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## Question Time: What are “Sins of Commission” and “Sins of Omission?” --- by Elder Kevin Anderson

Unfortunately, for the sake of our topic, there is no “scriptural basis” for the terms *sins of commission and omission*. This terminology is not found in any of the three standard books of scripture. Their application in “religious” society appears to be the product of man’s understanding, more than a doctrinal or theological reference. However, these ideas, like many others, are worth a little investigation and a little scrutiny. Let’s scrutinize!

The words *commission* and *omission* are most likely taken in this context, from their base or root words, *commit* and *omit*. Commit in its root, verb form, means “to do.” Omit, in its root, verb form, means, “to leave out, or fail to do.”

Without having an original source with which to confirm the basis for this ideology, we will do our best to explore the meaning of these phrases. *Commission* and *omission*, in reference to sins, is usually a response to whether or not our sins were based on sinning against a principal or law that we know to be a sin, or whether our sins were based upon neglecting to do something that we know we should have done, but didn’t.

To give example to the idea of these two types of sin, let us consider the sin of lying. Most people would consider that to tell an untruth would be *committing* the sin of telling a lie. However, some would consider “neglecting” to tell the truth, though not necessarily lying directly, would be the sin of *omission*...or failing to tell the truth, when a matter needed further truth or revelation. For some individuals, this can cause confusion as they try to sort out whether or not “neglecting” to tell all of the truth is acceptable or *a form of deceit*.

So how does one sort out these issues? How does one decide whether a sin is the sin of commission or omission? At best, many sins of omission are sins of idleness, or rather, the sin of not doing something we know we should have done. When we fail to act upon something that we know needs our attention, have we not been idle or a procrastinator? When we neglect to reveal “all of the truth” to a situation, have we not perpetuated the building of an unsound foundation? How do we reconcile these issues in our minds and our hearts? How do we answer our conscience clearly, and know that we have not offended our Heavenly Father?

Part of the problem that we encounter when we attempt to label our sins is that we fall into the trap of seeking to “save ourselves” by the keeping of the law. Uh-oh! Haven’t we heard about that trap before? Isn’t that how the Israelites ended up in trouble, by seeking to determine exactly what they could and could not do? The result of that mentality, as natural as it seemed, was that the Israelites wanted to be able to clearly determine whether or not they were guiltless. This seems like an acceptable plan for mankind, except for this: It compelled them to follow a law and not a Savior. It compelled them to be obedient, but not to establish a relationship with Christ that would cause them to desire Him more than their own wishes. When faced with *committing* a sin, they were ill-prepared to choose a God whom they did not know over a desire they could immediately satisfy.

In order for men to choose God, and to desire for Him to live in their hearts, they would need to KNOW Him. Once in their hearts, they could learn to be like Him...to think like Him...to begin to desire to live with Him, and thus, learn to feel after Him, and to know in their hearts what He would find acceptable or unacceptable. Perhaps it really is necessary to diligently pursue Him through prayer and study and fasting, and to develop a relationship with Him that allows Him into our hearts forever. Perhaps the issue should not be labeling our sins as “sins of commission or sins of omission,” but to be **omitting** *our will and our way* and being **committed** *to His will and His way*.

