

What Is Sin?

Why am I prone to do bad things? Why must I constantly watch what I say and do? Why is there so much evil, sorrow, suffering, and death in the world? Why is there envy, greed, and malice?

Psychology says it is because of maladjustment or your relationship with your mother. Biology would explain it away as the result of a chemical imbalance or disease. Ethics might call it a moral lapse. Sociology would suggest it is the result of a bad environment. There is always an excuse.

However, to get an authoritative answer to these questions, we must turn to the Word of God. The Bible uses several words to describe man's strange behavior—transgression, iniquity, ungodliness, lawlessness, and sometimes disobedience. Yet, the word used most often in the Bible to describe man's evil behavior is SIN.

In the New Testament, the Greek word HAMARTIA (hay-mar-tee'-uh) is translated sin. It is from this Greek word we get the word used in theology to describe the study of sin, "hamartiology." The word HAMARTIA literally means "missing the mark." It is the idea of an archer's arrow missing the target. Therefore, sin is missing the mark or the target, God intended. One scripture that best projects this basic idea is Romans 3:23. With the meaning of the word HAMARTIA in mind, write this verse in your own words and personalize it: (Try using two translations.)

In the original language of the New Testament, the word translated come short (KJV) is in a tense that emphasizes continuous action. With this in mind, what does this verse mean?

Now, the question naturally arises, "What is the glory of God?" It is clear from this verse that we all fall short of it, but just what is this glory of God? Probably the best place to find the answer is John 1:14. According to this verse, how did God reveal His glory to us in a way we can understand?

God's glory is the result of His grace, which is His friendly disposition from which kind acts proceed and His love is expressed. His glory is also the result of His absolute truth in words and actions. These two attributes—grace and truth—make up His righteousness. You see, God's glory is His righteousness, and you and I have missed it; therefore, we are sinners. We are sinners because we are not righteous like Jesus.

For a better understanding of what sin really is, we will look at its origin, its nature, its realm, and its results.

I. The Origin of Sin

From where did sin come? Where did it originate? Often, a study of the origin of sin begins with the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, where man merely reenacted the sin that had already been committed in heaven. Sin originated with Satan. In Paul's list of the qualifications for a bishop or pastor in 1 Timothy 3:6, he writes: ... *not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.* To discover the origin of sin, we must also find the origin of the devil. It is believed Satan was once one of the brightest, most beautiful, and highest-ranking angels in heaven.

Read Isaiah 14:12–15, and explain what happened to Satan:

The same thing happened in the Garden of Eden—Adam and Eve wanted to be like God (Gen. 3:4–5). This was simply a reenactment of Satan's earlier fall. It is easy to see that selfishness and pride were involved in Lucifer's original sin. That is why the Bible so often condemns these two characteristics. From this study we can conclude that sin originated with Satan but was passed on to the human race in the fall of man. Having looked at the origin of sin, let's now discover ...

II. The Nature of Sin

There is much debate on the subject of sin. Some deny its existence, others take pleasure in it, and still others laugh at it. However, the most dangerous attitude toward sin is to play down its maliciousness. Sin is evil, and sin is active, not dormant. It is a relentless unwillingness to abide in the sphere and limitation in which God in His infinite wisdom has placed us.

How does 1 John 3:4 describe sin?

You see, not only does humankind "miss the mark," which is a definition of sin; but they also transgress God's Law, which is a description of sin. The word "transgress" means to go across a forbidden border. It is like hunting on "posted" property. Sin is defying God's Holy Law!

God's laws are given to protect us, guide us, and help us be all God intended. Obeying His laws will increase our potential, not limit us. We, therefore, only hurt ourselves when we defy God's laws because He gave them to us to make us happy, healthy, and holy.

However, sin is more than just breaking God's holy laws. Read James 4:17, and explain:

We have looked at the origin and nature of sin; now let's consider ...

III. The Realm of Sin

Sin is universal in more than one way. At this point in our study, we must touch upon the doctrine of the "total depravity" of man. "Total depravity" does not mean all people are equally malicious in their acts or that humanity is devoid of good. The total depravity of man means all are corrupt or sinful because we have all broken God's Law. The sins God detests most are not necessarily adultery or murder. Read Luke 18:11–14; John 3:18–19, and James 2:10, and explain:

Finally, let's see ...

IV. The Results of Sin

The results of sin can be classified into three categories—immediate, progressive, and ultimate.

The immediate result of sin is the loss of fellowship with God. The immediate result of Adam and Eve's sin was demonstrated by their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In its natural state, humanity does not have fellowship with God. Read Isaiah 59:2, and explain why:

In his or her natural state, every human being has an inner sense of loneliness because we were created to have fellowship with God, and when there is no fellowship, we are lonely. This loneliness can be explained as a God-shaped vacuum in our hearts that only He can fill.

Another immediate result of sin is found in 1 Corinthians 2:14. Explain:

The second category of the results of sin is progressive—physical death. God created man to live forever. His food was to be the tree of life, which would enable him to live for eternity. Whether the tree of life is to be taken literally or figuratively, the truth is the same. As a result of sin, the moment a person is born he or she begins to die progressively.

The soul and spirit of man are immortal. The body is physical and perishable. It ages, decays becomes diseased, and finally ceases to be a suitable dwelling place for the soul and spirit. The ensuing result is physical death, at which time the soul and spirit are separated from the body.

This brings us to the ultimate result of sin—spiritual death. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9 and Revelation 20:11–15, and explain:

The eternal ruin of the soul and spirit is also called the second death in Revelation 20:6 and 21:8. The eternal separation of the soul and spirit from God, with no hope of any reunion with God, is the ultimate result of sin.

How could the future of humankind seem any more dreadful? However, we can all praise God because along with this bad news of the terrible result of sin, God has some Good News for us in Jesus Christ, as we will see in our next lesson.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 John 3:4