

# Deliberate Known And Unintentional Sin

The Scriptures reveal God categorises sin in a number of different ways. One type of categorising involves dividing sin into two types:

- Deliberate known sin.
- Unintentional sin.

## Deliberate known sins

A deliberate known sin occurs when a person who knows God's revealed will written in the Bible or on his conscience or spoken to him by the Holy Spirit, chooses deliberately to disobey. (Note all guidance from the Holy Spirit will *never* be contrary to the teachings of the Bible). It can also be called *intentional known sin*.

Deliberate known sin is specifically spoken of in Exodus 21:14, Numbers 15:30, Deuteronomy 1:43, 17:12, 17:13, 18:20, 18:22, Psalm 19:13, Luke 12:47-48, John 15:22 and Romans 7:7. In Psalm 19:12-13, David draws a distinction between hidden sin and presumptuous sins: "...**Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins...**" The Hebrew word for "**presumptuous**" here is "zed". The word "zed" is derived from the Hebrew word "zid". Zid" means "to be disobedient to God; applied to the person who sins not ignorantly or inadvertently, but wilfully, knowingly, of set purpose...".<sup>1</sup> "Zid" is used in Exodus 21:14, Deuteronomy 1:43, 17:13 and 18:20. In Numbers 15:30, the word "**presumptuously**" is a combination of the words "rum" and "yad" in Hebrew. "Rum" means literally "high" and "yad" means literally "hand". But "a high hand" symbolically means "obstinate rebellion"<sup>2</sup>, pride and deliberate known sin.

Deuteronomy 1:43 refers to when the Israelites deliberately committed known sin by disobeying God's clear instructions recorded in Numbers 14:26-45. Numbers 14:41-45 refers to this deliberate known sin as *transgressing God's command* and *presuming* to go up.

The distinctions between known and unintentional sin are not only found in the Mosaic Law. In Luke 12:47-48, Jesus drew a clear distinction between deliberate known sin and unintentional hidden sin: "**And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.**"

## "Wilful disobedience"

When I was 8 years of age, I was born again of the Holy Spirit. About two or three years later, I became involved with deliberate known sin which I foolishly refused to abandon.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, page 325.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 363.

When I was about 18 years, I began to come back to Jesus Christ. At 20 years, I totally recommitted my life to Him. A few years later, the Lord gave me a spiritual dream in which I saw a picture of myself falling into the sins that led me to backslide when I was about 10 or 11 years old. Then at the end of the dream, God said loudly, *“Wilful Disobedience!”*

## Unintentional sins

There are two types of unintentional sin:

- *Unintentional hidden sin.* Such hidden sin can take two forms. The first of these is any disobedience to a specific Biblical command when the offendant was *unaware* of the command. The second form of hidden sin relates to any area in our lives in which we are not like Jesus Christ in character to the degree created beings are able.
- *Unintentional known sin.* This involves an unplanned or unintended disobedience to a Biblical command which the offender knew. He *accidentally* did evil. Leviticus 4:1-12 and Numbers 15:22-29 refers to unintentional sin in general.

## Unintentional hidden sin

Unintentional sins of the hidden type are spoken of in Leviticus 4:13-35 and 5:14-19. These verses show the hidden type of unintentional sin makes people guilty in God’s eyes. Leviticus 4:13-14 says: *“Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which should not be done, and are guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting.”* Note verse 14 here speaks of the sin later becoming known.

Leviticus 5:17-19 speaks of individuals committing unintentional hidden sins or sins of *“ignorance”*. Unintentional hidden sins are spoken of by David in Psalm 19:12: *“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.”* Our hidden sins may be obvious to people who know us, but they are hidden from our awareness.

## Abimelech’s unintentional hidden sin

Genesis 20:1-9 records King Abimelech committed the unintentional hidden sin of taking Abraham’s wife, Sarah as his own. Genesis 20:6, however, shows God told Abimelech that Abimelech had done this in integrity of heart. God went to great lengths to prevent Abimelech from committing a second unintentional sin – having sex with Sarah. God gave Abimelech a dream threatening him with death if he did not turn from his unintentional sin of taking Sarah as his wife. Genesis 20:17-18 shows prior to giving Abimelech the dream, God had inflicted remedial punishment on Abimelech, his wife and slave girls. God prevented them having children because of Abimelech’s unintentional sin.

## **Dealing with unintentional hidden sin**

We cannot turn from sins hidden from our own awareness. Imagine foolishly telling someone, "I am turning from a sin but I do not know what it is." All we can do with hidden sins is to ask God to forgive us of them in a general sense like David did in Psalm 19:12. We must ask God to forgive us with the attitude that if He reveals these hidden sins to us, we would be willing to forsake them immediately. We should also pray what David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Hebrews 5:12-14 shows the more we know God's written Word, the more easily we will be able to distinguish good and evil in our lives.

## **Unintentional known sin**

An example of an unintentional known sin is found in Numbers 35:22-25. In these verses we see if someone accidentally killed another person, he was regarded differently by God than someone who intentionally killed another person. Read Exodus 21:14, Numbers 35:16-21 and 35:30-31 to see God commanded that intentional murderers be treated more severely. Joshua 20:1-9 refers to unintentional killings. Leviticus 4:14, 4:23 and 4:28 refer to unintentional hidden sins becoming unintentional known sins. Such hidden sins can be revealed later by conscience, the Holy Spirit, Bible reading or another person.

## **The distinctions only occur sometimes in the Bible**

The Bible only sometimes draws distinctions between deliberate known, unintentional known and unintentional hidden sin. Many times, they are lumped together in the words related to sin. This is similar to how sometimes the Bible draws distinctions between imputed sin (see Romans 5:18), the inherited Adamic sinful nature (Colossians 3:9), sinful words (see James 3:8) and sinful thoughts (see Matthew 15:19). At other times, the Scriptures combine two or more of these together in words related to sin.

It is difficult in some cases to know whether a particular sin we battle with has all deliberate aspects known to us or whether it also has some unintentional aspects as well. For example, does a certain fear we fight have some underlying hidden unintentional aspects that magnify it? This is why we need God's guidance about such matters.

### **Bible Study Questions**

1. What is the difference between deliberate known sin and unintentional sin?
2. What does Jesus teach us in Luke 12:47-48?
3. Describe the two types of unintentional sin.
4. What does Genesis 20:1-9 teach us about unintentional hidden sin?