

A Realistic Look at Sin

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

If you want to liven up a conversation, introduce the subject of sin.

The reactions will be varied. Some will get angry and others will jokingly sneer about it. Some will suggest that the idea of sin is an arrogant imposition of “religion” — an invention of the priest craft and clergy for the purpose of exercising control over the masses.

Others will pontificate that “sin” is simply an ignorant appellation for those cultural and psychological aberrations which plague our society. Few will have a sensible and biblical view of this important theme.

The Reality of Sin

The reality of sin is apparent on every hand. All men of every culture throughout history have acknowledged that certain conduct is wrong.

The Roman philosopher Seneca declared: “We have all sinned, some more, some less.” The Roman poet Ovid wrote: “We all strive for what is forbidden.”

Goethe, a German poet and philosopher, confessed: “I see no fault in others which I myself might not have committed.” And a Chinese proverb goes like this: “There are two good men: one is dead and the other is not yet born.”

The conscience of man tells him that there is a “right” and a “wrong.” The conscience, of course, does not define what is right or wrong, but it certainly points to the existence of such (cf. Romans 2:14,15).

In a study on crime and personality, psychologist H.J. Eysenck noted that criminal activity is restricted to a relatively small segment of society. He points out that most people lead law-abiding lives. Dr. Eysenck observes, for example, that

“the reason we do not steal under conditions when it is almost certain that we would never be caught must be that there is something in us which restrains us from doing so. This is far more powerful in controlling behavior than the rather abstract fear of the policeman and the magistrate” (*Family Weekly*, June 11, 1972).

The Scriptures, of course, are quite explicit about the reality of sin and man’s complicity in the same. An Old Testament writer affirms: “there is no man that sinneth not” (2 Chronicles 6:36), and Paul is bold to say that “all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). If we deny that we have sinned, or that we do sin, we are certainly self-deceived (cf. 1 John 1:8,10).

The Origin of Sin

Sin appears to be almost as ancient as the creation itself. John wrote:

“he that doeth sin [i.e., he practices sin in an unrestrained fashion] is of the devil; for the devil sinneth [present tense form; has been habitually sinning] from the beginning”(1 John 3:8; cf. John 8:44).

Satan has been practicing sin since that initial act of rebellion by which he became “the devil” (for a more detailed discussion of this point, see “**Courier Publications**” for the chapter, “The Origin, Mission and Destiny of Satan,” in my volume, **The Book of Job**).

Genesis 3 contains the record of man’s original fall. Satan, working through the serpent, deceived the woman and she in turn influenced man to sin (cf. Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13,14). Since that time, all accountable people, except Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:22), have sinned and so fallen under its horrible effects.

What Sin Is NOT

Before we define sin positively, suppose we briefly call attention to what it is not.

First, sin is not simply the violation of cultural standards. Jesus occasionally violated cultural traditions — such as when he publicly conversed with a Samaritan woman (John 4:27) — but he never sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

Second, sin is not to be equated with sickness. This is demonstrated by the fact that Jehovah holds humanity accountable for its sins, but not its sicknesses. Frequently sickness cannot be avoided; sin can!

Third, sin is not a matter of genetics (inheritance); the son does not inherit the iniquity of the father (Ezekiel 18:20). Paul informed the saints at Ephesus, “you were dead through your trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). He did not suggest that their forbearers were responsible for the current state of sinful conduct.

Sin Defined Biblically

The Bible gives several dramatic definitions of sin.

Law breaking

Sin is a violation of divine law (cf. 1 John 3:4). The Greek word rendered “sin” is *hamartia*, which literally meant to miss the mark or target. Note the use of the term in Judges 20:16 where the record indicates that certain men of the tribe of Benjamin could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss. To swerve aside from the revealed will of God is to sin. Sin is the very opposite of obedience and righteousness (cf. Romans 6:16-18).

Ignoring God

A refusal to consider what Jehovah has to say is sinful. Jeremiah spoke of those rebellious ones who had “turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words” (11:10). Again he says, “I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard: and I have called unto them, but they have not answered” (35:17; cf. Acts 7:57).

Refusing to believe

It is sinful to disbelieve the message of the Lord for he has buttressed it with a vast array of credible evidences. Christ plainly said: “He who believes not shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is (by means of divine truth — Ephesians 6:17) to convict of sin those who believe not the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:8,9).

Presumption

Presumption is sin. The psalmist declared: “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.” (Psalm 19:13). The Hebrew word rendered “presumptuous” denotes pride, arrogance. It suggests the activity of one who feels that he can operate independently of divine counsel.

When Jeroboam, the first king of Northern Israel, overhauled the Mosaic worship system to his own specifications (1 Kings 12:25ff), he was guilty of this evil (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:6 — ASV; 2 John 9).

Neglecting religious and moral duties

A neglect of one’s religious and moral obligation is sinful. James declared that he who knows to do good, and yet who does it not, is guilty of sinful conduct (4:17).

In one of his vivid illustrations, our Lord spoke of a certain servant who “knew his Lord’s will,” and yet, he “made not ready,” i.e., he neglected to do what he knew he ought. And what was his fate? At the time of his Master’s coming, he would be severely punished (Luke 12:47).

Surely we must remember this: man has not been given the option of defining “sin” for himself. God has given a clear and definite picture of evil in the Scriptures and we must direct our lives accordingly.

The Effects of Sin

Sin has left a horrible devastation in its wake ever since its introduction to the planet Earth. Let us consider a few effects of its curse.

Physical consequences of sin

Sin has debilitated mankind physically. Paul noted that by means of sin death entered the world (Romans 5:12), bringing, of course, all of its attendant evils — disease, weakness, etc. Every funeral is an exclamation point concerning the consequence of sin!

Psychological consequences of sin

Sin has extracted a high price psychologically. Isaiah declared that the wicked have no peace (57:21); indeed, the “way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). One writer has observed that every other hospital bed in this country is occupied by someone with a mental problem. Being “in therapy” is almost stylish!

Environmental affects

Sin has wrought geophysical havoc on the earth. In Romans 8:20ff, Paul discusses the effect of sin’s curse upon the creation generally. The great flood of Noah’s day certainly changed the features of the earth resulting in many of the catastrophic conditions (earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) that plague us today.

Cultural division a result of sin

Sin has affected humanity culturally. Whereas at one time in the ancient past all of the human family spoke the same language, as a result of man’s ambitious rebellion, God confounded humanity’s language so that various nations no longer understood one another (Genesis 11:7). This lack of communication has doubtless contributed to numerous international conflicts which have brought much heartache to the peoples of the earth.

Spiritual separation from God

Sin has made of man a spiritual corpse! The “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The term “death” denotes a spiritual separation from God (cf. Isaiah 59:1,2). By his transgression man has clearly divorced himself from close communion with his Creator — a truly terrible price to pay (Genesis 3:8,22f; Ephesians 2:2).

Eternal death

Sin extracts an eternal cost as well. In the book of Revelation, John speaks of “the second death,” i.e., the final separation from God, which, in the symbolism of the narrative is called the “lake of fire” (20:14). Eternal punishment for the wicked is a clear and fearful Bible truth (cf. Matthew 25:46).











The Remedy for Sin

God is an absolutely holy and just Being (Isaiah 6:3; Habakkuk 1:13). Such attributes demand that evil be decisively addressed. And yet, Jehovah’s love and mercy (1 John 4:8; Ephesians 2:4) longed for man’s redemption.

How, therefore, is this problem to be remedied? The answer is in Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). In the death of the Lord Jesus, an innocent victim, the love of the Father is extended and his justice satisfied. It thus only remains for sinful people to humbly accept his redemptive grace (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1) through obedience to the gospel of his Son (Hebrews 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Someday, the glad song of the faithful will be, *“having overcome sin, hallelujah amen! ...”*

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Scripture References

Romans 2:14, 15; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Romans 3:23; John 1:8, 10; 1 John 3:8; John 8:44; Genesis 3; Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:22; John 4:27; Hebrews 4:15; Ezekiel 18:20; Ephesians 2:1; John 3:4; Judges 20:16; Romans 6:16-18; Acts 7:57; Mark 16:16; Ephesians 6:17; John 16:8, 9; Psalm 19:13; 1 Kings 12:25; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9; Luke 12:47; Romans 5:12; Proverbs 13:15; Romans 8:20; Genesis 11:7; Romans 6:23; Isaiah 59:1, 2; Genesis 3:8, 22; Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 25:46; Isaiah 6:3; Habakkuk 1:13; 1 John 4:8; Ephesians 2:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Corinthians 6:1; Hebrews 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8

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