

LESSON 6: THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH.

Salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the core of the Christian faith. However, before looking at this subject, we must consider the necessity of man's salvation. "Hamartiology" comes from the most frequently used Greek word for "sin," *hamartia*, and is the study of sin.

I. A DEFINITION OF SIN

There are many words in the Bible that refer to sin; eight principal words in the OT, and twelve in the NT. Human concepts of sin as being merely *finiteness*, *illusion*, *sensuousness*, *ignorance*, or *selfishness* are inadequate (Rom 7:13; 1 Tim 1:15).

A. NEGATIVELY CONSIDERED

1. Sin is not an accident

As opposed to the teaching that "sin" is a chance happening that carries with it no guilt. Although man sometimes does wrong ignorantly, this is not the sum total of his sin. Scripture states that sin is the result from an act of conscious disobedience on the part of Adam (Rom 5:12).

2. Sin is not a creature weakness

As opposed to the understanding that "sin" is merely a kind of infirmity or weakness; of which man is very unfortunate, but in no wise guilty. Although individual persons tend to have individual weakness in various moral areas, this does not comprise the sum total of his sin. Scriptures teaches that man is inherently "wicked" (Jer 17:9).

3. Sin is not an absence of good

As opposed to the Christian Science faith teaches that "evil" is merely the absence of good or righteousness. Although man is void of righteousness, he also possesses positive evil. Scripture declares that sin not only has a passive sense, but also a very active existence, even being aggressive (Rom 3:10-18; 7:14; Jas 1:13-15).

B. POSITIVELY CONSIDERED

1. Sin is failure to meet God's standard

The coming short of God's glory – man's inability to measure up to the divine standard (Rom 3:23; Jude 24). The Greek word "hamartia" means *to miss the mark*. The commission of unrighteousness – all action and attitude that is against any prohibition of God (1 Jn 5:17). The omission of righteousness – to leave undone and duty or commandment that we should do (Jas 4:17). Backsliding – allowing distance between us and God (Isa 59:1-2; Jer 14:7).

2. Sin is any wrong attitude towards the Person of God

Pride – self-exaltation (Prov 21:4). Murmuring – expressing dissatisfaction with the divine plan and providence of God (Num 21:7). Unbelief – this is the root sin from which all others have sprung (cf. Jn 1:7-11; unbelief in Christ).

3. Sin is any wrong action in relation to the will of God

Doubtful indulgence – participating in questionable things will inevitably bring condemnation (Rom 14:23). Disobedience – open defiance of and insubordination to the sovereignty of God (Jer 3:25). Rebellion – strong wills are sources of great good when arrayed on the side of righteousness, otherwise they are productive of much evil (1 Sam 15:23). Lawlessness – the law fixes the line between good and evil; to step across its boundary is sin (Rom 3:19-20; 1 Jn 3:4).

4. Sin is any wrong action in relation to men

Favouritism – to place our dealings with man on the basis of personal satisfaction or gain (Jam 2:9). Despising one's neighbour – which is direct obedience to the command to love thy neighbour as thyself (Prov 14:21).

5. Sin is the wrong tendencies of human nature

The evil principle in man (sin) that gives man a bent, or a bias, towards disobedience and wickedness (Rom 7:15-17). As soon as we are told that we are not allowed to do something, there is often an immediate desire to then seek after that which is forbidden!

II. THE ORIGIN OF SIN

Although there are a number of unanswered questions concerning the origin of sin, Scripture teaches that God did not originate sin.

A. THE ENTRANCE OF SIN INTO THE UNIVERSE

Lucifer brought sin into the universe when he chose his will over God's will. Through pride, he fell (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-19).

B. THE ENTRANCE OF SIN INTO THE WORLD/HUMAN RACE

Through deception and disobedience, sin then "came into the world" by the one man Adam (Rom 5:12-20). The question is always raised, "If God is all powerful, why didn't He prevent sin from entering the world?" The Bible does not fully answer this question, but it does teach that God was not forced into a "dilemma"; God has always been in control. The Bible tells us that God provided a remedy for sin "before the foundation of the world" through "the Lamb slain" (Rev 13:8).

Ephesians 2:7 states, "That in the ages to come [God] might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." By allowing man the choice to sin, God will always be able to demonstrate His marvellous grace extended towards man!

III. THREE ASPECTS OF SIN

To completely understand what sin is, we must examine the difference between personal, inherited and imputed sin.

A. PERSONAL SIN

This is the form of sin which includes everything in the daily life which is against or fails to conform to the character of God, either by acts of omission (failing to do what one should do) or commission (doing what one should not do). Generally speaking, personal sin relates to some particular command of God in Scripture.

B. INHERITED SIN

Through the fall, Adam became an entirely different being, depraved and corrupt. Every person born inherits the sinful nature of his parents (Ps 51:5); we are each born after our "kind."

Some feel that if they are not presently sinning, then they are not "sinners." This is not the case. Because we are children of Adam we are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). We are not sinners merely because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. The lost have only a sinful nature; although saved (regenerated) persons receive a divine nature, they never rid themselves of their sinful nature in this life (Gal 5:16-17; 2 Pet 2:22).

C. IMPUTED SIN

See "Anthropology: Doctrine of Man."

IV. THE PENALTY FOR SIN

A. PHYSICAL DEATH

Physical death is *the separation of soul and body*. For the Christian, death is no longer a penalty (Christ has endured the penalty of sin). For the believer, death is referred to 1) as "sleep" of the body until the resurrection, and 2) as the removal of the soul into the presence of His Lord (Gen 2:16-17; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21).

B. SPIRITUAL DEATH

Spiritual death is *the separation of the soul from God*. The penalty denounced in Eden which has fallen upon the race of man is primarily this death of the soul (see Gen 3:22-24; and Rom 3:23 with Jude 24).

Everyone is born into this world spiritually dead. All are in need of a new or spiritual birth; to be "regenerated," made *alive again* (Jn 3:37; Eph 2:1-5).

C. ETERNAL DEATH

Eternal death is simply the culmination and completion of spiritual death; *the eternal separation of the soul and body from God*, together with the accompanying remorse and outward punishment. This is an eternal condition for the lost once they have passed physical death (Mt 25:41; 2 Thes 1:9; Heb 10:31; Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14, 21:8).

V. THE HERESY OF SINLESS PERFECTION

A. TWO FORMS OF THIS TEACHING

1. "The old sin-nature can be eradicated."

However, 1 John 1:8 states, "If we say that we have no sin [singular], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The use of "sin" denotes the sinful nature; saying we have none, we lie.

2. "The old sin-nature can be entirely suppressed."

However, 1 John 1:10 states, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." To say we are at a place where we do not sin, we lie.

John then deals with the different characteristics of the sinful nature and the divine nature (1 Jn 3:6-9): saying, that the divine nature *cannot* sin, and therefore the spiritual man walks with God and therefore demonstrates more of the divine nature and not the sinful nature.

B. TWO FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

"Sinless Perfectionism" professes that every step of life is a step of perfect faith. However, the implication then is that he always takes advantage of every opportunity to do good, and that he measures up to the very character of God in thought and deed. This is merely self-deception (1 Jn 1:8-10) and hypocrisy (Lk 18:9-14).

"Sinless Perfectionism" has of necessity watered down the very definition of sin to include "only the wilful practice of certain things." However, this position ignores the Scriptural teaching of the spiritual conflict of the two natures (Gal 5:16-23; Rom 7:14-25; Phil 3:12).