



What Does It Mean To Sin?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What does it mean to sin? “Sin” is a word rarely used outside of a religious context. Consequently, we need to take some time to really understand the true meaning of the word “sin.”

Sin Is Contrary To God

Perhaps you can identify some things as being “sinful.” And, maybe you are even accurate in doing so. However, perhaps you have not truly understood the reason those sinful things are “sinful.” In fact, the true reason any sinful activity is “sinful” is because it is contrary to God (His nature and His word)!

Definitions given to the Greek word translated “sin” involve the ideas of straying from the path of right. More generally, to “sin” (in the Greek) would have reference even to an archer who misses his target. Applied spiritually, this would involve missing the mark that God has set for our lives by making decisions that are not in agreement with His instructions.

Actually, the Bible defines sin in this exact way. 1 John 3:4 says, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 5:17 says, “All unrighteousness is sin...” James 4:17 says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Each one of these passages help us to learn about the true nature of sin.

(1) It is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Something that is “lawless” is something that acts against or contrary to law. In the spiritual sense, it is acting without regard for or contrary to the laws God has given to govern your conduct on this earth. So, sin is a departure from following God’s laws.

(2) It is unrighteousness (1 John 5:17). Righteousness refers to the condition of being right with God. So, anything that is unrighteous is something which fails to meet God’s standard of right. Again, this would indicate that sin is departing from God’s path of right, choosing instead to live according to your own desires.

(3) It is failing to do the good we know we should do (James 4:17). God's word fully equips you to do every good thing God wants from you (2 Timothy 3:16-17). However, whenever you learn what good things God wants you to do but you make a decision *not* to do it, you sin.

All three of these passages demonstrate a common trait for sin: It is contrary to God! God is identified as being "holy" in Revelation 4:8. Consider what is said about Him in 1 John 1:5: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." It naturally follows, then, that the law of this holy God is also holy and "the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). Therefore, God's ways are completely pure and right – and the way of sin is unrighteous and wicked!

Things Involved In Sin

So, we can clearly see that sin occurs anytime you act contrary to God's holy ways (as He has identified in the pages of His word). But, as we attempt to gain a greater understanding of sin, we need to identify some things specifically involved in sin. Let's consider.

As we prepare to identify some things specifically involved in sin, James 1:13-15 will prove to be valuable: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

(1) God's commandment. Romans 7:7-12 describes the connection between God's law and sin. Paul states that God's law is certainly not sinful. Rather, Paul says that he would not have known sin except through the law. For instance, Paul says, "I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" So, he says that sin took opportunity by God's commandment and produced evil desire in him, deceived him, and killed him. But, he concludes that God's law is "holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." So, while sin cannot be counted without God's commandment (see Romans 5:13), the commandment itself contains God's instructions to lead you into a way that pleases Him!

(2) Your own desires. James made it clear (in James 1:13-15) that the problem is not with God. He is not the source of temptation. Rather, the problem begins with man's fleshly desires. Mankind often chooses to focus on fulfilling his own desires rather than living in a way which is pleasing to God. This point of having fleshly desires that are stronger than a desire to serve God leads to sin.

(3) Temptation. Whenever your fleshly desires are stronger than the desire to do God's will, Satan will provide you with an opportunity to fulfill your fleshly desires! He will attempt to lure/bait you into acting upon your own fleshly desires and abandon God's holy path! Notice how Satan is described in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Listen to what Jesus says about Satan in John 8:44: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." So, whenever Satan presents these

temptations to you, you can absolutely know that he is not telling you the truth! He is trying to deceive you and convince you to abandon the holy ways of God!

(4) Violation of God's commandment. This is what James refers to as the point "when desire has conceived." Being tempted to do something that is contrary to God's law is *not* sin! Actually making a choice to violate the law of God is sin! This is the point at which your own physical desire is victorious over God's holy and righteous ways. Now, before we move on, please recognize that this God-inspired identification of sin's progression means that infants and young children are not capable of sinning. They simply do not make intentional decisions to do things in violation of God's holy commandments! This is what Paul refers to in Romans 7:9 when he says, "I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Before he was old enough to know God's law, he was pure and without sin. However, whenever he reached the age of personal accountability and learned God's law, sin came to life and he died. Note that "revived" is a poor translation by the *New King James Version* of the Bible – and should be translated "came alive."

(5) Death. Here is the result of sin. James said that when sin is "full-grown," it brings forth death (James 1:15). Romans 6:23 says that "the wages of sin is death." Now, this is not physical death (though physical death did begin due to sin). Instead, these references are to spiritual death (spiritual separation from fellowship with your holy God). Think about Adam and Eve. God promised them they would "surely die" – "in the day" they violated His law (see Genesis 2:15-17). Now, whenever they did eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they violated God's law. But, they did not die (physically) until some time after being removed from the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 5:5) – after they were able to bear children. Yet, they did die "in the day" they ate of the tree – *spiritually*!

To die spiritually refers to being separated from God (death is a separation). Isaiah 59:1-2 should help you understand the connection between sin and spiritual separation from God: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear." You simply cannot be in fellowship with the holy and righteous God while living in your sin (unrighteousness). Read 1 John 1:5-2:2 to learn more. Ultimately, if you die physically while in your sins, you will experience eternal spiritual death in Hell fire (see Revelation 21:8). This is eternal separation from God in this place of punishment (see Matthew 25:41 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)!

Examples

Finally, the Scriptures do not just identify what sin is and the process involved in sin. Instead, the Scriptures demonstrate sin in numerous Bible examples.

The example of Adam and Eve is the first such example – and makes sin very easy to understand. After God had created Adam, He gave Adam the law (recorded in Genesis 2:15-17) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This law was also told to Eve after she was created (see Genesis 3:2-3). Then, the Bible records how Satan (using the serpent) tempted Eve and deceived her to think that there would not be consequences for eating of the forbidden fruit. He said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be

like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5). This temptation caused Eve to look at the tree in a more favorable way – and she chose to violate the law of God and eat of its fruit (Genesis 3:6). She also gave it to her husband and he ate (Genesis 3:6). The result was spiritual separation from God, being cast out of the Garden of Eden, and other physical consequences (Genesis 3:8-24).

We might put sin into two “categories” in order to help us better understand it. Now, as we briefly consider these two “kinds” of sin, please do not think that one “kind” is more dangerous than another – for all sin is equal in the sight of God. Also, please understand that the Bible does *not* identify some sins as sins of “commission” and some as sins of “omission.” These are simply terms that are *helpful* to us to think about areas of sin we must avoid!

(1) Sins of commission. Sometimes God tells us *not* to do something. Sins of commission occur whenever we do what God has said we must not do. So, sins of commission would include things like committing fornication, lying, stealing, coveting, gossiping, using profanity, etc. These are all things God has told us *not* to do. If we go ahead and do them, we commit sin.

(2) Sins of omission. Sometimes God has told us to *do* certain things. Sins of omission occur whenever we fail to do what we must do. So, sins of omission would include things like failing to preach the gospel to others, failing to do good to those we have opportunity to help, failing to pray for our enemies, failing to love our spouses or our children in the way God has prescribed, etc. These are all things God has told us *to* do. If we refuse or fail to do them, we commit sin.

Conclusion

Sin is “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). The “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Spiritual separation from God is both what we get and what we deserve whenever we sin. Thanks be to God that He has provided the gift of eternal life in Heaven through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

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