



Wretched Man I Am

Introducing the struggle of the nature of man and sin.
by Don Hooton

Lesson 1 | March 8, 2023

The subject of sin is seamlessly connected to the subject of the Bible story of redemption. It is impossible to ignore. Often simplistically, though Biblically, we go through definitions and believe we have answered *every* question that could be raised about the sin problem. And yet, Paul would write to the Romans, *“For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me... So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me... For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.”* (Romans 7:11-25). Is Paul describing his own experience here? If so, is it his experience before he was saved, his experience as an immature believer, or his experience as a mature believer? Since Paul is teaching the gospel of what God has done for us to overcome sin through Christ, it’s an important text to understand. And we will address it later.

Further, the Apostle John would say, *“If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”* (1John 1:8-10).

Just to name a few. So, it follows that we will only come to fully understand the enormity of redemption that God has offered the world in Christ when we have come to fully understand the enormity of sin that God has “paid the wages of” for us (c.f. Romans 6:23).

Yet, New Testament writers do not really leave us in the dark about what sin actually *is*:

1. **“Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness”** (1John 3:4).
 - a. In this verse, we can read that sin is **lawlessness**. In the King James Version, this is translated, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” Transgression means, “The act of passing over or beyond any law or rule of moral duty; the violation of a law or known principle of rectitude; breach of command” (*Webster’s Dictionary*).
 - b. From this verse, we can say that **whoever disobeys God’s commandments, he is guilty of sin.**
2. **“So, it is sin to know the good and yet not do it”** (James 4:17).
 - a. Sin is not just *doing* something bad to others or to God, but it is also *not doing* what is good. This verse is reminiscent to what Jesus said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them...” (Matthew 7:12).
 - b. This means that we should not be like a hermit who secludes himself from society just to avoid sinning.
3. **“...everything that is not from faith is sin”** (Romans 14:23).
 - a. This verse tells us that doubt in doing things against what we believe is sin. If our faith says we should not do something and yet we still do it, we sin.



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- b. Sometimes, an act is not necessarily a sin, but it becomes a sin if done against your belief, faith, and conscience.

4. “**...All unrighteousness is sin**” (1John 5:17).

- a. sin as including anything in our character, motives, thoughts, words, emotions, and behavior which is not right in God’s eyes.

Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words notes that the Greek word *hamartia* and related words “incorporate the full range of meaning of all three basic Hebrew words [for sin], *hata*, *pasa*, and *awon*. Like them, *hamartia* assumes a divine standard or norm and portrays humanity as missing the mark. Yet sin is also seen in the NT as rebellion and as conscious deviation from known right . . .” (p. 568).

But once we leave definitions, we come across more explanations to undergird Paul’s declaration above of his wretchedness. For instance, the same *Zondervan Dictionary* quoted above goes on to say that “Sin is not only missing God’s mark; it is an inner reality, a **warp** in human nature, and a malignant **power** that holds each individual in an **unbreakable** grip” (p. 568, my emphasis).

And most certainly, the Bible describes sin negatively. It is lawlessness, **disobedience**, **impiety**, **unbelief**, **distrust**, **darkness** as opposed to light, a **falling away** as opposed to standing firm, **weakness** not strength. It is **unrighteousness**, **faithlessness**. And Jesus warns us in John 8:34: “*Jesus responded, “Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.”*”

Sin is, and has been, a part of our life because we are humans. We will explore the different ways Bible teachers through the ages have tried to address the nature of our humanity in the context of our sin. Is it inherited? Does sin from ages past warp us? Is *sin* truly a part of our DNA? Or, is the *guilt* of sin that is in our DNA or is it the *consequences* of sin in our DNA?

The clear definition of sin – just by itself - could make it all overwhelming! And as we review the impact of Augustine (354-430), Luther (1483-1546) and Arminius (1560-1609), but Paul asserts – and we must insert this reminder here – that “*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” Certainly, we will swelter in the heat of the debates about our human nature because of the influences mentioned above – and there are plenty of things to learn from them all – but the answer to our problem remains the same: *we can be saved from sin and death through Jesus Christ*. Even at the very beginning of the gospel announcements:

1. Jesus said, “*The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:46-47).
2. Peter said, “*Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (Acts 2:38).



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What is sin? **Sin is when we don't meet God's way.** Augustine of Hippo defines sin as "a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God." Sin is going against God and His perfect ways.

Further, based on Scripture, it is certain that **sin did not originate on earth** because before Adam and Eve sinned, **the Serpent had already begun his descent** from the presence of God through his own transgression (see Genesis 3:14-16 that must have followed to what Jude 6 and 2Peter 2:4 refer). In fact, Jesus says that Satan "*was a murderer from the beginning*" (John 8:44; see 1John 3:8). Sin, as such, then, originated in heaven, at the feet of God's throne, in his immediate presence – not in the Garden – because of the angel's rebellion. And the transgression was introduced to the perfect man by the one who was already tainted by his own rebellion, Satan. And the Bible says, Adam and Eve sinned. But for their descendants, aka humanity, *we have inherited something* from Adam – and the purpose of our study is to sift through the Biblical record and the way people have referenced it throughout history to make sense of it all.

Even with this context, which Paul would have not disputed (see 1Timothy 2:14; 2Corinthians 11:3), Paul says that **sin entered the world because of Adam** (Romans 5:12). And Paul further warns church leaders against becoming puffed up "*with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil*" (1Timothy 3:16) which clearly suggests that Satan's sin was a pride which resented his position (see Jude 6) and perhaps resented the creation of humans in God's image. It stands to reason that Satan tempted Adam and Eve to be "like God" (Genesis 3:5) because this same discontented rebellion occasioned his own fall.

The Bible's teaching about human sin, likewise, starts in the garden where Adam violated God's prohibition from eating from the forbidden tree. We will hope to show, through a balanced and biblical approach to this all, that *God is not the author of sin*, since in his holiness God is without any sin or evil of his own. Careful biblical reflection will show that God is never the primary, but only the secondary cause in human sin. According to the Bible, then, man, as made by God, was upright, but was made capable of a choice. Further, he was sinless. However, when Adam succumbed to temptation in the garden, along with Eve, humanity experienced *the consequence* universally with them – and Adam and Eve and all their descendants were cast from the garden.

In this important sense, **Adam willed to sin in his heart.** Having been forbidden by God to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17–18), Adam ate the fruit and fell into sin (3:6). Sin therefore did not originate in the human nature as God made it; instead, it resulted when Adam was tempted by the evil serpent through his wife. Once Adam had sinned, his progenitors (his earthly heirs) would suffer with them and lose their place in their Garden (Romans 5:12, 18), and as a result, they would become corrupted with sin in themselves so that henceforth each individual human originates from a sinner (Psalm 51:5).

We will not only wrestle about the meaning of sin – and the origin of sin – but the effect of sin because of Paul's exclamation in Romans 7 – "*Wretched man I am!*" What does that mean? **How does the sin of Adam affect humanity and most specifically, how the "works of the flesh" work in us?** With respect to this, in fact, many have called this the "doctrine of original sin" and others will refer to it as "total hereditary depravity." We will spend time dealing with that in other lessons. Though the terms are not used in Scripture, it can be a bit confusing, and almost misleading. The "*doctrine of original sin*" has historically



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emphasized that humans, through the fact of birth, inherit a tainted nature in need of regeneration and a proclivity to sinful conduct. **Original Sin is that term that has come to define the nature of mankind's sinful condition because of Adam's fall.** We will address the Biblical evidence on this after we study Genesis 3 next week.

Finally, do a quick review and reflection of these passages that warn or illustrate the way we are tempted to sin. Reflect on that in your own life this week and see what you can learn about the "Wretched Man I Am" that Paul was referencing.

Review and Reflection:

James 1:13-15 (CSB).

No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God," since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when he is _____ and _____ by his _____ evil desire. Then _____ desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.

1Corinthians 10:13 (CSB).

No temptation has come upon you except what is _____ to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are _____, but with the temptation he will also _____ the way out so that you may be able to _____ it.

1Peter 5:6-11 (CSB).

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you. Be sober minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil _____ prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. _____ him, _____ in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world. The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you _____ you have suffered a little while. To him be dominion forever. Amen.

1John 2:1-2 (CSB).

My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not _____. But if anyone _____ sin, we have an advocate with the Father—_____ the righteous one. He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

Upcoming Lesson | Sin and the Fall | March 15

Read Genesis 3