

LESSON ESSENTIALS

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

LESSON 4: WHAT IS SIN ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE?

People can spend a lifetime wondering why God allows tragedies in our world. But the Bible is clear on the fact that sin is the cause of most of these evils. Read on to know what sin really means, how it came into existence, the consequences it brought and finally what God is doing to tackle sin.

We must remember that while the Bible condemns sin, it also gives us the promise of forgiveness when we repent. Even though it is important to preach the consequences of sin, it is even more vital to share the free gift of forgiveness with our friends. This lesson will help you put the themes of sin and forgiveness in perspective.

We live in a world that fails to understand the seriousness of sin, and even discounts it as a being a relative phenomenon. This lesson can help you understand how God views sin.

The Bible describes sin as 'turning our own way,' according to Isaiah 53:6 and 'breaking God's law and rebelling against God' according to 1 John 3:4... . To Sin means to miss the mark or fall short of the goal God has for us. Because we all sin, we all fall short of God's perfect standards. As the Bible rightly states in Romans 3:23: 'All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.'

When was the last time you heard a news report on the radio or sat down to read a newspaper? It can seem overwhelming – every day we hear reports of murder, disaster, wars, scams, economic problems, etc. Even though people might debate why these tragedies happen, the answer is quite simple. In fact, the Bible clearly tells us that the cause of these tragedies is sin.

While the dictionary describes sin as 'breaking a moral law', or 'breaking God's law,' people today have formed their own definitions of sin. Some say that there is no such thing as sin or that sin is circumstantial and relative. They argue that something might be wrong in a certain situation, but right in another or that what is right and wrong for you may be different than what is right or wrong for them. Some people also say that you sin only when you harm someone else. But it is evident that these views are self-serving and are simply intended to make someone feel better about choosing their own desires over God's.

The Bible describes sin as 'turning our own way,' according to Isaiah 53:6, and 'breaking God's law and rebelling against God according to 1 John 3:4. James 4:17 also says that we sin if we know that we should do good, but don't do it. John 16:9 tells us that if we don't believe in Jesus Christ, we are sinning. Everything from our smallest devious thoughts to the bigger crimes such as murder are all sin, according to the Bible. In fact, because we all sin, we all fall short of God's perfect standards. As the Bible rightly states in Romans 3:23, 'All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.'

Even if we really don't want to, we continue to sin. We're born into a sinful world and we have inherited a sinful nature from our predecessor, Adam. Explaining the origin of sin, the Bible tells us that the very first sin took place in heaven when an angel tried to compete with God (Isaiah 14:12-14). Punishing this angel - Satan - for his sin of pride (Ezekiel 28:15-17), God threw him from the heavens. From then on, he's been standing against God, and causing man to sin. He wasted no time in attacking mankind and entered the Garden of Eden to tempt the first human family (Genesis 3). Giving in to his tricks, Adam and Eve committed their first sin by eating a fruit that God had forbidden them. Since then, man has never been able to escape sin on his own.

When sin entered the world, not only did it bring a curse, it also separated man from God. How much it must have grieved our Holy God to see His creation turning against Him, and how hard it must have been to dismiss His own creation from His presence! But it got worse. When people's sins became especially corrupt during the time of Noah, God was even sorry he created man. Genesis 6:5-6 says, 'Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to His heart.' Sin brought the consequence of death and God's judgement on mankind, and as people's sins became increasingly worse, people grew even further from God.

The amazing fact is that in spite of our failings, God has always taken initiative to seek and save mankind. Adam did not go and tell God about his sin, instead he hid himself. But what did God do? He pursued him and desired to restore their relationship. This wasn't a one-time gesture. God still yearns to bring man back into a relationship with Him. There are many verses in the Bible that reinforce this notion. Luke 19:10 is just one of them – "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Overcome by the need to save the world from sin, God decided to send us a Saviour in the form of Jesus, His Son. Ever since Adam, man only seemed to be distancing himself from God's presence. And with every generation, it only seemed to be getting worse. (Adam's first son Cain sinned by killing his brother.) Unfortunately, the consequence of sin is death. As Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." And we know that 'the wages of sin is death,' according to the Bible. This death is both physical as well as spiritual. What comes after death is even scarier. No one can escape God's judgement: "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

While man might choose to downplay sin and even be casual about it, God's standard of holiness is firm. Sin isn't simply an action that man might commit in a moment of weakness. In God's eyes it is an action that concerns his entire being – his heart, mind and will. In Matthew 15:18-19 Jesus says, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." These are the things which defile a

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While man might choose to downplay sin and even be casual about it, God's standard of holiness is unshakable. Sin isn't just another action that man might commit in a moment of weakness. In God's eyes it is an action that concerns his entire being – his heart, mind and will.

man. Given the pitiable state that man was in, the only way for God to save us was to send Jesus, who was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), to take the punishment for our sins. He became our substitute, allowing himself to be punished for the whole world's sin so that we do not have to suffer sin's consequences, "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all," says Isaiah 53:6. Yes, the Lord Jesus bore our sins, "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

It was to bring us eternal life that Jesus took on our sin and our punishment, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). After the Lord Jesus died for us, paying the penalty of sin, he rose again, showing He was Lord over death and no sin or curse could destroy him. It is in the power of Jesus Christ to defeat sin and death that we – God's children – have our hope, that we may also live eternally.

IN REVIEW

- While the dictionary defines sin as 'breaking a moral law,' or 'breaking God's law,' people today have formed their own definitions of sin. The Bible describes sin as 'turning our own way,' and 'breaking God's law and rebelling against God.'
- Sin came into existence when Satan started competing with God for power. God punished him for his sin of pride by throwing him down from heaven. Satan then caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden.
- We continue to sin because we're born into a sinful world and have inherited a sinful nature from our predecessor, Adam. No one but Jesus is innocent.
- God sent His only Son Jesus, who knew no sin, to take the penalty of our sins upon Himself. This act paid the penalty for our sins and allows us to be made clean in God's sight.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- What do you do when you sin, wallow in guilt, ignore it, or turn to God for forgiveness?
- What are some of the areas of sin that you are still struggling with? What can you do to overcome those issues?
- How can you help a friend from another faith to become conscious of his sins and the importance of God's forgiveness?
- How will you explain to a friend about sin as revealed to us from God's Word?

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