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What About Plain Old Sin?

At one of our seminars, after we finished talking about the Immanuel Approach and our material from *Outsmarting Yourself*, a gentleman in the audience asked, "So what about plain old sin? Does all this stuff about trauma, triggering, implicit memory, the VLE, central nervous system extrapolation, immaturity, and non-relational mode explain away sin as a cause for hurtful behavior?"

I'm not a theologian, and so can't provide a systematic theological discussion, but I would like to offer a couple thoughts. First, I perceive that we can sin by choosing to persist in non-relational mode. That is, when the Lord or others in our community are offering attunement, we can make a sinful choice to refuse their attunement by turning away in bitterness and/or self-pity and/or rebellion. And in my experience, this sinful choice to persist in non-relational mode is often associated with choices to engage in various combinations of immature, inconsiderate, selfish, self-centered, judgmental, mean, and negligent behavior.

My second thought is just an observation. When I'm free of triggering and in relational mode, I rarely engage in sinful behavior. That is, when I correctly perceive reality; when my spontaneous, normal experience is to feel relationally connected and to feel the desire for connection; when I experience others as relational beings, I am aware of others' true hearts, I feel compassionate concern regarding what others are thinking and feeling, I perceive the presence of others as a source of joy, and I'm glad to be with them; when I both want to offer attunement and am able to offer attunement; when I'm flexible and creative even when unexpected circumstances require that I change my plans at the last minute, and little things don't "get under my skins;" when my spontaneous, normal experience is to perceive others as allies, even in difficult interpersonal situations; when I want to join with them in the collaborative process of exploring the situation together; when I want to understand their perspectives; and when I want to join with them in the collaborative process of working together to find a mutually satisfying solution, I rarely engage in immature, inconsiderate, selfish, self-centered, judgmental, mean, or negligent behavior.

In contrast, when I'm triggered into non-relational mode, I find myself constantly slipping into sinful behavior. That is, when "invisible" traumatic implicit memory feels true in the present and gets directed at and/or blamed on those around me; when my spontaneous experience includes the absence of feeling relationally connected and I don't even want to be connected; when I don't perceive others as relational beings, I'm not aware of other's true hearts, I don't feel compassionate concern regarding what others are thinking and feeling, I'm not glad to be with them, and I don't experience their presence as a source of joy; when I don't want to offer attunement and I'm not able to offer attunement; when I'm rigid and unable to think outside the box; when even small problems irritate me; when I perceive others as adversaries in difficult interpersonal situations; when I tend towards judging, interrogating, and focusing on trying to "fix" the situation, and when I perceive others as resources to be used or problems to be solved, I constantly find myself falling into various combinations of immature, inconsiderate, selfish, self-centered, judgmental, mean, and negligent behavior.

From a very concrete, practical perspective with respect to sin: ongoing work to resolve traumatic memories, so that I am less often triggered, and taking deliberate steps to spend as much time as possible in relational mode, have been two of the most effective interventions for helping myself to sin less.