

## Sin and Forgiveness

Why do we need Jesus? The reason is found within our own hearts.

The scriptures say the human heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (**Jeremiah 17:9**).

At first that seems overly harsh. I'm a pretty good person, right? But if we take an honest look at ourselves, we have to acknowledge the evil lurking in our heart.

Again, if we look at humanity as a whole, it becomes clearer. War, oppression, torture, crime, human trafficking, genocide, And that's just in one day's headlines.

"The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact." — Malcom Muggeridge, British journalist and caustic social critic

"Sin" is defined as an offense or a transgression of a moral code. To transgress is to "cross the line."

Every culture has a generally uniform set of actions that are considered wrong or unethical. Each of us has our own personal version, too.

Murder, stealing, adultery, incest, lying, injustice all have social implications as well as moral ones. Other sins are internal and subjective - pride, racism, selfishness, lust, impatience, dissatisfaction, cowardice and hate, etc.

Most cultures also have a category of forbidden blasphemies against their beliefs - taboos and violations of ritual commands.

Sin sometimes hurts others, but it always is an offense toward God.

The Bible contains the "Thou shalt nots" of the Ten Commandments as well as 613 additional ritual commandments that Jews were required to follow.

Jesus redefined all these moral codes by emphasizing that even unseen mental actions would be counted as sinful actions by God. Even if we "behave" He left no way for us to insist we are sin-free.

The New Testament Greek word for sin "*hamartia*" means "to miss the mark" - like an arrow flying off course from the target.

When we become aware of our sins, it usually generates an internal feeling of anxiety and guilt. People deal with this in different ways - we rationalize it away, blame others, deaden the feeling with drugs, claim we're a victim, subconsciously punish ourselves, or just try to ignore it. We may also try to hide or offset our guilt by covering it over with "good" acts of kindness or generosity.

If our sins become publicly known, we also usually feel shame on top of the guilt.

Where does all this come from?

The Bible explains our root moral dilemma with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. In **Genesis 3**, God tells them that if they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will surely die. The first "sin" is explained as a result of the serpent's lie about what God had actually commanded and then his casting doubt about God's motives, combined with the desire of Eve's own senses.

Eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the first "sin" and the primordial root of all future human sins.

There are numberless explanations of what the fruit of the tree actually was, but the sin was in the eating of it. It resulted in the human ability to judge good and evil for ourselves rather than as it is determined by God.

Now, when we confront society's standards of good and evil, we simply "judge good and evil" for ourselves, choosing to obey what we think are useful or do-able rules and to ignore or disobey those we don't like or think we can't accomplish (or think we can get away with).

We can't live up to even our own standards, so we accumulate a lifetime of growing anxiety and a load of guilt and increasing misery.

Jesus came to free us of that guilt by taking away the actual blame for sin and absorbing it onto Himself.

This is why forgiveness is such a powerful concept.

God is both merciful and just. His mercy is offered to us as forgiveness. But His justice demanded death as a result of sin. So He sent His own Son - Jesus - as a sacrifice on the cross, to take all sin as well as the just punishment for sin on Himself.

God solved the dilemma of sin for us.

**1 Peter 2:24** - "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

In the New Testament letter to the Romans, Paul says, "For the wages (result) of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (**Romans 6:23**).

If we receive God's gift of forgiveness, our condemnation is lifted.

When we leave our old life at the cross, God looks at us and sees only the sinless life of His Son.

**Romans 8:34** - "Who is there to condemn us? For Christ Jesus, who died, and more than that was raised to life, is at the right hand of God — and He is interceding for us."

**Romans 8:1** - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..."

The best part is that our own efforts don't help - it's a gift from God.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** - "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

The new life only requires that we trade in our old one.

**Galatians 2:20** - "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."