

# 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.*

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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?

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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?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 5:18*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** That sin is a painful reality inherent in our nature.

**Feel:** The freedom from sin available exclusively through Jesus.

**Do:** Accept the divine grace God has offered us.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

### I. The Reality of Sin (*Rom. 7:21–24*)

**A** Sin has pervaded our world so much so that it has become part of our nature. It is an everyday struggle to eschew our sinful tendencies and reflect Christ. What can we do to overcome these inclinations?

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**B** It is so easy to slip into sin. Scripture refers to different types of sin: lawlessness, rebellion, sin of thought, sin of omission. To avoid these traps, we must understand the dangers they pose to us. What are the differences between these sins? How do we, sometimes inadvertently, commit them?

### II. Freedom From Sin (*Acts 4:12*)

**A** Just as sin came into this world from the actions of one man, God provided an escape through one Man, His Son. Why is Jesus the only escape from the sin problem?

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**B** How does your realization of the enormity of this gift affect the choices you make?

### III. Refuge in Christ (*John 3:16*)

The way God has dealt with sin entering this world reveals much about His character. His divine knowledge, love, and infinite grace are evident in His actions. He has done so much for us. What can we, in turn, do to accept His gift of grace more fully into our lives?

▶ **Summary:** In a terrible, sin-ridden world, God in His mercy offers us a way out through Jesus. Accept this gift and live accordingly.

## 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?

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Sin affects all of us. Getting rid of it is bigger than our problem-solving skills can handle. Fortunately, a solution has been provided in Jesus Christ—God’s Son.

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity illustrates just how helpless we are to fix the sin problem. Plan to do an actual demonstration if you can.

Even someone with the most rudimentary knowledge of the laws of physics safely could predict what would happen when a dish towel is placed in a jar full of water. Eventually, the water would soak through the dish towel.

What then happens when food coloring is added to the water? The dish towel soaks up the coloring, of course, and changes color.

Simple and straightforward as this demonstration may seem, it yields a rather profound insight: our spiritual lives have a bit more in common with that dish towel than might be expected. As long as we exist on this planet, we will be affected by sin. Sin will be in our natures, and its destructive effects will be all around us. And unlike the saturation of the dish towel in the jar of water, the degree to which sin’s invasive and pernicious effects will harm us is not something we safely can predict.

So, how can we get the dish towel white again? Perhaps the only way to clean it would be with some bleach. Likewise, accepting Jesus as our Savior and receiving the power in His blood is the only solution to our sin problem.

**Consider This:** How do the jar of water and the dish towel help to demonstrate just how vulnerable we are to sin? In what ways does Jesus’ blood serve as a spiritual *bleaching agent* to help us, “though our sins be as scarlet,” to be “white as snow” again?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## Bible Commentary

**I. Father Knows Best** (*Review Genesis 3:1–7 with your class.*)

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## “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. 7:21–24; 8:7, 8*. **How** have you experienced the reality of these tendencies in your own life?

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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?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

Why did the simple act of eating a piece of fruit bring such dire consequences to all humankind? How did such a small, trivial act constitute a great sin? After all, wasn't Eve, in eating the fruit, giving nourishment to her brain and nerve cells? Wasn't she making good blood? What made the vitamin C and the fiber in this fruit so lethal to body and soul?

Sin is deadly. When we willfully engage in any sin, from the most innocuous act to the vilest, we are, in essence, telling God that we know better than He does. Sin is the equivalent of telling God He deserves no supremacy in our lives. The true horror of sin is trusting in our own wisdom.

**Consider This:** Compare the attitude of trusting in our wisdom to Satan's attitude found in Isaiah 14:12–14. What are the similarities?

## II. Inside Out *(Review Matthew 5:28 with your class.)*

The power of thought distinguishes human beings from the rest of the animal world. But all too often Satan perverts this most powerful gift and uses it for our destruction and to alienate us further from God.

Jesus knew that sin begins in the thoughts, which is why He warned us, in Matthew 5:28, to guard the mind. Our thoughts, whether positive or negative, have a powerful impact on our bodies and eventually lead to action (*see Matt. 15:19*). James 4:8 also advises us to guard our thoughts. David must have struggled with this problem, as well, as we see in Psalm 19:14. David pleads with God for help to keep his thoughts pure. It is a prayer that all of us should pray daily. Think about it. Wrong deeds, wrong words, wrong actions all begin with wrong thoughts. Keep the thoughts right, and the words, deeds, and actions will be, as well.

**Consider This:** Read David's plea again in Psalm 19:14. Why is it such a struggle to keep the thoughts pure? Why is it necessary to do so? What hope is there for us if we fail?

## III. The Battle of Good and Evil *(Review Romans 7:18–25 with your class.)*

Most of us are familiar with the timeworn expression that the apple does not fall far from the tree. We use it to mean that children often will make the same choices their parents make, whether good or bad, simply because of the genes that they have inherited. Likewise, because we have inherited a sinful nature from Adam, we are in constant battle with our fallen natures.

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## 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 power of sin and death far exceeds 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?**



*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

Along with this legacy from our first parents, we inherit a genetic legacy from our biological parents: traits such as eye color, hair color, height, and smile that define our faces and forms. Unfortunately, our birth parents also gave us many other traits that we all too often wish they hadn't: a predisposition to overeat, to get impatient, to flare up easily, or to be oversensitive. We even may joke that our poor character traits are a result of the "bad blood" on one side of the family tree or the other. But there's more truth to this statement than we might think. It is our blood that carries the genetic material that makes us who we are.

Fortunately, this fact is good news when we recall that from our heavenly Parent we receive, by faith, the potent gift of the blood of Jesus. Read in Romans 7:18–21 how the apostle Paul describes the efficacy of Jesus' blood in the warfare with our fallen natures. Jesus helps us to put to death our sinful natures. He renews a right spirit within us. His blood cleanses us from all sin. And what is more, it delivers us from the stranglehold of sin in our lives. Victory over self is more than possible by accepting the power in Jesus' blood. (*See also vss. 24 and 25.*)

**Consider This:** How does the power in Jesus' blood, as Paul says in Romans 7:18–25, give us victory over our genetic and cultivated tendencies toward evil? What must we surrender to Jesus in order for this victory to be possible in our lives?

► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

- 1 Discuss the difference between our sinful natures and the sinful acts we do. Why do we still have sinful natures even when we are not sinning but doing right?
- 2 There are sins of commission (doing things that we should not) and sins of omission (not doing things we know we should). Why is it not enough to refrain from wrongdoing? Why must we embrace rightdoing, also?

**Application Questions:**

- 1 Read Matthew 23:23. Use a cross-reference Bible to do a study on three words: *judgment*, *mercy*, and *faith*. Jesus used these three words when He told the Pharisees that they had omitted those things. What do you learn

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## 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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

about these three attributes from your study? After completing your study, write at least one example of how the attributes of judgment, mercy, and faith can be displayed in your life.

**2** What does the Bible mean by talents? Review Matthew 25:14–30. What does the Bible teach about the number of talents each person has? Why is it so important to develop our God-given talents and abilities?

**Questions for Witnessing:**

**1** Suppose you are out running errands. You are approached by someone who says that he is collecting donations to protect an endangered species or to preserve a wilderness or forest. What is the Christian’s duty toward preserving the environment and the wildlife of our planet? How involved should Christians become in these “movements”? What are the ways in which Christians, in good conscience, can take care of our planet?

**2** A friend tells you that he or she has not knowingly done anything wrong and therefore has not sinned. What texts could you use to show her that we all need a Savior?

**► STEP 4—Apply****Try This:**

**1** Find the song “Trust and Obey,” number 590, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. Prayerfully read over the words, asking God to help you truly to trust Him. Then sing or hum it whenever you get a chance. If you don’t have a hymnal, you can find it on [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org) and learn it there.

**2** The effects of sin are all around us—sickness, suffering, death. Find one or two things that you can do to help alleviate any negative effect in someone or in the environment. For example, you could plant flowers in a common area that is looking drab. Or send a note to someone who is suffering from depression or loneliness.

**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 through His Son, Jesus Christ.