

A close-up photograph of a hand placing a wooden block on top of a Jenga tower. The tower is made of many wooden blocks, some light and some dark, stacked in a precarious balance. The background is a soft, out-of-focus teal color. A semi-transparent red horizontal band runs across the middle of the image, containing the text '2 PROBLEM'.

2

PROBLEM

NOTES FROM VIDEO



SECTION ONE: IT'S A MISTAKE

In Part 1, we determined that the starting point for the Christian faith is a question: *Who is Jesus?* Traditionally, however, the starting point for the Christian faith is an accusation: “You’re a sinner.”

Big difference.

Sin is an uncomfortable word. It’s so uncomfortable that we’ve pretty much abandoned it. When kids disobey, parents don’t respond with, “You’ve sinned against me.” When an employee is late with a report, managers don’t respond with, “Have a seat. We need to talk about your sins.” Even judges don’t use that term.

But we know we aren’t perfect. So in our efforts to address the tension between our inability to get it right every time and our disdain for being categorised as never getting it right, we’ve adopted a new term that falls somewhere in the middle: *mistake*. We aren’t sinners. But we aren’t perfect. We make *mistakes*.

There is a problem with using the term *mistake* to describe all our less-than-perfect decisions and behaviours. The problem is that label doesn’t adequately describe everything we call a mistake.

A mistake is an error in action, calculation, opinion, or judgment caused by poor reasoning, carelessness, or insufficient knowledge. Mistakes are *accidental*. A mistake is something a sixth grader makes on a math test. A mistake is something adults make when filing their income tax returns. A mistake is something we learn from so we don’t do it again. However, we’ve expanded that definition to include just about everything.

But sin harms our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. It’s so deeply engrained in all of us, we can’t stop sinning.

How about a celebrity when it’s discovered that he’s been involved in a multi-year affair? He almost always refers to those recurring rendezvous as *mistakes*. But does *mistake* really capture the magnitude and nature of an affair? Offended spouses say no. Offended spouses feel betrayed. They might even reach back for the old-fashioned term *sin* to describe what their partners did.

**Your best teacher is your
last mistake**

 **Ralph Nader**

Then there's this. Sometimes we make *mistakes* on purpose. Don't we? Don't you? Sometimes we *plan* our mistakes. Think about that. You are guilty of premeditated *mistakes*! What do you call a *mistake* you make on purpose? What's the best term to describe a *mistake* you make on a recurring basis? What do you call a person who plans and carries out the same mistakes over and over? A serial *mistaker*? Last question. What term should we use for a premeditated *mistake* that hurts another person?

Perhaps we've made a *mistake* substituting the term *mistake* for all things less than perfect. Perhaps we need a new term. Or perhaps we should reach back and resurrect an old term. As uncomfortable and as old-school as the term *sin* may seem, there is a benefit to reintroducing the word into our vocabularies.

Experience enable you to recognise a mistake when you make it again.

 Franklin P. Jones



SECTION ONE:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Where have you experiences or observed the inadequacy of labeling something a *mistake*?
- 2 What do you associate with the word *sin*?
- 3 How do you respond to the consequences of having done something wrong?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Every age has its massive moral blind spots. We might not see them, but our children will.



Bono



SECTION TWO: REPEAT OFFENDERS

You may resist being branded as a sinner. That's understandable. But the truth is, it's a brand no honest person can avoid. A sinner is anyone who knows the difference between right and wrong and chooses to do wrong. On purpose. Sound like someone you know?

Perhaps your resistance to being branded a sinner stems from its close association with divine condemnation, alienation, and separation. Listen to the average street preacher and you may conclude that not only does being a sinner condemn you to hell, but also that God is actually looking forward to sending you there!

Jesus had a very different response to those wearing the sinner brand. When you read the Gospels, you can't help noticing that he was attracted to sinners. Never once do we find him threatening them with hell. Not once. In fact, just the opposite is true. Jesus' response to sinners was an offer of restoration. As a result, people who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus. And he liked 'em back. Self-righteous religious leaders who peddled graceless religion were the only ones Jesus consistently condemned. Jesus had little patience for religious people who considered themselves sinless. He knew better. He knew they knew better as well.

Jesus taught that sin separates us from God, but that God's willingness to forgive reconnects us. So it was important to Jesus that men and women faced and embraced their status as sinners so they would recognise their need for forgiveness. Mistakers don't ask for forgiveness. Mistakers don't need forgiveness. Mistakers just need opportunities to do better next time.

When Jesus talked about sin, he made it so all-inclusive that nobody could escape. He said things like, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Ouch!

Jesus raised the standard so high that nobody made a passing grade. Then he turned right around and insisted that God was on an endless pursuit to restore his relationship with sinners. The transaction that made this possible was a personal admission of guilt and a request for forgiveness. So, while being branded a sinner is uncomfortable, Jesus taught that it is necessary. Sinners need forgiveness. Forgiveness is the means by which humanity is restored to a right relationship with the heavenly Father.

The difficulty we have in accepting responsibility for our behaviour lies in the desire to avoid the pain of the consequences of that behaviour.



M. Scott Peck



SECTION TWO: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What does the fact that Jesus was attracted to sinners say about him?
- 2 What does it cost a person to acknowledge he or she is a sinner?
- 3 Do you resist the idea of being called a sinner? Why or why not?

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But until a person can say deeply and honestly, "I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday," that person cannot say, "I choose otherwise."

 Stephen R. Covey



SECTION THREE: ONLY ONE PERSON

The Gospels record breathtaking events in which Jesus extended forgiveness and restoration to individuals who were considered beyond redemption. One involved a woman caught in adultery. This was not a one-time occurrence. This was not a mistake. It wasn't an accident. She knew better. Jewish law required that she be stoned. Jesus, who taught that the law was good and should be obeyed, invited those who assembled for the stoning to go ahead and commence the punishment ... but with one interesting caveat.

"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." - John 8:7

Jesus didn't defend her. Jesus didn't dumb down her sin. Jesus didn't give her any wiggle room. No talk of her desperate plight or her difficult upbringing. She was guilty as charged and deserved to be punished. Again, he invited it. But no one moved. No one threw a stone. Eventually, the crowd dissipated. The oldest members of the mob were the first to leave. Before long, Jesus was alone with the frightened woman. It was only then that he addressed her directly.

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. - John 8:10-11

What he said next is, well, breathtaking.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." - John 8:11

Jesus, who called people to an impossible standard of behaviour, declared this condemned woman uncondemned. This apparent contradiction reflects the essence of Jesus' message and ministry. He did not condone sin. He did not condemn sinners. He called sin, sin. But instead of insisting people get what the law said they had coming, he extended the very thing sinning people deserved least: forgiveness.

Another incident is even more amazing. This one takes place during Jesus' crucifixion. The gospel writer Luke tells us that Jesus was crucified between two criminals. According to Luke, one of the criminals crucified with Jesus hurled insults at him. The other criminal, however, came to Jesus' defense.

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" - Luke 23:40

What came next was shocking.

“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.” - Luke 23:41

That’s quite a statement. The criminal’s behaviour was so heinous, he not only believed he deserved to die, he believed he deserved to be crucified—a horrible form of execution in which people often suffered for days before dying. Referring to Jesus, he continues,

“But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” - Luke 23:41–42

There’s no way, right? He has no opportunity to do “better.” There’s no way to know if he’s sincere. He’s desperate. He would say anything at this point. Wouldn’t you? That’s what makes this story . . . breathtaking.

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” - Luke 23:43

Just like that, he’s forgiven.

He’s restored.

He’s in. He’s in.

If life were fair, we'd get treated the way we treat others, and if life were fair, we'd get paid exactly what we are worth. And in the end, we'd all get exactly what we deserve. So, son, maybe it's better if life isn't fair. Sometimes I'm thankful that life isn't fair.

 Mike Williams

2 Do you think Jesus' response to the criminal next to him was fair? Why or why not?

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 C. S. Lewis

BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 2

- Jesus raised the behavioural standard so high that no one could make a passing grade.
- God is on an endless pursuit to restore his relationship with sinners.
- Jesus never minimised the seriousness of sin, but he did not condemn sinners.

For however devoted you are to (God), you may be sure that he is immeasurably more devoted to you.

● Meister Eckhart

