

# NATURE OF SIN

## “falling short of the glory of God”

### Key question

Are we to understand sin as a human condition, an inner attitude, or an outward act?

### Key text

### Romans 3:9-12

“for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.’”

### Key Definition

## Sin

Sin is falling short of the glory of God (expressed in His moral law) in not being true to ourselves as beings made in His image and for His likeness.

### Introduction

1. Sin is a dominant theme in the Bible’s portrait of reality.
2. It has been easy to describe man’s problems in terms other than sin for several reasons.
  - a. We live in a time when a positive “self-image” is a very high priority. Sin is too negative.
  - b. We have become “hardened” in our hearts so that we do not sense “guilt.” Guilt is something we have worked hard to eradicate in our enlightened age.
  - c. We find it easier to understand “acts of sin” than the concept of sin.
3. Are all sins individual (personal) or are there corporate sins? Are there systemic sins?
4. How much of our behavior is really under our control?

Chemistry (nature)	Culture (nurture)	Character (spirit)
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### A. How have various Christian and non-Christian groups understood sin?

1. **20th century secular explanations for what Christians call “sin.”**
  - a. **Animal nature** - To man’s natural selfish impulse of survival is added (in time) a conscience (expressed in Hebrew moral law) resulting in a sense of guilt & sin.  
NOTE: Further evolutionary progress is our salvation.

- b. **Anxiety of finiteness** - Man's sense of finiteness is in tension with his freedom to aspire. Religion is the formal expression of that dramatic tension. Sin is the aspiration to be god. NOTE: Salvation is a matter of altering our attitude about self and God - accepting self & trusting God.
  - c. **Existential estrangement** - Man's turning away from his own essence (what he was designed to be) and entering an existence (what he unfortunately is) is sin. NOTE: Salvation is a matter of altering our attitude so as to be in touch with "god", the ground of being.
  - d. **Economic struggle** - Sin is not private or religious but socio-political, economic oppression, and exploitation of one class by another. NOTE: Salvation is a matter of economic and political reform.
  - e. **Individualism and competitiveness** - Man's failure to appreciate his social context and interdependence leads to an individualism & competitiveness which is the essence of sin. NOTE: Salvation is a matter of educating people stressing noncompetitive endeavor toward common goals.
2. **"Christian" emphasis in defining the nature of sin.**
- a. **Sensuality** - Greek dualistic philosophy and gnosticism.  
 Man has a spirit derived from the kingdom of light, and a body with its animal life derived from the kingdom of darkness. Sin is thus a physical evil, the defilement of the spirit by its union with a material body. Sin is to be overcome by destroying the influence of the body on the soul.
  - b. **Selfishness** - Strong.  
 Sin is selfishness. It is the preference of one's own ideas to God's truth. It is the preference of the satisfaction of one's own will to doing God's will. It is the loving of oneself more than God. It may manifest itself as sensuality, unbelief, or enmity to God.
  - c. **Choice of evil** - Pelagius.  
 Adam's sin injured only himself. All persons are born into the world in the same state in which Adam was created. They have knowledge of what is evil and the power to do all that God requires. Sin, therefore, consists only in the deliberate choice of evil.
  - d. **Hereditary depravity** - Augustine.  
 All persons possess an inherent, hereditary depravity, which involves both guilt and corruption. We are offensive to God's holiness because of deliberate acts of transgression and the absence of right affections. But sin is negation; it is not necessary.
  - e. **Corruption of nature** - Roman Catholic tradition.  
 Original sin is transmitted to all people. We are born in sin and oppressed with the corruption of our natures. This privation of righteousness allows the lower powers of man's nature to gain ascendancy over the higher, and he grows up in sin. The nature of sin is stated as the death of the soul. Sin, therefore, consists in the loss of original righteousness and the disorder of the whole of nature.
  - f. In short I define sin in three ways.
    - 1. On one level, sin is **failure to conform to the character of God** as revealed in the law of God. This is a failure to be true to ourselves as "bearers of God's image."

- a. The law written on our hearts - The moral common sense that comes from being made in God's image.
- b. The law written on stone - The moral commands of the Law of Moses.
- c. The law revealed in Jesus - The moral example of Jesus.

This can also be stated as a **failing to live up to the image of God within us** .

2. Sin is the **failure to acknowledge and walk in the light (reality)** of:
  - a. This fallen world.
  - b. The living Lord God.
  - c. Our nature as the bearers of God's image.
3. Sin can also be understood as the **response to our finiteness and pain (soul sorrow) that moves us in any direction but to God**.
4. In the next section of notes we will address the relationship between imputed sin, indwelling sin nature, and implemented sin.
- g. **Millard Erickson** summarizes with the following points.
  1. Sin is an **inherent inner disposition** inclining us to wrong acts. We are not simply sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.
  2. Sin is **spiritual disability**.
  3. Sin is **rebelliousness and disobedience**.
  4. Sin is **failing to live up to God's standards**.
  5. Sin is the **displacement of God**. Idolatry in any form, not just pride, is the essence of sin. The Bible uses many terms to describe the nature of sin. Sin's essence is placing something else in God's place. It is anything that falls short of His glory and perfection.
- h. **The universal nature of sin**.
  1. **Ps.143:3** "no one living is righteous before you"
  2. **Eccles.7:20** "there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins"
  3. **II Chron.6:36** "There is no one who does not sin"
  4. **Rom.3:12** "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps.14:1-3, 53:1-3)
  5. **I Jn.1:8** "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us."
  6. **Rom.3:23** "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
  7. While it is true that not everything that man does is sinful, there is no person who does not sin in many areas of life.
  8. It is also true that there is no area of human experience that is not touched in some way by sin. For example, we cannot assume that human reason is untouched by moral weakness.

### 3. **How does the Bible talk about sin?**

- a. **Gen.3** "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."

#### 1. **Introduction.**

- a. Genesis 1-2 speak of human dignity. Genesis 3 reveals human depravity.



- a. In Rom.5:12 Adam is seen as culpable even though it was Eve that feel at the temptation.
  - b. Original Sin is tied to this one act of Adam and Eve. But even though we might find the imputation of Adam's sin onto us to be hard to accept, we cannot deny that we have sinned like Eve. We have protected ourselves with lies, tried to find wholeness in power, sexual license, and social position, and sought freedom in writing our own rules.
6. **The discernment of evil – three indications that we can discern evil.**
- a. **Covering** – a sense of shame. “Wretched man that I am.” Shame is God's tool before repentance and Satan's after.
  - b. **Avoiding** – hiding out of fear. The fear of and attempts to avoid moral authority are increasing characteristics of our culture. This indicates that we are all in deed sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.
  - c. **Excusing** – blaming others. “You are more responsible than I am.” When we take the blame we end the strife.
- Note that “walking in the light” consists of more than knowing evil. It also consists of knowing the solution to the human dilemma of shame and guilt. I Jn.5-10
7. **The curses of the Fall have a God ordained purpose.**
- a. The curses seem to be related to God's callings.
  - b. The curses are gender specific.
  - c. The curses have a God ordained purpose.
    1. The curses came from God not Satan.
    2. God is not removing His call on our lives but He is rendering it less joyful and more painful.
    3. The object of this curse is the Gospel. **Rom.8:18-25**
      - a. Our present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory. Vs.18
      - b. Our present bondage is to showcase our coming freedom. Vs.19-21
      - c. Our present groaning sets the stage for our coming redemption. Vs.22-23
      - d. Our present lack gives meaning to our coming hope. Vs.24-25
  - d. We should respond to the frustrations of living in a fallen world with wisdom.
    1. Be patient – there will not e full relief until Christ returns.
    2. Be assured – our frustration will be overwhelmed by the glory that awaits us.
    3. Be diligent as you wait – resisting the impulse of the curse by walking in the Spirit of Christ and by resisting the temptation to find hope in something less than Christ.
8. **What ended in the Garden?**
- a. The good old days ended with the Fall.
  - b. The present age of darkness is initiated.
    1. The Fall was not the end of all life.
    2. The Fall was not the end of God's care.
    3. The Fall was the end of our access to the tree of life.
    4. The age to come will bring back the tree of life through Christ.

- b. **Jas.1:13-15** “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted **when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”
1. Sin does not originate from God or nature.
  2. Sin does originate from human longings.
    - a. CASUAL LONGINGS - desires for temporal superficial comforts.
    - b. CRITICAL LONGINGS - desires for deep interpersonal relationships with others.
    - c. CRUCIAL LONGINGS - desire for reconciliation and peace with God.
  3. Sin is the inner desire of the heart to satisfy deep human longings apart from God.
- c. **I Jn.2:16** “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.”
- Sin is the misdirection of our natural desires.
1. **To enjoy** - experiences, things & people can become “the lust of the flesh.”
  2. **To acquire and rule over** - things & people can become “the lust of the eye.”
  3. **To accomplish or achieve** - can become “the pride of life.”
  4. In **Matt.4:1-11** Jesus models an appropriate response to each of these areas of temptation.
    - a. Satisfying physical appetites - **Live by the Word of God.**
    - b. Ruling the earth - **Bowing down to God alone.**
    - c. Dramatic acts of control - **Respecting God’s sovereignty.**
  5. We are convicted of sin in many ways.
    - a. Our conscience is distorted in two directions.
      1. We can be hardened so as to not recognize sin as sin.
      2. We can be conditioned to guilt over things that are more of this world than the Kingdom.
    - b. The Body of Christ has an important role in helping us see our sin.
      1. We learn to be sensitive to sin through the values of our parents.
      2. We learn to be sensitive to sin through the teaching of the Word.
      3. We learn to be sensitive to sin through friends who counsel us.
- d. **Rom.1:18-32**, Sin is man’s willful rejection of God.
1. vs.18 “**suppress** the truth in unrighteousness.”
  2. vs.23 “**exchanged** the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.”
  3. vs.25 “**exchanged** the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”
  4. vs.28 “they **did not see fit** to acknowledge God any longer.”
- e. **Rom.3:9-18**, Sin is something that every person is “under.”
1. In quoting from several Psalms Paul underscores the fact that “there is none righteous”, “none who does good.”
  2. This would suggest that sin is more than just a deed done. Sin is a state or condition from which we do not escape in this life of the flesh.

3. We never outgrow our need for grace.
  4. An example of this is seen in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus applies the law of God to the motives and intentions of the heart not just to the behavior of the person. Motives are seldom if ever pure.
- f. **Terms used for sin in the Bible.**
1. Terms emphasizing **causes** of Sin:
    - a. **IGNORANCE (to not know)** AGNOIA - Eph.4:18 “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the IGNORANCE that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (see Eph.4:17-19).
    - b. **ERROR (to miss the mark as a result of being deceived or led astray)** PLANOMAI - Rom.1:27 “--- receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their ERROR.”
    - c. **DISOBEDIENCE (to disobey because of hearing amiss or incorrectly)** PARAKOE - Rom.5:19 “through the one man’s DISOBEDIENCE the many where made sinners,”
  2. Terms emphasizing the **character** of the Sin:
    - a. **SIN (to miss the mark)** AMARTANO - Rom.3:23 “For all have SINNED and fall short of the glory of God.” (This is the most common word for “sin” in the N.T. The Hebrew equivalent, **CHATA**, is also the most common O.T. expression for “sin.”)
    - b. **UNGODLINESS (to not worship)** ASEBEO - Rom.4:5 “---Him who justifies the UNGODLY.”
    - c. **UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (to fail to measure up to the standards of righteousness)** ADIKIA - Rom.1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and UNRIGHTEOUSNESS of men,”
    - d. **LAWLESSNESS (to be outside the law generally)** ANOMIA - I Jn.3:4 “Every one who practices sin also practices LAWLESSNESS; and sin is LAWLESSNESS.”
    - e. **TRANSGRESSION (to violate the Jewish law)** PARABAINO - Rom.4:15 “Where there is no law, there is no TRANSGRESSION.”
    - f. **INIQUITY (to lack integrity)** AWAL - Ps.51:5 “Behold I was brought forth in INIQUITY and in sin my mother conceived me.”
    - g. **DISOBEDIENCE (to be beyond persuasion)** APEITHEO - Eph.2:2 “---of the spirit that is now working in the sons of DISOBEDIENCE.”
    - h. **FALL AWAY (to defect)** APHISTEMI - I Tim.4:1 “---in later times some will FALL AWAY from the faith”; APOSTASIA - Heb.3:12 “---lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in FALLING AWAY from the living God.”; PARAPTOMA - Heb.6:6 “---and FALLING AWAY, it is impossible to renew them again”
  3. Terms emphasizing **results** of Sin:
    - a. **WICKEDNESS (to be restless)** RESHA - Isa.57:20 “But the WICKED are like the tossing sea;”
    - b. **EVIL (to be toxic or bad)** RA - Jer.42:6 “Whether it is good or EVIL (ADVERSE), we will obey the voice of the Lord,”

- c. **SIN OFFERING (guilt) ASHAM** - Isa.53:10 “---shall make His soul an OFFERING FOR SIN.”
- d. **CALAMITY (trouble) AVEN** - Prov.22:8 “He who sows injustice will reap CALAMITY.”

## Pastoral advice

### How should we view sin?

1. One of the mistakes we can make is to reduce sin to outward behavior and fail to see the complex nature of our sin as it effects our motives and perspectives. We are indeed all under sin.
2. There is need for wisdom to know when to forbear with a sinner, when to punish or discipline a sinner, and when to forgive and restore a sinner.

### Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. **Specific facts you should know.**
  - a. What is a good definition of sin?
  - b. What texts of Scripture define sin for us?
2. **Issues that you should be able to discuss.**
  - a. How is sin defined outside the Christian faith?
  - b. How are we convicted of sin?
  - c. In what sense can we expect to control sinful behavior?
  - d. In what sense is sin something that we will never be able to control in this life?
3. **Issues that you should be wrestling with.**
  - a. How is sin to be understood in the context of genetic and environmental determinism?
  - b. How does personality type effect our understanding of sin?