



SIN NEUTRALIZERS – THINGS WE DO TO JUSTIFY OUR WRONG ACTIONS

Sin demands a response. It will always give one. The question is not, “Will I respond to sin?” You will. The real question is, “How will you respond to sin?” Like gravity, sin is an unalterable law. God has given us the answer to our sin problem as well as the power to overcome sin’s realities. Because of Christ we do not have to be overcome by the vicissitudes of sin. We can become Gospel-centered, Gospel-motivated, and Gospel-empowered. It is up to us as to how we respond to the things done to us.

Man-centered Neutralizers

1. Excuse – This is probably the most often used tactic to neutralize one’s sin. Our old friend Adam used this back in the Garden of Eden and it is a tempting response to a dumb act. The downside, for those who have to live with us, is that it is frustrating to them because it is not really a solution at all. It does not get rid of sin. It merely turns sin into some kind of ambiguous grey gibberish that leaves everyone feeling awkward because the sin is still like the elephant in the room. Resorting to excuses rather than taking responsibility for our actions is not a good path to follow.
2. Justify – Many times we compare ourselves to others, which is part of the process in use to talk ourselves into thinking that our sin is not as bad as the sin of others. Typically, when we go into a self-justifying mode, it is because we think we deserve better than what we have. Justification is a form of anger that comes from a heart that says, “I will get what I want regardless of what it costs or who is hurt in the process. The big idea that dominates this thinking is **“I deserve to be happy.”**

Usually the justifying persons have not been able to deal with their personal disappointments in life. They have talked themselves into being a victim of this or that and because of what has happened to them, they have reasoned that they deserve better. And when they sin, when they are in the process of getting whatever they feel they deserve, they justify their sinful actions because they have convinced themselves that they have been unnecessarily hurt and should be rewarded. It is a cycle that leaves many casualties.

3. Alleviate – Typically people who try to alleviate their sin have a different kind of sensitivity to their sin. Their sense of morality is more inward focused rather than the Justifier or the Excuser, who tend to point to externals as the reason that they do what they do. While the

Excuser and the Justifier know the difference between right and wrong, they are not as introspective about their sin.

The way this practically works out for the Justifier or the Excuser is that their response to sin is to blame others while the Alleviator chooses to blame himself/herself. This is their version of self-atonement. Some “self-punishing” responses to sin are: drugs, sex, over-eating, excessive T.V. watching, spending money, medication, anger, cutting, or “woe is me” and other self-loathing remarks.

These responses are intended to help the Alleviator in at least three ways: (1) There is a hope for comfort through these responses; (2) There is a feeling of payment for sin; (3) There is a distraction from guilt. None of these responses accomplish the intended goal of removing the sin.

4. Blame – The core issue with blame is self-righteousness. It is difficult to admit that you have done anything wrong – or at least anything that compares with the wrong that is suffered! They are too in love with themselves to say that they made a mistake. Though they are aware of their sin, they choose to place their sin on someone or something else. A response to sin is required and they choose to respond by saying some version of “It is not really my fault!”

CONCLUSION

If a person chooses any of the four responses above they are rejecting God’s method of dealing with wrongs. It might be helpful to consider these three questions:

1. What is it that is difficult about the Gospel for you to grasp and apply?
2. Are you accepting responsibility for your sinful choices and appropriating God’s Gospel to your life on a daily basis? If not, why not?
3. Do you need some help in practically applying the Gospel to your life?

Consequences for Rejecting the Gospel Solution

1. Lying: You must ignore your sin
2. Guilt: You know sin is still a problem
3. Blame: He/she did wrong and is going to pay
4. Self-Loathing: I must punish myself
5. Anger: He/she did wrong and I am mad
6. Fear: I have done wrong and God is mad at me
7. Stubbornness: I will not repent or forgive
8. Hopelessness: It is too late for hope
9. Manipulation: I will use something to punish the other person
10. Mistrust: I can never trust this person again
11. Cynicism: God allowed this to happen

12. Shame: I don't want to talk about it

13. Regret: "I wish....."

Three Alternatives

1. Develop a Biblically-informed conscience. This is a person determined to live by God's kind guidance.
2. Antinomianism is a direction characterized by a hardened conscience. They are selfish and self-centered.
3. The Pharisee is a person who lives by "lists" of what is right and what is wrong. They do not struggle with imposing their standards on others.

Any life is moldable. Our conscience can be softened or hardened, depending on how we respond to guilt and conviction. A tender conscience has sensitivity to God's Word. It responds quickly and precisely to conviction and individual lives in a continual state of love, joy, peace, holiness, and victory. A tender conscience is not the same as a weak conscience. A tender conscience is informed by the Word of God and brought in line with the truth of the word.