



LESSON EIGHT: SIN

FACILITATOR NOTE

This class covers an enormous topic and will involve a lot of jumping through Scripture. In attempting to be comprehensive in this discussion we cannot really do justice to any one aspect of sin. Feel free to study additional or different verses on sin with your class if the discussion takes a useful detour from this outline. These notes are a suggested guide to keep the discussion on course. Feel free to adapt either in advance or in class if you think that it would be fruitful to the discussion. Your feedback is welcomed.

PRAYER

Spend time in prayer with the class. Allow for requests and center your prayer on this lesson.

FOCUS

"The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is.

Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this.

In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner." –Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

Memory Verse: So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
(James 4:17 ESV)

- Our family believes the Bible teaches that all people...
 - Are separated from God through sin (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:21)
 - Are without hope apart from God's saving grace through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Romans 3:23)



LESSON

As we begin this study, some of you might be asking, "Why do we need to study sin? I come to church and this class to be lifted up and encouraged, not to be torn down and made to feel guilty." This is why we need to study sin...

1. The Bible discusses sin at length (its nature and consequences). In fact, there are some **700** Bible verses in which the word "sin" or a similar word appears! If God thinks the topic of sin is this important, then we need to study understand it.
2. We are often too casual about sin, especially in our own lives. We tend to minimize and excuse our sin ("I didn't mean to."), which can eventually lead to failing to recognize it.
3. We will not fully appreciate what Jesus' sacrifice on the cross unless we recognize how bad sin is and how bad off we were.

THINK OF IT THIS WAY: If you went to the doctor and were diagnosed with cancer, you would not accuse the doctor of "tearing you down" or being negative. As bad as the news is, it is critical information that you need in order to get the treatment you require. Sin is a disease and we all have it. It is serious and deadly! Rather than deny it or ignore it we need to understand it and seek the proper treatment: JESUS.

I. WE ARE SEPARATED FROM GOD THROUGH SIN

A. What is sin? [Allow the class to offer their answers]

1. A break in relationship/fellowship with God. Sinful thoughts, words, motives, and actions are rooted in our *sinful state* of estrangement from God. (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:21)
2. **Biblical descriptions:**
 - a) Disobedience – Genesis 3
 - b) To go astray, sin unintentionally – Numbers 15:28.
 - c) Transgression, to step over the line, out of bounds – Psalm 32:1.
 - d) Iniquity, a perversion or distortion – Psalm 32:2.
 - e) Deceit, fraud – Psalm 32:2.
 - f) Rebellion – Exodus 32-34; Jeremiah 33:7-9; Hebrews 3:14-16
 - g) Lawlessness/Transgression – 1 John 3:4-5
 - h) Missing the mark – *hamartia*, Psalm 32:1 and Romans 3:23, fall short of the glory of God.
 - i) Anything that does not come from faith – Romans 14:23
 - j) Not doing the good/right thing we should be doing – the "sin of omission", James 4:17
 - (1) Sin includes both commission – in which we do what we should not have done; and omission – where we do not do what we should.



B. What are the consequences of sin?

1. **A break in fellowship with God.** Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with God. Their sin broke that fellowship and they could never return to that state of innocence (Genesis 3). For us, as believers, our fellowship is broken and must be restored through confession of sin (1 John 1:9).
2. **Guilt and Shame.** Adam and Eve hid from God. When we sin, God's hand remains heavy on us, convicting us of sin - John 16:8; Psalm 32:3-4. Guilt can be a "canary in the coal mine" to warn us and protect us from further sin. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-10
3. **Death.** Both *physical* and *spiritual* – Genesis 3:3, 19; Romans 5:12. Spiritual death beyond this life means judgment and an eternity separated from God in hell – Matthew 5:22; Luke 16:23; John 3:36.
4. **Increased pain in childbirth.** Genesis 3:16.
5. **Increased difficulty in work.** Genesis 3:17-19. Remember, work in and of itself is not part of the curse. Instead, the consequence is how hard it would be.
6. **Discipline from the Lord.** Hebrews 12:4-8.
7. **Earthly consequences.** Natural disasters, financial difficulty, disease, psychological problems, loss of job, jail time, etc. We may be forgiven by the Lord but the earth still reaps the consequences of sin. Read Romans 8:18-23

C. Can't we simply choose NOT to sin?

1. Read Romans 7:14-25
2. We need grace and the Spirit because we are unable to resist sin on our own. Why? It is in our nature to sin. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

D. Are there degrees of sin?

1. Many people teach the concept that "all sins are equal in the sight of God." Is this true?
2. While the result or consequences of all sin is the same (separation from God), not all sins are equal in nature nor in their results.
 - a) Proverbs 6:16-19
 - (1) Why do you suppose these sins are particularly infuriating to God?
 - (2) Read Matthew 18:6-7
 - b) 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
 - (1) Why is this sin any different from all the others?

E. How do we recognize sin?

1. Galatians 5:19-21
2. **[Note to facilitators]** Ask the class to discuss which of the sins listed in this passage are most prevalent in modern times, or even condoned by our society. Other questions (if you have time) might include:



- a) Compare what Scripture considers sexual immorality with the modern attitudes of society.
- b) Discuss the difference between rightful ambition (Romans 15:20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11) and selfish ambition.
- c) Notice that both the Galatians list and the Proverbs list include stirring up conflict as an act of a sinful nature. Can anyone give examples of this particular sin, in churches, families, the workplace, or society at large?
- d) Sexual behavior of some sort is mentioned 4 different times in this passage (sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, orgies). It has been said more than once that the strongest weapon in Satan's arsenal is sexual temptation. Do you agree or disagree?
- e) What do hatred, jealousy, envy, dissensions, and selfish ambition all have in common? [**Short answer:** they all involve putting self first]

F. What is Satan's Role in sin? – Genesis 3:1-5

1. Temptation
2. Deception about the sin and its consequences. He uses truth to mask untruth.
3. One thing that Satan cannot do is *make* us sin

G. How do we face sin?

1. God, through the Spirit, empowers us to resist temptation
 - a) 1 Peter 5: 8-9
 - b) James 4:7
2. And if we fail?
 - a) 1 John 1:8-10 – Confess
 - b) 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 – Repent
 - (1) The Greek term for repentance is *metanoia*, meaning to change one's mind or way of thinking.
 - (2) **Discussion:** Why is changing our minds so important in getting right with God?

H. What is the Unforgivable Sin?

1. Matthew 12:22-37
2. What makes this sin unforgivable?
 - a) Accusing God of evil
 - b) Discrediting a presentation of divine power
 - c) Willful hardening of the heart
 - d) One preacher described it as "spitting in God's face"
 - e) **Discussion:** Some say that today it is impossible to commit this sin because Jesus is not with us in the flesh. Do you agree? Why or why not?



II. WE ARE WITHOUT HOPE APART FROM GOD'S SAVING GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

A. We're not really "that bad" are we?

1. You might be thinking right now, "I'm not really that bad, am I? I mean, it's not like I've ever killed anybody. I don't cheat on my taxes, don't kick my dog, I attend church, etc. I'm a good guy!"
2. This is how we tend to minimize, excuse, or overlook our sin. We do this sometimes by comparing ourselves to others so that our sins appear minor and even "less sinful". We can always find someone who is a "bigger sinner" than we are. When we do this we are playing games with God and fooling ourselves.
3. Of course, not everyone is the same and some sins are worse than others (not in consequence, but in nature). We are not all mass murderers, or child molesters, or.... Not everyone is like Hitler and Stalin who were responsible for the deaths of millions of people.
4. **CONSIDER THIS:** We are not as bad as we could be, but we are as bad off as we should be.
 - a) Read Romans 3:23; Acts 4:12
 - b) All means all. The best person you can think of (Mother Theresa, Billy Graham) is still a sinner in need of a Savior.
5. Don't compare yourself to Hitler or Mother Teresa – compare yourself to Jesus. He did not sin; we do, PERIOD.
 - a) The world record in the long jump is 29 feet, 4.25 inches held by Mike Powell. Imagine challenging Mike to a contest in the long jump but here's the deal: you are both going to try to jump across the Grand Canyon. Will Mike jump farther than you? Absolutely. Will either of you come close to jumping across the canyon? Not hardly. You will both end up at the bottom. Are some people better than others in what they do and how they live? Sure. Is anyone perfect and sinless like Jesus Christ? Not hardly.
6. **Remember:** We are not as bad as we could be, but we are as bad off as we should be. We are sinners, we cannot save ourselves; we cannot be good enough and we do not deserve heaven. We need a Savior!

REFLECTION

- How do we trivialize sin?
- What do you think are the most common rationalizations for sin?
- Are we more tolerant or dismissive of some sins than others? Do we discriminate?

PRAYER

NEXT WEEK: GRACE