



*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
Romans 3:23 NIV*

There's no sense in talking about Jesus if we don't talk about sin. After all, that's why Jesus came to earth—to save us from our sins! We all sin. I sin, my pastor sins, the Pope sins, even the late Billy Graham was a sinner, and he wasn't afraid to tell you so.

When you hear the word “sin,” the Ten Commandments may come to mind. You know, the “major sins,” such as murder, adultery, and stealing. We can trick ourselves into believing that it's the really “big” sins that keep us separated from God, but the reality is that *all* sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 NLT says, “But your iniquities (sin) have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you that he will not hear.” This doesn't just apply to some people. It applies to all people. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

In the original translation of the Bible, sin literally means “to miss the mark.” It's a Greek word that comes from an archery term meaning to miss the bullseye, or in the case of basketball, to miss a shot. Pastor Duke Taber rephrases Romans 3:23 in this way: “All have missed the mark and didn't get their arrow to hit the perfection of God.” If you shoot 100 free throws and make 95 of them, that's pretty darn good—but not perfect. You still missed. Essentially, even though 95% of your shots were good you, still made mistakes.

We all mess up. Wouldn't you agree? When you're on the basketball court, you make mistakes. Sometimes, you make the same mistake over and over again. It might be as minor as not making the smartest pass or it could be as major as making the winning basket for the other team. Oh, I've seen it happen! When I was in middle school, one of the most popular guys in my grade experienced the mental and emotional anguish that comes from such a mistake. What made it even worse was that our girls' basketball team witnessed the mortifying moment! Almost forty years later, I still remember it like it was yesterday. I bet he does too.

As much as you don't want to make mistakes, they happen. Eventually, you learn, grow into your game, and mistakes are made less frequently. But rest assured, as long as you're playing basketball, you'll goof up. Your coach messes up, the referees mess up, and your parents even mess up. (But you already knew that)! One of the greatest areas of personal growth comes when you can acknowledge your mistakes and then move on.

God wants us to recognize our mistakes too. By acknowledging our sins, and showing sorrow for them, we acknowledge our need for Christ's forgiveness. “For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that



kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death” (2 Cor. 7:10, NLT).

So what is sin and what does it look like in our everyday lives? Sin is anything we do, say, or think that is not pleasing to God, including our attitude. Some fairly common examples are being prideful, wanting what others have, being self-righteous, judging others, looking at inappropriate material, using profane language, showing disrespect, tearing others down, and being downright mean. And that’s just to name a few! You could easily apply this list to your character on or off the basketball court. Have you ever been prideful after playing a great game, shown disrespect to the referees or your coach, or gossiped about a teammate in front of other teammates? Have you ever punched an opponent in the gut when you thought the ref wasn’t watching? Yeah, I’m not too proud of that moment. But enough about me! I must confess that sometimes basketball brings out the worst in me. Even now, watching my own kids play, there’s an active battleground in my mind. Am I going to publicly criticize the refs when they’re calling a one-sided game or am I going to practice self-control and keep my mouth shut? The struggle is real!

Do you get the picture? If you are wondering if you’re struggling with a sin issue, just ask yourself, “would this be pleasing to God?” If the answer is “no,” confess your sin the moment you become aware of your sin. Follow up your confession with repentance.

Confession and repentance go hand in hand; however, they are two very different things! Confession acknowledges sin. To repent means to turn away from sin and turn to God. It basically means to change your mind. Acts 3:19 says, “Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

Here’s an important side note: God may not convict you of something that he convicts me of and vice-versa. In my experience, the closer I’ve grown to Jesus, things that may have been acceptable for me to say or do don’t feel right anymore. For example, even though I’m over fifty years old, I have strong convictions about the movies I watch. I was recently watching a film that was rated PG-13 and the language got a little raunchy. Even though no one else was home, I felt very uncomfortable so I chose a different movie. You may not have that same conviction and that’s okay. Therefore, it’s important that we not judge one another based on our own personal convictions. Ultimately, it’s for God to judge our hearts so let’s leave the judging to him!

While the word “sin” has a negative overtone, once we receive God’s free gift of grace, we can celebrate our victory over sin because of what Christ did on the cross! Hebrews 10:10 says, “Our sins are washed away and we are made clean because Christ gave His own body as a gift to God. He did this once for all time.” That’s right! He took *all* mankind’s sin upon himself one time for everyone! One and done! And I’m not referring to the kind of “one and done” that Greg Oden and Kevin Durant faced when they entered the NBA after one year of college ball. To

help you fully understand Christ's "one and done," let me briefly explain the incredible significance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Don't tune out. This is cool!

In the Old Testament, God's people had to make animal sacrifices in order to experience forgiveness of their sins. This process was known as *atonement*. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was commanded to make an offering of two goats. One goat was sacrificed in order to make atonement for the sins of all the people in the Israelite community. The second goat was a symbol of those sins being removed from God's people. That was the lucky goat—the "scapegoat." The priest would place both hands on the head of the goat, symbolically placing all the sins of the Israelite people on him, but then the goat was released back into the wilderness. This had to be done year after year to keep God's people in right standing with Him. Jesus takes the place of those animal sacrifices! Not only did he sacrifice his body on the cross for you and me, but the weight of all the sins of the world were laid on him, just like they were laid on the scapegoat; except you and I are the ones that got set free, unscathed. Jesus came to make atonement for our sins *one time* for *all* mankind. That's the kind of one and done that gives you and I forgiveness of our sins *and* eternal life!

Dwight Howard, center for the Houston Rockets, sums up God's gift of forgiveness and the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ in this way: "Everybody needs to realize that it doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are, you still can be a Christian and live for God. It's not easy but that's why we have God's word and He forgives us when we do something we shouldn't be doing. You know, God sent His son to die for us and He paid that sacrifice so you can go to Heaven."

Personal Training

- Sin can be described as anything that you do, say, or think that is not pleasing to God, including your attitude. Take a moment to think about areas in your life where you may be experiencing sin, according to our definition. Would you be willing to list a few here?

- God wants us to acknowledge our mistakes by confessing them to Him. Look up 1 John 1:9. What does God say he will do if we confess our sins to him?

- Is it possible to confess your sin without repenting? Is it possible to repent without confessing? Explain your answer.

Post-Game Prayer

Most merciful God, I confess that I have missed the mark of perfection by sinning against you in thought, word, attitude, and action. I have followed the desires of my own heart rather than following you. I have done things I should not have done and have left things undone that I should have done. I am truly sorry and humbly repent. Give me the wisdom necessary to turn away from sin and turn to you, daring not to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. Help me to take delight in your will and to walk in your ways. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who made atonement for my sins. Amen.