

Section: Doctrine of Sin (Hamartiology)

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Lesson 29**

**Question 33- “What is Sin?”**

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**Q33. What is sin?**

Sin is disobeying God; sin is any disobedience in heart or deed to God’s perfect law and commands.

**Disobedience in Heart**: Having the wrong state of mind, motivation, or desire behind what we do or feel.

**Disobedience in Deed**: Doing or saying what God forbids, or not doing or saying what God commands.

I have the privilege to teach tonight and lead us into the next section, which is the **Doctrine of Sin.**

**The theological word for the “Doctrine if Sin” is Hamartiology.**

(Greek: *hamartia*, "missing the mark, error" and *-logia,* "study"), the study of sin within Christian theology.

**Q33. What is sin?**

Sin is disobeying God; sin is any disobedience in heart or deed to God’s perfect law and commands.

**1- Inherited, Imputed and Practiced Sin**

Sin first plagued mankind in the Garden when man decided to disobey God’s command.

**Genesis 2:15-17** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

This simple and single act of disobedience set in motion a three-fold reality of sin the lives of all mankind to follow.

**Reality #1: Inherited Sin (Original Sin):**

**Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

As a result of Adam's sin, we are all conceived having a fallen nature, and therefore, are born sinful.

This is *original sin*- the sinful tendencies, desires, and dispositions in our hearts with which we are all born. Therefore, original sin is something *inherent in us*--it is a morally ruined character.

When Adam sinned, his inner nature was transformed by his sin of rebellion, bringing to him spiritual death and depravity which would be passed on to all who came after him. Certainly, we inherit genetic or physical characteristics from our parents, and we also inherit our sinful nature from our first parents, Adam and Eve, passed on to us through our birth parents.

So through Adam the inherent inclination to sin entered the human race, and human beings became sinners by nature. The original sin that we are all born with manifests itself throughout our lives in actual sins--the actions, thoughts, and feelings we have that violate God's law and commands.

Consider it this way:

“Due to Adam’s failure, mankind didn’t fall *because we* sinned, rather, **we sin because each of us *are* fallen**.”

King David lamented the reality of our condition in our fallen human nature in **Psalm 51:5:** “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

In effort to understand this important doctrine, Rob will teach more on it in more detail in a few weeks.

**Reality #2: Imputed Sin:**

Second, the guilt of Adam's sin is credited not just to Adam himself, but to us all. We are regarded as having sinned *in Adam,* and hence as deserving of the same punishment.

This is *imputed sin.*

Used in both financial and legal settings, the Greek word translated “imputed” means “to take something that belongs to someone and credit it to another’s account.”

Adam acted as the representative of the entire human race. With the test that God set before Adam and Eve, He was testing the whole of mankind. Adam was the first human-being created. He stands at the head of the human race. He was placed in the garden to act not only for himself but also for all who would come from him. Just as a federal government has a chief spokesman who is the head of the nation, so Adam was the federal head of mankind.

This is called ***federal headship*.**

The chief idea of ***federal headship*** is that when Adam sinned, it was counted for all of us. His fall was our fall. When God punished Adam by taking away his original righteousness, we were all likewise punished. The curse of the fall affects us all. Adam’s choice to sin means we are brought forth under the penalty of that sin, and his sin is imputed (credited) to us.

This doctrine of Federal Headship (how it works and why) is something we will study in more detail in a few weeks.

So not only have we received polluted and sinful natures because of Adam's sin (original sin), but we are also regarded as having sinned in Adam such that we are guilty of his act as well (imputed sin).

**Reality #3: Practiced Sin**:

Practiced sin is the sin we commit every day. Because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, we commit individual, personal sins.

Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God.

**1 John 3:4** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Sins or lawlessness are not just things we do with our actions but are also offences against God with our words and thoughts and feelings.

List of sins from Mark 7:21-22, Rom. 1:24-31, Rom. 13:13 Gal. 5:19-21, 1 Cor 6:9-10, Col 3:5-9, 1 Tim 1:9-10, and Rev 21:8

-evil thoughts

-sexual immorality

-theft

-murder

-adultery

-coveting

-wickedness

-deceit

-sensuality

-envy

-slander

-pride

-foolishness

-idleness

-pPracticing homosexuality

-malice

-strife

-gossip

-hatred of God

-haughtiness

-disobedience to parents

-ruthlessness

-orgies

-drunkenness

-quarreling

-jealousy

-sorcery

-enmity

-fits of anger

-rivalries

-dissension

-division

-obscene talk

**2- Passive and Active Sin**

The Bible speaks of sin is in terms of transgression of law. Sin can be passive or active disobedience.

**Romans 7:18-20** 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

In this passage Paul clearly exposes both the Sin of Commission and the Sin of Omission.

**Paul does what he doesn’t want to do and knows is wrong:** This is the sin of commission!

**Paul doesn’t do what he knows he should do and really wants to do:** This is the sin of omission!

Let’s look at both of these briefly.

**Sins of commission:**

A sin of *commission* is a sin we act on to commit, whether in thought, word, or deed. *We “commit” the sin*.

**The sin of commission is the sin of actively doing what God prohibits.**

This is what we typically think of when we think of sin.

It is important to note, a sin of commission can be intentional or unintentional. Meaning just because you didn’t know the law of God in that particular area of life doesn’t mean you are not guilty of breaking His law in sin. Modern example: If you visit another country in which traffic drives in the left lane, and you drive in the right lane, you are still breaking the law whether you know it or not.

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that atonement was needed, even for the unintentional sins of the people. **Hebrews 9:7** but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people

“Unintentional sins.” The NASB says “for the sins of the people *committed in ignorance*.”

**Humanity’s first sin was a sin of commission.**

God commanded man to not eat of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil(Genesis 2:16–17).

But, Adam and Eve disobeyed God. (Genesis 3:6). They took action to commit a sinful act.

**Sins of omission:**

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin **James 4:17**

A sin of omission is a sin that is the result of *not* doing something God’s law requires and/or His word teaches that we should do. “Omit” – to leave out or exclude something....to fail or neglect to do good that should be done.

**The sin of omission is the sin of failing to do what God requires.**

In the New Testament, the classic example given by Jesus is the account of the Good Samaritan. After a man had been beaten and left in need of help, the first two men to pass by—a priest and a Levite, both of whom knew better—failed to act. The third man, a Samaritan, stopped to show compassion to the man in need (Luke 10:30-37). Jesus used this example to teach that we are to likewise help those in need. By doing so, he clearly communicated that it is sinful to avoid doing good!

**Sin is disobeying God; sin is any disobedience in heart or deed to God’s perfect law and commands.**

**On the page for this Q&A in the Catechism, there is extra clarity given for the reader. It’s helpful, it says:**

**Disobedience in deed**: Doing or saying what God forbids, or not doing or saying what God commands.

**Disobedience in heart**: Having the wrong state of mind, motivation, or desires behind what we do or feel.

It is important to read these closely because **the motivation** being what we do or don’t do is often root of our sin.

**1. Sin often is disobedience to God’s commands**

**2. Sin can also be obedience to God’s commands for the wrong reasons, thereby still dishonoring God.**

**This can also be understood as the sin of self-righteousness.**

**3- The Sin of Self Righteousness**

1. Sin is doing the wrong thing (disobedience of God’s perfect law).

2. Sin is also doing the right thing for the wrong reasons (self-salvation or self-righteousness).

**Luke 16:15** And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Consider Jesus’s interaction with the Rich Young Ruler

***Mark 10:19-20*** You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” **20**And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

Jesus directs him to consider the 10 commandments. The man is excited because this is an area he feels he has nailed.

Jesus, being the second Person of the all-knowing God, knows this man feels he has earned his inheritance for eternal life because he thinks he has kept the laws well and is simply asking his teacher, “Did I get a passing grade on my test?”

Now this is Religion 101. If there was a banner or phrase that described what works-based religion is, it’s this: **“I obey; therefore, I am accepted.”**

This is the mantra of a religion. **“I do these things, and because I do these things, God will accept me, God will forgive me, and God will bless me.”**

In our sin, man has pridefully, self-righteously tried to live our lives with the goal of **achieving** a certain identity, life of significance, level of security, of purpose, of joy, etc.

When we try to achieve these things on our own, it is called SELF SALVATION.

Life becomes about our achievement. We think, “I have to be more, do more, and prove myself.”

Our sin tells us that we must achieve on some level to find a sense of identity, or significance, or purpose, or joy!

Job, friends, love, family proud of you, family, house, car, bank account, recognition/awards, etc.

**It becomes: “Can I achieve to the point of Self Salvation (or achieving whatever self-focused goal I have).”**

HEAR THIS: **As long as you live in achieve mode, you will live as a slave! We cannot save ourselves from sin. And we are terrible idols—the idol of self cannot provide true, lasting, God-glorifying joy and resolve.**

If you are here today and you think that somehow you have figured out a way to avoid this “sin” thing, that you figured out a way to be good enough in this life, the holy Bible says otherwise:

**all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **(Romans 3:23 )**

“**None** is righteous, no, **not one**; **no one** understands; **no one** seeks for God.

**All** have turned aside; together they have become worthless; **no one** does good, **not even one**.” **(Romans 3:10-12)**

And if you are here today, and you think you might be able figure out a way in your own effort to be happy **in yourself** or, worse yet, be in good standing with God, the Bible says…

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, **it cannot**. **(Romans 8:7)**

The very real truth is: **We do not measure up to our holy God because of our vile sin.**

And we CANNOT clean ourselves up in order to restore ourselves to a right standing with GOD.

**We are desperate for Christ alone to do this work for us, and then in us.**

**4-Unbelief: The Root of all Sin**

The most sobering definition of sin that I am aware of in Scripture is the last part of **Romans 14:23:**

“For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

The reason it is so penetrating is that it goes to the root of all sinful actions and attitudes, namely, the failure to trust God.

The original language gives emphasis to this even more than in English versions. It says, **"Everything which is not from faith is sin."**

Everything, anything… any act or attitude which is not from saving faith unto the glory of God is sin, no matter how good or right or moral it may appear to men. God looks beyond the action to the heart, the motivation.

**The all-pervasive fault in every sin is its character of unbelief.**

By unbelief I do not mean merely refusal to accept the truths of the Bible.

We are not saved by giving mental assent to the promises of God. We are saved by whether we hope with our hearts in those promises and truths. The failure of the heart to be confident in the promises of God and to rejoice and find pleasure in his way and provision is the root and essence of all sin. **Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."**

**5- The Seriousness of Sin:**

Now the world has polluted the minds of men into thinking that because “God is LOVE,” He cannot also exercise His wrath on sinners. Oh, how common it is that man wants to put our limitations around GOD. This is only another sign that sin is at work in us.

This line of thinking has led to a popular evangelistic approach which is to tell non-believers, **“God loves you just the way you are.”** This is purely and simply not true! We’ve got to get rid of this kind of humanistic nonsense and submit ourselves solely on the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

God does not love us just the way we are in our sin. God hates sin, and His wrath is His right and holy response to all those who remain in sin. This is the hard but just truth.

The worldly culture and even some proclaiming Christians have diminished the significance of sin itself.

**Sin is often communicated in our day in terms of *making mistakes or making poor choices.***

But this is an insufficient view of sin.

Any decision to sin is indeed a poor one, but what we must do business with it being an act of disobedience against a holy and deserving God.

R.C. Sproul said it well: **“Sin is cosmic treason.”**

Meaning even the slightest sin that a creature commits against his Creator seriously dishonors to the Creator—His holiness, His glory, His righteousness, etc. Every sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is an act of rebellion against the sovereign God who reigns and rules over us and as such, it is an act of treason against the cosmic King.

**James 2:10** For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

This is because God’s holiness is the standard of perfection. Not other men. God alone.

**Sin= falling short, missing the mark**

The mark is not how we stack up next to another person but how we stack up against a HOLY GOD. When we sin, we don’t just miss the bull’s eye and get a part of the target.

We fall short of the entire target of God’s perfection and end up on the ground!

It is not until we understand who God is that we gain any real understanding of the seriousness of our sin.

Not until we take God seriously will we ever take sin seriously. But if we acknowledge the righteous character of God, then we, like the saints of old, will cover our mouths with our hands and repent in dust and ashes before Him.

At the heart of all sin is a lie. The lie says to all of us in our sin, "The act you are now doing, the desire or attitude you are now feeling, is not very bad because there are much worse things; not very bad because everyone else experiences the same things; not very bad because you can't help it; not very bad because there is no God;” or if that won't work, “God knows you are but frail and weak, and He will tolerate and pity your sin."

There are a thousand distortions of the truth which sin brings with it into the human heart, so that Jeremiah cries out,

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" - **Jeremiah 17:9**

**6- The Penalty for Sin:**

We are all three times condemned due to inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin. The only just penalty for this sin is death: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord -**Romans 6:23**

This is not just physical death but spiritual and eternal death.

**Revelation 20:11-15** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire

Thankfully, inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin have all been crucified on the cross of Jesus for His people, and now by faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” Ephesians 1:7.

**Sin is Sin**

What we must understand is that all sin is sin. All sin—any sin—is a transgression against the holy deserving authority of God. All sin (and any single sin) is liable for God's judgment.

His holiness is the standard, and everything that is sin falls short of His holy standard.

So we should not make light in our hearts or lives any sin. We should take all sin seriously and see that it earns us death and eternal separation from God. I mean if there was ever an example of this, it is the first sin.

Adam and Eve ate a piece of fruit. What is so wrong with that? In our flesh, we may ignorantly think that eating a piece of fruit wasn’t that big of a deal, but, to our point, we need to see and agree that any sin against God is a serious matter.

Church, we must see that what matters is that it is a transgression against God-- a disobedience of His law.

That is all that matters. Sin is sin. The thing we must stop doing is measuring sin **by how we feel or think about it.**

**Not all Sin is the Same**

Now, that one sin is enough to condemn us to hell, however, does not mean that all sins are evil to the same degree and that the consequences for our errors are all the same. While all sin (and any single sin) is liable for God's judgment. The heinousness of sin does vary. Murder is worse than stealing a pencil that belongs to someone else, etc.

As RC Sproul has also said, “Many portions of Scripture tell us there are degrees of sin, guilt, and punishment. The Jewish authorities who turned Jesus over to Rome were guilty of a greater evil than Pilate was because they had greater access to God’s revelation and had less reason for refusing to acknowledge Christ’s identity (John 19:1–16). Punishments under the old covenant civil law were meted out according to the circumstances of the crime (for instance, see Ex. 21:28–32).”

“Jesus taught that hate is a sin against another person’s life. Hatred violates people. It is not as severe as actual murder, but is nevertheless a sin. …The idea of gradations of sins is important for us to keep in mind so we understand the difference between sin and gross sin. Again, all of our sins require forgiveness. All of our sins are acts of treason against God. We need a Savior for our ‘little’ ones as well as the ‘major’ ones. But some sins are [in fact] more significant than others.”

So, every sin is in fact cosmic treason, and it is also true that some sins are worse than others.

**The varying consequences of sin**

With that being said, outside of the very real fact that unforgiven sin earns mankind death and separation from God, the earthly consequences of sin vary greatly. Sometimes depending on the grace of God and sometimes depending on the kind of sin it is determines its consequential impact. Let me give you a few examples:

**Matthew 23:23-24**  “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel

**Jesus is condemning the Pharisees for making much of the parts of the law that have little consequence and paying no attention to the parts of the law that have the weightiest consequence.**

We must be careful to not make light of the fact that certain sin carries with them greater consequence.

**1 Corinthians 6:18** Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Here is why this is important: **Many times you will be faced with moments in your life where you might consider more sin or deeper sin because you have already sinned.**

This is the thinking of the bank robber who is about to be caught so he thinks, since I am going to get caught I might as well murder these people and go out with a band. The thinking is, since I am going to be judged and condemned anyway, I might as well make a name for myself by going further.

Now, I don’t expect any of you to rob a bank anytime soon.

Although, **I will remind you that no sin is beyond any of us.**

More than 15 years ago, a young man, who was visiting our church as a relative to a family in our church, robbed a local bank.

Here is how this applies: often you will catch yourself in sin, and you will think, “because I already blew it, I will do more sin.” This is seen in simple ways, like gluttony. Well I already blew my diet today, I might as well indulge in gluttony a little further.

Or how many times did you get caught when you were younger and then preceded to lie about it thinking, “What do I have to lose, I am already busted.”

The first offense deserved one kind of punishment, but the false testimony deserves another.

What you just did was heap up more punishment than you would have had.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. ’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. - **Matthew 5:27-28**

His point is to highlight that sin against God is happening even though you didn’t sleep with her.

His counsel is to still see the adulterating of the heart that is happening.

See its consequence on your life and the offense it is to God.

What if that person in the restaurant is tempting you, and you’ve lusted over them. Should you just go all the way since you have already sinned? **No**, **WHY?** Because the consequence of the adultery of the heart is different than the adultery of the flesh. Both hurt you and others, both are an offense against God’s command for sexuality to be between a husband and wife only, but one has worse consequences than the other.

We need to be careful to not use **failure in sin to justify more sin**, and **we need to not excuse less consequential sins as more permissible than more consequential sins.**

David said it well in **Psalms 19:13** Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression

"Presumptuous sins" or "willful sins" or "deliberate sins."

This is the approach that justifies it’s ok to do a “little” sin because it’s not that bad,

or to justify more severe sin because it’s just too hard for me to obey God in this area.

**7- Exposing and Avoiding Sin:**

What we should do is practice exposing and avoiding sin. How can we do this? What tools are at our disposal to expose and avoid sin?

**1. The Word of God:**

**Hebrews 4:11-13** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two- edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Nothing exposes sin like the word of God. It blows away the thick fog of deception and lets us see sin for what it really is. Not that we might wallow in it, but that we might flee from it.

**2. Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

**Hebrews 3:13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

It is sad when the blessing of Christian accountability is as disregarded and as avoided as it is.

Church, God gave us the critical and loving ministry of accountability.

We don’t accept the pagan approach of “to each his own.” No, we take the truth of God to a brother or sister in Christ, and we help them see their sin and call them to repent of it. **This is love**: that we would be in relationship the way God has ordained for His people, helping one another avoid or turn from sin.

**3. The Holy Spirit:**

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment **John 16:7-8**

**For the Christian**, the Holy Spirit brings ongoing illumination of the word and to your spirit to bring conviction of sin.

**For the unbeliever,** the Holy Spirit is the one, if God wills, who regenerates the heart to finally see your sin so that you can confess it and repent from it.

**Here is the GOOD NEWS to CLOSE!  
 🡪 In Christ we literally die to sin instead of die because of our sin.**

**Romans 6:11-14 & 17-18** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.[**12**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-12.htm)Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [**13**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-13.htm)Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [**14**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-14.htm)For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

[**17**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-17.htm)But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [**18**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-18.htm)and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

**Why is this good news?** Because Jesus did the work needed to redeem sinners, that you and I in our flesh never could.

**Praise God for the substitution of the perfect spotless Lamb.**

Praise God for Jesus’s self-sacrifice for God’s glory and our eternal good. Trust in Jesus alone for salvation, the forgiveness of sins unto reconciliation to God.