. If you don't have a working definition of it that's Biblical, you end up straggling. Let me ask you a question, how many of you have ever heard this? To waste food is sinful, have you ever heard that; it's a sin, but what if you eat it, what does God think? That's a sin! So what's the sin? To leave it or to eat it; I'll promise you brothers and sisters without a working definition of sin, you give me any issue, any idea, anything that's coming around, and I can make a sin out of it. And that's what we do.

And here is what happened. My wife sent flowers to this lady who acted as if all my wife's fault caused to her were a bother. When she got those flowers, she called back and, "Oh, thank you, you didn't have to do that." She was just as soft and friendly, and kind. I have a bouquet of flowers I want to offer you today. His name is Jesus. And here is what happens. When He comes into our life, instead of being bothered by a conscience that is wondering, "Is this a sin, is this a sin, do I do this, can I do that, what about this, what about that, everything an issue, all mad, there is a Devil here, there is a Devil there, I don't know if I should do this, or if I should do that, I am just worried about all this religious thing," now, Jesus comes and He says: "I give you peace!" Because what ever sin is, He's got us covered. He's got us covered. So, I offer you a bouquet of flowers today, His name is Jesus. And when you get him, those phone calls of guilt that you thought were bothersome, they are not going to be there because you have a Savior. And sin, what ever it is, is out of your life because of Him.

So I ask you today, would you like to receive Jesus again? Would you like to say to Him, Lord I want you in my heart, if you would like to say that, then I am going to ask you to stand right were you are at.