

# Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

## Topic 3 – Sin

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### Introduction

The history of mankind as recorded in the Bible and as we see it today is the story of man's sinful rebellion against his Creator, and the Creator's salvific plan to bring man back to Himself. This is evident in the purpose of the nation of Israel as a whole, in the Old Testament's sacrificial system, and most magnificently in Christ's sacrifice on the cross.<sup>1</sup> Since sin entered the world, its powerful effect has only been overcome through the Holy Spirit's work in believers' lives.

<sup>3</sup>And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you **all the families of the earth** will be blessed. Genesis 12:3

<sup>18</sup>In your seed **all the nations of the earth** shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. Genesis 22:18

<sup>4</sup>I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants **all the nations of the earth** shall be blessed; Genesis 26:4

<sup>14</sup>Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall **all the families of the earth** be blessed. Genesis 28:14

<sup>35</sup>Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar, on the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make **atonement for him in regard to his sin** which he has committed, and he will be forgiven. Leviticus 4:35

<sup>10</sup>The second he shall then prepare as a burnt offering according to the ordinance. So the priest shall make **atonement on his behalf for his sin** which he has committed, and it will be forgiven him. Leviticus 5:10

<sup>22</sup>And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and **without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness**. ...<sup>26</sup>Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once **at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. Hebrews 9:22, 26

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **shall not perish**, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup>He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:16-18

Definitions of Sin:

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<sup>1</sup> See Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Lev. 4:35; 5:10; Heb. 9:22; Jn. 3:16.

Sin can be defined as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”<sup>2</sup>

John MacArthur holds that sin is a disposition of the heart that thinks evil, speaks evil, acts evil, or omits good.

*Disposition of the heart* – <sup>20</sup>And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. <sup>21</sup>"For from within, out **of the heart of men, proceed** the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup>deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. <sup>23</sup>"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." Mark 7:20-23

*Thinks evil* – <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** Genesis 6:5

*Speaks evil* – <sup>6</sup>And **the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity;** the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. James 3:6

*Acts evil* – ...<sup>24</sup>**Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, ...**<sup>26</sup>**For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions;** ... <sup>28</sup>And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, **to do those things which are not proper,** <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup>and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:18-32

*Omits good* – <sup>17</sup>Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. James 4:17

Cornelius Plantinga, in his book on the topic of sin, has said, “Sin is not only the breaking of law but also the breaking of covenant with one’s savior... [it] is any act [or disposition] – any thought, desire, emotion, word, or deed – or its particular absence, that displeases God and deserves blame.”<sup>3</sup>

In sum, it is “anything contrary to the character of God either by commission or omission, transgressing God’s word, lawlessness or rebellion, and missing the mark of perfect righteousness.”<sup>4</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the world does not believe that sin can be so easily defined. Paula Frederiksen, professor of religion at Boston University, has recently written a book entitled *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*. In this book, she traces the usage and understanding of sin from Jesus’ time to the present, and one of her main points is that mankind’s understanding of sin has evolved. She believes it has evolved to the degree that it is impossible to clearly define it in American culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In an interview following the publication of this recent work, she said that the theological concept of original sin “would have baffled Jesus and Paul.”<sup>5</sup> However, doctrines that will be discussed in this study, such as original sin, are based on

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Thompson, “Notes on Systematic Theology: Hamartiology”, [www.valleybible.net](http://www.valleybible.net) (accessed 2/15/2014).

<sup>5</sup> Rich Barlow, “Evolving Ideas of Sin” *BU Today* (2012), [www.bu.edu/today/2012/evolving-ideas-of-sin/#share-tools](http://www.bu.edu/today/2012/evolving-ideas-of-sin/#share-tools) (accessed 3/4/2014).

truths from God's word that have not changed since the apostolic era. In reality they have not changed since the beginning of time.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so **death spread to all men**, because all sinned ... <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless **death reigned from Adam** until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come... <sup>19</sup>For as through the one man's disobedience **the many were made sinners**, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:12, 14, 19

The theology of sin is called hamartiology, and covers not just its definition, but also original sin, sin nature, imputed sin, and how a Christian deals with sin. *Hamartia* ἁμαρτία is the Greek word for sin. As one seeks to find biblical solutions for life's problems it is necessary to understand sin correctly in order to deal with it biblically. More foundationally, one must have a proper awareness of sin before becoming a believer. Finally, before any counsel from God's word can be put to work, specific sin(s) need(s) to be identified.

### **The Fall of Mankind**

Sin entered the world at the beginning of time when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. God clearly commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it was Adam's responsibility to make sure Eve clearly understood the Lord's command as well.

<sup>16</sup>The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup>but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6

From that point, sin and death entered into the world.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... Romans 5:12

This explains why there is suffering, pain, and death in the world. Often people wonder why a God who is so good would allow such bad things to happen to people. In reality it was mankind's rebellion that caused and still causes those evil things to happen.

### **Original Sin and its Ramifications**

Definition of Original Sin: "The sinful state and condition in which men are born ... the corruption of our whole nature."<sup>6</sup>

The result of original sin is that man is totally depraved. Yet, this does not mean that every person is as completely sinful as they possibly could be. Rather this corruption extends to all people<sup>7</sup> and all parts of people so that there is nothing in people that could merit God's favor.<sup>8</sup> Total depravity means that "man is

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 224.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Kin. 8:26; Ps. 14:3; Rom. 3:10.

<sup>8</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 111.

totally unable to contribute to his own salvation in any way, because he is dead in his sins.”<sup>9</sup> The restraining factor that prevents people from being as sinful as they could be is God’s common grace which,

...refers to the grace of God that is common to all humankind. It is “common” because its benefits are experienced by the whole human race without distinction between one person and another, believers or unbelievers. It is “grace” because it is undeserved and sovereignly bestowed by God. In this sense, it is distinguished from the Calvinistic understanding of “special” or “saving” grace, which extends only to those whom God has chosen to redeem.<sup>10</sup>

Another result is that people innately sin, or have an innate sin nature, meaning a person can do nothing to commend them to God in any way.<sup>11</sup> Totally depravity is a biblical concept all believers must know and understand. Many believers spend too much time justifying their sin by labeling as something else or blaming others for it. A proper understanding of one’s total depravity brings humility and a preparedness to deal biblically with sin as sin.

This sin nature came to man, or was imputed, through the sin of Adam. “Imputation” comes from a Latin word which means “to charge to one’s account.”<sup>12</sup> When Adam sinned, his sin was charged to the account of mankind. Based on Romans 5:12, it is evident that “...through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...” Due to the overwhelming presence of sin in the world today there is a great need to understand how God’s word can be applied in the lives of believers to overcome it.

### **The Believer and Sin**<sup>13</sup>

The believer is born into and lives in this world of sin, and their struggle is to honor God as they seek to live holy lives.

<sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:10

<sup>15</sup>...but like the Holy One who called you, **be holy** yourselves also in all your behavior; <sup>16</sup>because it is written, ‘**YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**’ 1 Peter 1:15-16

Clearly, the believer is saved to live a life of holiness. The difficulty is knowing exactly how to do this with a sin nature and in a sinful world.

There are three areas in life from which sin attacks the believer. First, sin attacks the believer from the world. The world is under the power of Satan.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>**For all that is in the world**, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, **is not from the Father, but is from the world.** 1 John 2:15-16

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Wilson, “For the Record: Total Depravity”, <http://www.reformed.org>, Copyright © by Covenant Community Church of Orange County 1991 (accessed 2/20/2014).

<sup>10</sup> “Common Grace”, [http://www.theopedia.com/Common\\_grace](http://www.theopedia.com/Common_grace) (accessed 2/20/2014).

<sup>11</sup> See 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 4:2; Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:18-3:20.

<sup>12</sup> “Impute”, Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=impute> (accessed 2/16/2014).

<sup>13</sup> General outline and principles taken from *The Moody Handbook of Theology* by Paul Enns, and *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem.

<sup>14</sup> See 1 Jn. 5:19.

Second, sin attacks the believer in the form of his or her very own flesh. The flesh is what governs one's life before salvation, and for the believer it is that against which he or she struggles until being released from it. This struggle can be seen in the Apostle Paul's life in Romans 7:14-25. "The solution to the dilemma of Romans 7:25 is the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2ff) and a renewed mind (Rom. 12:1) that reckons the flesh crucified (Rom. 6:6)."<sup>15</sup> Until one dies or is raptured this battle with the flesh rages since, as Paul also stated in Romans 7:23, "sin is in my members."

Third, Satan seeks to hinder the Christian from effectively glorifying God. He seeks to devour Christians as Peter says.

<sup>8</sup>Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, **the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion**, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

The way Christians are told to resist Satan<sup>16</sup> is with the spiritual armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-17.

Though this three-pronged attack can seem overwhelming, believers would do well to remember and review the promise of God from 1 Corinthians 10:13.

<sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, **who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Additionally, God has provided Christians with the provision of His word to fight sin. Timothy reminds Christians that the Bible is not only God-breathed, but that it is useful for "training in righteousness."<sup>17</sup> The believer's life-long battle with sin is called sanctification, and Christ Himself made it clear that God's word is that which sanctifies: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the Scriptures, Christ's intercession as the believer's advocate has and always will aid believers in their fight against sin.<sup>19</sup> Finally, believers have the Holy Spirit living in them. Romans 8:9-17 clearly spells out the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's indwelling identifies one with Christ (v. 9), gives life (v. 11), puts to death the deeds of the flesh (v. 13), and identifies God's children (v. 16).

<sup>9</sup>However, you are not in the flesh but **in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Romans 8:9

<sup>11</sup>But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you**. Romans 8:11

<sup>13</sup>...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body**, you will live. Romans 8:13

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that **we are children of God**... Romans 8:16

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 325.

<sup>16</sup> See Jas. 4:7.

<sup>17</sup> See 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

<sup>18</sup> See Jn. 17:17.

<sup>19</sup> See Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1.

Most significantly for this study, the Holy Spirit gives the believer the power to put to death the deeds of the flesh. Paul repeated this spiritual reality in his letter to the Colossian believers.

<sup>5</sup>Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead** to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Colossians 3:5

Often in the believer's fight against sin, the simple reminder that he or she is dead to sin is all that is needed to win the battle. This is not to say that believers can become perfect. Believers do still sin even as they seek to fight sin biblically and in the power of the Spirit who lives within them.

When a believer sins, there are several implications to bear in mind:

According to Romans 8:1, *their position before God does not change*. They are still forgiven in His sight. Christ's sacrifice paid for past, present, and future sins of believers.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

*Fellowship with God is disrupted*. Ephesians 4:30 says that the Holy Spirit of God is grieved when believers sin.

<sup>30</sup>Do not **grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30

In addition, Hebrews 12:5-11 speaks of God the Father's discipline of His children. *There is a fatherly displeasure* that precedes this divine discipline.

<sup>5</sup>and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY **THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD**, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; <sup>6</sup>**FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES**, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." <sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup>But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup>Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? Hebrews 12:5-9

Finally, the sinning believer will not be as fruitful in ministry. According to John 15:4, Jesus says that believers cannot bear fruit unless they are abiding in Him. To abide in Him means to live righteously. In Luke 3:8, John the Baptist warned those waiting for the Messiah to prepare by "bearing fruits in keeping with repentance." If a believer is not living in a state of constant repentance, they will not bear good fruit.

So while a believer's standing before God does change when they sin, their effectiveness as His servant is severely diminished. In the end, it should be noted that if a believer continues in sin without repentance, they should test themselves to see whether or not they are in the faith as Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers.

<sup>5</sup>**Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith**; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? 2 Corinthians 13:5

## Challenge

The world is under the power of Satan and under the curse of sin and death caused by mankind's sin in the Garden of Eden. Sin is what controls the non-believer's life, and sin attacks the believer from all angles. Graciously, God has provided His word and the Holy Spirit to overcome sin once salvation has taken place through faith in Jesus Christ.

Q: What is your understanding and perception of sin?

Q: Do you know how to correct unbiblical views of sin in your own life and in others' lives using God's word?

Q: What overarching biblical truths can help you and others in fighting sin?

## **Biblical Solutions for Life Issues**

### **Topic 3 – Sin – Additional Study**

1. How would you define sin in your own words? What Biblical basis do you have for this definition?
  
2. Based on Genesis 3:6 and Romans 5:12, what effect did sin have on mankind and the world? Why is this important to keep in mind as a believer? How can the total depravity of mankind described in Romans 5:12 help you keep a biblical perspective when you see “injustices” in the world?
  
3. Read Psalm 51 and answer the following questions.
  - a. When we sin, who is it against? How should that affect how you deal with your sin?
  
  - b. Where does David want to be in his relationship with God?
  
  - c. How can you bless others after having dealt with sin in your own life according to verse 13?
  
  - d. What kind of sacrifice does God desire?
  
4. Read Colossians 3:1-10 and answer the following questions.
  - a. What kind of mindset are you to have when fighting sin?
  
  - b. What is true of your “self” when you have been redeemed?
  
5. Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Proverbs 20:5. What role can the body of Christ play in helping you fight your sin?
  
6. Do you have any sin from which you have been unwilling to repent? If so, read Hebrews 12:5-9 and 2 Corinthians 13:5 and consider the implications of your unwillingness to repent of this/these sin(s).