

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT MAN, SIN, AND SALVATION

Lesson 9: Sin's Definition

This is the second of six lessons on the biblical doctrine of sin (hamartiology, from Greek *hamartia*, sin). Through the years some people have doubted the reality of sin, but the Bible gives abundant evidence as to the fact of sin, its origin, definition, consequences, transmission, and cure. The question is asked, "If God is perfect and all-powerful, why does He allow sin and its consequences in the world?" We can be sure that sin could have been prevented by God if He so desired, but He chose to allow it and by doing so He has revealed more of His glory. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, it was the darkest hour of human history. Dark because of its original impact on the first couple. Dark because of the abiding impact on all others. Dark because of the infinite cost to redeem those who had sinned and were separated from God. The darkness of sin, however, has been dispelled by the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ. The light of His person and work of salvation overcomes sin's darkness. Grace triumphs over guilt. The sin and fall of man then becomes the black backdrop against which the marvelous grace of God shines ever so brightly. How could we ever know or fully appreciate God's holiness, righteousness, grace, love, and patience apart from the contrasting nature of sin? Let us approach the doctrine of sin with grateful awareness that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). The Doctrine of Sin is closely related to the Doctrine of God, the Doctrine of Man, the Doctrine of Salvation, and the Doctrine of Satan. There are many biblical definitions of sin which reveal the reality and nature of sin in a clear and comprehensive way.

Lesson 9 – Central Truth Q and A

Question: What is sin?

Answer: Sin is any failure to meet God's perfect standard.

Lesson 9 – Memory Verses

1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

Leviticus 5:17 *And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he knew it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.*

Lesson 9 – Outline

Every person is a sinner by nature (Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:3) and every person sins (Rom. 3:23). The only exception is Jesus Christ who was perfectly sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Jn. 3:5). Since God's moral law (Ten Commandments) is a reflection of God's perfect and holy character, sin is any failure to obey His law, and any rebellion against, violation or transgression against God and His law. A person may sin in attitude or action, word or deed, by doing what he ought not (sin of commission) or failing to do what he ought (omission). Sin is both internal and external.

1. Internal Sin

Sin may be external, but it always begins internally by thought, attitude, or desire (Eph. 2:3). All people are born with a sin nature, a propensity or tendency to sin. Adam and Eve were created in perfection and innocence with no sinful tendencies, until they sinned and fell from their original righteousness. Since then, all people are born with a sin nature inherited from their parents (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Rom. 5:12, 21). Parents don't need to teach their children to sin; it comes naturally or instinctively. Man can only see external sin, but God sees the heart, the mind, and the desires. To desire sin is sinful in itself. Pride, coveting, and idolatry are other examples of internal sin. Sinful thoughts, attitudes, and desires do not always remain hidden, but they are often revealed outwardly by our sinful words and actions. Christ taught that someone is guilty of murder if he has anger in his heart and is guilty of adultery in the heart apart from the physical act. The ancient pre-flood world was full of sinful people: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Internal sin led to much external sin: "The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12).

2. External Sin

Internal sin produces external sin. Man's internal sinful nature produces external sins that others can hear and see. Sinful acts like stealing, murder, and lying reveal that sinners have broken God's moral law. Sinning not only becomes visible, but it grows and expands. Adam and Eve's sin of eating the forbidden fruit in the garden was soon followed by Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4). The apostle Paul reveals how all people sin by their words and deeds (Rom. 3). The Bible teaches that sin begins internally, but it is revealed externally. Each person is responsible for his own sins and he will bear the guilt of his sins unless he trusts in Christ for salvation. Sin is the black backdrop against which God displays His amazing grace: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Sin is anything in thought, attitude, word, or deed that is contrary to the character and will of God as revealed and expressed in Scripture. Sin is moral evil, personal rebellion against God, and breaking God's moral law. Sin is rooted deep in our human nature and results in a corrupted condition and a guilty standing before the righteous and holy God.

SCRIPTURES ON THE NATURE OF SIN

Psalms 139:23-24 ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: ²⁴ And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Proverbs 6:16-19 ¹⁶ These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: ¹⁷ A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Proverbs 14:9 *Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favor.*

Proverbs 20:9 *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*

Proverbs 24:9 *The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men.*

Matthew 15:19 *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

James 1:15 *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

James 4:17 *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

1 John 5:17 *All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

SELECTED QUOTES ABOUT SIN

To be in darkness is not to know God, not to experience or even know for sure that he is angry with sinners but that he also forgives their sins. In fact, it is not to know what sin is. Human reason does not know what righteousness is, because it imagines that God can be appeased by our works.

PHILIPP MELANCHTHON (1497-1560)

Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable.

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)

The rich and poor, the learned and the unlearned, the young and the old, all give evidence that, to serve and please God, is not their chief delight, their meat and drink. A few, converted by divine grace, differ from the rest of mankind, and esteem it their pleasure and honor to obey God; but these very men testify that it is God who has made them to differ, and that, in themselves, they are like other men.

JOHN L. DAGG (1794-1884)