

SIN ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

We continue our study of Chapter 6 of *Biblical Doctrine* which covers both *Man and Sin*.

For the last few studies, we have been looking at the *Consequences of the Fall*, the results of sin. This evening we begin looking at some *Sin Issues* (pp. 468-472 in *Biblical Doctrine*). Such issues include:

1. *Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?*
2. *The Unpardonable Sin*
3. *Sin Leading to Death*
4. *Are There Mortal and Venial Sins?*
5. *Sin and the Christian*
6. *The Coming Man of Sin*
7. *God and the Problem of Evil [Tyrone Skelton]*

CONTENT

SIN ISSUES

There are sin issues to be addressed. Our task then is to bring the Truth of God's Word to bear on these matters relating to sin.

ARE SOME SINS WORSE THAN OTHERS?

**Are all sins the same in God's eyes, or are some sins worse than others?*

On the one hand, all sins are the same in that *each sin renders a person guilty and worthy of God's wrath.*

There is a passage in Scripture that helps us with this.
It is found in **James 2:10-11** –

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

¹¹ For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Now James is not suggesting It is possible to keep the whole law perfectly. He simply puts forth a "suppose it were so" scenario.

Q: *What if you were stumble* [Gr. *πταίω* to lose one's footing, stumble, trip¹ in a moral sense, fail to obey] on one *point*, i.e. *one commandment*?

A: We incur guilt for the law as a whole. We become guilty of all!

Such is the unity of God's Law, each individual commandment is a part of the indivisible whole because they reflect the will of the One Lawgiver.

To fail to obey is to disobey God Himself and *renders a person guilty and worthy of God's wrath.*

¹ William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 894.

Whether it is adultery or murder, whether you commit one and not the other, James says, “*you have become a transgressor of the law.*”

Perhaps there were those that might think that adultery and murder were far worse sins than the sin of partiality, as some were committing.

Look back at **v. 9** –

⁹ But if you show partiality, **you are committing sin [ἁμαρτία]**, being convicted by the law as **transgressors**.

If you commit adultery = you become a transgressor of the law.

If you commit murder = you become a transgressor of the law.

If you show partiality = you become a transgressor of the law.

In each case, you are rendered *guilty and worthy of God’s wrath.*

It becomes evident that James is addressing unbelievers in the church, pseudo-Christians who were masquerading as believers.

It is not just *missing the mark* of God’s standard of righteousness (ἁμαρτία), you are **παραβάτης**, a transgressor which refers to *someone who willfully goes beyond God’s prescribed limits.*²

It only takes one sin to be deemed a sinner. It only takes one sin, to send anyone to hell. One sin against a Holy God demands an infinite punishment.

All of that to say, on the one hand: *each sin renders a person guilty and worthy of God’s wrath.*

On the other hand, Scripture does speak of the reality that *some sins are considered greater than others.* How so?

² John MacArthur, *James*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 113.

Consider these passages from the Gospel writers. They are words from our Lord.

First, a conversation between Jesus and Pilate in **John 19:10-11** –

¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?”

¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above [i.e. God the Father; nothing happens outside of the sovereignty of God];

for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin.”

Q: *Who is this?*

A: It is not Judas, but the Jews who had delivered Jesus over to the Roman governor. Not just Jews but someone in particular.

Turn over to **Matt. 26:57** –

⁵⁷ Now those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.

The Sanhedrin had met at Caiaphas’s house during the night (Matt. 26:57-68) and decided that Jesus should die (v. 66 “He deserves death”).

Since Jewish law did not permit capital trials to be held at night, the Sanhedrin reconvened after daybreak and formally pronounced sentence.

We pick up in **Matt. 27:1-2** –

¹ Now when morning came [3:00-6:00am], all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel together against Jesus to put Him to death;

² and they bound Him, and **led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.**

The Jewish leaders were powerless to carry out the death sentence; the Romans did not permit them to execute anyone (Matt. 18:31).

So the Jewish leaders led Jesus away and delivered Him to Pilate. It was Caiaphas in particular but the Sanhedrin as a whole who were the instigators. They bore the greatest blame for Christ's death.

Peter preached at Pentecost saying "*this Man...you nailed to a cross by the hands of lawless men and put Him to death*" (Acts 2:23).

Caiaphas was more guilty than Pilate for at least two reasons:

1. First, he had seen the overwhelming evidence that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God; Pilate had not.
2. Further, it was Caiaphas who, humanly speaking, had put Pilate in the position he was in.³

D.A. Carson add the following in his commentary:

True, Pilate remains responsible for his spineless, politically-motivated judicial decision; but he did not initiate the trial or engineer the betrayal that brought Jesus into court. Judas, Caiaphas and Pilate all acted under God's sovereignty. But Pilate would not have had judicial authority over Jesus unless the event of the betrayal itself had been given to him *from above* (and thus God was in some mysterious sense behind the action of the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate). *Therefore* the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate, the one who from the human vantage point took the initiative to bring Jesus down, is guilty of the greater sin.⁴

First, you have this statement from our Lord concerning the one who committed the greater sin.

³ John MacArthur, *John 12–21*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 341.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 602.

Next, I want you to turn over to **Matthew 11:20-24** where we read:

²⁰ Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

²² “Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

²³ “And Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

²⁴ “Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

These Jewish cities had heard the kingdom message. While they may have not taken any action against Jesus, they ignored Jesus.

Though He performed *unprecedented* miracles in their midst, though He taught and preached His heart out, they carried about their life as usual.

Indifference is a heinous form of unbelief – a complete disregard for God.

At this point, it is far better to have heard nothing of Christ than to hear the truth about Him and reject Him. The author of **Heb. 10:26-27** writes –

²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

What do you expect? Pastor John writes,

The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility; and the greater the light, the greater the punishment for not receiving it.⁵

⁵ John MacArthur, *Matthew*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 264.

Those Jewish cities that heard the kingdom message would face a far worse on judgment day than the Gentile cities that did not.

So we go back to our question: *Are all sins the same in God's eyes, or are some sins worse than others?*

There are two biblical realities we are faced with:

1. All mankind is guilty of sinning against an infinitely holy God. If you die without repenting and turning to Christ, you will face the eternal punishment for your sins.
2. God will punish those who have committed *qualitatively* greater offenses with a *qualitatively* greater punishment.

ARE THERE MORTAL AND VENIAL SINS?

The Roman Catholic Church has historically divided into two categories.

According to Catholicism, there are venial sins (less serious ones) and mortal sins (those that result in eternal damnation).

Mortal sin are those that result in the spiritual death of the soul and include those intentional and grave sins such as murder, adultery, and fornication.

If you die with one of these mortal sins, your soul is lost forever. The only way to get out of that predicament is through another sacrament, which is penance.

According to the RCC, penance is *the second plank of justification* for those who have made shipwreck of their souls. Penance involves contrition, confession, absolution, and works of satisfaction.

Such a classification for sins, however, is completely foreign to the *NT*.

As we have noted earlier: *each sin renders a person guilty and worthy of God's wrath.*

That is why it is important to understand justification.

At the moment of saving faith, the Christian is declared righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Paul wrote in **Rom. 4:3-5** –

³ For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted according to grace, but according to what is due.

⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes upon Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Abraham was made right with God only because of his faith, no other basis than on believing upon Him who justifies the ungodly.

CONCLUSION

My beloved, you were saved by God’s grace *through* faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God (**Eph. 2:8**).

Faith is not a type of work. Thank God that sin is not classified as the RCC does. Thank God that there is “*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (**Rom. 8:1**). Thank God that we do not look at our works, at our “sacrament of penance” by which we can save ourselves from eternal separation.

For there is nothing that will be “*able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus oOur Lord*” (cf. **Rom. 8:38-39**).