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Conducted by  
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*"What really is sin?"*

I used to sing the chorus as a child:

*"S-I-N is a very little word  
That always spells disaster;  
You must leave it very much alone  
Or it will become your master."*

A good way to understand sin is to analyse the original Hebrew and Greek words. Both nouns and verbs should be carefully considered. A thorough knowledge of these languages would help, but, nevertheless, there are many works available to assist us in the exercise.

### **WORDS OF DEFINITION IN THE O.T.**

First, there is a group of three Hebrew words which all have the same basic meaning: *chet*, which is used more than thirty times; *chataah*, which occurs around seven times; and *chattath*, which is found about one hundred and seventy times. These words are similar to the Greek word *hamartia* and all of them mean a failure, a missing of the mark. I am reminded here of the comment one time of G.K. Chesterton, the eminent Catholic writer: "Whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be". Other Hebrew words are: *avon* (about two hundred and twenty times) and is a word associated with guilt; *peshu* (more than eighty times) and has a basic meaning of rebellion; *resha* is a word that describes a state rather than an act. The state it describes is the complete opposite of righteousness.

William Barclay has written: "So then in the Old Testament sin is a failure; sin is perversion; sin is rebellion; sin is the state in which sinning finally leaves a man".

### GREEK WORDS FOR SIN

In the Greek, there are eight main words for sin. First, there is *hamartia* (more than one hundred and seventy times) and is used of an individual act, a state and quality, and of sin as a malign power, which has seized the throne-room of people's hearts. Second, there is *perabasis* (six times) and means transgression. Literally it means a stepping across. God draws a line and man steps across it in disobedience to Him. Man knows it is wrong, but still does it. The third word is *paraptoma*, (more than twenty times), which basically means to slip or stumble over a line. This slip or stumble results from lack of care or watchfulness. The fourth Greek word for sin is *anomia*, the word for lawlessness. *Anomia* implies the enthronement of self and the dethronement of God. *Asebeia* (six times) is the fifth word. It is the opposite of *eusebeia*, which means godliness. So *asebeia* is the word for impiety and ungodliness. The sixth Greek word is *adikia* (twenty-five times). In the A.V. it is translated, for example, "iniquity, unrighteousness, wrong". *Dike* is the accepted standard by which a man ought to live. *Adikia* is the refusal to accept that standard. Think of the number of people in the world today who simply refuse to accept God's standard in the person of His Son, Christ Jesus. The seventh word is *ophielema* (once). It occurs in Matthew 6:12. "**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**". These words are part of the Lord's prayer, which I uttered most mornings at school assembly for six and a half years. I think I understand them better now. As Edwin Rice has pointed out: "All our failures in duty are debts due to God". *Parakoe* (three times) is the eighth word. It means disobedience or, literally, the deliberate refusal to hear the voice of God. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear.

### ASPECTS OF SIN

So, from our study of the Greek terms, we can say that sin is a failure to be what God wants us to be; it is the transgression of His law; it is a stumble through lack of vigilance; it is lawlessness as the result of pride in the heart; it is the irreverence which denies and refuses God the honour and the respect He deserves; it is the refusal to conform to the standard set by God Himself; it is our complete failure of duty to God; it is the refusal to hearken to God's voice. I want to share with you some words of Alexander Campbell on this subject "1) Every sin wounds the affection of our heavenly Father. 2) Insults and dishonours His law and authority in the estimation of His other subjects. 3) Alienates our hearts from Him. 4) Oppresses our conscience with guilt and dread. 5) Severs us from society by its morbid selfishness and disregard for man. 6) Induces to new infractions and habitual violations of right. 7) Subjects us to shame and contempt - our bodies to the dust and our persons to everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

Many years ago I produced a special feature on Sin in my magazine "Sound in Faith". I wrote at the time some important statements on the subject. For example, "Sin is imperfection. Who can say I am the perfect husband, the perfect wife, the perfect son, the perfect daughter, etc?" "Sin is saying, 'Not thy will but mine be done' rather than 'Not my will but thine be done'". "Sin is the missing of the target at which life must aim, and which life ought to hit". "Sin is setting self in the middle of the picture". "Sin is the weapon of a master-strategist, who is Satan". "Sin alienates from the life of God". "To Him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin" (James). "All unrighteousness is sin" (John).

### MASTER AND SLAVES

The apostle Paul saw sin as a very real power that had seized the hearts of men and women and had left them helpless and hopeless. To him, sin was like a king and people

were the wretched subjects; or sin was like a master and people were the poor slaves. What made sin able to operate within human beings was, quite simply, "the flesh". We have to be careful here. "The flesh" is not the body. A good definition of "the flesh" is man apart from God, the Christless human nature. Calvin once wrote: "Whatever is not in Christ, Paul calls flesh". Paul wrote to the saints in Galatia: **"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"** (6:19-21).

### UNIVERSALITY OF SIN AND ITS CURE

Sin is universal. **"There is none righteous, no, not one"** (Psalm 14:1; Romans 3:10). **"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"** (Romans 2:23). Human nature was corrupted at the beginning through the fall of our first parents and all of us have inherited this fallen sinful nature. Agreed, some human beings are worse than others, but the point is that all of us are affected one way or the other and the consequence is dying - spiritually, physically, eternally. But Jesus came to give life and to give it more abundantly (John 10:10). **"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"** (I Corinthians 15:22). **"And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit"** (I Corinthians 15:45).

To transform his life the alcoholic must first acknowledge that he is a slave to drink. To transform his life the sinner must first acknowledge that he is a slave to Satan. Of course, it is Jesus who leads us from slavery to freedom. Belief and obedience to Him is vital (Latin *vitalis*, from *vita*, life). John wrote: **". . . but these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name"** (20:31). "But until man in his present preternatural state believes the gospel report of his sins, and submits to Jesus Christ as the only Mediator and Saviour of sinners, it is impossible for him to do any thing absolutely pleasing or acceptable to God" (Campbell).

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