

Lesson One

What's The Problem?

Basic Studies in the Good News of Jesus Christ

By Dr. Bill Denton

Let's get right to the problem. It's called sin. This is one of the most important words you can know because it identifies the problem between people and God. If you do not understand the meaning of sin or if you do not clearly understand that there are sins in your life, then you cannot understand what Jesus did for you, and you cannot understand what Jesus wants you to do. Let's start by defining sin, looking at some examples of sins in the Bible, and learning about the serious consequences of sin.

Sin is a violation of God's will. That means we do something that goes against what God wants.

The person who sins breaks God's law. Yes, sin is living against God's law (1 Jn 3:4, NCV).

When God wants you to do one thing but you do another, then sin is the result.

Can you think of some things that God wants for people to do? Write them down. Make a list. It's important that you be able to recognize the things that God wants us to do.

Can you think of some things that people do to disobey what God wants? Write those down too. Make another list. It's important that you be able to recognize the actions of life that are sins.

We can sin either by doing something God tells us not to do, or by not doing something God says we should do. Either way, we have done the opposite of God's will. Someone might say, "But I didn't know that's what God wanted! How can God say that I did wrong when I didn't even know it was wrong?" That's a good question, but keep in mind that not knowing about a law doesn't mean you're not responsible. If you drive your car faster than the speed limit, a policeman can give you a ticket. What matters is that you broke the law, not that you necessarily knew what the speed limit was.

Sometimes we sin by what we do. That one is easy to understand. If someone steals money from a friend, that's a sin. But we can also sin by not doing what we ought to do. This one is a little harder to understand, but it's true. Our friend might need our help, but instead of helping, we hurry and do something else. We could have helped, but we didn't do what was right. That is also a sin. See James 4:17.

We can sin with our words by saying things that hurt others or by lying. We can even sin by thinking bad things. Jesus taught this in the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5 - 7. Read Matt. 5:21-48. Have you ever had bad thoughts that you knew God did not want you to think about or that you now know were wrong?

Sometimes, it help to know about things the Bible calls sin. That way there is no doubt about what goes against God's will. Here are some passages of scripture that can help you identify specific sins. This is not intended to be a complete list, but it will help you know what God considers to be sin.

The Ten Commandments can help you understand the problem of sin. The commandments were at the foundation of the Law of Moses. There were many laws God gave that were meant just for the nation of Israel, including some found in the Ten Commandments. However, there are many laws that were part of God's universal, moral code for life. These laws were in force before the Law of Moses and remain in effect

today. The important point is that we can learn about God's will for how to live life – what He wanted people to do or not do. To break these laws was sin. To break those moral laws today is still sin. Here is a list of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3ff):

- You shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not make for yourself a carved image
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet.

An important point about keeping such laws is that there is only one way to do it. To keep a law, you cannot ever break it. In other words, there is no room to violate any of the laws even a little bit.

For example, the Ten Commandments say, "Honor your father and mother." Have you ever dishonored them? Have you ever treated them badly? Have you ever disobeyed them? Have you ever talked back to them? Don't try to defend yourself by thinking, "Yes, I've done some of those things, but I'm not as bad as others." Or by thinking, "Yes, I've done those things, but it was so long ago, it doesn't count anymore." The issue isn't how long ago it was, or how you fare in comparison to others. The issue is how well you keep the commandments. Any violation breaks the law of God.

Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever passed on gossip or said things about others that wasn't true? Did you ever accuse someone of doing something he or she didn't do? These are all sins.

Have you ever coveted something that belonged to a friend? Have you ever made anything so important that it took you away from God? Some people comfort themselves in that they haven't done some of the things listed in the Ten Commandments. But it's not a matter of keeping most of them and violating only a few. When we break any one of these commands, it is a sin, and God's law is broken. Read James 2:10, for a frightening reality concerning what it means to either keep or break God's law.

This may be difficult for some people, but it's important that you be able to identify the sins in your own life. Using the Ten Commands as a start, can you identify anything by which you have broken the will of God? Write them down. Make a list. You might want to burn that list later, but it's important you identify your own sins. Unless you do that, you cannot appreciate what Jesus has done for you.

Another Bible passage helps us understand both the source of sin and more specific sins. It's found in Mark 7:20-23:

And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.

Jesus said that the problem is our heart. Sin begins inside us. In the Bible, "heart" is used to mean our mind, our emotions, our will, and even our conscience. A lot can go wrong inside us that produces sinful conduct. Read that passage again. See if you can identify any evil thoughts or specific behaviors in your life that would be sins. If you need help with the meaning of any of the words in this passage, get help from a Bible dictionary. Write them down. Make a list. Again, it is important that you be able to identify your sins.

Another passage that help us understand sin is Galatians 5:19-21. The sins listed here are known as the "works of the flesh" and are contrasted with the "fruit of the Spirit," which is a list of good things God wants to see in our lives. Here is the passage telling us about sins:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul said that this is not a complete list. His warning is against these sins and "such things." But if you know the kind of things that the Bible calls sin, you will easily be able to identify others without the need for a list.

This is not a very happy part of our study. Nobody likes to confront the sins in his or her life. It's uncomfortable. It makes us feel guilty. You need to understand that this is a very important part of seeing the problem between yourself and God. If you cannot recognize the sins in your life, you cannot understand what Jesus has done for you. You will not know what to turn away from in order to follow Jesus. If you are having trouble at all understanding this section, then slow down. Write us by email at billdenton@crosssties.org and describe your problem. We'll try to help you understand this very important lesson. Before you can continue in these lessons, you must first deal with this one on your sin problem.

If you can identify specific sins in your life and you know at least some of the ways you have broken God's will, then you are ready to move on in your study. However, before you do that, it's important that you complete the quiz at the end of this lesson.

On the next page, you will find a list of questions designed to test your knowledge and understanding of the problem of sin. You should be able to click on the correct answer. Be sure to read any verses referenced.

Thank you for your interest in studying God's word and understanding His will for your life. There is one more lesson on the problem of sin that deals with the consequences. It, too, is important because you can't understand how bad the problem is unless you understand the consequences. But be encouraged! The rest of the lessons in this study series are about the answer to your sin problem. They are about good news! Sin may be the problem, but Jesus Christ is the answer, and regardless how many sins you are guilty of committing, Jesus died to forgive them.

Go to the next page now, and complete the quiz.

Problem of Sin

The Basic Bible Studies in the Gospel of Jesus Christ



Answer True or False to each of the following

Defining Sin

T F

1. Sin is living against God's law.
2. We sin when we do something God forbids.
3. We sin when we do not do what we know is right to do.
4. It is not a sin if we do not know it is a sin.

Identifying Sin

T F

5. The Ten Commandments can help us identify sins.
6. James 2:10 says that breaking one law breaks the whole law.
7. One must break more than five of the Commandments to be a sinner.
8. One lie makes a person a sinner.

The Heart

T F

9. Sin originates in a person's heart.
10. Anger is a heart problem that produces sin.
11. Immorality is a sin, but it's OK to be proud or slander other people.
12. Answer for yourself: "I am a sinner."

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the quiz. You can score your own results by checking the correct answers on the next page.

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of Sin*

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Christ



Answer Key For Lesson 1

1. T
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. T
7. F
8. T
9. T
10. T
11. F
12. T