

What is Sin?

A decade ago, we most likely would not have asked that question. In our society today, it seems that most people do not know what sin is anymore. It may be that some of us were never taught about sin. It may be that some of us dismissed what we were taught about sin. In any case, sin is on a rampage. It is evident that we cannot depend on a subjective definition because the definition will change for each person. We must have an objective definition and standard that will not change on how a person feels about what is right and wrong.

Sin Defined

Brother Phil Sanders made the following observation and gave the words in the Greek for sins and their definitions, "Anyone who seeks to do the will of God ought to know what sin is and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). This death is spiritual separation from God, the source of life (Isaiah 59:1, 2). There are various words used in the Greek New Testament to describe sin. They are:

1. Sin (αμαρτια): "a missing of the mark" (Romans 6:23; James 4:17; 1 John 3:4; 5:16).
2. Sin (αμαρτημα): "an act of disobedience to Divine law" (Mark 3:28, 29; Romans 3:25; 2 Peter 1:9).
3. Error (πλανη): "a wandering, a forsaking of the right path" (James 5:20; 2 Peter 3:17; 1 John 4:6; Romans 1:27; 2 Peter 2:18; Jude 11).
4. Iniquity (ανομια): "lawlessness or wickedness, crookedness" (Matthew. 7:23; 13:41; Titus 2:14; 1 John 3:4; Romans 4:7; Hebrews 10:17).
5. Iniquity (παρανομια): "law-breaking" (2 Peter 2:16).
6. Iniquity or unrighteousness (αδικια): "unrighteousness; a condition of not being right"
9Luke 16:8; 18:6; 2 Timothy 2:19; James 3:60.
7. Iniquity (αδικημα): "a wrong, an injury, misdeed" (Acts 18:14; 24:20; Revelation 18:5).
8. Evil (πονηρεια): "bad, evil, worthless, wickedness" (Matthew 22:18; Mark. 7:22; Luke 11:39; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:8; Ephesians 6:12).
9. Trespass (παρappτωμα): "a false step, a blunder, a deviation from uprightness or the truth, to fall" (Matthew 6:14, 15; 18:35; Mark. 11:25, 26; Gal. 6:1; James 5:16; Col. 2:13; Eph. 1:7; 2:1, 5).
10. Transgression (παρabaσις): "a going beyond the prescribed limits" (Romans 4:15; 5:13, 14, 20; 7:7, 13; Galatians 3:19) (Adapted B.W.).

The above definitions are for the student who desires a more complete meaning of the words for sin. The following is a summation of sins as used in the New Testament. The Bible describes sin as the following:

Romans 14:23 (KJV) And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Emphasis B.W.).

James 4:17 (KJV) Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin (Emphasis B.W.).

1 John 3:4 (KJV) Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law (Emphasis B.W.).

1 John 3:17 (KJV) All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death (Emphasis B.W.).

When people break the Law of God, they have committed sin and it is essential for the student to understand that there are no degrees of sin. Sin is sin and there is no justification for any kind for the practice of it. The bottom line is that when people violate the law of God sin has been committed.

The catalogue of sin can be found in several places. It should be remembered that what is about to be presented in this article by no means is intended to leave the impression that these list are complete Some of the sins that are listed in the inspired Word of God are as follows:

Romans 1:28-32

KJV

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; ²⁹ Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, ³⁰ Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: ³² Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Galatians 5:19-21

KJV

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8 (KJV)

⁸ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

One reason for the above list is to remind the student that sin is real and to help clarify sin. The sad note is that many today do not understand what sin is or they have become so desensitized to it that they fail to recognize it.

What Sin Can Do And What It Does To A Person

One of the problems of sin is that people do not realize what it can and does to them. Much has been written about this subject and books have been published. One such study book is one by Wendell Winkler entitled "Studying Sin Seriously". What we are about to present can be found from many different sources including Brother Winkler's study book. What kind of affect does sin have on people? We shall address this question in this part of our lesson.

1. Sin separates mankind from God. Isaiah, the prophet, wrote the following inspired words, "***Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear***". Sin is offensive to God and, therefore, where sin is God cannot be. One of the reasons for Jesus coming to the earth and dying on the tree was to reconcile mankind to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

2. Sin is deceptive. The Hebrew writer said, "***Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end***" (Hebrews 3:12-14; emphasis B. W.). The following should help us to understand the meaning in this passage".

The Greek word ***apatáō, exapatáō*** is defined as...to deceive or entice" Judg. 14:15; Jer. 4:10; Genesis 3:10; Job 31:27). The chief sense in the New Testament is that of enticing to sin (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; Rom. 7:11). Eph. 5:6 warns against "deception and 1 Corinthians 3:18 refers to sinful "self-deception".

One of the points made in the above definition is "self-deception". Sin can cause a person to think that what sin he/she is committing is not wrong. People have a way of justifying their actions. In fact, some people have gone so far with this self-deception, they do not recognize sin any more. When one hears a person

say, "I know what I am doing" it will not be too far in the future that the person who made that statement will be doing the thing in a habitual way; it is evident that that person has deceived himself/herself. The apostle Paul said that people like we just mentioned have their "hearts seared with a hot iron" (1Timothy 4:2). Have you ever heard of someone having a hard heart? When sin sears the heart to the point that it does not bother a person when he/she sins or when someone is hurt by sin, that person has a hard heart. One of the most precious things a person possesses is the conscience. When it is seared, there is little or no hope. The Hebrew writer said, "**for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.**" (Hebrews 6:4-6) Christians must take care with their conscience. When the conscience is guided by God's Word, then the conscience will keep the Christian from doing wrong and from hurting other people. In the Book of Titus, it is described this way, "**Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled**" (Titus 1:15).

This Greek word (ἀπάρτη) is used only seven times in the New Testament including Hebrews three and they are Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19 in the parable of the sower. Paul used the same word in Ephesians 4:22 when he told the brethren at Ephesus to "**that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts**". Brother Paul also warned the church of Colosse of deceit, "**beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ**" (Colossians 2:8). He does not leave the brethren to wonder what he intended, he explained it so there would be no misunderstanding. When he wrote his inspired letter to the church at Thessalonica, he said,

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all

deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; emphasis B. W.).

Paul warns the church that there are people who refuse to know the truth, but because of the deceivableness (self-deception) they will not receive the truth (God's Word; John 17:17).

In 2 Peter, the apostle Peter said, ***“And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you”*** (2 Peter 2:13). Peter indicates that there were people who were deceiving the church and the deception came from people they trusted.

3. Sin will enslave. Jesus used words that would take help to misunderstand about how sin enslaves, ***“Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin”***. (John 8:34). Jesus said that the person who commits sin is a slave to it. The author is sure that there will be those who object to that statement, but it is the words of the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul said that when a person obeys or practices sin, that person is a slave to sin, ***“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness”*** (Romans 6:16-18).

The apostle Peter shows us that once a person who is freed from sin and goes back into that corruption, he/she is a slave to sin, ***“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire”*** (2 Peter 2:18-22; emphasis B. W.). Think of what brother Peter told us and the description of that situation of turning back to sin and corruption.

4. Sin will bring spiritual death. The word death includes the following meanings: separation, severance or disconnection, taking apart, partition. The Old Testament prophet said, "***The person who sins is the one who will die. A son will not suffer for his father's iniquity, and a father will not suffer for his son's iniquity; the righteous person will be judged according to his righteousness, and the wicked person according to his wickedness***" (Ezekiel 18:20; Net Bible). About the things stated in this verse, one thing must be considered: Sin is an individual matter. Each person is about to understand what they are doing that commits sin. People do not inherit sin; it is when a person violates God's directives is when sin is committed (1 John 3:4). No one can blame someone else for their condition of being a slave to sin. A person chooses to follow God's instruction or they decide to serve sin and its master (Satan; Romans 6:16-18).

Questions

1. What is sin?
2. How would you say sin affects people?
3. What does it mean that sin can sear the heart?
4. Are you able to name some specific sins that are mentioned in the Scriptures?
5. What does Ezekiel state about sin?
6. What does Romans six mean when it states that sin enslaves?
7. How does sin sear the heart?
8. How many times is the word deceptive deceit used in the New Testament?