

The Bible Doctrine Of Sin

Biblical Lessons Aimed At
Helping Us Define, Describe,
And Defeat Sin

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Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Suppose you read of Americans surveyed about various cultural issues. One question asked was...

“What do you think is the greatest problem facing our country?”

In your opinion, what would be some of the more prevalent answers? No doubt we would read some of the following...poverty, hunger, crime, racism, etc. While these are “problems” our nation has to deal with and in which many find themselves struggling, they would not be the “greatest” problem. That unfortunate title belongs to what is the true greatest problem...sin.

The nature of sin can be difficult to grasp...not because it is un-definable, but because it is often seen from many perspectives. As one writer states, *“It is hard to fully define sin in a single sentence because of its many-faceted character.”* The apostle John helps us with revealed truth: *“Whoever commits sins also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”* (1 Jn. 3:4), and *“All unrighteousness is sin...”* (1 Jn. 5:17a). In short, it would be safe to say all sin is a violation of the will of God.

The “exponential effect” of sin is even seen in the way the Bible presents its spread:

- ◆ Jesus talked about the “leavening effect” of the religious error taught by the Pharisees (Mt. 16:6-12).
- ◆ Paul warned of the dangers of the wrong kind of friends (1 Cor. 15:33).
- ◆ Paul also told Timothy to beware of the influence of Hymenaeus and Philetus...their words “spread like cancer” (2 Tim. 2:17).
- ◆ Sin became so pervasive and damaging that God was forced to destroy the entire world (Gen. 6).

Contrary to public opinion, the Bible teaches there is such a thing as “sin.” It is a small word that begins a very long & disturbing sentence...“sin” occurs 430 times in 380 verses. The Bible rests so strongly on the existence of this “great problem” that if it could be proven to be false, the Divine story would be reduced to nothing more than a legend without truth or meaning. Consider the following quote from Bob Buchanon –

“Sin is universal. It knows no bounds. It is everywhere and affects everyone. No technology can eliminate it. No human accomplishment can hinder its parasitic growth. No military force can conquer it. Sin is man’s terrible enemy.”

- Florida College Lectures, Feb. 1997

A problem in our society is the multiple and different understandings of sin. Almost everyone admits to being “against” sin, but we can’t seem to agree on defining or recognizing what is sinful. Situations once universally agreed on being “sinful” have been watered down so much that no one is guilty of anything anymore (Isa. 5:18-23). Even among brethren we’ll hear either *“I think...”* or *“I don’t think that’s sinful.”* However, just because one thinks something is or isn’t “sinful” doesn’t make it so.

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As God's people of the new covenant, it is imperative we fully grasp the concept of sin and see it for what it really is. Terms like "weaknesses" or "faults" are totally inadequate. Sin is a personal affront to God...it is something which grieves Him (**Gen. 6:5-6; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 5**).

A survey conducted in 2007 revealed the average mindset of Americans re: sin.

- 87% of American adults believe in the existence of sin, defined as "something that is almost always considered wrong, particularly from a religious or moral perspective."
 - "...almost always..." leaves the door open for "situation ethics" [JBS]
- yet, several behaviors the Bible would classify as "sinful" are not labeled as such

Despite our culture's unwillingness to properly identify & define sin, God does. The Bible contains "lists" of behaviors & attitudes that do not meet with Divine approval...i.e., ***sin***. By the way people act and respond to such surveys as the one listed above, it is apparent most have not even read these passages, or they have read them and are not overly concerned about the warnings inherent in them. Consider these:

Rom. 1:21-32

Eph. 4:17-32

Rom. 13:13

Eph. 5:3-5

1 Tim. 4:1-3; 5:8, 11-13

Gal. 5:19-21

Col. 3:5-9

Despite surveys claiming sin's absence, or that some behaviors just aren't sinful, the honest Bible believer recognizes sin's existence. According to Jesus upon describing the Holy Spirit's work when He would come to help the apostles, sin can be identified (**Jn. 16:7-11**). If there is no such thing as sin, or if it can be minimized into an unimportant irrelevance, these words are absolutely meaningless. For the Holy Spirit to "convict the world of sin" implies a concrete definition of sin.

The careful Bible student recognizes sin can be understood and dealt with on numerous levels. There are sins of the flesh, the tongue, and the heart. There are sins of action ("*commission*") & inaction ("*omission*"). There are even "sins of conscience" that might not affect others in the same way. While sin is largely on the individual level, we also read of collective sin (*national, congregational*).

The best way to understand sin is to see it in terms of its consequences. Remember the old adage...

Sin will...

- ...take you farther than you want to go;**
- ...keep you longer than you want to stay;**
- ...cost you more than you want to pay.**

All of us have suffered because of our sins. Others also suffer when one sins...like ripples advancing when a stone is thrown into the water. These "ripples" bring heartache, suffering, and pain that would not exist if someone had not committed sin. Many times, others who suffer do so as "innocent victims" (**Josh. 7:1, 5**). All of this illustrates the warnings we have received in God's word re: the devastating effects of sin:

- because of sin, all men face physical death (**Gen. 2:17**)
- because of our own individual sins, all men face spiritual death (**Rom. 6:23**)

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When the Bible speaks of sin, it speaks of conduct or behavior. Calvinism (*a prevalent man-made doctrine that influences all Protestantism and Catholicism*) teaches sin is a "state" into which man is born. It is a "condition" all humanity inherits ("*original sin*") because of Adam's behavior in **Gen. 3**. From this religious error springs all sorts of ideas and conclusions re: sin that do not harmonize with the Scripture: "baptizing" (*sprinkling*) babies, and the absence of personal guilt or accountability (**Ezek. 18:2-4, 5-24**).

Despite such a bleak picture, there is hope for everyone. Jesus Christ came to redeem man from his sins. He brought eternal truth with Him that was to reveal the Father and teach us about sin that alienates us from God (**Jn. 1:14-18; 1 Jn. 2:1a**). His sacrificial death provides the way out of the dilemma we put ourselves into because of our sins (**Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:56-57; Eph. 2:1-7**).

The purpose of these lessons will be to help us better identify sin. We'll approach this from many different angles. Hopefully our resolve to overcome sin will be strengthened. Accomplishing this will not only benefit us toward our own desire for heaven, it will also make us better teachers of others still caught up sin's deadly snare. The gospel of Christ is the only hope the lost have of coming out of sin's darkness & despair.