

BASIC BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

4. SIN

Text: Romans 3:10-23

WHAT IS SIN?

Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary defines sin as "**MORAL OFFENCE OR SHORTCOMING**". It is not a popular word in society and seldom appears in newspapers or popular literature. When the word is mentioned, it is often used to imply **sexual immorality**. However, SIN means much more than that. In fact it touches on **every aspect and area of living**.

Simply defined, SIN is a **TRANSGRESSION** as well as a **SHORTCOMING**. Either condition is an **OFFENCE** against GOD'S LAW. A person who offends against GOD'S LAW is a **SINNER**, and faces the **PENALTY** of that LAW.

In society, one who **offends** against the law is in trouble: he has no peace. Similarly, one who offends against GOD'S LAW is also in trouble - **serious trouble**. There is no **peace**, until that offence is remedied or removed.

SIN is a reality of life which we must face up to. To pretend that it does not exist, or to dismiss it as an imagination of the mind does not help. We must be serious about it, because it concerns all of us.

Therefore, let us spend a little time considering what it is, what it does to us and what we can do about it. It will be time well spent.

SIN IS A TRANSGRESSION

To transgress is to exceed or overstep, to enter into **territory** not meant for us. A few examples from everyday life will amply illustrate.

We are all familiar with the RED traffic light, the NO ENTRY sign, the SPEED LIMIT and the DOUBLE WHITE LINE. Each of these stands for a law of limitation: thus far and no further! The motorist, whether carelessly, ignorantly or wilfully, who oversteps the limit in any of these cases has **transgressed** the law. He has committed an offence and is liable to action by the LAW.

In like manner, GOD'S LAW places certain limits and restrictions beyond which we may not venture. To do so becomes an offence or SIN. We shall shortly look into the transgressions of GOD'S LAW.

SIN IS A SHORTCOMING

A shortcoming implies a falling short of the requirement of the law. One is "not up to the mark". A few examples from everyday life, again, will bring out the meaning more clearly.

In parts of America, certain highways have a **minimum** speed of 50 miles per hour. Any vehicle caught driving on such a road at under 50-mph is liable to be prosecuted. This is a **shortcoming**. Other examples of shortcomings are: driving at night without lights, operating a radio or television set without a valid licence, omission to declare income for tax purposes. All these fall into the class of **shortcomings**.

Similarly with God's law: not to do what is expected or required is a SIN.

Scripture tells us that "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). Every wrong is SIN. Any act or conduct which is short of perfection is SIN.

ORIGIN OF SIN

In our study on "Man" we saw that he was created in the image and likeness of GOD, an upright, pure and blameless creature. In this state of sinless perfection, GOD placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Then GOD laid down a law to test their loyalty and obedience. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16,17).

Into the Garden enter the Tempter, Satan. He was the fallen angel Lucifer, and God's enemy No. 1. By subtlety and cunning, he caused our first parents to break God's law. Doubt, discontent, pride, selfish ambition, disobedience, rebellion were the downward steps leading to the fall of Adam and Eve.

This rebellion **broke the happy relationship** between God and man, between the Source of life and the creature. From that moment, the process of death began to take effect. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (**Romans 5:12**).

From that first act of rebellion by Adam, the seed of sin passed on to all the human race so that even a newborn baby is already tainted with sin. King David recognised this "original sin" when he wrote Psalm 51:5 "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

The reality of original sin is clearly seen in the child's natural tendency towards jealousy, bad temper, malice and falsehood-childhood sins which appear without adult tuition.

SIN IS UNIVERSAL

The Bible says: "For all have sinned ..." (Romans 3:23). "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE" (Romans 3:10). There is no exception. Many people will not agree with these statements. Some would feel highly insulted and indignant at such a suggestion.

It is human nature for a person to feel that he or she is, after all, "not bad". In fact, the tendency is for us to **compare ourselves with those who seem, in our eyes, to be "crooks" and**

“sinners”. We therefore tend to pat ourselves on the back and say “We are surely better than they” or “we’re good enough”.

This sort of self-appraisal, however, is entirely subjective and partial. If everyone is left to set **his own standard** and be his own judge, the whole society will be plunged into disorder and lawlessness. There will be no moral standard and no justice. No one in his right mind will want to live in such a society.

If we want to understand the subject of SIN, we must adopt the right approach. We must have the right standard and a competent judge. We ourselves cannot set our own standards and then be our own judge. We have been created by God, who is both holy and just. HE alone must be our Standard and our Judge. Only HE who is perfect can be our standard.

When we are judged by God according to His standard of holiness and perfection, **NONE meets the required standard**. We ALL fall short. We are **sinful and undone!** **There is no exception before GOD.**

Let us now proceed to examine and assess ourselves according to GOD’s standard. To do this, let us allow ourselves to come under the searchlight of GOD’s LAW, the TEN COMMANDMENTS.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (Exodus 20:1-17)

1. **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”**

This is the first Commandment. GOD comes first in life. HE is the CREATOR and SOURCE of life. HE is also our GOD. HE rules the earth and the universe, and all things. HE is the GIVER of all good gifts, the PROVIDER of our daily needs. “...He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust” (Matthew 5:45).

If all our goodness comes from Him, is it not reasonable that we express our gratitude too Him in adoration, service and WORSHIP? HE alone is GOD, and there is none else. Therefore, HE alone must receive our utmost and highest devotion and love. GOD must come first in our affection. **HE MUST TAKE THE FIRST PLACE IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES.** No one else, and nothing else must take that place, not even our nearest and dearest ones, such as father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter (Matthew 10:37).

What a great offence it is, then, for anyone to worship idols of metal and wood, or to idolise some person or thing or ambition. To put something or somebody first in one’s love and devotion is to break the **FIRST COMMANDMENT**. Among the things which fall into this category, taking the place of GOD, are money, ambition, hobbies, pleasure and recreation, besides the host of idols and false gods, and evil spirits which have captured men’s hearts and minds.

There is ONE GOD and HIM only should we serve.

2. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”

The SECOND COMMANDMENT specifically prohibits idolatry in any form. “GOD is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Men in their rebellion against GOD have fashioned for themselves, by the imagination of their evil minds, a host of false gods and idols, and set these up as objects of worship. We see them in the temples, in homes and even in churches. To pay respect and reverence to images of the Virgin Mary, the Apostle and saints or any idol is an offence against this COMMANDMENT.

3. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

Our GOD is the ALMIGHTY and SUPREME RULER. All men must reverence HIS HOLY NAME. Whenever we mention HIS NAME we must do so with great respect.

There are some people who use the word “GOD” in their everyday speech as part of their common vocabulary, thoughtlessly and carelessly, sometimes even as a “swear word”. This is a breaking of the THIRD COMMANDMENT.

4. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

God created all things in six days and observed a day of rest on the seventh. This is the divine PLAN and PATTERN. Man was formed in GOD’s image and likeness. We must therefore also conform to this divine PLAN and PATTERN, to observe one day of rest in seven. On this day, the CREATURE MAN must devote himself to the remembrance and service of the CREATOR GOD.

Christians observe SUNDAY as a day of REST and WORSHIP. By REST is meant the stoppage of all normal secular occupation, the work which occupies us during the other days of the week. Our SUNDAY is the LORD’S DAY and should be kept holy. On that day, all our thoughts and activities should be devoted to the LORD and HIS KINGDOM. We should refrain, as much as possible, from doing work which can be done on other days. We should also refrain from selfish pleasure and enjoyments.

If we observed the LORD’S DAY as our REST DAY of the WEEK for SERVING GOD, we shall receive a special blessing.

5. “Honour thy father and thy mother.”

Our earthly parents are the source of our physical life, our support, shelter and upbringing. From the moment of birth we begin to receive their love and care, devotion and concern for all the years of our dependency. This debt of gratitude can never be fully repaid, at least not in material recompense. However, though this may be true, we must all endeavour to show our gratitude to our parents by giving them due honour, obedience, love and respect. In their evening years or in their time of need, we must see to their adequate support and care.

Observance of this Commandment carries the promise of long life and the implied blessing of God with it.

6. “Thou shalt not kill.”

Every human life is precious in GOD’s sight. No one should therefore do anything to cause the harm or death of a fellow human being. While the latter of this law says, “Thou shalt not kill”, the spirit of it includes all thoughts of hatred, words of anger and acts of malice. If looks could kill, murder would be a common everyday event!

7. “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

From the beginning GOD had instituted marriage as one-man-one-woman partnership for life. Adam and Eve set the divine pattern. Within the marriage bond every married person should find proper, legitimate and satisfying fulfillment of the sex function. When the law is obeyed, the family unit is firmly established, there is peace and harmony in the home, and society stable and strong.

On the other hand, when this Commandment is disregarded by lawless acts relating to sex, then the involved parties suffer, homes break up and society become unstable. In Scripture, adultery includes all offences of a sexual nature e.g. premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, pornography, prostitution, impure sexual thought and desires.

As we honestly examine ourselves, alas, how far short we fall of GOD’s requirement!

8. “Thou shalt not steal.”

The impulse of wanting what belongs to someone else is all too often the natural desire of the heart. When such a desire is translated into action it becomes theft in its different guises e.g. shop lifting, robbery, burglary, evasion of taxes, giving short change, overcharging, sharp and unscrupulous business methods, under-paying one’s employee, borrowing with no intention of repaying, etc.

Christians should return a minimum of one-tenth of the income to GOD, the GIVER of all good gifts. Those who fail to do so are guilty of robbing GOD (Malachi 3:8).

9. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

“Honesty is the best policy”, so the old saying goes. Our speech should be “Yea, yea, and Nay, nay” (Matthew 5:37). There should always be a crystal clear conscience in our communications, without fabrication, distortion, exaggeration or giving false impressions.

This commandment requires us to be truthful, accurate in our statements and sincere in our motives.

10. **“Thou shalt not covet”**

The unlawful desire of seeking the possession of what does not belong to us is present in every heart. It may be our neighbour’s good, business contracts, or wife. When this desire becomes action it appears in the form of theft, undercutting and adultery.

God’s Word says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Let us all learn to be content. Also, let us set our priorities right. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). We should not covet the things of this world. We should only covet spiritual gifts from God (1 Corinthians 12:31).

An honest and sincere self-examination in the light of GOD’s holy Commandments will only show how utterly sinful and unclean we are. The Apostle Paul’s confession best expresses the failing of every mortal: “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

Truly, SIN is a universal experience.

ITS CONSEQUENCES

1 **Sin causes conflict with God**

After Adam and Eve sinned, they could no longer face GOD. When they heard HIS voice, they were afraid and hid themselves.

2 **Sin causes conflict in oneself**

Like a deadly toxin, sin poisons our whole system. Our heart becomes stained with sin, our nature becomes corrupt. We are unable to do the things we ought to do. We are burdened with a guilty conscience. There is no peace.

3 **Sin causes conflict with others**

When sin rules in the heart, self becomes paramount and our relationship with others is marred. Conflicts and strife break out in the home, in society and between nations. The effects of such conflicts are seen in domestic upheavals, industrial unrest and wars.

Many people delude themselves, thinking that death is the end of all things, and the wrong doings of this life will be forgotten. Not so, God’s Word says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). The day of judgement is coming.

ITS REMEDY

Basically SIN is an OFFENCE against GOD. Therefore, only GOD can settle or remove the offence. By ourselves, we have no means of “making up” or “making right” with GOD. The

Bible says that we have no strength. All our efforts are destined to fall short: even our best is not good enough, our righteousness are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

There was no way but for GOD to step in to help fallen men. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6,8). This is GOD’s remedy for man’s sin.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in.

C F Alexander

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

4. SIN

Fill in the blanks (one letter for each space)

1. Sin is an offence against GOD's ____.
2. When Adam fell, sin passed on to ____ men.
3. It is a ____ to pay respect and honour to the image of the Virgin Mary.
4. We must not use GOD's _____ carelessly. This is laid down in the 3rd Commandment.
5. Christians must keep the Lord's Day _____.

Multiple choice: Underline the correct answer

6. Christians should express their thanks to GOD by giving HIM
 - (a) one per cent
 - (b) at least 10%
 - (c) nothing of their income
7. The 7th Commandment prohibits
 - (a) impure thoughts
 - (b) gambling
 - (c) late nights
8. Godliness with contentment is
 - (a) the way of fools
 - (b) dangerous
 - (c) great gain
9. Sin causes
 - (a) true happiness
 - (b) conflict with God and men
 - (c) long life
10. The only remedy for sin is
 - (a) do our best
 - (b) confess to the priest
 - (c) God's grace