

Sin

“The big issue is sin. From the very beginning, man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden and that has been inherited by the entire human race. It’s a problem all over the world and in our own hearts. That’s why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer to sin, because when he died on the Cross, he took the sins of the world upon him.” (TIME, Ten Questions for Billy Graham, Nov 29, 2004)

Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City (author of *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, published 2008), speaks about "sin" to his audiences, which are 70% single and younger than 40: "I use it with *lots and lots of explanation*, because the word is essentially obsolete.

Why study sin?

Essential for a proper understanding of:

- the history of man (Christian interpretation)
- current conditions in the world
- God’s justice and the concepts of accountability and judgement
- the nature of God’s grace and salvation
- the ministry, death & resurrection of Christ - without sin Christmas/Easter are meaningless
- the Christian response to psychological issues such as guilt
- how the sects have misunderstood Biblical teaching about the Fall of man
- overcoming sin and living sanctified lives

I. THE FACT OF SIN

The Bible teaches the universal nature of sin.

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

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (1 John 1:8-10 NIV)

Non-Christian Views of Sin

Greek Philosophy	Sin is the failure to achieve one’s true self-expression and to preserve one’s due relation to the rest of the universe.
Atheism	The notion of “sin” is unacceptable to an atheist. There is no breaking of the Law if there is no Lawgiver. The best we can talk about is social averages/cultural practices. The absence of God makes sin subjective, ie <i>who</i> determines what is “right” or “wrong”? Some societies permit torture, polygamy, slavery and honour killing. If there is no God, what’s to stop oppression, in the final analysis? Whales are saved while millions of children die in utero.

Determinism (sometimes Fatalism)	<p>People are destined to do what they do. There is no such thing as free will. Infers people are programmed. According to this scenario, “sin” is unavoidable. Adam had no choice but to sin. We are all victims of fate. Determinism denies human responsibility.</p>
Hedonism	<p>The highest good in life is pleasure. The Epicureans in Athens (Acts 17) were hedonists. Hedonism suggests that “sin” is whatever does not give pleasure.</p>
Christian Science	<p>“God is the only reality. All other things, including man, are mere illusions. Matter is illusion because God is mind. Hatred is an illusion because God is love. Sin is an illusion because God is good. Sin, sickness and death are the effects of error. Evil is unreal. “Man is deathless, spiritual. He is above sin or frailty.”</p>
Evolution	<p>All religious impulses in man are products of the evolutionary process. Evil desires and practices have been inherited from brute beasts.</p> <p>The Bible’s teaching about sin is one of the core theological reasons Christians cannot embrace evolution. The message of Christianity starts with Adam’s fall into death, with sin being passed on by him to all of his descendants.</p>
Behaviouristic Psychology	<p>Some psychologists assert that all actions, feelings, motivations are produced by genetic and environmental factors.</p>
Karma (various religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism)	<p>A person’s past life determines what his present one is like.</p> <p>In Hinduism sin is conceived as ignorance. Sin has no moral connotation as being committed against a personal God. The Hindu believes he is part of God; sin is ignorance of this fact. The Hindu becomes increasingly aware of his identification with God through a continual cycle of rebirths and achieves deliverance or salvation through obtaining knowledge by self-effort.</p>
Islam	<p>Theistic determinism. Everything is pre-determined by an omnipotent and transcendent God. Islam is fatalistic.</p>
Relativism	<p>Everything is basically acceptable as long as it feels good.</p>
Theological Liberalism	<p>Rejects the Fall as incompatible with the scientific understanding of man, man’s origin and his nature. The Fall is myth, or allegory. Adam is “Everyman”.</p>
Spiritualism	<p>“Man never had a fall. Evil does not exist. Evil is good. No being is naturally bad”.</p>

Armstrongism	“Sickness is the only penalty of physical transgression, and whenever one is sick, he is paying that penalty”.
Mormonism	“We ought to consider the fall of our first parents as one of the great steps to eternal exaltation and happiness.”
Freidrich Nietzsche	Sin is a slave-psychology that originated from Jewish culture and Christianity is a branch of the same tree, causing the devaluation of happiness.
High Orthodoxy	Some churches divide sin into mortal sins (which involve a deliberate turning away from God, in the full knowledge and consent of the sinner - this type of sin cuts the sinner off from God’s grace, until repented of) and venial sins (involving less important matters, committed with less self-awareness of wrongdoing and turning from God - this type of sin does not block the inflow of divine grace).
Arminianism (Christian Permissiveness)	Based on the teachings of Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian (1560-1609). Minimizes sin because of the promise of forgiveness. Leads to notions of “cheap grace”.
Contemporary Western Thought	Sin doesn’t exist. The <i>Ten Commandments</i> are breakable, without impunity. Who still worries about adultery, envy, strict parental authority, and so on? These are just matters of personal opinion; everyone makes up their own mind. If standards are dictated by society alone, the tendency is toward moral decay (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 shows that this can only be arrested by God’s redemption).

Jolly Old Sigmund Freud

by Anna Russell

I went to my psychiatrist
To be psychoanalysed
To find out why I killed the cat
And blacked my husband's eyes.

He laid me on a downy couch
To see what he could find,
So this is what he dredged up
From my subconscious mind:

When I was one, my mommy hid
My dolly in a trunk,
And so it follows naturally
That I am always drunk.

When I was two I had the feeling of
Ambivalence towards my brothers,
And so it follows naturally
I poisoned all my lovers.

Now I am happy; now I've learned
The lesson this has taught;
That everything I do that's wrong
Is someone else's fault.

Christian View of Sin

Old Testament Definitions

<i>hatta'a</i> (more than 600 times)	missing the goal or path, eg missing a target (the word "Torah", referring to the Law, literally means <i>hitting</i> the target)
<i>awon</i>	going astray, getting lost committing a crime
<i>shagah</i>	going astray wandering
<i>marad</i>	rebellious against God

New Testament Definitions

<i>hamartia</i> (175 times)	missing the mark
<i>anomia</i> (15 times)	lawlessness
<i>parabasis</i> (7)	overstepping the mark
<i>asebeia</i> (6)	Godlessness
<i>apeitheia</i> (7)	disobedience
<i>paraptoma</i> (21 times)	transgression
<i>poneria</i> (7)	baseness, depravity
<i>adikia</i> (26 times)	unrighteousness, doing wrong
<i>epithymia</i> (38 times)	lust, strong desire

Nature of Nurture?

“I was pre-disposed by my DNA and my environment to live the life I did.” (American singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier, interviewed on ABC’s *Life Matters* on 15 March 2010)

- Inference: “I became what I did because of my parents and other people; I could not help it.”

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)

- Inference: “Someone else made me what I am.”

“I have sinned” (Luke 15:21)

- Inference: Change comes by recognising personal accountability.

The Bible shows that sin is real and personal:

- consider the fact of sin in peoples’ lives (including the “heroes” of the Bible)
- revelation of God’s nature (holy, cannot tolerate sin)
- God’s actions in relation to sin, including in His commandments
- revelation of God’s mercy, grace and longsuffering
- the reality of the cross - Jesus was “made sin for us”
- our experiences of sin and redemption
- call to repentance/forgiveness/cleansing

Although the human condition is accounted for in the Genesis account of the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Old Testament says almost nothing about the transmission of sin to the human race. The Gospels do not explicitly teach on the subject. The main Scriptural affirmation is found in Romans 5:12-19, a passage in which Paul establishes a parallel between Adam and Christ:

- > sin (and death, as a consequence) entered the world through Adam
- > grace (and eternal life) have come to all through Christ.

Orthodoxy sometimes prefers the term “ancestral sin”, because sin is hereditary.

II. THE ORIGIN OF SIN IN THE WORLD

1. Temptation: Its Possibility, Source, Subtlety

Genesis Chapter 3 contains the historical account of the temptation and the fall of man.

Temptation came from Satan (he “sinned from the beginning” - 1 John 3:8).

The following table illustrates how Adam and Eve were tempted (as was Jesus, with different results), based on 1 John 2:15, 16:

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - does not come from the Father but from the world”.

Subjects	Cravings of Sinful Man *	Lust of the Eyes	Pride of Position	Key to Understanding
Eve	The fruit was good for food (Genesis 3:6)	The fruit was a delight to the eyes (Genesis 3:6)	Wisdom to be like God (Genesis 3:6, 22)	The event was “all about Adam and Eve” and their desires.
Jesus	Tempted to make stones into bread (Matthew 4:3)	Tempted by the glory of the world’s kingdoms (Matthew 4:8)	Tempted to foolishly test God (Matthew 4:6-7)	This event was all about the integrity of Jesus and His honouring of God.

* Cravings can be for valid things that are desired too much; or good things that are allowed to become supreme and replace God (such as money, sex, power/influence, food/physical appetite, fame/recognition, health/fitness, material goods/”affluenza”).

The tree was placed in the Garden of Eden to test Adam and Eve. Without testing/personal choice, they would have been like machines.

The source of temptation was Satan (through the serpent). God did not design or cause the Fall; nevertheless, it fits into His eternal purpose (eg Matthew 25:34; Acts 4:27-28; Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:8,9; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 5:6-12; 13:8).

The temptation was subtle. The serpent: twisted God’s words; sowed doubts about God’s words and motives, insinuated he knew better than God, sowed doubts about God’s integrity and downplayed the seriousness of the situation.

A different spin is placed on sin in the story of Cain:

“... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:6). The image is of a lion, or a cat, crouching, waiting to spring on unsuspecting prey.

2. Guilt

Adam and Eve immediately recognised their guilt (unlike some claims: “I could not help it”). They hid their nakedness and tried to hide from God. Each blamed another. They had the enlightenment they sought, but it came with fear. Fellowship with God was broken.

Is guilt good? There are two levels: *true* guilt (whether “felt” or not) and *false* guilt (self-blame or refusal to accept forgiveness). Guilt is one mechanism God has created to lead us to acknowledge sin, seek and receive forgiveness and be free from its consequences.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable (Hypnotics, lit one who has lost a lawsuit and is under judgement) to God. (Romans 3:19) Guilt should lead to conviction, repentance and forgiveness.

There is no longer any condemnation to those who are forgiven in Christ (Romans 8:1).

3. Judgement

Judgement on the Serpent (Genesis 3:14-15). God will crush Satan under our feet shortly (Romans 16:20).

Judgement on the Woman. Pain in childbirth. Submission to Adam. Separation from God. Spiritual death (Genesis 3:16). Blessing also, as her seed (Christ) would be the Saviour (Genesis 3:15).

Judgement on the Man. Separation from intimate relationship with God. Laboriousness in his work (Genesis 3:17-19). A curse on the ground. Spiritual and physical death.

The worst punishments were separation from God and expulsion from the Garden.

As Pearlman points out, “Sin has marred all the relationships of life”.

4. Redemption

- promised - Genesis 3:15 contains the first Messianic prophecy
- pictured - sin had to be paid for - the killing of an animal in the Garden foreshadowed the Old Testament sacrificial system and Christ’s redemptive death on Calvary

III THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

“Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:14, 15)

Pearlman says “sin is both an act and a state” (ie I sin and I am a sinner). We sin because we are human and as an act of the will, ie sinners by *nature* and by *choice*. We cannot claim, “The Devil made me do it”.

Spiritual Weakness

1. Marring of the Divine Image. We did not lose the image of God in us, but we need to be recreated. “No good thing” dwells in us apart from Christ.
2. Inborn sin (original sin). Bias to sin passed down from Adam (Psalm 51:5). Read Romans 5:12-21. There is sin in our race and in our nature. (Judaism, Hinduism and Islam do not believe in original sin.)
3. Inner Discord. The harmony for which God created us has gone. We are wretched (Romans 7:24). No peace (Romans 3:10-18).
4. Evidences in our physical bodies. Many sicknesses result from sin (all, ultimately). Some overt, eg drug addiction, alcoholism, gluttony, psychosomatic illnesses. Physical death is the ultimate evidence.

5. Evidences in our minds and spirits. We feel lost (*anomie*), out of touch with God, without meaning in life (out of God's order). Negative feelings, guilt (can lead to breakdown and suicide)
6. Evidences in our society. The world around us is filled with the tragic results of sin (war, suffering, disease, inequality).
7. Evidences in the natural environment. Instead of valuing creation, nature is abused through war, pollution, indiscriminate destruction of flora and fauna, waste of natural resources. In time vegetarian man/animals began to devour one another. The earth was cursed because of man (Genesis 3:17-18). Paul says creation has been groaning up to the present (Romans 8:21, 22).

We are:

- judged to have sinned (Romans 3:9)
- under a curse (Galatians 3:10)
- strangers to the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- found to have deceitful and wicked hearts (Jeremiah 17:9)
- corrupt as to our mental and moral nature (Genesis 6:5, 12; 8:1; Romans 1:19-31).
- at enmity with God (Romans 8:7, 8)
- slaves of sin (Romans 6:17; 7:5; John 8:34)
- dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1)
- controlled by the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2)
- children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)

Punishment

Adam was told he would die (Genesis 2:17)

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)

God's promise of unending life relied on obedience. When sin entered:

- spiritual death followed, while Adam lived physically (cf Ephesians 2:1; 1 Timothy 5:6)
- followed by physical death (Hebrews 9:27)
- second death, or eternal death in Hell, will be the end result (Revelation 21:8; John 5:28;29; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:41).

Eternal punishment, not annihilation (as Jehovah's Witnesses believe).

Why was/is the penalty so severe?

- Adam/man chose disobedience
- he betrayed God deliberately and with adequate understanding of the consequences
- he rejected God's authority
- he chose allegiance to Satan
- he corrupted the holy, godly character with which God endowed creation
- God had to comply with the warning of death if Adam chose sin.

Only through knowing God through Christ can we have eternal life (John 17:3; Romans 6:23).

What about children who died in infancy?

Children inherit Adam's tendency to sin, but until they reach an age of accountability (understanding, choice) under God's law, there is no judgement. However, only God is able to judge such cases.

Sin Leads to Death, Demands a Saviour

“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:18-21)

Can Christians fall into sin in this life? Yes, but we have an Advocate. While we should not choose to sin, if we fall into temptation, Jesus pleads on our behalf and we have the forgiveness He purchased for us on Calvary (Read 1 John 2:1-2. We will consider this theme in depth under “Salvation”).

Conclusion

All have sinned, but God has sent a gracious Saviour, Jesus Christ. Just as Adam was the “federal head” of a fallen race (ie we fell through him), so Jesus is the new federal head of a redeemed people (we are redeemed in Him).