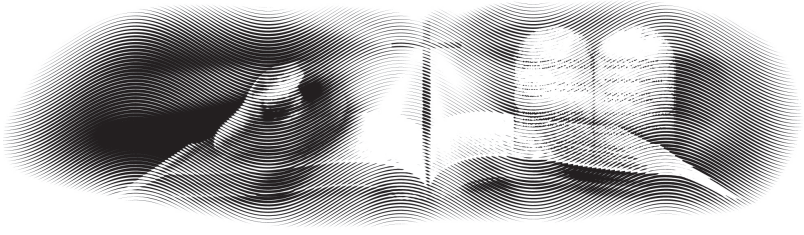
LESSON 9 *May 23–29

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Sin, *the* Gospel, *and the* Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 14; Mark 9:42–48; Rom. 3:20; Matt. 5:17, 18; Rom 3:28; Matt. 7:24–29.*

Memory Text: **"I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts"** *(Psalm 119:93, 94, NKJV)***.**

Without a doubt, sin is the greatest obstructor to a close relationship with God. Not only does sin separate us from God now *(Isa. 59:2)*, but it also deceives, hurts, consumes, and eventually destroys us. Our battle against sin and self is the greatest battle we'll ever face, with tremendous, even eternal, implications.

Some dismiss sin as just a regular part of life. After all, it's human nature to indulge in pleasure. But do we make light of sin because society has become so comfortable with it? We can tiptoe around the topic of sin, afraid that we'll offend someone if we call it what it is, but in the end, the more we choose to live comfortably with it, the further we'll slip from a healthy relationship with God.

Yes, every person has sinned, and our thoughts, motives, actions, and words hurt others, ourselves, and God. Ultimately, sin destroys our relationship with God, but God has revealed Himself to us through the knowledge of His law, which shines light on the sin in our lives.

This week let's explore the reason God gave us His law and, when someone transgresses God's law and consequently sins, what or who can help to restore their relationship with God.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 30.*

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Distractions and Temptations

Read about Samson's temptations in Judges 14 and Judges 16:1, 4, 16, 17. Although called by God for a specific purpose, Samson served God while giving in to temptation. What does the outcome of his life teach us?

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The great controversy is real, and we are all involved in it. The cosmic battle that began in heaven is now being played out in each of our own lives, as well.

Satan knows that he has to pull out everything he's got in the times that we're living in, right before Jesus comes, to keep us from having a close relationship with God. Perhaps you've been distracted with something that may not necessarily be wrong in itself but takes so much time and energy that there's very little left for God. Maybe it's work, social media, shopping, sports, or food. When we take a good hard look at ourselves, we'll see that overconsumption and an imbalance of any of these things can allow for little time for God and others. The enemy knows each of our weaknesses and the kinds of things that distract us from spending time with God. We should remember to seek God first *(Matt. 6:33)* before rushing into our day and all that may come our way.

Jesus understands our condition, but He rebukes our apathy *(Rev. 3:14–22)*. Although He is God, He was also a human being who felt tired, as we do *(John 4:6)*. He knew the pressures of life, as we do, but He often got relief by going away alone to pray to His Father *(Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35, Matt. 14:23)*. He knew that time with His Father was the best thing He could do to regain strength to battle temptations. It's the best and surest way for us too.

Samson fell because he thought he was strong. He depended on his own strength to overcome temptations. Every day, each of us faces battles with sin as the enemy of souls tries to weaken and destroy our relationship with God. He knows our weaknesses and zeroes in on them in order to dull our relationship with God and to bring guilt and a sense of unworthiness upon us, all of which tend to drive us away from God. The devil works to shift our thinking, our intentions, and our actions in order to gain a stronghold in some part of our lives. But remember: our faith will help us to stand, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

What are you struggling with now? How can the Word of God help you right now?

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Strongholds in My Relationship With God

There are many messages in the Bible that speak about our relationship with God and the barriers that prevent us from growing in Christ. Consider these words from Paul and Jesus:

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" *(1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV)***.** Like Samson, self-reliance will bring you down.

" 'Do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do . . . , that they may have glory from men' " *(Matt. 6:2, NKJV)***.** Stop telling everyone how good you are! Be humble, as Jesus was humble.

" 'But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you' " *(Matt. 5:28, 29, NKJV)***.** Do anything to remove the lust from your heart, because this is a barrier to your relationship with God.

" 'Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged' " *(Matt. 7:1, 2, NKJV)***.** Stop being so critical and judgmental of others. God is the Judge, so let Him be so *(1 Cor. 4:5)*.

" 'But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you' " *(Matt. 5:44, NKJV)*. Stop hating your enemies. When you feel negatively toward those who treat you badly, it instantly places a barrier in your relationship with God. Instead, start praying for your enemies and see how this changes not just your walk with God but also your relationship with others.

" 'But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment' " *(Matt. 5:22, NKJV)***.** Perhaps you've been justifying why you yell at those close to you. How is your anger impacting your relationship with God, not to mention those you're angry at? These are just a few areas that make us stumble.

Jesus warned about what we should do when our hands, feet, and eyes cause us to sin. What was Jesus warning us about? Read Mark 9:42–48.

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To cut off your hand or foot or to pluck out your eye because it's causing you to sin is extreme. It was supposed to be. But this is how seriously Jesus sees sin and its impact in our lives. How seriously are you taking it?

The Law

How would you define and describe sin to a non-Christian? How does the Bible describe sin? Read Romans 3:20 and 1 John 3:4.

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Sin is a transgression of God's law *(1 John 3:4)*, and sin also is wrapped up in our natures *(Ps. 51:5, Jer. 17:9)*. So, it's the law that brings to light what sin really is. The law is like putting on a pair of glasses so we can clearly see what's really around us, or using a mirror to see what we really look like. It brings clarity and conviction to our lives and our characters while at the same time telling us about God's character and what's important to Him.

The Ten Commandments *(Exod. 20:3–17)* were written by God's own finger. Jesus echoed their importance: " ' "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these' " *(Mark 12:30, 31, NKJV)*. He added: " 'On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' " *(Matt. 22:40, NKJV)*.

God's words to the Israelites at Mount Sinai and to us today *(Heb. 1:1, 2)* tell us that the law is all about relationships. God gave the law as a safeguard to protect our relationship with Him and with others. However, Satan has distorted the beauty of God's law so that some see it as a burden. Legalism rather than love and freedom is often attached to the law, even though the Bible tells us, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" *(1 John 5:3, NKJV)*.

1. On a scale of one to five, how precious is the Living Word (and the law, as a part of it) to me?

2. When I keep God's law, is it restricting me or strengthening me? How can I better understand the law if I think it is restricting me?

3. What might happen if God's law of love for Him and others was brought into the center of my life, my family, and my church? What might change in my life and my relationships?

The Law and the Gospel

Jesus Himself explained very powerfully and succinctly what His relationship to the law was.

In Matthew 5:17, 18, what did Jesus say about the law?

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In a similar way to how parents' boundaries for their child reveal what they value, God's law tells us about His character and what is important to Him. God gave us His law to protect our relationship with Him and with one another, knowing that His law would guide every aspect of our lives as we grow in Him. After all, who hasn't suffered the terrible consequences of what sin, a violation of the law, has caused to each of us?

Love for Jesus is at the very center of the law. Jesus said, " 'If you love me, you will obey my commandments' " *(John 14:15, NET)*. When we genuinely love Jesus, we will be naturally compelled to keep His law. When we see His law clearly, we will feel compelled to love Jesus more. And, even more important, always keeping before our eyes a vision of the Cross and Christ's substitutionary death for us is the best way to foster our love for God.

That's why the gospel goes hand in hand with the law. That is, however much we believe in the law and in the importance of keeping it, we must always remember that in terms of our legal standing before God, the law only condemns. The law never forgives, never justifies, and never atones. On the contrary, it points out why we need to be forgiven, why we need to be justified, and why we need atonement. That's why along with the law—even foundational to our understanding of the law—is the gospel, Christ's death on our behalf, which does for us what the law can never do: justify us before God.

Read the following verses: Romans 3:28, Romans 4:13–16, Galatians 2:16, Galatians 3:13, and Philippians 3:9. What do these verses teach us that can help us, as believers, to keep the law, without becoming legalistic?

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Knowing *and* Doing

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks a lot about relationships—with Him and with one another. He says something very poignant toward the end of His message:

" 'Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven' " *(Matt. 7:21, NKJV)*.

Jesus explains that some will call out to Him and clearly know *about* Him without really *knowing* Him. Of course, seeking knowledge is important, and the Bible tells us that God's people could be destroyed because of a lack of knowledge of God and because they have rejected their knowledge of Him *(Hos. 4:1, 6, 10)*. We should never downplay the importance of timeless biblical truth. But if such knowledge doesn't change us and deepen our commitment and our walk with God, it's of no use.

" 'And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent' " *(John 17:3, NKJV)*. Jesus stated that the prerequisite of entering heaven is to do the will of God and ultimately to know God—for we can't do His will without knowing Him. This is the defining factor and a very reasonable expectation. If your children say they love you and usually do what you ask, their actions reveal the depth of their love and respect for you. In the same way, when we love God, we'll want to do His will, because we know there is nothing better for us to do! Our response to Him, and, ultimately, our obedience to Him as an overflow of our love, show the true nature of our relationship with Him.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by leaving His listeners with a poignant final challenge. What was it? Read Matthew 7:24–29.

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When we really hear Jesus' messages, we can't help being challenged and changed. But, first of all, our ears must be opened and our hearts receptive so that the blueprint for living in a close relationship with God can be etched upon our very souls with every breath we take. Our lives can be built upon the Rock and God's perfect plan for us.

This blueprint of a close relationship is no secret. It's revealed in the pages of God's inspired Word, and He offers it to every person. It's each one's personal choice to accept it by faith, to claim the perfect righteousness of Christ, and then to live out that righteousness.

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Further Thought: It shouldn't surprise us that the topic of the law can be such a twisted and misunderstood one, given that Satan's ultimate challenge against God was about His law.

Some in Jesus' day thought that He had come to do away with the law, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. Jesus shone light on the law and God's beautiful character, and He came to fulfill the law *(Matt. 5:17, 18)* to show us what God is like.

"Only as a reverence for God's Holy Word was cherished in the hearts of the people, could they hope to fulfill the divine purpose. It was regard for the law of God that gave Israel strength during the reign of David and the earlier years of Solomon's rule; it was through faith in the living word that reformation was wrought in the days of Elijah and of Josiah. And it was to these same Scriptures of truth, Israel's richest heritage, that Jeremiah appealed in his efforts toward reform."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 465, 466.

Discussion Questions:

❶ How does popular culture view sin? How should our church respond?

❷ When have you seen firsthand how sin destroys relationships with God and with others?

❸ Has obedience to God's law been easy or hard in your life? What factors have contributed to this?

❹ How can we as Seventh-day Adventists, whose very name shows how seriously we take the law, avoid the trap of legalism, of depending on our law-keeping to save us? (Do a thought experiment: On the day of judgment, what are you going to rely on as your every sin is brought before a holy and perfect God in judgment? Your law-keeping? Or Jesus' perfect righteousness in your stead?)

❺ How can knowledge (or the lack of knowledge) impact someone's relationship with God? *(Read Prov. 24:3, 13, 14.)*

Summary: Our lives are infected with sin, which separates us from God. However, God invites us to know and love Him with all of our mind, heart, soul, and strength. When we do this, we'll naturally have more love for others. Such love for God and others is captured in God's law, which was given to protect and preserve our relationships with Him and those around us. God's law is a beautiful reflection of His character, and when we understand His law, our relationship with Him will grow stronger.

INSIDE *Story*

Miracle Money in Brazil

Tarsis Gomes, a 19-year-old student, received a monthly allowance of 50 Brazilian real (worth US$50 at the time) from his father. After giving 5 real for tithe and 5 real for offering, he had 40 real left for university expenses.

One Sabbath, after giving tithe and offering in church, a friend named Nivaldo asked Tarsis for help buying new tires for his wheelchair. Tarsis didn't hesitate. "Sure, I'll give you twenty real," he said.

Then a second friend, Jairo, also asked for help. He sang with an a cappella group called Communion that was touring churches in Brazil, and they needed money for lodging. "Sure, I'll give you twenty real," Tarsis said.

He forgot that he needed 23 real to cover university fees that month.

A few days later, Tarsis got in line at an ATM to withdraw money for his university fees. His sister, who also was a student, stood with him. It was then that he remembered that he had promised the 40 real that remained after tithe and offering to his two friends. He began to talk to God. "Why did You allow me to make those promises?" he asked, bowing his head sadly. "How can I help people if I don't study? What will Father say to me?"

At that moment, he sensed God was saying, *Look up at the ATM*. He raised his eyes and saw money sticking out of the ATM's cash dispenser slot. Then someone approached the ATM and withdrew money, but the banknote remained in the slot. He couldn't believe it. He prayed, "Lord, if three people use the ATM and don't see that money, then I'll know that it's for me."

The next three people in line withdrew money, but the banknote remained.

With a prayer, Tarsis boldly cut in line and walked up to the ATM. Reaching out his hand, he pulled a 50-real banknote out of the slot. All eyes fell on him. His sister later said it looked like he pulled the money out of thin air. One moment there was no money in the slot, and the next it was in his hand.

Tarsis couldn't believe it. He was shaking. The next second, his sister was beside him, asking, "Where did you find that money?"

"Right here," he said. "It was just sticking out of the ATM."

"No way," she said. "If it had been there, I would have taken it myself."

Tarsis, now a 42-year-old military police officer in Recife, Brazil, has been asked why God provided 50 real and not more. He replies, "Because I didn't help more people. If I had offered to help more people, God would have given me more." To him, the 50 real made perfect sense: 5 real for tithe, 5 real for offering, and 40 real for his friends."We do not become poor when we help people," he said. "God is the One who sustains us. Be faithful."



Watch a YouTube video of Tarsis at: bit.ly/Tarsis-IS.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Matthew 5:17, 18*

Study Focus: *Ps. 119:93, 94; Eccles. 7:29; Matt. 7:24–29; Rom. 3:20.*

A story is told of twin boys who learned from early childhood that all pleasure was sin. All their actions were restricted by stringent rules: do not read this book, for it is sin; do not eat that food, for it is sin; do not laugh, for it is sin; do not go to that place, for it is sin.

When these two boys grew up, their paths in life diverged. One brother developed a great fear of the forbidden and hardly dared to venture outside of his house for fear of coming into contact with morally, and physically, contaminating influences. He even was afraid to open the windows of his room and dared not eat widely of the produce sold in the market. He finally died young from being overly abstemious.

The other brother, however, suffered from the opposite problem. He developed a strong attraction for the forbidden. He experimented with drugs, binged on alcohol, and frequented all sorts of casinos and seedy dives. He developed a gustatory relish for certain proscribed foods. It was not too long before the young man got sick and died from overindulgence.

Was the education the boys received so very wrong? After all, shouldn't we do our best to avoid sin? What was essentially wrong with their education is that they never learned what sin really was. Nor did they understand why sin was evil; thus, they weren't equipped to fight against it. In this lesson, we will address what sin is and how to overcome it.

Part II: Commentary

What Is Sin, and Why Is Sin Evil?

Failing to Identify Sin. When we fail to call sin by its name, we add to the problem of sin. For instance, if we fail to call adultery a sin, we run the risk of minimizing its threat and, worse, of normalizing it.

The problem of failing to call sin by its name is particularly rampant in many cultures today. In secular society, we may avoid using the term "sin" for a number of reasons. First, secularized society may avoid the term "sin" because it has religious connotations. For most people, sin does not exist; it implies something that is forbidden by God or by religion. For most people who do not believe in God and do not adhere to

the moral standards of religion, there is no such thing as sin. They speak of mistakes, crimes, ethical or social misbehaviors, but not of "sins." From their perspective, a discussion of sin is, therefore, irrelevant or even is perceived as an attack on their liberties. However, one of the dire consequences of our refusing to acknowledge sin is remaining ignorant of evil. Thus, for the secular mind, the motivation for refraining from making a "mistake" is not because it is bad or evil; rather, refraining is simply a matter of social, or civic, consideration. The secular mind doesn't know that it sins, because it has no knowledge of what the Bible calls the "fear of God."

When Abraham traveled to a foreign land, he worried that he would be mistreated because the people there did not have the fear of God *(Gen. 20:11)* presiding over their hearts. Thus, the concept of "sin" was foreign to them. Just because the concept was foreign to them does not mean, however, that those who ignore sin are not responsible for their sins. Even if those who are ignorant of their sins do not believe in the God of Israel, this same God will judge them, just as surely as He will judge His people *(Amos 1, 2)*. As for those who know that they "sin" and yet refuse to recognize it as such, but say that they have not sinned, God promises that He will make His case against them *(Jer. 2:35)*.

Sin as a Distortion. The Hebrew word for sin *ḥṭ'* means literally "missing the mark." "Sin" is understood as a "deviation," or a "distortion," from the original "straight" way. Ecclesiastes describes the human condition as tragically "crooked"; it is irreparable: "What is crooked cannot be made straight" *(Eccles. 1:15, NKJV)*. For this reason, the act of committing "sin" is connected with the problem of "forgetting," referring to a past situation that is irredeemable, lost as it is to the passage of time. Hence, the existence of numerous biblical passages wherein the prophet urges God's people not to forget, lest they fall into sin unawares *(Deut. 6:12, Deut. 32:18; compare with James 1:24)*.

Sin Against God. In ancient Israel, sin was a religious act that concerned God directly, as, for instance, idolatry *(Deut. 9:16)* or disobedience to God *(Deut. 1:41)*. Injustice, or ethical misbehavior against people, was also considered sin against God.

When Joseph resisted the lustful overtures of Potiphar's wife, who tried to entice him to sleep with her, he identified her proposition not only as a crime against her husband but as a sin against the Lord *(Gen. 39:9)*. When David committed adultery against Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed, he later understood that by doing so, he had sinned against the Lord *(2 Sam. 12:13)*.

Later in Old Testament history, the prophets confronted nations and

Israel for committing violent crimes and unethical acts that harmed others *(Amos 1:11, Amos 2:6–8)*. Micah even goes so far as to emphasize the superiority of the ethical duty over the religious ritual *(Mic. 6:6–8)*.

The New Testament continues in the same line. For Jesus, if we sin against our neighbors or fail to take care of them, it is as if we sinned against or neglected Him *(Matt. 25:45)*. For Paul, when you sin against the brothers, "you sin against Christ" *(1 Cor. 8:12, NKJV)*. Even when we sin against ourselves in our own body, we sin against God. The reverse is also true: the first sin committed by Adam against God had an impact on his life and on his environment *(Gen. 3:17–19)*. Sin is the cause of death for all humans *(Gen. 2:17),* a principle that will be repeated again and again in the Bible *(Prov. 8:36, Ezek. 18:4, Rom. 5:12)*. Because our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, to sin against our body is to sin against God *(1 Cor. 6:18, 19)*.

How Can We Fight Sin?

Knowledge of Sin. We can do nothing against sin in our own strength. Thus, the first solution to the problem is simply to recognize sin and to acknowledge that its very nature is evil. For that purpose, we need the law of God. For only "by the law is the knowledge of sin" made manifest *(Rom. 3:20)*. The law is thus compared to a "tutor" who will bring us to Christ *(Gal. 3:24, NKJV)*. Just as the tutor in ancient Greek society was to lead the child to his master, the law of God will lead us to Christ. As we strive in that struggle with the law of righteousness, we will realize how difficult it is and how hopeless we are. We will then realize that our only hope is to embrace God's grace.

The Way of Adam and Eve. Let us consider Adam and Eve's confession of sin. On one hand, we may infer that they realized they had broken God's law because they hid themselves from the presence of a righteous God *(Gen. 3:6–10)*. On the other hand, when God asked them to present themselves and then commenced to conduct His investigation as to what happened, they both responded by charging God with their wrongdoing. Adam referred to his nakedness, which was the original state in which God created him to exist *(Gen. 2:25)*, and then to the woman, who had been given to him by God *(Gen. 3:12)*. Eve blamed the serpent, who had been created by God *(Gen. 3:1, 13)*.

The only passage that discloses the effect of sin on the nature of Adam and Eve is found in Genesis 3:22, 23, in which God notices that Adam and Eve were originally like God. (Note that the Hebrew verb *hayah*, translated "has become" in Genesis 3:22 *[NKJV]*, should be translated as "was" in the past tense, just as in Genesis 3:1). The common translation "has become" wrongly suggests that the sin marked an improvement in

their condition and status. In addition, such translation gives the impression that the serpent was right when he warned Eve that God did not want her and Adam to become like Him *(Gen. 3:5)*. In reality, God deplores the tragic reality that, after sin, Adam and Eve have lost their likeness to Him. Only God acknowledges, then, the real negative effect of sin on them. Adam and Eve were unable to make a confession of sin because they had lost their connection with God. As long as Adam and Eve had not sinned, their connection with God allowed them to discern the reality of sin. As soon as they departed from God's presence, they lost their capacity to discern between good and evil. As Ellen G. White comments: "By the mingling of evil with good, his [Adam's] mind had become confused, his mental and spiritual powers benumbed. No longer could he appreciate the good God had so freely bestowed."—*Education*, p. 25.

The basic lesson we learn from the fall of humanity is simply this: because humans have sinned, they have lost their innate sense of discernment, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil. So, apart from God, we are unable to exercise that judgment successfully. For this reason, God gave us the law and the gospel. We need the law to guide us in the right direction. Likewise, we need the grace of Christ to help us walk with hope and love in that direction.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: Ask for a volunteer to read the reflections on sin below. Permit time for discussion of the related questions that follow or for the sharing of testimonies as indicated below.

For Reflection: Is Sin Ever Not Sin?

A Christian man committed adultery. When his friends confronted him with his infidelity, he insisted that it was not sin because he loved the woman. Because God is love, the man argued that what he did was approved by God. Later, this man got involved with another woman, and then subsequent women after that. When his friends confronted him again on these latest developments and asked him whether God was still approving, the man responded that he did not believe in God anymore.

For Discussion:

1. Think of cases in your life, and in the lives of friends or in the news, in which sin is justified and even portrayed as a good action. What is the effect of such attitudes on the moral fabric of society? Why is this thinking so dangerous?

2. Think of cases from the Bible, history, and current events in which the dismissal or decriminalization of a person's sin led to an increase in his or her misery.

3. What arguments would you use to help someone face the reality of his or her sin?

For Reflection: Sin and Happiness. On the basis of his work on the connection between ethics and happiness, psychiatrist Henri Baruk concluded, "One finds happiness in doing good to others. We are not happy when seeking our own happiness. The man who seeks happiness will never find it" (Henri Baruk, in *Shabbat Shalom*, December 1996).

1. Ask class members to give testimonies about the happiness they achieved from doing good to others.
2. Resolve to help someone in physical, financial, or spiritual need this week.

Notes