

WHAT IS SIN?

DEFINITION: *Sin is the lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state.*

SIN IS THE LACK OF CONFORMITY TO THE MORAL LAW OF GOD IN OUR ACTIONS

We will not spend much time speaking of the external act which people consider sin. This is most evident and accepted by all who believes in the authority of the Scriptures. For example the Scriptures say “*thou shalt not lie*” therefore anytime we do not tell the truth we sin. The Scriptures say “*thou shalt not murder*” so obviously any pre-meditated killing of another person is an external act of sin. “*Thou shalt not steal*”, therefore anytime anyone takes something which does not belong to them it is a sin. The list could continue but everyone here accepts the truth that an external act of disobedience is sin.

Prior to continuing, let us look at a couple words used in the Scripture to describe sin. Many different words in the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT are used to describe the nuances of sin ranging from “minor” sins as *wandering astray* or *sinning through ignorance* to sins which indicate a much heavier degree of guilt: *trespass, rebellion, unrighteousness, law-breaking* or *lawlessness*. But the word which is most widely used in both the OT (hata) and the NT (hamartia) for “sin” means “*to miss, to miss the way, to miss the mark.*” It is used in the OT in Judges 20:16 (not in reference to sin):

Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. — Judges 20:16 NASV

In the NT it is the word used in Romans 3:23,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God — Romans 3:23 NASV

Literally the sense is that all people have *missed the mark* or *missed the standard of righteousness* set by God.

SIN IS THE LACK OF CONFORMITY TO THE MORAL LAW OF GOD AS A STATE OF BEING

The second manner by which we sin is a more permanent position and might be described as *all people are in a state of sin*. What do we mean by “*state*” of sin? This is not a reference to anything physical, as if a person is located here or there. Rather this is a reference to *the condition of a person or thing in respect to circumstances or attributes*, for example, someone in a *state of health*. **Synonyms would include condition, situation or status.**

Pastor William Brown used an illustration which perfectly describes man in a *state* of sin: A ship sets sail out of England for America. All of those aboard the ship are citizens of England and in a right relationship with the laws of the land. However not long after setting sail the crew mutinies, capturing the captain and loyal officers of the ship and putting them in the brig. The ship continues to sail therefore with a crew that is under condemnation of England due to their mutinous actions. Every day when the crew awakes and goes about their duties, many actions are done which are not bad actions; in fact, possibly some of those actions may be considered very good deeds. But those good deeds do not alter the fact that they are under condemnation and judgment according to the laws of England. For the entire time since the mutiny, the crew is under a *state* of condemnation. All actions, good or bad, must be considered as being done under that state of condemnation. And upon arrival in America the entire crew is taken and judged for their crime. They will not be judged for small individual actions done on a daily basis, they will be judged for that one action of mutiny which tainted every other action.

Scriptural proof of this may be found in man's relationship to Adam:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." — Romans 5:12, 19 NASV

Other proof is found in sinners being judged not only because of what we do but because of what we do not do:

"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." — James 4:17 NASV

SIN IS THE LACK OF CONFORMITY TO THE MORAL LAW OF GOD IN OUR DISPOSITION

The third manner by which the Scriptures attributes sin to man is in our disposition. Disposition is defined as *a prevailing tendency, mood or inclination; the tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances*. Synonyms would be our temperament, character or personality. This is possibly the most important aspect of this lesson and the point I wish to emphasize.

- ***The source of our external sin actions is said to be within***

"Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." — Matt 15:17-20 NASV

"For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." — Luke 6:43-45 NASV

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" — Jer 17:9 NASV

Moral evil is ascribed not only to the thoughts and affections, but to the heart from which they spring. ***The state or condition of the soul which gives rise to wrong desires and acts is expressly called sin.*** Therefore sin is not just "oh, that person committed an act of sin!" as if a righteous person made a mistake or stumbled; rather *all sinful actions find it's source within our fallen human nature*. This is illustrated in this poem:

Below the surface stream, shallow and light, of what we say we feel;
Below the stream, as light, of what we think we feel;
There flows, with silent current, strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed.

This might be compared to what psychologists call the sub-conscious.

- ***This inner source (sin) is an influence which controls our being***

“But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.” — Rom 7:8 NASV — note sin here is not an act but is present prior to its external act

“I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me” — Rom 5:9, 10 NASV — if sin became alive, then it must have been present prior to its manifestation.

“for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.... For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.... So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.... But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” — Rom 7:11, 14, 17, 20 NASV

Sin is represented here as an inward principle which exists in our souls (in our fallen human nature) even prior to our being conscious of its existence, which is discovered and awakened by the holy commands of God to be seen as it really is. For example, a torch in cave discovers reptiles and stirs them, but they were there before, the light and heat did not create them; a beam of light through your shades in a darkened room reveal thousands of particles floating in the air whose existence was not seen before.

“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” — Rom 5:21 NASV

“knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin ... Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts ... For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.... Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed ... For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.... But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” — Rom 6:6, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22 NASV

“So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. They answered Him, We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, You will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” — John 8:31-34 NASV

A momentary act cannot reign nor dwell. As poisonous gases find its source in dangerous chemicals, so the ever re-occurring thoughts and acts of sin reveal a source of sin within. ***God declares sin to be a permanent or reigning principle; not just a momentary act but a settled depravity of nature.***

CONCLUSION — Therefore we conclude sin to be the lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state. Without taking the time to bring forth scriptural support, this definition includes the following:

- sin is only predicable to rational and voluntary agents
- assumes man has a nature below his consciousness, a voluntary nature separate from his actual volition
- the divine law requires moral likeness to God in the affections and tendencies of the nature, as well as the outward activities; therefore the lack of conformity to the divine holiness in disposition or state is a violation of God’s law, equally with the outward act of transgression

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This teaching brings forth **the issue of responsibility, both for the saved and lost: *who's fault is it that I sin?*** Psychology searches for others to blame (as did Adam). The bible says **the problem's within each of our hearts, not outward.** *If we were sinless and had no sin nature, any of us could be born in the worst of circumstances and turn out well, uninfluenced by the evil around us. But being sinners, we could be born in the best of circumstances and still do wickedly.* The best proof of this is Jesus, God's holy Son who was born in adverse conditions yet remained sinless.

This is one of the keys to America's survival and the reason so many questionable decisions are being made by those in authority. **America has rejected the depravity of man**, therefore:

- the judicial system allows criminals to walk away unpunished because "it is not really their fault, it is the environment they were born into" or "it is society's fault"
- those who do make it to prison are no longer punished but "rehabilitated"
- a generation has been lost by rejecting proper discipline because "we do not want to mar the child's psychological profile"
- movies, TV, radio and the internet is being debased in the name of "freedom of speech", refusing to recognize what those influences are doing to our carnal nature

Is this to teach environment has no bearing on our temperament? — if we believed that then we would not have homeschooled. Our character is affected by our surroundings and therefore the scriptures are adamant about what we take in mentally as well as with whom we associate (1 Cor 15:33; Phil 4:8). ***Rather this is a refutation of today's teaching of "babies are born morally neutral, as a blank slate".***

CHRISTIANS — *Christian growth is not us becoming better and better; rather it is seeing ourselves more and more as the Lord sees us* — this sin is universal, not limited to the Hitlers. What makes the "wicked" different than you or I? — ***only the grace of God! This is the foundation for true humility; not the false humility that permeates our Christian circles today, but a true recognition of who we are in the eyes of God.*** America's churches are filled with those who really are saved, but when their obvious outward sins drop away as the Lord works on their being, they begin to be lifted in pride because they no longer do the sinful outward acts they used to do. They can see many unsaved who are still in the clutches of sin, and self-righteousness begins to settle in. What has begun so well is thwarted by its good results. While outwardly they continue to reject those former sinful acts, inwardly they begin to sink further and further away from the Lord, no longer relying on Him but depending on their own external goodness. Thus a **"Baptist Pharisee"** is created.

The Baptists are not the only Christians who have problems with this teaching, but ***this also contradicts the popular Charismatic teaching of "we're just not 'sinners saved by grace' but we're children of the King!"*** This cannot be denied but an improper emphasis of that truth removes the internal element of sanctification and makes sanctification a matter of our hair cuts, how we dress, women's make-up, etc. Cp Mt 5:3 ***"blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God"***

Consider the testimonies of others:

Luther during his early experience often wrote to Staupitz: ***"oh my sins, my sins!" yet in the confessional he could name no sins in particular which he had to confess;*** it was clearly a sense of the general depravity of his nature which filled his soul with deep sorrow and pain

Jonathan Edwards wrote: Often since I have lived in this town I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness, very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have been often obliged to shut myself up. ***I have***

had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness and the badness of my heart than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind, of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time; and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell. When others that have come to talk with me about their soul's concerns have expressed the sense they have had of their own wickedness, by saying that it seemed to them they were as bad as the devil himself; I thought their expressions seemed exceeding faint and feeble to represent my wickedness.... *When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell.* And it appears to me that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, and the arm of His power and grace stretched forth in all the majesty of His power and in all the glory of His sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself, far beyond the sight of everything but the eye of sovereign grace that can pierce even down to such a depth. And yet it seems to me that my conviction of sin is exceeding small and faint; it is enough to amaze me that I have no more sense of my sin. I know certainly that I have very little sense of my sinfulness. When I have had turns of weeping for my sins, I thought I knew at the time that my repentance was nothing to my sin. ... It is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the bottomless, infinite depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy, and deceit left in my heart.

George Whitefield used to say, *“When I see myself I seem to be half devil and half beast,”* and again, as he passed through great crowds on his way to preach: “I wondered why the people did not stone so vile a wretch as myself.”

From the diary of **David Brainerd** - missionary to the Indian in New Jersey in 1700s. Much of his diary was found to be occupied with bemoaning his sinful state:

May 13, 1742: *Saw so much of the wickedness of my heart, that I longed to get away from myself. I never before thought there was so much spiritual pride in my soul. I felt almost pressed to death with my own vileness. Oh what a body of death is there in me! Lord, deliver my soul.*

May 15: indeed I never saw such a week as this before; for I have been almost ready to die with the view of the wickedness of my heart. I could not have thought I had such a body of death in me.

June 30: spent this day alone in the woods, in fasting and prayer; underwent the most dreadful conflicts in my soul that ever I felt, in some respects. I saw myself so vile, that I was ready to say, “I shall now perish by the hand of Saul.” I thought, and almost concluded, I had no power to stand for the cause of God, but was almost afraid of the shaking of a leaf. Spent almost the whole day in prayer, incessantly. I could not bear to think of Christians showing me any respect.

This awareness of man's depravity is a result of the Holy Spirit's work and not a natural conclusion.

Where in the scriptures do we find a lost man in anything but defiance to God's holiness and defensive of himself? The lost as Pharaoh may be quick to say “I have sinned” when caught but just as quick to return to their sin when the pressure's relieved. ***It is only from the saved that we see an awareness of our inner depravity:***

- **David:** *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. — Ps 51:1-5*

- **Isaiah:** *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. — Isa 6:5*

- **Paul:** *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* — Rom 7:24; *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* — 1 Tim 1:15
- **Peter:** *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.* — Lk 5:8

The unsaved pharisee justified himself while the saved publican cried “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” — Lk 18:13. “***It is evident that in none of these cases were there merely single acts of transgression in view; the humiliation and self-aborrence were in view of permanent states of depravity.... It may be doubted whether any repentance is genuine which is not repentance for sin rather than sins; cp Jn 16:8 — He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.***”

Regarding sanctification:

There being no cause in the creature why Grace should be shown, the creature must be brought off from *trying to give cause* to God for His Grace.... He has been accepted in *Christ*, who is his standing! He is not “on probation”. As to his life past, *it does not exist* before God: he *died* at the cross, and *Christ is his Life*. Grace, once bestowed, *is not withdrawn*: for God knew all the human exigencies beforehand: His action was independent of them, not dependent upon them....

The Proper Attitude of Man Under Grace:

- To believe, and to consent to be *loved while unworthy*, is the great secret.
- To refuse to make “resolutions” and “vows”; for that is to trust in the flesh.
- To expect to be blessed, though realizing more and more lack of worth...
- To rely on God’s chastening [child training] hand as a mark of His kindness...

Things Which Gracious Souls Discover:

- To “hope to be better” [hence acceptable] is to fail to see yourself in Christ only.
- To be *disappointed* with yourself, is to have *believed* in yourself.
- To be *discouraged* is *unbelief*, — as to God’s purpose and plan of blessing for you.
- To be *proud*, is to be *blind*! For we have no standing before God, *in ourselves*.
- The lack of Divine blessing, therefore, comes from unbelief, and not from *failure of devotion*...

To preach devotion first, and blessing second, is to reverse God’s order, and preach *law, not grace*. The Law made man’s blessing depend on devotion; Grace *confers undeserved, unconditional* blessing: our devotion may follow, but does not always do so, — in proper measure.

— William R. Newell; *Romans*

UNSAVED — You don’t need forgiveness because of what you do, you need forgiveness because of what you are! You just don’t sin, but you’re a sinner by nature! Many come to the Lord because of one thing they have done (or was caught at) and desire forgiveness, yet never truly seeing themselves as the Lord saw them in the act. Instead of “forgive me for I am a dreadful sinner who’s life is filled with sin”, it’s more like “forgive me for although I am basically a pretty good person, I have failed this one time and made a mistake!”

Basic Definitions – Old Testament

chāṭā = **to miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt**; root word used about 580x in OT, and is primary word for sin; note Judges 20:16 (literal rendering of the Heb word) ‘*sling stone and not miss*’; forms of this word translated ‘*sin, sinners, sinful thing, sin offering*’ (TWOT 638)

’āsham = **trespass, guilty, offense, sin**; primary meaning centers on guilt, but often moves from the act which brings guilt to the act of punishment; the word used in trespass offering (TWOT 180)

’āvōn = **iniquity, guilt, punishment for guilt**; used as singular to cover sins collectively; i.e. Isa 53:6 Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity (singular) of us all; from a root meaning ‘*bend, twist, distort*’ (TWOT 1577a)

pāsha’ = **rebel, transgress, revolt, rebellion**; fundamental idea of the root is a breach of relationships, either civil or religious (TWOT 1846)

shāghāh = **to err, to wander, to err through ignorance or inadvertence, mistake**; verb used 22x, mostly ‘*to err*’ to mean a sin done inadvertently; 2x in Lev to refer to sin of ignorance; Ps 119:67 ‘*before I was afflicted I went astray*’ (TWOT 2325)

rā’a’ = **bad, evil**; often in juxtaposition with ‘*good / evil*’ (Mic 3:2; 2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9) (TWOT 2191)

rāsha’ = **to be wicked, act wickedly, to condemn as guilty**; occurs 33x in OT; forms of this word translated ‘*wrong, wickedness, guilt, wicked, criminal*’ (TWOT 2222)

tā’āh = **err, wander, go astray**; sometimes used in a physical sense of Hagar wandering with Ishmael (cf. Gen 21:14); most familiar passage is Isa 53:6, ‘*all we like sheep have gone astray*’ (TWOT 2531)

Basic Definitions – New Testament

hamartia = **missing of the mark**; the only Greek word (or form of it) used in NT translated ‘*sin, sinner, offended*’ (Acts 25:8), *trespass* (Lk17:3) (STRONGS 266)

ponēros = **bad, wicked, evil** (STRONGS 4190-91)

adikia / adikos = **unrighteousness, a condition of not being right (with God or man), iniquity, unjust** (STRONGS 93-94)

adikēma = **wrong, evil doing, iniquity**; only used 3x in NT (STRONGS 92)

adokimos = **unable to stand the test, rejected, refuse, worthless**; used 8x in NT; translated *reprobate, a castaway, rejected* (STRONGS 96, 99)

asebēs = **ungodly, godless, wicked**; (*a = not, negative, sebō = to worship, to be devout*); used to denote those who fight against the purposes of God (STRONGS 765)

kakos / kakon = **wicked, evil, bad**; of a bad nature, something not as it ought to be (STRONGS 2556)

anomos = **without law, lawless, lawlessness**; (*a = not, negative, nomos = law*); translated *wicked, transgressors* Mk 15:28, *without law* 1 Cor 9:21, *lawless, unlawful* (STRONGS 459)

enochos = **danger of judgment, guilty**; in a forensic sense, denoting the connection of a person either with his crime or the penalty (STRONGS 1777)

paranomeō / paranomia = **law-breaking, to violate or transgress the law**; (*para = against, nomos = law*); the first word used 1x in Acts 23:3, ‘*contrary to the law,*’ the second word used 1x in 2 Pet 2:16, ‘*iniquity*’ (STRONGS 3891, 3892)

paraptōma = **trespass, sin, transgression**; a lapse or deviation, either an unintentional error or wilful transgression (STRONGS 3900)

parabainō / parabasis = **breaking the law, transgression**; lit, *a going over*; metaphorically, *a disregarding, violating the law*; Rom 2:23; 4:15; 5:14 (STRONGS 3845, 3847)

planaō / planē / planos = **a wandering, deceit, deception, delusion, seduction**; used of those who wander from the truth (James 5:19) and who try to deceive others (1 Jn 2:26) (STRONGS 4105, 4106, 4108)