

Week #3 – Sin¹

Key Concepts:

- The Definition of Sin
- The Origin of Sin
- The Doctrine of Inherited (or Imputed) Sin
- Actual Sin in Our Lives
- The Punishment of Sin

Preface: Be Encouraged, not Discouraged!

Most of the Bible portrays mankind in a state of **fallenness** or sin. This means that mankind's relationship with God has been **fractured**. While this is bad news, the good news comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ, who has allowed for mankind's relationship with God to be **restored**.

1) The Definition of Sin

Sin may be defined as "Any failure to conform to the **moral law** of God in act, attitude, or nature."² This means that sin is much more consequential than simply "**missing the mark**" or merely **selfishness**.

a. Sin as an Act

We know that the Old Testament was full of **commands** or ordinances that were prescribed by God for humanity (*Exodus 20:1-17; Leviticus; Deuteronomy*). Failure to act in accordance with God's law resulted in **sin**.

b. Sin as an Attitude

Outward actions were easy to identify as sin. The **inward** attitude (or "heart"), however, was just as capable of behaving sinfully. Consequently, loving and **obeying** with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength was just as important as obeying Him with your actions (Mark 12:30).

¹ Much of the material in these notes is taken directly from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, 1994.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 490.

Notice that Jesus raises the bar for what God considered to be sin through His radicalization of the **law/Torah** (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44).

c. Sin in our Nature

We are all by nature, children of **wrath** (Ephesians 2:1-3). This means that our hearts are naturally set **against** the desires of God. Still, we are made in God's **image**, (Genesis 1:26-27) which means that we have the capacity to choose to do **good**.

We should understand that sin is a very important issue to **God**. The noun "sin" is used over 200 times in the Old Testament (חַטָּא) and about **150** times in the New Testament (ἁμαρτία). Sin is ultimately harmful to ourselves and others, but more importantly, it is opposed to God's **holiness**. Consequently, God must **hate** sin.

2) The Origin of Sin

a. **God did not sin. Angels and humans willfully chose to disobey Him** (Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 34:10).

b. **At the same time, sin was not a surprise to God.** In His sovereignty, He knew that would come into the world, but He does not delight in it.

c. **The first "sin" was committed when Satan and numerous angels fell** (Isaiah 14:12-15; 2 Peter 2:5; Jude 6).

d. **The man and the woman also sinned, resulting in the Fall** (Genesis 3:1-19; Romans 5:12 – see more below). Terms: "man" and "woman" (not "Adam" and "Eve")

1. Their sin challenged what is **true**. They doubted God's clearly spoken word to them (Genesis 2:17; 3:4).

2. Their sin challenged what was **right**. The serpent urged that becoming "like God" was a good thing even though God told them not to eat of the fruit (Genesis 3:5-6). God was no longer trustworthy of determining right from wrong.

3. Their sin challenged God's **authority** over them. Instead of viewing themselves as creatures created by God (and, therefore, subordinate to Him), the man and woman attempted to put themselves in God's place (Genesis 3:5).

4. Their sin was ultimately **irrational**. The man and the woman made a foolish choice to disobey God and deny His existence, goodness, and authority.

Interestingly, the same behavior continues all the time in our lives today (*Psalm 14:1; Proverbs 10:23; 14:7; 18:2, etc.*)

3) The Doctrine of Inherited (or Imputed) Sin

This is also known as “**original** sin.” We inherit sin from Adam in two ways:

a. Inherited **Guilt**

In *Romans 5:12-21*, Paul is talking about the **guilt** of our sin rather than our sinful **actions**. As descendants of Adam, we are all guilty of his sinful disobedience. In this way, Adam is our representative and his guilt has been **imputed** to us (this view is called the “**Federal Headship**” of Adam).

While we may not think this is “**fair**,” we must look at these factors:

- All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (*Romans 3: 23*).
- If any of us had been in Adam’s position, we would have done the **same thing**.
- If we think having Adam as our representative is unfair, then we should also think Christ’s role as our representative is equally unfair (*Romans 5:19*).

b. Inherited **Corruption** (i.e. our “sin nature” [NIV] aka “the flesh” [NASB]).

This refers to our predisposition towards sinfulness. This is part of our nature. While we may be redeemed **in Christ**, we still wrestle (*Romans 7:14-25*) with the innate tendency to disobey God in order to please **ourselves**. (*Psalm 51:1-5; Romans 3:9-18*)

For those with children, we know that we don’t have to teach our children to **disobey**, they naturally do it. This is evidence of their **fallen** or corrupt nature.

Ultimately, apart from God’s grace, we are unable to do anything that pleases Him. In other words, we are unable to do any spiritual good. We see this in two areas:

1. Our **nature** (*Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:18, 21*).
2. Our **actions** (*Romans 3:9-18*).

This idea of imputed/inherited/original sin is also known as total **depravity**. We cannot come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ on our own (*John 6:44*). We are utterly dependent upon the **grace** of God and the work of His **Holy Spirit** in our lives (*John 15:5; Romans 5:10-11*). This should create a spirit of humility in each one of us!

4) Actual Sin in Our Lives

a. Our sinful actions can be broken down into two general categories:

1. Sins of Commission

This refers to the sinful or disobedient actions that we actively commit. These actions can be overt (as in *Galatians 5:19-21*) or hidden within the depths of our corrupt hearts (*Psalm 140:1-2; Mark 2:6-8*).

2. Sins of Omission

This refers to our failure to act for righteousness and the cause of Jesus Christ when given the opportunity to do so. Even unintentional sins were necessary to atone for in the Old Testament (*Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22; 5:17*).

While sin is not technically defined as selfishness or self-centeredness, our self-centered thoughts and actions are often sinful because they often cause harm or detriment to others. While sins of omission are not always harmful, they are still contrary to God's desire and expectation for humanity.

b. Are there degrees of Sin?

While certain sins have more devastating consequences than others (murder, rape, stealing v. anger, lust, coveting), all sinful actions ultimately separate us from God and damage our relationship (or fellowship) with Him.

Even still, Scripture does indicate that some sins are "worse" or "greater" than others (*Numbers 15:27-30; Ezekiel 8:6, 13, 15; John 19:11*).

This does not, however, lend support to the Roman Catholic doctrine of venial and mortal sins. From the Catholic point of view, venial sins can be forgiven (often after death while the individual is in Purgatory), but mortal sins can never be forgiven (meaning the individual is excluded from the kingdom of God).

*In God's economy, while even the "smallest" sin makes us guilty before God, all sins can be forgiven when one embraces the gospel truth of Jesus Christ.

c. What is the Unpardonable Sin? (cf. *Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29-30; Luke 12:10*)

This particular sin, also known as "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit." In the immediate contexts of the gospels, this refers to attributing the Holy Spirit's work through Jesus Christ as that of Satan. The Pharisees had all the evidence

in the world that Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) were carrying out God's work, yet they still believed Satan was doing these things (*Matthew 12:22-24*).

In these instances, people already know the **truth**, but through their hardened **hearts** and lack of **repentance**, they have twisted it and rejected it. These individuals are never forgiven because they never seek forgiveness from God. This is ultimately because they never seek to be reconciled to God by **faith** in Jesus Christ.

Consequently, if you are afraid that you have committed this unpardonable sin, you have **not** committed it.

5) The Punishment of Sin

The main reason why God punishes sin is because He **has** to. His **holiness** and righteousness demands that sin be punished. If God did not punish sins, then He would not be righteous and just.

Through **Jesus Christ**, God demonstrated His ultimate justice by once and for all judging humanity for its sinfulness. Jesus was the propitiation³ for our sins (*Romans 3:24-25*). This act of divine grace demonstrated the God was truly righteous (*Romans 3:26*).

Thanks be to God for the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ!

Key Terms:

Imputed/inherited sin
Mortal sin
Original sin
Propitiation
Sin
Sins of commission
Sins of omission
Total depravity
Unpardonable sin
Venial sin

³ According to Grudem (p. 509-10), "Propitiation" is defined as "A sacrifice that bears the wrath of God against sin and thereby turns God's wrath into favor."

Key Verses:

Genesis 3:1-19
Leviticus 5:17
Jeremiah 17:9
Luke 12:10
Romans 3:9-18, 23
Romans 5:12-21
Ephesians 2:1-3

Scripture Memory:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (*Romans 3:23, NIV*).

Homework Assignments #3:

1) Did this material increase your awareness of sin in your own life? Did it emphasize the beauty of God’s grace in your life? Take some time and write in a journal or notebook what you have learned about sin through this material.

2) Define the term “sin.” How does an accurate understanding of this concept of sin impact how you share the gospel? How would you articulate “sin” to a non-Christian in a way that they might understand? Will you have an opportunity to share this truth this week?

5) Know definitions for Key Terms on page 5.

6) Memorize *Romans 3:23*.

7) Review class notes.

Next Week: Full Deity and Humanity of Jesus Christ!

Topeka Bible Church, *What We Believe: Statement of Faith*⁴

Topic: SIN

We believe that Adam was created without sin, but through his sin fell from his original innocence. Descendants of Adam are born in sin and are subject to death and judgment, apart from divine grace. Genesis 1:26-27; Jeremiah 17:19; Romans 3:10-19; Ephesians 2:1-3

Dallas Theological Seminary, *Doctrinal Statement*

*Article IV — MAN, CREATED AND FALLEN*⁵

We believe that man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, and that he fell through sin, and, as a consequence of his sin, lost his spiritual life, becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and that he became subject to the power of the devil. We also believe that this spiritual death, or total depravity of human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race of man, the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life, but is essentially and unchangeably bad apart from divine grace (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 6:5; Pss. 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; 5:40; 6:35; Rom. 3:10-19; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:6; 1 John 3:8).

⁴ <http://www.topekabiblechurch.org/statementoffaith.htm>

⁵ <http://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinalstatement/>