



Foundations of

FAITH

The Nature of Sin

Lesson 15

What is the greatest affliction in the world? Cancer? Drugs? War? None of these. By far the most terrible scourge is sin. Sin not only causes more misery than any other tribulation, but if it is not overcome by the blood of Christ it will result in eternal punishment.

What is sin? John says, "Sin is the transgression of the law." (I John 3:4) It is the transgression of God's law." Again John says, "All unrighteousness is sin." (I John 5:17) Literally, the Greek word from which "sin" comes means "to miss the mark." The will of God is the mark; when we miss it we have sinned.

There are different kinds of sin. We will list four. (1) Sins of immorality; (2) sins of omission; (3) sins of brotherly offence; and (4) sins of disobedience to God.

SINS OF IMMORALITY. Many things which society approves of are condemned by God. Therefore, our basis for determining what is immoral must be the scriptures rather than human opinion. The New Testament is not just a catalogue of things that we may not do. But the principles that are given in it, properly applied, are sufficient to govern our actions in every situation. Some sins are condemned by name while others are prohibited by principle.

Let us notice those things which are proscribed by name. An analysis of several passages of scripture (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:25-32; I Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 10; Col. 3:5-9; II Tim. 3:1-5; Romans 1:29-31) shows that sins of immorality may be divided into three general categories – sins of thought, word and deed. The sins of word and deed originate in our minds. Jesus says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. 12:34) Again he teaches, "But those

things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." (Matt. 15:18, 19) Sometimes we think that only the deed is condemned by God; Jesus shows that the thought which produces the deed is also sin. For example, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt. 5:28) The deed is adultery; the thought that produces it is lust. Again we are told, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." (John 3:15) Murder is often produced by hatred; if the thought had not first existed, the deed would not have followed. Likewise, the deed of theft is often produced by covetousness. The sin of slander is often the result of jealousy. Both the thought and the action which produces are sin. But there is this difference. The consequences of a sin of thought are different from the deed which may be produced by that thought. We would all rather be hated than murdered; we would rather that another would be jealous of us than that he would slander us. The sin that is in thought often hurts no one except the person who does the thinking, while the sin in action or word may seriously harm another individual. The consequences are different, but the sin is the same.

Some sins of thought should be noted. One often considered in the scriptures is **covetousness**. Covetousness is an unlawful desire for that which another has. Should our neighbour purchase a new car and should we desire to have it, that would be

covetousness. But if we desire to have a car **like** his, we do not necessarily covet.

Another sin is **lasciviousness**. It may be defined as lust or unlawful sensual desire. The Christian must not allow his mind to be thus polluted. Other sins of the mind include **jealousy, malice** and **wrath**.

Many times we sin by word of mouth. Jesus says, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt. 12:36, 37) These verses should cause us to think seriously about the language that we use. Some sins of speech are **railing, reviling, blasphemy, lying** and **boasting**. Of the tongue James says, "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:8) The tongue cannot be tamed, but by constant vigilance the Christian can learn to control it.

Consider a few of our sins of speech. Jesus forbade **swearing**. He said, "Swear not at all: neither by heaven: for it is God's throne: nor by the earth: for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem: for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by thy head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, yes, yes: no, no: for whatsoever is more than these comes of evil." (Matt. 5:34-37) It has been debated whether Jesus had in mind judicial oaths, but all should agree that profanity is condemned. This includes using the name of God and Christ in a light or flippant way. Many expressions which are thought of as slang are actually derived from the name of God or Christ. "Gee" comes from "Jesus"; "gosh" and "golly" are substitutes for "God". Each of these is a euphemism which is "the substitution of an inoffensive or mild expression for one that may offend." Other euphemisms are "deuce" which comes from "devil"; "heck" from "hell"; "darn" from "damn". Since our speech should be above reproach, these words should be removed from our language.

One of the strongest condemnations of the scriptures is reserved for lying. "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." (Rev. 21:8) And those who tell "white" lies are not excepted. The scriptures make no distinction between "white" lies and "black". The Bible teaches that the end does not justify the means (Romans 3:8), and while we are not always required to

reveal all that we know, we are forbidden to speak or imply a deliberate falsehood.

Christians are forbidden to gossip. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." (1 Tim. 5:13) People usually gossip either because they desire to slander or because they wish to have the glory resulting from telling something new. A good rule to follow is that if what you would say about another will not help him or others, don't say it.

Railing and **reviling** are kindred expressions that refer to unnecessarily harsh or vituperative language. While it is true that it is sometimes necessary to rebuke another, we ought never to do it in the cruel way denoted by these expressions. Too often this type of language is directed against members of one's own family with resultant bitterness and discord. If we are filled with love our words will be couched in kindness.

The largest number of sins condemned in the scriptures involve human actions. Some of these, such as **adultery, theft** and **murder**, are condemned by society as well as by the word of God and therefore little need be said of them. Others, however, while not approved by society are seldom condemned. These include **drunkenness, strife, factions** and **deceit**, most of which result from sinful thinking on the part of the one committing the sin. Some of them come from a lack of self-control. Whatever the cause we should remember, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (II Cor. 5:10)

Many sins are condemned by the principles of the scripture rather than by name. The devil is constantly inventing new devices designed to lead men astray. Gambling is nowhere mentioned in the Bible, yet when Biblical principles are applied it is found to be sin. It appeals to selfishness and is therefore covetousness. It is theft in the same sense that duelling is murder. In both cases the action is by mutual consent, but the result is the same. Two men agree to fight until one kills the other. Two men agree to gamble until one steals from the other. The difference between the two is one of degree, not of principle.

Many kinds of dancing are condemned by principle. The physical actions in many dances inevitably result in lasciviousness on the part of one or

both of the partners. Whether or not this lust results in further sin, such as adultery, if the dancing causes such evil thoughts, it is sin.

SINS OF OMISSION. In The sins we have been discussing are sins of commission, positive things which we may do which are wrong. It is also possible for us to sin by failing to do what we have been commanded to perform. James says, "Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17) In the great judgment scene described by Christ in Matthew 25, the unrighteous are condemned for their failure to do good. Thus if we know we should visit the sick and neglect to do so, we sin; if we know to help the needy and do it not, we sin. If we fail to study, pray or worship God when we know we should do so, we sin. Christianity is not merely not doing certain things that are wrong, but it involves doing those things which are right.

SINS OF BROTHERLY OFFENCE. Every Christian has a responsibility to his brother. Paul discusses this in 1 Corinthians 8. He points out in regard to the

matter of eating meats, "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, yet sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend. (1 Cor. 8:12, 13) His line of reasoning is that, while it is not wrong to eat meat, if Christians eat meat which has been offered to idols and, in so doing, cause those weak in faith to stumble, they have sinned in causing offence, and it is better to do entirely without meat rather than to cause another to be lost. While we do not have this problem with respect to meat today, the principle applies in many ways. Each Christian is his brother's keeper. We not only must not do those things which we know are wrong, but we must consider the effect that our habits and practices will have on others. We cannot rightly say, "What I do is my own business." As well expressed by Paul, "Let not then your good be evil spoken of." (Romans 14:16)

The next lesson will deal with the fourth kind of sin – disobedience to God.

TEST ON LESSON 15

Underline the phrase that correctly completes each of the following statements:

1. Sin is the transgression of: (a) the law of the land, (b) the law of God, (c) the customs of the people.
2. The Greek word from which "sin" is translated means: (a) "to miss the mark", (b) "to think evil", (c) "to be mean".
3. Some sins are condemned by name and others are condemned by: (a) human judgment, (b) conscience, (c) principle.
4. Our sins of action have their origin in: (a) thought, (b) speech, (c) deed.
5. An example of a "euphemism" is the expression: (a) "swear", (b) "God", (c) "gosh."
6. If one knows to do good and does it not, he is guilty of the sin of: (a) brotherly offence, (b) omission, (c) commission.
7. If a practice that we have causes a person to stumble we should: (a) condemn the person that stumbles, (b) give up the practice, keep on practicing the same thing.
8. Paul illustrates the sin of brotherly offence by the example of: (a) smoking, (b) going fishing, (c) eating meats.

List three sins of **thought** mentioned in Colossians 3:5-9:

1.
2.
3.

List three sins of **word** mentioned in II Timothy 3:1-5:

1.
2.
3.

List seven sins of **action** mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

Below are four sins of **word** and **action**. In the blank after each write a sin of thought which may produce it:

1. Murder
2. Slander
3. Adultery
4. Theft

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – (b), (a), (c), (a), (c), (b), (b), (c).

Section 2 – Any three of: Covetousness,
Idolatry,
Anger,
Wrath,
Malice,
Inordinate affection,
Evil concupiscence.

Section 3 – Any three of: Boasters
Blasphemers
False accusers
Trucebreakers.

Section 4 – Any seven of: Adultery
Fornication
Uncleanness
Idolatry
Witchcraft
Strife
Emulations
Seditions
Murders
Drunkenness
Revellings

Section 5 – 1. Hatred
2. Jealousy
3. Lust (lasciviousness)
4. Covetousness.

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