

Sin



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 14:12–14, Matt. 23:23, 25:45, Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.*

Memory Text: “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (*Romans 5:18, NIV*).

The solid optimism of former generations that everything in the world will get better and better no longer rings true today. Even after the cold war, the world is far from being a safe place. The threat of terrorism has made us all feel extremely vulnerable. Science, which was supposed to be the harbinger of a better world, now threatens to wreak havoc on that world. The common sources of energy are being depleted. The icecaps are melting. Crime is a sad fact of life everywhere. Human beings show little, if any, signs of moral improvement over past generations. The gap between rich and poor constantly is widening. Our daily installment of news almost invariably tells us about atrocities and moral decay. No wonder someone once said that the Christian teaching of human sinfulness is one teaching that is easily verifiable. That is, that's one doctrine we don't need to take on faith.

Yet, as bad as sin is, it's not the end of the story. Sure, sin is real, but so is divine grace.

The Week at a Glance: Sin, and the results of sin, are a painful reality in human life. Thank God for Jesus, who has made a way of escape for us all.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.*

Sin Is Rebellion

What is the essence of sin? How does the Bible define it? First John 3:4 (*NIV*) states, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” The New Living Translation reads, “Sin opposes the law,” while the traditional KJV rendering defines sin as “transgression of the law.” But it is not just any law that humanity has broken—it is God’s law. Humans have rebelled against their Maker, pretending that they themselves are the measure of all things rather than in humble trust submitting to the wisdom and love of God.

What do the following Bible passages reveal about the essence of sin? *Gen. 3:1–7, Isa. 14:12–14, Rev. 12:7–9.*

Why did God punish Adam and Eve for what seemed to be an insignificant matter? It may have seemed unimportant, but there was a crucial principle involved. “There was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself, and the sin was not merely in yielding to appetite. It was distrust of God’s goodness, disbelief of His word, and rejection of His authority, that made our first parents transgressors, and that brought into the world a knowledge of evil. It was this that opened the door to every species of falsehood and error.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 25.

What will be a major characteristic of God’s people in the time of the end? *Rev. 14:12.* How does the issue of obedience come into play here?

God has done for us all that infinite love could. In return He asks of us love and obedience. In a time in which the world is plagued by rampant lawlessness and a relativistic philosophy—which claims that good and evil depend simply on cultural circumstances and communal and personal preferences—there must and will be a people who will staunchly defend God’s standard of holiness, the Ten Commandments.

We tend to think of rebellion as an outright attack and rejection of authority. Yet, it can come in much more subtle forms. How could you tell if, perhaps, you yourself are harboring some rebellious attitudes toward God?

Missing the Mark

The seriousness of sin is often played down. “Ah, we cannot all be perfect!” people say. But sin is serious business. “The full seriousness of sin can only become apparent when we have understood the full potentialities of human existence as created in the image of God.” —John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 238.

Sin does not only have to do with wrongfully committed acts. It also includes the desire and the fantasizing about things that we know are wrong (*Matt. 5:28*).

What have you fantasized about in the past 24 hours? Would you be ashamed to have those thoughts made public? What should your answer tell you about where your heart is? *See Rom. 8:6.*

There also is a category of sin that usually is referred to as “sins of omission.” This refers to the willful neglect of duty, the conscious refusal to do something one knows ought to be done.

In Matthew 23:23 and Matthew 25:45 we find statements made by Jesus that deal with sins of omission. Read these verses in their context. What are the implications of these statements?

Also in chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel, we find the parable of the talents (*vss. 14–28*). What happened to the servant who had hidden his one talent? What is the significance of this for our discussion?

We all have been given certain talents. It is part of the concept of stewardship that we utilize our talents to the full. We must answer to God for what we fail to do with what He has given us. Let us remember the words of the apostle Peter: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (*1 Pet. 4:10, NIV*).

Sins of omission, sins of thought—who hasn’t been guilty of them all? Dwell on the promise of forgiveness that we can have in Jesus. Why should this mean so much to us?

“Original” Sin

Theologians often distinguish between the sinful acts that we commit and the *sinful nature* that we possess. We all have been corrupted by Adam’s fall; we all are deemed sinners even before we sin. The widespread rite of infant baptism is linked closely with the acknowledgment of this belief. The idea is that a newborn child who dies without having been baptized will be lost eternally because the child is a sinner, and if this sinfulness is not somehow taken care of, the child loses eternal life.

There is no scriptural support for this practice, nor for the idea that a child who dies is automatically condemned to destruction. Now, it is true that the “original” sin of Adam and Eve has had all-pervasive consequences that impact everyone. Sin entered the world through one person, and through this sin death came to “all men” (*Rom. 5:12, NIV*).

How does the apostle Paul describe the powerful tendencies toward sinful behavior with which all of us are born? *Rom. 8:7, 8; 7:21–24*. **How** have you experienced the reality of these tendencies in your own life?

Through the ages some Christians have declared that they achieved a state of perfection. Yet, those who claim perfection delude themselves. It is contrary to the clear words of Scripture. Quoting Psalm 106:6, Paul stated, “‘There is no one righteous, not even one!’” (*Rom. 3:10, NIV*). His fellow apostle John is just as adamant: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves” (*1 John 1:8, NIV*).

“Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, or a day. It is a continual growth in grace. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. Satan lives, and is active, and every day we need to earnestly cry to God for help and strength to resist him. As long as Satan reigns we shall have self to subdue, besetments to overcome, and there is no stopping place. There is no point to which we can come and say we have fully attained.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

Suppose you reached a point where you truly had victory over sin; that is, you weren’t committing any known sin. More so, you were always kind, loving, generous, and living in accordance with all the light you had. Suppose you “perfectly” reflected the character of Jesus. Why, though, would you still need a Savior whose righteousness alone can allow you to stand with “no condemnation” (*Rom. 8:1*) before God?

Corporate Versus Personal Sin?

Ever since the Fall, the world has been tainted by sin. The results of sin are visible in nature. They are visible also in wars, in the evil of slavery and other forms of exploitation, and also in the ways in which we ravage natural resources. The world of the past and of the present is full of materialism, egotism, injustice, and perversion.

These facts raise many difficult questions. Foremost among these is whether we as individuals carry any responsibility for these things and if we should assume any guilt for this corporate state of sinfulness. The following considerations may help us to deal with this dilemma.

1. Consider how corporate wrongs in our world may be seen against the background of the great controversy. “Behind the rise and fall of nations and the play and counterplay of human interests lies the unseen struggle between the Godhead, together with the host of loyal angels, and Satan with his hosts of fallen angels—a struggle that directly impacts all human activity.”—Frank Holbrook, “The Great Controversy,” in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 995.

2. Consider the totally destructive nature of sin. Sin wants to destroy everything that has any value. Sin and death are synonymous, and they are everywhere. There is, therefore, no hope for this world without divine intervention, because the powers of sin and death far exceed our human abilities to deal with them.

3. But also consider that we all have some influence. We can all make small decisions that at times may increase or diminish, however slightly, the evil in this world. We can work for peace and justice. We can do acts of compassion. We can choose to cooperate with all who want to protect the environment. What do such passages as Ecclesiastes 9:10, Luke 16:10, and Philippians 4:8, 9 contribute to our understanding of this issue?

It’s so easy just to throw your arms up in despair and say, “The problems are too great. What can little, old me do to help?” Nevertheless, how should the example of Jesus and the good He did healing the sick and comforting the poor (which, considering all the sick and the poor in the world at that time, was comparatively small) influence our decisions to try to make the world a better place?

The Only Solution for the Sin Problem

There is no easy or cheap solution to the sin problem. Sin cannot be overcome by human determination and perseverance. Sin is larger than we are. The solution must therefore also supersede our possibilities. There is a lot of confusion among people about the issue of salvation. Many claim there are many different roads to the kingdom. The roads differ, they say, but they all lead to the same destination. But they are wrong.

What is the clear testimony of Scripture regarding the one and only road toward salvation? *John 10:7, 14:6, Acts 4:12.*

We do not know who will enter through the gates of the kingdom. Thank God, that decision is in the hands of the One to whom judgment has been given, the One who is love and justice personified. But we do know one thing: Those who receive eternal life do so only because Christ died for them. Some may never have had the privilege of learning about their Savior. But that takes nothing away from the fact that if they are saved it will be through the name of Christ, even if they have never themselves heard that name.

Why was Jesus the only One who could save fallen humanity? *Phil. 2:6–8, Heb. 1:1–5, Rev. 5:9–12.*

“The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God’s perfect law. . . . Upon Christ no requirements were laid. He had power to lay down His life, and to take it again. No obligation was laid upon Him to undertake the work of atonement. It was a voluntary sacrifice that He made. His life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition.

“The Son of God was in the form of God, and He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. He was the only one, who as a man walked the earth, who could say to all men, Who of you convinceth me of sin? He had united with the Father in the creation of man, and He had power through His own divine perfection of character to atone for man’s sin, and to elevate him, and bring him back to his first estate.”
—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 24.

Think of just how bad sin must be that it cost so much, the death of Jesus Himself, in order to atone for it. How can keeping this amazing truth before you help you in your own struggle with sin?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Satan,” “The Fall of Man,” and “The Plan of Salvation,” pp. 145–153, in *Early Writings*. These three short chapters are about the origin of sin in heaven and on earth and about the first revelation of the plan of salvation.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the world is not going to get better but worse—much worse, in fact. The question is, How are we to relate to the world’s problems? Do we just shrug them off, saying, “Well, God said that things were going to be bad, and they are, so what can we do about them?” Or do we get so involved in trying to solve the world’s problems that we forget our calling to point people to the only solution: that is, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and is coming back? How do we strike the right balance?
- ② Should our church be clearer in its condemnation of the corporate evils in this world? Or would this have little impact and only detract from the commission to take the gospel to every individual? At the same time, if we keep quiet about many of these big issues, where is our moral credibility?
- ③ Of all the horrible effects of sin, death has to be the worst. Absolutely nothing we as humans can do can reverse it. Sin has had such devastating effects that only the supernatural intervention of God can solve it. What should that tell us about how important it is that we strive against sin with all our God-given strength?
- ④ As Seventh-day Adventists, central to our understanding of the whole question of sin and evil is the great controversy scenario, the idea that onlooking intelligences from other worlds are watching what is happening here and seeing how God will deal with sin and its consequences. Imagine being a sinless being from another part of the universe who has seen what sin has done to us. What would they see? What would they be thinking? What lessons might they be learning from what they see us going through here? Imagine how incomprehensible and irrational some of our actions must seem to them.

Summary: Sin has infected all spheres of life. We are faced with the reality of something that far exceeds our ability to deal with. But it does not exceed the power and the love of God. He has decisively dealt with the sin problem in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Ministry on the River Bank

by DANIEL JIAO

Brother Chen is 92 years old and a retired piano tuner. But he's not retired from God's work. A few years ago he and his wife moved to her hometown in China. There they began sharing their faith with their neighbors, and a few people started coming to their home to worship on Sabbath, in spite of the government's warning that this was illegal.

Brother Chen spent his own money to print some tracts and pamphlets. Every day he sits on a stool on the walkway beside the river that runs through his town. He chats with people who pass by and gives those who seem interested a tract or a pamphlet. If the person responds to the literature or to Brother Chen's testimony, he invites them to his small apartment on Sabbath to worship.

Mae had seen Brother Chen sitting beside the river every day. One day she stopped to talk to him and soon learned that he was a Christian, and she wanted to know more. After several conversations, she accepted Chen's invitation to visit his house group, and eventually she was baptized.

Another couple met him at the river and began listening to his testimony. They were moved by God's love, and soon they too were baptized. Eventually this couple became Global Mission pioneers. Today they are helping to establish the church that meets in the Chens' home.

When the little group grew too large for the tiny apartment Chen and his wife were renting, Brother Chen found a larger apartment, one that would seat 50 people. He wanted to buy it, but all he had was the money he had saved for his funeral. He stepped out in faith and bought the apartment.

Chen's money was not enough to pay for the apartment, so a business friend responded by paying a large sum toward the apartment, and a newly baptized couple sold a family heirloom and donated the money to purchase the apartment-church. Together the believers were able to pay for the apartment. Brother Chen, concerned that upon his death the apartment would be taken from the church, registered the apartment in the church's name instead of his own.

Currently some twenty people worship in the apartment-church each week. And Brother Chen still sits on a chair on the riverside ready with a smile and a tract and a few words about his friend Jesus. And the Global Mission pioneers who work with him follow up on interests Brother Chen meets during his riverside outreach.

DANIEL JIAO is a director of Chinese Ministry in Southwest China.

20 QUESTIONS GOD wants to ask YOU

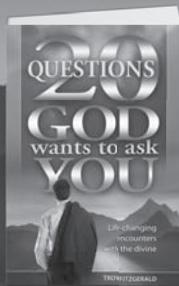
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