

SIN

Key Verse: 1 John 1:8-10

Key Idea: I believe in sin.

Key Question: What is sin and what are its consequences??

Sin disrupts everything. We don't live the lives we were originally designed to live, and we don't live in the world we were originally designed to live in. Sin mars the image of God in us; we no longer reflect the perfection God created us to reflect. Because of sin, things simply aren't the way they were originally meant to be. The story of the human race, as presented in the Bible, is the story of God fixing broken people living in a broken world. It is the story of God's victory over the many results of sin in the world.

What Sin Is

Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. God sets forth his moral law in many places throughout the Bible. One such place is the Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20:1-17. If sin is any action contrary to God's moral law, it makes sense that Exodus 20:13 says, "You shall not murder," and Exodus 20:15 says, "You shall not steal." But sin is also found in attitudes contrary to God's moral law. This is why Exodus 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Sin is also found in our nature – the internal character that is the essence of who we are. This is why Paul says that those who reject Jesus are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).

Where Sin Came From

Since sin is in complete contradiction to God, he cannot sin, and we should never blame God for sin or think that he bears the responsibility for sin. God's "work is perfect" and "all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deut. 32:4). It is impossible for God even to desire to do wrong, "for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). Yet the Bible also says that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11), so it seems that God somehow ordained that sin would come into the world. Sin did not surprise God when it came into the world, nor did it overpower him. Instead, God decided that he would allow moral creatures to willfully and voluntarily choose to sin. How we put these two truths together is one of the most difficult questions in theology, and it is healthy for us to allow a substantial element of mystery, admitting that a full understanding is beyond anyone's ability in this age. (The recognition that there is mystery here should also guard us against getting into heated arguments over this topic!)

Sin existed in Satan and his demons before the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and then it entered the world of humans through their decisions. God told Adam, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen.2:17). So when Adam and Eve ate from the tree (Gen. 3:6), they directly contradicted God's command. Neither God nor Satan forced them to eat from the tree; they did so willingly and so willingly sinned against God.

As a result, Adam's nature became sinful. Sin became something Adam naturally did. Adam's sin also caused us to inherit a sinful nature, one that is naturally opposed to God and his moral law. That is why Paul said, "I know that nothing good dwells in me" (Rom. 7:18). It is why Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). It is why David

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said, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). It is why "the wicked...go astray from birth" (Ps. 58:3).

How Sin Affects Us

Scripture is clear: "There is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46); "There is none who does good, not even one" (Ps. 14:3); "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); and as John tells us, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Therefore, all stand guilty before God.

God said the penalty for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was death (Gen. 2:17). Death, Paul tells us, is actually the penalty for all sin: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). But just as God didn't bring the penalty of death immediately on Adam and Eve, so he doesn't bring the penalty of death immediately upon us. In fact, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God offers us freedom from the condemnation sin brings. Peter says about Jesus, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). For those who look to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, "there is therefore now no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1).

So, when we sin as forgiven Christians, our legal standing before God is not affected. We are still forgiven because Christ's death paid for all of our sins. As Paul tells us, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3) – without any distinction among past, present, and future sins. Although John tells us we all sin, he also affirms that even in our sin, "we are God's children now" (1 John 3:2).

While sin does not affect our status or standing with God, it does affect our fellowship with God, for God is grieved by our sin. This can often result in God's discipline in our lives since "the Lord disciplines the one he loves" (Heb. 12:6). This loving discipline is "for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). Sin can also affect our relationships with others. Sinful words or actions can result in a broken relationship, even between Christians.

Even though all Christians still sin, they should not participate in a long-term pattern of greater and greater disobedience to God's moral law, for "no one born of God makes a practice of sinning" (1 John 3:9). But if a person makes a practice of sinning, that is, if someone continues in a pattern of disobedience without repentance, he may not have ever truly put his trust in Jesus for salvation. That is, the sinful pattern of his life could show that he never really was a Christian.

In contrast, when Christians sin, they should earnestly and quickly "confess" their sins to God. When we do so, we will find God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Personal Questions

1. What is sin? How does it affect our lives and the world we live in?
2. Will Christians continue to sin? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the negative results of sin in the life of a Christian? What should Christians do if they sin?
4. How was sin defeated? How does it make you feel? Take a moment to pray, telling God how his defeat of sin makes you feel.

Christian Beliefs, Wayne Grudem

Group Study

OPEN

Do you think Christians today have lost sight of the seriousness of sin? Why or why not? Explain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read 1 John 2:8-10

1. Make a quick list of the statements here about sin; then comment on one of them.
2. Read Genesis 3:1-13. Note the steps into sin taken by Eve.
3. Romans 3:23 states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” What are the implications of this for everyday living?
4. Share your gut reaction to this passage.
5. What is the connection here with self-control?
6. Read Hebrews 12:6-10. Is this encouraging or scary? Explain.
7. Sin, in the life of all believers, disrupts fellowship with God just like a marital fight causes temporary coolness in the relationship. What is the best way to get past the blockage and get growing again in harmony with God?
8. Non-believers have to fear God’s judgment and punishment, but believers do not (Romans 8:1). How can we help non-believers to take this issue seriously?

Key Application: We ought to avoid sin and honor God.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray for the person on your right (or left) asking God to help them resist temptation and avoid sin.

Next Week

Key Verse: Matthew 16:16 (John 1:14)

Key Idea: I believe Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh, the Messiah

Key Question: Who is Jesus?

Questions

1. Jesus is fully God. Why is this important to you?
2. Jesus is fully human. In what ways does this encourage you?
3. How can a clear understanding of who Jesus really is help us
 - a. Face temptation?
 - b. Pray?
 - c. Face difficulties?
 - d. Maintain a positive attitude in spite of your faults?
4. How can we make Christmas a real celebration of Jesus coming to earth?