

## From Wayne Grudem's [Systematic Theology](#): Chapter 24 - Sin

### THE DEFINITION OF SIN

Definition: Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.

This definition includes not only acts, but also wrong attitudes:

- In the ten commandments it says to not covet your neighbor's things specifying that a desire to steal or commit adultery is also sin in God's sight (Exodus 20:17)
- The Sermon on the Mount prohibits sinful attitudes such as anger (Matthew 5:22) and lust (Matthew 5:28)
- Paul lists attitudes such as jealousy, anger, and selfishness as works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20)

The definition also includes our moral nature:

- Paul says we were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)

### (B) THE ORIGIN OF SIN

First, we must affirm that God himself did not sin, and God is not to be blamed for sin. It is impossible for God to do wrong (Job 34:10). It is even impossible for God to desire to do wrong (James 1:13).

But we must also affirm that God ordains and controls all things (Daniel 4:35) so he ordained that sin would come about through the voluntary choices of moral creatures and that God would ultimately accomplish his purposes through this (Ephesians 1:11)

With respect to the human race, the first sin was that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-19). This sin is typical of sin generally:

- It struck at the basis for knowledge, for it gave a different answer to the question "What is true?". God told them they would die if they ate from the tree (Genesis

2:17) while the serpent said they would not die (Genesis 3:4). Eve chose not to trust what God had told them.

- It struck at the basis for moral standards, giving a different answer to the question, "What is right?" God said it was right to not eat of this one tree (Genesis 2:17) but the serpent suggested that it would be ok to eat from it and in fact make them become like God (Genesis 3:5). Eve decided to use her own evaluation of what is right and wrong instead of what God told her was right and wrong.
- It gave a different answer to the question, "Who am I". Adam and Eve were creatures of God, dependent and subordinate to him, but they succumbed to the temptation to be like God, attempting to put themselves in the place of God. (Genesis 3:5)

We must affirm the historical truthfulness of the narrative of the original sin by Adam and Eve just as it is important to affirm the truthfulness of the creation of Adam and Eve as actual historical figures. (Romans 5:12,16; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14)

Finally, we must admit that all sin is ultimately irrational. Just as it did not make sense for Satan to rebel against God thinking he could exalt himself above God, we are foolish to think that there can be any gain in disobeying the words of our creator. Scripture affirms that this is foolish (Psalm 14:1; Proverbs 10:23; Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 14:7,16; Proverbs 15:5; Proverbs 18:2)

### **(C) THE DOCTRINE OF INHERITED SIN**

How does the sin of Adam affect us? Scripture teaches that we inherit sin from Adam in two ways.

#### **1. INHERITED GUILT: WE ARE COUNTED GUILTY BECAUSE OF ADAM'S SIN**

When Adam sinned, God thought of all who descend from Adam as sinners. Sometimes called "original sin", it means that all members of the human race were represented by Adam in the time of testing in the Garden of Eden. As our representative, Adam sinned, and God counted us guilty as well as Adam. The key passage illustrating this point is Romans 5:12-21

- The context shows Paul is not talking about actual sins we commit every day. The passage is a comparison between Adam and Christ

- Romans 5:12 says that sin came into the world through one man, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned. This means that God thought of us all as having sinned when Adam disobeyed
- Romans 5:13-14 says that sin was not counted as infractions of the law before Moses because the law was not given yet, but death still reigned. This is emphasizing again that God counted people guilty on the basis of Adam's sin
- Romans 5:18-19 says that one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, through one man's disobedience many were made sinners...emphasizing the same point.

Some object to this teaching (Arminians are among this group) and say that it is not just for God to count us as guilty because it was Adam that sinned and not us. Response:

1. Everyone who protests that is in unfair has also voluntarily committed many actual sins for which God also holds us guilty so you could say it is a moot point.
2. Some have argued that if we were in Adam's place, we would have sinned as well.
3. If we think it is unfair for us to be represented by Adam, then we should also think it is unfair for us to be represented by Christ in the opposite manner for the passage also says one man's act of righteousness leads to our justification and life (Romans 5:18-19)

## 2. INHERITED CORRUPTION: WE HAVE A SINFUL NATURE BECAUSE OF ADAM'S SIN

We also inherit a sinful nature because of Adam's sin.

- David acknowledges that he was conceived with a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5)
- The wicked go astray from the womb (Psalm 58:3)
- Paul affirms we were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)
- Children do not have to be taught how to do wrong, parents have to teach discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4)
- God does give us a conscience to help constrain this sinful nature (Romans 2:14-15)
- This is also why the Bible teaches that God ordained civil government, to restrain the influence of this sinful nature in society (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14)

Our inherited corruption, our tendency to sin, which we received from Adam, means that as far as God is concerned we are not able to do anything that pleases him. This can be seen in two ways:

a. In Our Natures We Totally Lack Spiritual Good Before God

- Paul says nothing good dwells within me (in the flesh) (Romans 7:18)
- The minds and consciences of unbelievers are corrupted (Titus 1:15)
- Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful, corrupted (Jeremiah 17:9)

b. In Our Actions We Are Totally Unable to Do Spiritual Good Before God

- Paul says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8)
- Jesus says apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5)
- Without faith it is impossible to please him (Hebrews 11:6)
- All of our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:9-20)
- Unbelievers are not even able to understand the things of God correctly (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- We are unable to come to God in our own power (John 6:44)
- Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)

## **(D) ACTUAL SINS IN OUR LIVES**

### 1. ALL PEOPLE ARE SINFUL BEFORE GOD

- There is none that do good (Psalm 14:3)
- No man is righteous before God (Psalm 143:2)
- There is no man that does not sin (1 Kings 8:46; Proverbs 20:9)
- Paul affirms everyone is under sin and none are righteous (Romans 3:9-10)
- All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)
- We all make mistakes (James 3:2)
- If we say we have no sin then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8-10)

### 2. DOES OUR ABILITY LIMIT OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

No, we are held responsible for everything that we do. The fact that we cannot do any spiritual good without God does not limit our responsibility. The true measure of our responsibility and guilt is not our own ability to obey God, but rather the absolute perfection of God's moral law and his own holiness (Matthew 5:48)

### 3. ARE INFANTS GUILTY BEFORE THEY COMMIT ACTUAL SINS?

Some maintain that there is an "age of accountability" but the scripture on inherited sin does not teach this. They indicate that we have a sinful nature from conception. So are infants that die before they can hear and respond to the gospel saved. We cannot know for sure, but if they are it is because of God's mercy (Romans 9:14-18) and due to Christ's redemptive work and not their own merits as is the case with everyone.

There is evidence of God bringing regeneration to an infant before they are born in the instance of John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) and King David (Psalm 22:10)

There is also a pattern throughout scripture to save the children of those who believe in him (Genesis 7:1; Hebrews 11:7; Joshua 2:18; Psalm 103:17; John 4:53; Acts 2:39; Acts 16:31; Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Titus 1:6; Matthew 18:10)

While we cannot know for sure, we can find some comfort in this.

### 4. ARE THERE DEGREES OF SIN?

Are some sins worse than others? The question may be answered either yes or no, depending on the sense in which it is intended.

#### a. Legal Guilt

In terms of legal standing, any sin; however small, makes us guilty before God and therefore worthy of eternal punishment. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:16; Galatians 3:10; James 2:10-11)

#### b. Results in Life and in Relationship With God

There is some evidence in scripture that supports the idea that there are degrees of seriousness of sin.

- Jesus tells Pontius Pilate that although both have sinned Judas' sin is greater than his (John 19:11)
- God shows Ezekiel visions of sins in the temple, but tells him he will see greater abominations indicating degrees of increasing sin (Ezekiel 8:6-15)
- Jesus distinguishes between lesser and greater commandments (Matthew 5:19; Matthew 22:23)
- Scripture distinguishes between unintentional sin (Leviticus 4:2,13,22; Leviticus 5:17) and those done with arrogance and disdain for God's commandments (Numbers 15:27-30). Both are still sin, but it shows a different severity of each.
- There is indication that more mature Christians such as those who are in leadership positions are held to a higher standard of accountability by God (James 3:1; Luke 12:48)

Scripture does not support the Roman Catholic Church teaching of "venial" and "mortal" sins. "In Roman Catholic teaching, a venial sin can be forgiven, but often after punishments in this life or in Purgatory (after death, but before entrance into heaven). A mortal sin is a sin that causes spiritual death and cannot be forgiven; it excludes people from the kingdom of God."

Scripture teaches that all sins are mortal in that even the smallest sin makes us legally guilty before God. But even the most serious of sins are forgiven as affirmed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). It is better to simply recognize that sins can vary in terms of the degree to which they disrupt our relationship with God and not add something to it that scripture does not teach.

Application:

(1) It helps us to know where we should put more effort in our own attempts to grow in personal holiness.

(2) It helps us to decide when we should simply overlook a minor fault or when it would be appropriate to talk to the individual (James 5:19-20)

(3) It may help us decide when church discipline is appropriate

(4) May help us realize that there is some basis for civil governments to have laws and penalties prohibiting certain kinds of wrongdoing (stealing, murder), but not others (anger, jealousy, greed)

## 5. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHRISTIAN SINS?

### a. Our Legal Standing Before God is Unchanged

When a Christian sins, his or her legal standing before God is unchanged. He or she is still forgiven.

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)
- Salvation is not based on our merit anyways, but is a free gift of God (Romans 6:23)
- Christ died for our sins past, present and future without distinction (1 Corinthians 15:3)
- John says that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8), but he also says a couple of chapters later that we are God's children now (1 John 3:2). So while we still have sin in our lives, we never lose our status as God's children

In theological terms, we keep our "justification" and we keep our "adoption"

### b. Our Fellowship With God Is Disrupted And Our Christian Life Is Damaged

Much like a earthly parent, God is displeased with us when we sin, but he does not cease to love us. Also like a parent, because God loves us he will discipline us. When a Christian sins it creates separation between that person and God and damages their relationship with him and their fruitfulness in ministry.

- We can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)
- The Lord disciplines him whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:11-12)
- God disciplines us for our good that we may share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:9-10)
- Jesus speaking of how he disciplines those he loves (Revelation 3:19)
- Sin creates separation between us and God (Isaiah 59:1-2); 1 John 3:21)
- We must abide in Christ to bear fruit, without him we cannot (John 15:4)

Scripture reminds us of the need for regular confession and repentance of sin (Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:9). As Christians we should strive to progress on a path of ever-increasing righteousness and not on a path of sin that leads to death (Romans 6:16)

### c. The Danger of "Unconverted Evangelicals"

There needs to be a warning that mere association with an evangelical church and outward conformity to accepted "Christian" behavior does not guarantee salvation. If someone lacks the elements of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and lives a consistent life of sin in disobedience to Christ, then this is a warning that this person is probably not a genuine Christian and is not born again. Scripture warns us of this danger (Matthew 7:23; 1 John 2:4)

## 6. WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

There are several passages of scripture that speak about a sin that will not be forgiven. It is described as blasphemy against the Spirit. (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29-30; Luke 12:10; Hebrews 6:4-6)

Possible interpretations:

(1) Some have thought that it was a sin that could only be committed while Christ was on earth, but Jesus statement in Matthew 12:31 is too general to mean this and Hebrews 6:4-6 is speaking of apostasy that occurred after Jesus.

(2) Some hold that it is describing unbelief that continues until the time of death. While it is true that unbelief until death will not be forgiven, these verses are not speaking about unbelief in general, but a specific sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit.

(3) Some hold that this sin is serious apostasy by genuine believers. While there is a case based upon Hebrews 6:4-6, the argument loses strength when considering the context of the gospel passages where Jesus is responding to the Pharisees denial of the work of the Holy Spirit through him.



(4) The most likely interpretation of the unpardonable sin in these verses is that it is an unusually malicious, willful rejection and slander against the Holy Spirit's work attesting to Christ, and attributing that work to Satan. In the context of these verses, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees accusation that he was casting out demons by the power of Satan. This despite of the fact that they were aware of Jesus' miraculous works and authoritative teaching that was consistent with scripture. This made their lies especially malicious in nature. This sin is speaking of one that includes (a) a clear knowledge of who Christ is and the power of the Holy Spirit working through him, (b) a willful rejection of the facts about Christ they knew to be true, and © slanderously attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ to Satan. This explanation fits with the passage in Hebrews 6:4-6 as well because it describes someone who has knowledge and conviction of the truth, but willingly turns away from Christ and holds him in contempt.

These verses speak more to the condition of the human heart than the willingness or ability of God to forgive them. These people have hardened their heart so much toward God that normal means of bringing them to salvation would not work. Believers who fear they have committed such a sin should not really worry because the fact that there is still sorrow for sin and a desire to return to God is evidence in itself that they do not fall into this category.

### **(E) THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN**

The primary reason that God punishes sin is that God's righteousness demands it. Jeremiah 9:24 says that God delights in steadfast love, justice, and righteousness. Because of His love, he chose to send his son as propitiation for us (a sacrifice that bears the wrath of God and turns God's wrath into favor), but it is also because he is a just and righteous God. In order for him to be just, a penalty had to be paid for sin. Jesus bore it. This is of course a free gift for those who have faith in Christ (Romans 3:25-26).