

CHAPTER 7 - SIN

Most of the rest of Bitesize Theology deals with Salvation and various aspects and benefits of Salvation. But the starting point for understanding Salvation is understanding Sin. How we perceive sin, and the impact that sin has had on humanity (and all of creation) is enormously important to grasping how God relates to man, and the steps He has taken to deal with this problem.

Modern secular society has no conception of sin, indeed finds the whole idea old-dated and foolish. People may still talk about sin, but they would usually think of it as a breach of accepted standards in society. They no longer think of it as an offence against God.

Unfortunately, many Christians have fallen into the same error. If there is no such thing as sin, then what does it mean to be saved? What are we saved from? Bad marriages? Low self-esteem? A job we don't like? Poor health? When put like this, it almost seems farcical. If that is all salvation does, it is no wonder people don't care about it. These are things we can generally sort out ourselves; we don't need saving from them.

What we need saving from is sin. Sin is "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7 KJV).

Salvation is infinitely more than having the unpleasant stuff in our lives removed, because sin is infinitely worse than most of us would like to believe. To really know and appreciate God's love and grace, we have to start with our sin and rebellion before our Creator. So, we can't afford to gloss over this chapter.

1. Define "sin."
 - 1.1. Sin – to break God's laws
 - 1.2. Sin – disobedience to God
 - 1.3. Sin - to fall short of the standard (perfection) which God has set for us (Rom 3:23)
 - 1.4. Sin - to act against your own conscience (Rom 14:22-23)
 - 1.5. Sin – a lack of moral perfection in something created perfect
 - 1.6. Transgression - to trespass outside the boundaries God has set (Heb 9:15)
 - 1.7. Iniquity – crookedness, moral distortion (Isa 53:6)
 - 1.8. Lawlessness – unrestrained by law (1 John 3:4)

- 1.9. Unrighteousness – being or doing wrong (1 John 5:17)
- 1.10. Omission of good – not doing right (Jam 4:17)

Webster's dictionary defines sin as "... voluntary departure... from a known rule... prescribed by God; any voluntary transgression of the divine law... Sin is either a positive act in which a known divine law is violated, or it is the voluntary neglect to obey a positive divine command..."

"The words which our Bibles translate as 'sin', in both Old and New Testaments, mean either failing to hit a target or reach a standard, or failing to obey authority. And the standard unreached, the target missed, the path abandoned, the law transgressed, the authority defied, are in each case God's. God, and His will, are the measure of sin... Sin is going contrary to God, retreating from God, turning one's back on God, defying God, ignoring God."¹

Sin includes guilt and pollution; the one expresses its relation to the justice, the other to the holiness of God. These two elements of sin are revealed in the conscience of every sinner.² This is important to understand. To come into right relationship with God, we need our guilt removed, or we will always want to hide from Him (see Gen 3:8-10, Rom 2:14-15, Heb 10:19-22). And we need our pollution removed also, or we will never be able to stand in His presence (see Isa 35:8 and Rev 21:22-27 & 22:14).

- 2. Peter Jeffery states, "Underlying all the actions of Jesus and all the teaching of the New Testament is the fact of human sin and the doctrine of the fall of man." What does the "fall of man" doctrine (or teaching) mean and find three scriptures that support this doctrine.

Adam and Eve were created perfect and without sin. They could choose obedience or disobedience. They chose to disobey, and sin entered into the world and into their relationship with God. Adam's nature was corrupted by sin, and he has passed that nature down to his descendents. Sin has now infected everything and everyone.

It is now impossible for a non-Christian to not sin. One day, in heaven it will be impossible to sin.

J.I. Packer says, "It may be fairly claimed that the Fall narrative gives the only convincing explanation of the perversity of human nature that the world has ever seen. Pascal said that the doctrine of

¹ J.I. Packer, *18 Words – The most important words you will ever know*

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol II*

*original sin seems an offense to reason, but once accepted it makes total sense of the entire human condition.*³

- 2.1. (Gen 3:16-19) To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
- 2.2. (Gen 6:5) The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
- 2.3. (Gen 8:21) ... for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth...
- 2.4. (1Kgs 8:46) "If they sin against you-for there is no one who does not sin...
- 2.5. (Ps 51:5) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 2.6. (Ps 143:2) Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.
- 2.7. (Eccl 8:11) Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.
- 2.8. (Eccl 9:3) ... Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.
- 2.9. (Jer 17:9) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
- 2.10. (Mark 7:20-23) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."
- 2.11. (John 3:19) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
- 2.12. (Ps 14:1-3) The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand,

³ JI Packer, *Concise Theology*

- who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.
- 2.13. (Rom 3:9-12) ... all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."
- 2.14. (Rom 3:23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- 2.15. (Rom 5:6) For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- 2.16. (Rom 5:12) Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-
- 2.17. (Rom 5:15-18) ... For if many died through one man's trespass ... ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ ... For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man... ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.
- 2.18. (Rom 5:19) For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
- 2.19. (Rom 6:16-21) Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.
- 2.20. (1Cor 15:21-22) For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

- 2.21. (Eph 2:1-3) And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
- 2.22. (1Tim 1:15) The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.
- 2.23. (Jas 1:13-15) Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (compare Gen 3:1-6).
- 2.24. (1John 1:8) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
3. It seems obvious that sin permeates all of society and every human being. In what ways does the presence of sin reveal itself in creation, in society and in you personally?

In creation

- 3.1. Earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, floods, natural disasters, famine, environmental problems (Rom 8:19-22)
- 3.2. Pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16)
- 3.3. Thorns, thistles and unproductive ground (Gen 3:17-19)
- 3.4. Disease (Gen 3:21)
- 3.5. Death (Gen 3:21)

In society

- 3.6. Violence (Gen 4:8)
- 3.7. Murder (Gen 4:8)
- 3.8. Addictions
- 3.9. Broken families
- 3.10. Dysfunctional families
- 3.10.1. Alcohol
- 3.10.2. Gambling
- 3.10.3. Violence
- 3.10.4. Neglect
- 3.11. Child abuse
- 3.12. Pornography
- 3.13. Greed
- 3.14. Wrong values
- 3.15. Extreme poverty

- 3.16. Homelessness
- 3.17. Wars
- 3.18. Religions and cults
- 3.19. Idolatry
- 3.20. Unbelief
- 3.21. Abortion, euthanasia
- 3.22. Mental illness
- 3.23. Loneliness

Personally

- 3.24. Strained relationships
- 3.25. Anger
- 3.26. Jealousy
- 3.27. Impurity
- 3.28. Favouritism
- 3.29. Legalism
- 3.30. Depression
- 3.31. Apathy
- 3.32. Complacency
- 3.33. Lust
- 3.34. Immorality
- 3.35. Gluttony
- 3.36. Laziness
- 3.37. Gossip
- 3.38. Bitterness

Unfortunately, one of the effects of sin is to make sin seem unimportant or not serious. We are prone to comparing ourselves with each other, and measuring our sin against other humans. When we do this, we can always find others that are worse than us, so we feel justified in thinking we are not really that bad. What we need to do instead, is to compare ourselves with a holy, pure and righteous God. Then we get to see ourselves as we really are.

There is a story that illustrates this. A woman was driving in the countryside with her little girl when they drove by a field that had a flock of lovely white sheep. "Mummy, look how clean and white those sheep are," her daughter exclaimed. And certainly, they looked pure white against the lush green backdrop of the field. But as they watched, snow began to fall. It fell until the whole field had a blanket of pure white snow over it. "Mummy, look how dirty the sheep look now," her daughter said. The pristine white background showed up all the dirt in a way that any other colour background could not.

It is the same with our sin. When we lay our sin against the not-so-white background of other sinful people, it will inevitably look white

and clean to us. It is only when measured against the pristine white background of God's perfect purity and holiness that our sin is revealed in the blackness and filth that truly characterises it.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of understanding the utter sinfulness of sin. It is the foundation of all that follows in our salvation. Every topic dealt with in Bitesize Theology through to the end of our study, from Atonement right through to Eternal Security, deals with the solution that God has provided to fix this problem for sinful humanity.

The grace of God in Atonement, Regeneration, Justification, and all the other things becomes really amazing when viewed through the lens of the blackness of our hearts, and the extreme hostility and enmity we had towards God by nature. His work in overcoming and renewing our dead hearts is nothing less than cause for awesome praise and adoration of Him.

CHAPTER 8 - ATONEMENT

Atonement means making amends, blotting out the offence, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship.⁴ ... to set things right.⁵ ... to give or do that whereby alienation ceases and reconciliation ensues.⁶ Atonement lays the foundation from which all the other blessings of God towards His people flow.

1. In pagan religious culture, people would make (and still do make) offerings and sacrifices to make atonement for their sin, to appease the gods and to make the gods propitious (favourably inclined) towards the person. In what ways does Atonement in the Bible differ from this?

Biblical Atonement is an act, initiated and carried out by God Himself, to deal with the offence of sin. It is an offering and sacrifice of God's own Son, given by God on behalf of people, according to God's own plan.

Pagan sacrifices for atonement are made over and over again, in the vain hope that they achieve the desired effect, but with no knowledge or certainty of whether they have worked, or how long they will be effective for. Human beings cannot atone for their own sins.

In fact, every religion other than Christianity is based on what man must do to get right with god (or the gods, or the universe). Christianity, in contrast, is based on what God has done to make man right with Himself.

Atonement is an act of "covering over" our sins. In the Old Testament, the priest would take the blood of a sacrificed lamb into the presence of God in the most Holy Place, and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat. This would then "cover over" the sins of the people, and God would withhold punishment from them. This needed to be done every year, without fail, on the Day of Atonement. This is no longer a requirement, because now our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, has taken His own blood into the presence of God, and covered over our sins permanently.

Biblical Atonement, once made, never needs to be made again. Jesus Christ's perfection qualified Him to make a permanent

⁴ JI Packer, *Concise Theology*

⁵ RC Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*

⁶ *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*

atonement, one that would never fail (see Heb 7:22-27). This atonement is claimed by faith by those who would place their trust in Him. It makes God propitious forever towards believers, and consequently we can rest confidently in the fact of the Atonement, knowing it never needs to be done again.

2. Read Lev 16:7-10. What does this passage teach us about how sin is dealt with in Christ?

The first animal was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat in the Holy Place inside the tent (Lev 16:15). This symbolised the requirement for death as the punishment for sin (Heb 9:22), and achieved atonement for the people (Lev 16:33-34).

The punishment for sin has now been served by Christ on the cross. The death penalty that we were under has been carried out on Jesus Christ instead of on us (see Mk 10:45, 2 Cor 5:21). This was foreshadowed by the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament (see Rom 3:23-26, Heb 7:26-27, Heb 9:6-8, Heb 9:16-23, Heb 10:1-4)

Sin is also removed from us by the scapegoat (see also Psa 103:12, Isa 53:11, Zech 3:9, John 1:29, 1 John 3:5). The priest laid hands on the head of the goat before sending it out into the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22), confessing the sins of the people and putting them on the head of the goat.

The symbolism in this act is (at least) four-fold. Firstly, it points to the truth of substitution – one taking on the sins of another. Laying hands on the head of the goat transfers sin from the guilty to the innocent, so that the innocent becomes a "sin-bearer." Secondly, it reveals the seriousness of sin, and the requirement for death as the only fitting punishment for sin. Thirdly, it points to the truth that sin is permanently and irreversibly put away from the guilty. The sin-bearer goes into the wilderness, never to return, carrying away sin forever. Fourthly, it tells us that when these requirements have been met that we then can have confidence to enter into the presence of God.

The scapegoat ceremony displayed publicly what had been achieved by the sacrifice of the first goat and the sprinkling of its blood on the mercy-seat.

No longer is this ceremony required. For Jesus Christ has achieved permanently what could never be achieved by the sacrifice of animals (Heb 9:11-17, Heb 9:23-28, Heb 10:11-14).

3. Scripture tells us that the death of Jesus on a cross was not an accident, but was part of the plan that God Himself initiated. How should this affect your view of God and your relationship with Him?

RC Sproul makes the point that "While the Father's wrath is real, it should be noted that the atonement Christ made was not a case of the Son working against the Father's will. It is not as if Christ were snatching His people out of the Father's hand. The Son did not persuade the Father to save those whom the Father was loathe to save. On the contrary, both Father and Son willed the salvation of the elect and worked together to bring it to pass."⁷

It also tells us that God is in control. The cross was not a ghastly mistake, forced on God by an out of control humanity, but part of a calculated plan to deal perfectly with the infinite ugliness of sin being confronted by the infinite justice of God, and filtered through the infinite love of God.

Since God had planned this from before creation, and since God is omniscient and omnipotent, we can have absolute assurance in His plan for us. He needed no "Plan B" because His "Plan A" is unfailingly effective. This is cause for much confidence and trust in God, and much rejoicing that He has chosen us.

We can be secure in the thought and knowledge that He knew us and chose us before creation to be saved (Eph 1:4-6). If we meditate on this truth, we will be stirred to want to know Him more, to love Him more, to worship Him more, and to be eternally thankful. It is an awe-inspiring thought.

We need have no fear of the Father and His love for us, nor should we have any leanings toward the Son in favour of the Father (or the Holy Spirit, for that matter). All are fitting recipients of our love and devotion, and all deserve it in equal and infinite measure.

*We now have confidence to draw near to God.
(Heb 10:19-22) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

⁷ RC Sproul again, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*

One of the paradoxes of Christianity is that the knowledge of our sinfulness before God, and the Knowledge of His grace towards us, is profoundly humbling, yet incredibly exhilarating at the same time. Strange how we can feel so bad about ourselves, but so encouraged and excited even while weeping over our sin. This also is part of God's plan. Acknowledging our unworthiness before Him, and rejoicing in His love for us and His salvation brings Him glory like nothing else. I know of nothing else that so takes away from man any opportunity for boasting, and magnifies totally God's justice and God's graciousness.

What then should be the ultimate outcome of these astonishing truths? Unbounded praise and adoration of the Lord. It should cause our hearts to soar with love and awe of the living God, the One who spared nothing to achieve our salvation and reconciliation to Him.