SIN
"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)

Hobart Mauer was a famous psychologist who earned his doctorate from Johns Hopkins, instructed four years at Yale, and eight years at Harvard. In 1954 he became president of the American Psychological Association. For most of his life he was an avowed atheist and ended his life by suicide when he was 75 years old. Later in life he came to see sin in a different light.

Mauer was born Jan. 23, 1907 in Unionville, Missouri. The death of his father when he was 13 had a profound influence on his life. Soon he suffered the first of a series of major depressions which would plague him throughout the rest of his life. He entered the University of Missouri in 1925 and chose psychology as a career hoping that it would help him to better understand himself. He became a laboratory assistant to Max Friedrich Meyer. Meyer was the first and only psychology professor on campus at that time. He had earned a PhD in physics before emigrating from Germany in the 1890s. Meyer was a rigorous behaviorist and led Maurer to abandon his Christian faith.

As a psychologist Mauer concluded that guilt was an integral part of understanding man, but he came to this conclusions through a secular process. He felt that Freud made a fatal error in attributing emotional distress to inappropriate guilt.. Mauer became convinced that mental disorders, even including schizophrenia, were the result of "real" not "imagined" guilt. Still, however, at this time he did not associate his views on "guilt' with religion.

In 1955 Mauer read the religious novel *Magnificent Obsession* by Lloyd Douglas. This reawaken his Christian faith and led him to consider that the Bible was a superb handbook on human relations. The central theme of the novel is a secret shared by a small group who discovered great spiritual and material success. They derived their fulfillment from following the teachings of Jesus to do their alms in secret. In the book it seemed that this philosophy of life gave the group almost magical powers. Mauer, however, reversed this concept and considered the affect of misdeeds that were kept in secret. He summed up this idea by saying "You are your secret" or "You are as sick as your secrets". He felt that confession of misdeeds was a key to mental health.

After coming to these conclusions he became a member of the Presbyterian Church. He was disappointed, however, for he felt that religion was as soft on sin as psychology was. Convinced that it was important for everyone to face the enormous reality of sin he obtained funding from the Lilly Endowment for a fellowship in morality and mental health. The program brought students from seminaries and divinity schools to learn his counseling and group techniques.

In 1960 he wrote an article entitled "Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils," which was published in The American Psychologist magazine. In it he said, "*For several decades we psychologists have looked upon the whole matter of sin and moral accountability as a great incubus and we have acclaimed our freedom from it as epic making. But at length we have discovered to be free in this sense to have the excuse of being sick rather than being sinful is to also court the danger of becoming lost. In becoming amoral, ethically neutral and free, we have cut the very roots of our being, lost our deepest sense of selfhood and identity. And with neurotics themselves, asking, "Who am I? What is my deepest destiny? And what does living really mean?"*

His article generated so much controversy that in a follow up article he clarified by writing, "*If we merely call it wrong-doing, we do not understand the gravity of what it is to violate some of these moral laws from which we are trying to break ourselves away.*"

The prodical son had it right. He did not a mental illness, he was a sinner. The cure for sin is not found on the psychiatrist's couch, but in humble repentance to our Heavenly Father. The Good News is that while the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life though Jesus Christ!