

Absolute and Directional (Abridged)

By Rickie Jenkins

Absolute sins are easily identified. We are not normally deceived by them. Lying, stealing, or murder, for example, are clear violations of God's law. When an absolute sin is committed, there is a particular act that can be identified and addressed.

Absolute sins can also involve the heart. Jesus said, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Here the sin is an act of the mind rather than an outward action, but it is nevertheless identifiable.

Directional sin may be more difficult to recognize. It has to do not simply with an isolated act, but with where a person is going. Directional sin is dangerous because of the path it reveals.

Consider Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. Simon had renounced his former practice of sorcery and become a Christian. But when he saw the apostles laying their hands upon others and imparting miraculous gifts, he attempted to purchase that ability with money.



Peter rebuked him, saying, "Your heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21). Simon had certainly committed a particular sin, but there was a deeper concern: Which direction was he going? He was beginning to drift away from what was right.

The Hebrew Christians faced a similar problem. The writer tells them that although they ought to have become teachers, they needed someone to teach them again the first principles of God's word. They required "milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). He then urges them to "go on to perfection" (Hebrews 6:1).

What particular sin would we charge against these people? Murder? Lying? Stealing? None of these is identified. Their problem was directional. They had failed to grow. Instead of progressing toward maturity, they were moving backward. Throughout Hebrews, the warning becomes increasingly urgent because their spiritual direction was leading them toward apostasy.

Now compare them with the Corinthians.

Sometimes people read First Corinthians and wonder how Paul could address such a troubled group as "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Their

problems were numerous and serious. Yet Second Corinthians reveals something important about their direction.

These people had been converted out of paganism and gross idolatry. When Paul confronted their sins, many accepted his correction. They responded to truth, repented,



and zealously addressed their problems. They had serious faults, but which direction were they going? They were moving toward God.

That direction made an enormous difference.

Imagine if Paul had confronted their sins only to discover that they continually resisted the truth and grew worse. Their situation would have been entirely different. Instead, despite their failures, they demonstrated a willingness to hear God's word and change.

Hebrews presents the opposite danger. These Christians had begun well, but now they were in danger of turning back. Corinth was

threatened by particular sins being practiced within the church. The Hebrews were threatened by something deeper: they were drifting away from Christ. Their direction placed them in grave spiritual danger.

This distinction should cause us to examine ourselves carefully. There are absolute sins that invade our lives through weakness, ignorance, temptation, and poor judgment. When we recognize them, we repent, seek forgiveness, and correct them.

But we must examine more than individual failures. We must also consider the trajectory of our lives.

Do I respond to correction? Am I growing in knowledge and maturity? Do I recognize sin and turn from it? Am I becoming more receptive to God's word—or increasingly resistant to it?

It is important to ask, "What have I done?"

But there may be an even more revealing question:

Which direction am I headed?