

Session 8: Sin That Kills, Sin That Wounds

The night the envelopes open

PART 1 · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Scripture itself distinguishes deadly sin from sin that is not deadly (1 Jn 5:16-17), learns the Church's precise anatomy of that distinction (grave matter, full knowledge, deliberate consent), and then, with seven sessions of evidence in hand, opens the sealed guesses and answers the study's question out loud.

Catholic Touchstone. "Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law" (CCC 1855); it "results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace," and unrepented, "it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom" (CCC 1861, in substance). Venial sin wounds and weakens charity but does not kill it (CCC 1862-1863). The distinction is not a loophole; it is a diagnosis, and it exists so that the remedy (Session 9) can be applied to the right wound.

What You Need to Know

Everything in this study has been walking here. Tonight has two summits, and the order matters: **first the discovery and the doctrine, then the ritual.** The group must hold the biblical distinction and the Church's definition before the envelopes open, so that when each person answers the question aloud, they answer from evidence rather than from temperament.

The live discovery is 1 John 5:16-17, and it startles people who have read past it for years: "There is sin which is mortal... All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal." The mortal/venial distinction is not medieval bookkeeping; it is apostolic ink, in the same letter that says God is love. John even regulates intercession by it. And the distinction resolves a tension inside John's own letter that the group can find: 1 John 1:8 ("If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves") sits four chapters from 1 John 3:9 ("No one born of God commits sin"). Unless John contradicts himself, the two must differ; the Church's traditional resolution, which the Catechism roots in these very verses (CCC 1854), hears two gravities of sin: the daily wrongdoing every Christian confesses, and the deadly kind that is incompatible with abiding in God. The Church's vocabulary simply names what John's letter already does.

Teach the three conditions exactly, because precision here is mercy: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is **grave matter** and which is also committed with **full knowledge** and **deliberate consent**" (CCC 1857). All three, together. This is where the scrupulous get their lives back: the intrusive thought was not consented to; the half-asleep failure was not fully known; the small matter was not grave. And it is where the presumptuous lose their loophole: adultery does not become venial by being sincere. Jesus himself grades culpability, both in Matthew 5:21-22 (anger, insult, and "the hell of fire" as escalating liabilities) and in Luke 12:47-48 (the severe beating and the light one, by knowledge). James gives sin's embryology: "desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin **when it is full-grown** brings forth death" (Jas 1:15): sin has stages, and the fatal stage is the grown one.

The ritual: ring-fence the final twenty-five to thirty minutes and do not let the Build section eat them. The full script is in the Discussion Guide. Its shape: evidence first (each person states their answer *now*, from the texts), envelopes second (each opens their own guess and meets their former self), confirmation third (you, with CCC 1861 and Trent), and mercy last, spoken in almost the same breath: the study's very next session is The Way Back, and its two case studies both sinned gravely against the Lord on the same night. One of them is the first Pope. **Never let tonight end on the diagnosis.** The last note must be Session 9's doorway, and the memory verse is chosen to hold it open all week: Ezekiel's "so turn, and live."

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Ezekiel 18 returns from last session, and now the group reads it whole enough to see it runs in both directions: the righteous man who turns away dies in his sin (18:24, last week), and the wicked man who turns away from his wickedness "shall surely live; he shall not die" (18:21-22, 27-28). The chapter ends with God's own motive, and it is the tenderest sentence in tonight's texts: "For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live" (18:32). The same prophet who armed the warning armed the hope. **David** is the distinction with a face: the man after God's own heart committed adultery and arranged a murder, acts of objectively grave matter, the kind that destroys the soul's life when chosen with full knowledge and consent, and Psalm 51 is what turning sounded like. The group has been praying that psalm since Session 4; tonight they learn its occasion is the study's whole subject.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Augustine of Hippo

Enchiridion (handbook on faith, hope, and love, c. 421)

St. Augustine teaches, in substance, that the light daily sins no just man escapes have a daily medicine: the Our Father, "forgive us our trespasses," prayed with a forgiving heart, and deeds of mercy; while his wider penitential teaching, with the ancient Church's practice, reserved the Church's penance for grave crimes.

Notice the architecture: two gravities of sin, two remedies, one mercy. The Lord's Prayer for the daily dust; the Church's ministry of reconciliation for the deadly wound. Tonight names the wounds; next session opens the clinic.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae I-II, qq. 71-89 (treatise on sin)

St. Thomas teaches, in substance, that the difference between mortal and venial sin is not a difference of paperwork but of what happens to charity: mortal sin turns the soul away from God as its last end, destroying charity, while venial sin stumbles over the means without abandoning the end, leaving charity alive though its fervor and act are impeded.

His analogy, in substance: some things injure a living body, and some things kill it, and no doctor treats the two alike. The distinction is diagnosis, and diagnosis is the beginning of every cure.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. John Paul II

Reconciliatio et Paenitentia (1984)

Facing a modern instinct to blur all sin into vague "sinfulness," St. John Paul II reaffirmed, in substance, the constant teaching: the mortal/venial distinction is rooted in Scripture and Tradition, and mortal sin, grave matter chosen with knowledge and consent, truly deprives the soul of sanctifying grace; and he warned equally against reducing mortal sin to a rare, almost impossible act. Both blurrings, he taught, cost souls the truth they need.

A pope of the group's own lifetime, saying to the twentieth century what John's first letter said to the first: some sin is deadly, and God has no pleasure in anyone's death.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1855. Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart by a grave violation of God's law, turning man away from God, his ultimate end. Venial sin allows charity to subsist even though it offends and wounds it.

CCC 1857. The three conditions, verbatim and non-negotiable: grave matter, full knowledge, deliberate consent. Teach all three every time; each one is somebody's freedom.

CCC 1861. Mortal sin "results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal

death of hell." This is the sentence the envelopes have been waiting for; read it exactly, and read the "if" in it exactly too.

CCC 1862-1863. Venial sin: committed in a less serious matter, or without full knowledge or complete consent; it weakens charity, merits temporal punishment, and, when deliberate and unrepented, disposes little by little toward mortal sin, yet "does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace." Not nothing; not death.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · leader only, never read aloud

The ritual is the thread. Everything planted in Session 1 pays off tonight; the mechanics are scripted in the Discussion Guide. Bring the envelopes, unopened, and do not surrender them early. If someone is absent tonight, hold their envelope sealed and give them a private version before Session 9.

Ezekiel 18, both directions. The group met the dark half last week. Let them discover tonight that the same chapter carries the hope; it teaches them to trust the whole counsel of Scripture, and it is the memory verse's home.

Peter and Judas: name them, do not tell them. In closing the ritual you will say next session studies two men who both sinned gravely against the Lord on the same night. Say no more; the contrast is Session 9's discovery.

Presumption and despair: plant only. Tonight's two failure modes (the loophole-hunter and the terrified) are Session 12's formal subject, where CCC 2091-2092 defines both sins against hope. Tonight, just steer individuals pastorally; the doctrine gets its night.

Crown discipline holds. Even tonight. Session 14.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers 1 John 5:16-17 and can resolve the 1 John 1:8 / 3:9 tension with it.
2. Every participant can recite the three conditions of mortal sin and explain why each one matters.
3. The group answers the "all sin is sin" objection from Jesus's own graded language.
4. The sealed guesses are opened by the full ritual, and every participant states an evidence-based answer aloud.
5. The night ends on Ezekiel 18:32 and the announced doorway of Session 9; no one leaves in the diagnosis.

Time Note

Plan for 95 minutes and defend the last 30 for the ritual with your life. Win 6, Build 45, Ritual 30, Send omitted tonight (the ritual is the Send), prayer 6. If running long, cut **Build question 4** (Luke 12:47-48 can live inside your Matthew 5 summary) and the **Dig Deeper**. The ritual is never shortened. If the Build threatens the fence, cut into Build, not ritual.

PART 2 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, you have no pleasure in the death of anyone. Tonight, give us the courage to call things by their names: sin, death, grace, life. Guard the anxious among us from fear you never sent, and the confident among us from comfort you never offered. And bring us all, turning, to live. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · Opening Questions

- In medicine, in law, in parenting: name a place where treating every offense as equally serious would itself be an injustice. Why do we grade?

BUILD · Into the Text

Live discovery, first thing. Say: "Somewhere in one short letter, the New Testament divides sin into two kinds by name, and tells Christians to pray differently over each. It is in 1 John 5. Find it, read verses 16 and 17 twice, and tell me what John just did." Wait for it.

1. What two categories does 1 John 5:16-17 establish, in John's own words? And what does John assume about who can commit the deadly kind?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"There is sin which is mortal... All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal" (1 Jn 5:16-17). John names two gravities: sin that kills and sin that does not, and he regulates the church's intercession by the difference. The Church's words "mortal" and "venial" are not a medieval filing system; John's own phrase is "sin unto death" (*pros thanaton*), which the RSV2CE rightly renders "mortal."

And notice the context: John is discussing what to do when "any one sees his **brother** committing" such sin. The deadly kind is a hazard he locates among the brethren. Which is exactly what Sessions 7's warnings led us to expect.

2. Now a puzzle inside the same letter. Read 1 John 1:8 and then 1 John 3:9. On the surface they collide. How does the distinction you just found resolve them?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." 3:9: "No one born of God commits sin." If "sin" means the same thing in both, John refutes John. But with 5:16-17 in hand, the letter reads whole: every Christian trips daily over the sin that is not deadly (1:8; "we all make many mistakes," Jas 3:2), and the one abiding in God does not commit the deadly kind, the sin incompatible with abiding, and must not, for it kills the life in him (3:9 with 3:15, "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him").

The mortal/venial distinction is not an escape from John's severity; it is the Church's time-honored reading, and it lets his whole letter be true at once. (Some read 3:9 of settled, practiced sin; the readings converge on John meaning something graver than 1:8's daily stumbles.)

3. Jesus grades. Read Matthew 5:21-22 and Luke 12:47-48. What escalates in each passage, and what does that tell us about how God weighs sin?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Matthew 5: anger, then the contemptuous insult, then "You fool!", with liability escalating from judgment to the council to "the hell of fire." Jesus, radicalizing the commandment, still grades within it. Luke 12: the servant who knew his master's will and defied it receives the severe beating; the one who did not know, the light one; "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required." Knowledge changes culpability, from the Lord's own mouth.

Grave matter (Matthew's escalation), knowledge (Luke's principle), and will (James's "desire when it has conceived", Jas 1:14-15): these texts illustrate that Jesus grades culpability along exactly the lines the Church's three conditions name; the technical formulation itself is CCC 1857's.

4. Read Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Paul lists "works of the flesh" and warns that "those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." To whom is he writing, and what makes his Corinthian list end in hope?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

To baptized Christians, in letters read at their assemblies; the warning about inheritance is family mail, which is exactly what makes it sober. These lists are Scripture's sober register of kingdom-excluding conduct: examples of the grave matter the Church grounds principally in the Decalogue (CCC 1858), acts that, chosen knowingly and freely, are incompatible with the kingdom.

And the Corinthian list pivots on one glorious tense: "And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (1 Cor 6:11), the group's Session 4 verse, now revealed as a before-and-after. Grave sin is not identity; it is history, for everyone who turns.

Build, Then Press

Leader: briskly tonight; the ritual is waiting. Full strength, then the turn.

A Protestant friend says: "**This ranking system is the problem. 'Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it' (Jas 2:10). Before a holy God, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment (Isa 64:6); the smallest sin is cosmic treason deserving hell, which is why we need grace for all of it. Your mortal/venial chart just teaches Catholics to manage a sin budget: which ones they can afford this week.**"

5. What is right in that? And what do tonight's texts say to it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Right, and worth keeping: no sin is trivial before God, every sin needs Christ's blood and not our minimizing, and any Catholic using the distinction as a budget has corrupted it; the Catechism itself says deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us "little by little" toward the deadly kind (CCC 1863). Deliberate venial sin is how souls rust.

But "all sin is equal" cannot survive tonight's texts: John names a sin that is mortal and sin that is not (1 Jn 5:16-17); Jesus grades liability by matter and by knowledge (Mt 5:21-22; Lk 12:47-48); James 2:10 in its own context teaches that the law is one seamless fabric, so you cannot keep the commandments selectively, not that a flash of impatience and an adultery are identical acts; the same James, earlier in the same letter, is the man who says sin "when it is full-grown" brings forth death, which is a gradation. And notice, gently, that everyone already knows this: no parent, no court, no conscience on earth treats all wrongs alike, because love itself distinguishes a scratch from a stab wound. The distinction does not shrink God's holiness; it takes seriously what different sins do to the life he put in us. A diagnosis is not a budget. It is the reason the patient goes to the doctor in time.

DIG DEEPER · Trent, Chapter 15: The Precision That Matters

The Council of Trent's justification decree includes a chapter written for exactly tonight: it teaches, in substance, that the grace of justification is lost not only by unbelief, by which faith itself is lost, but by **any other mortal sin as well, even though faith is not lost**. You can still believe every article of the Creed and be dead in grace: the demons of James 2:19 believe. This is why the Catholic question after a grave fall is never "did I stop believing?" but "have I turned

back?"

It is also why Session 5 mattered: if charity is the form and life of living faith, then the sin that kills charity kills the life of faith while leaving its skeleton standing. Trent is simply James, slowed down.

The Opening of the Guesses

Leader: ring-fence thirty minutes. Bring out the sealed envelopes, still sealed, and lay them where everyone can see them. Then follow this script.

1. The answer from evidence (10 min). Say: "Seven sessions ago you sealed a guess: *Can a true Christian lose their salvation?* Before anyone opens anything, we answer it fresh, from what we have read with our own eyes: the three tenses, the wilderness, the branches, the warnings, and tonight, the sin John calls mortal. Go around: your answer now, and the one text that most persuades you." Let every person speak. Do not correct anyone mid-circle.

2. The envelopes (10 min). Distribute each person's own sealed guess. Say: "Open it. Read your own words silently. Then, if you are willing: did you change your mind, sharpen it, or hold it? What changed it?" Volunteers share. Expect surprises; guard the ones who guessed "no" from any hint of gloating, because their instinct was protecting something true about God's faithfulness, and Session 12 will honor it.

3. The confirmation (5 min). Say: "Here is the Church's answer, and notice it is the one the texts have been giving." Read CCC 1861 aloud, slowly, including its "if": *if it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness*. Then say: "Yes. A Christian, truly justified, truly a child of God, can destroy the life of grace in his soul through mortal sin. The Council of Trent said it; John's letter said it first. That is the sober half of the truth. Now hear the other half."

4. The doorway (5 min). Say: "Next session, we study two apostles who both sinned gravely against the Lord, on the same night, within hours of each other. One of them is Peter, whom the Church honors as first of the apostles and names first among them in the Roman Canon. The difference between them is the entire rest of this study. The question was never really *can it be lost*. The question is *what does God do when it is*, and that answer has a door with a light on. Come and see." Then straight into the closing prayer; end warm, end forward.

Live It This Week

Keep your guess. Tape your opened guess inside your study Bible. It is evidence of something rare: a mind changed, or confirmed, by Scripture itself.

Pray Ezekiel's sentence. Each day: "You have no pleasure in the death of anyone, Lord; so I turn, and live." Notice it is present tense, and daily.

Do a gentle examen. One evening, review the three conditions honestly over your own week: matter, knowledge, consent. Not to torment yourself, but the way a sailor checks the hull, and knowing where the shipyard is: next session.

Closing Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, we have called sin what you call it, and grace what you call it, and we have answered a hard question honestly in front of each other. Thank you for a Church that tells us the truth. Guard everyone in this circle from the death you take no pleasure in, and walk with us through the door you are about to open. We ask it through Christ our Lord, who did not lose one of those you gave him except the son of perdition, and who restored the one who wept. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."

PART 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Passage	Where it is used in this session
1 John 5:16-17	Live discovery: sin which is mortal, sin which is not (Build Q1)
1 John 1:8 / 3:9 (with 3:15)	The in-letter tension the distinction resolves (Build Q2)
James 3:2	"We all make many mistakes" (Q2 answer)
Matthew 5:21-22	Jesus grades matter and liability (Build Q3)
Luke 12:47-48	Jesus grades by knowledge (Build Q3)
James 1:14-15	Sin's embryology; death at full growth (Q3 answer)
Galatians 5:19-21	Works of the flesh; inheritance warning (Build Q4)
1 Corinthians 6:9-11	"And such were some of you" (Build Q4)
James 2:10	Steelman text: guilty of all (answered in context)
Ezekiel 18:21-32	Both directions; "so turn, and live" (OT root, memory verse)
2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51	David: the distinction with a face (leader background)
CCC 1861	Read verbatim in the ritual, including its "if"