

Is Sin, Sin? Are There Degrees Of Sin?

by
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A question that I often hear, “is sin, sin?” In other words, “are some sins worse than others or are all sins equally bad?”

To answer that question properly, we have to define the scope of the question or agree on what aspect of the consequence of sin we are talking about. There is an area of sin in which we can accurately say that sin is sin and all sin possesses the same degree of consequence. That area is in the area of guilt as a transgressor. Every human being is born with a sinful nature and therefore practices sin. There is a difference between “Sin” and “sins.” Sin is the root of the tree and sins are the fruit of that tree.

Romans 3:23

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, NKJV

Not everyone commits the same sins or with the same frequency, but all “miss the mark” of God’s righteousness. In an archery contest where the goal is to hit the end of a log, an arrow that misses by an inch is still a miss and is registered the same as one that misses by a mile. In the record book both are registered simply as a miss with no reference to how close they were.

The same is true of the sins of all who reject Jesus Christ. The one who tells a lie and the one who murders are equally guilty before God as a transgressor of His righteousness and are worthy of the just wrath of God.

James 2:8-11

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;

9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is 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 you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. NKJV

Since God is pure, holy and sinless, no sin, of any kind can stand in His presence. All who reject the perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ, are equally condemned before God no matter what their particular sins may be.

Romans 3:9-10

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

10 As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one; NKJV

So as to the guilt and contamination of sin, sin is sin. A gossip who does not know Jesus as their Savior will be cast in the Lake of Fire along with the serial killer who has not accepted Christ.

Revelation 21:7-8

7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." NKJV

So if we are talking about the guilt and contamination of sin that separates us from God, then we can say that sin is sin. The only way for any sinner to stand before God and be forgiven, accepted and justified is by faith in Jesus Christ who bore all of our sin and fully paid the debt of all of our sins once for all on the cross.

Romans 10:9-13

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." NKJV

A murderer can be saved just as easily and just as fully as thief or liar or gossip. However, there is a real danger in applying this truth about the guilt and contamination of all sins and sinners to the practical consequences of sin and saying that there are no degrees of severity of the practical

consequences of specific sins. As to the practical consequences of sin we cannot say that sin is sin or that one sin is as bad as another.

I'll give an example of the misuse and misapplication of the phrase that sin is sin. I had a cousin who committed adultery with another cousin's wife. As a result, I made a statement to several family members that because of his sin, I could no longer have fellowship with him until there was acknowledgement of his sin and repentance. An uncle of mine said that was not right for me to take that stand because after all we are all sinners and his sin was not any worse than the sin of the rest of us. Sin is sin so we don't have a right to judge one another. That statement, in that context, shows an ignorance of a number of Biblical truths.

As believers in Christ, we are commanded to judge our own sins and the sins of others for the purpose of maintaining fellowship with the Lord and with one another for the spiritual health of the Body of Christ and its members. My uncle's statement assumes either that there is no difference between sins that have been acknowledged and repented of and sins that have not or that all Christians are walking around with unconfessed sins, or worse, that Christians are still stained with the guilt of sin that the Bible says was washed away once for all at the cross.

We won't take time in this study to consider the numerous passages that command us, as Christians, to judge sin in our own lives as well as the lives of others. We want to confine our thoughts to the truth that there are degrees of severity of the consequences of certain sins. There are sins that are far worse than other sins in respect to their damage to the individual and to those around them. There are sins that have less severe consequences than other sins.

Even God's eternal punishment of those who reject Jesus Christ appears to acknowledge varying degrees of sin

that deserve varying degrees of punishment. All are sinners and all are condemned to eternal torment, but...

Revelation 20:11-15

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. NKJV

Those who are at the Great White Throne Judgment are there because their names are not written in the Lambs Book of Life that contains the names of all who believe in Jesus. However, they are judged “according to their works.” In other words, the degree of their punishment directly corresponds to their specific sins. Make no mistake about it, the best place in hell will still be hell; eternal separation from God; the second death. Nevertheless, there does appear to be degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire.

There are differing degrees of consequences for different sins in this life as well. This principle or truth was established for us under the Law of Moses. Obviously, we are not under the Law of Moses, but the Law still stands as a revelation of God’s analysis of sin. Under the Law God provided several sacrifices for sin. Some dealt with the general contamination of sin that separated God from the

human race. Others dealt with specific sins and involved restitution to those who were directly affected by the sin of others. But there were 16 sins or kinds of sin for which there was no sacrifice and that were to incur the death penalty because they were particularly heinous in God's sight.

1. Under the law of Moses, the death penalty was required in cases of **premeditated murder** (Exodus 21:12-14,22-23; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16-21). This regulation even included the situation in which two men might be fighting and, in the process; cause the death of an innocent bystander or her unborn infant. It did not include accidental homicide, which we call "manslaughter."

2. **Kidnapping** was a capital crime under the Old Testament (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7).

3. A person could be put to death for **striking or cursing his parents** (Exodus 21:15,17; Leviticus 20:9). Jesus alluded to this point in Matthew 15:4 and Mark 7:10.

4. **Incorrigible rebelliousness was punishable by death** (Deuteronomy 17:12). For example, a stubborn, disobedient, rebellious son who would not submit to parents or civil authorities was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

The next six capital crimes can be identified as more specifically pertaining to religious matters.

5. **Sacrificing to false gods** was a capital crime in the Old Testament (Exodus 22:20).

6. **Violating the Sabbath** brought the death penalty (Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36).

7. **Blasphemy**, or cursing God, warranted the death penalty (Leviticus 24:10-16,23).

8. The **false prophet**, specifically one who tried to entice the people to idolatry, was to be executed (Deuteronomy 13:1-11), as were the people who were so influenced (Deuteronomy 13:12-18).

9. **Human sacrifice** was a capital crime (Leviticus 20:2). The Israelites were tempted to offer their children to false pagan deities, like Molech. But such was despicable to God.

10. **Divination**, or the dabbling in the magical arts, was a capital crime. Consequently, under Mosaic law, witches, sorcerers, wizards, mediums, charmers, soothsayers, diviners, spiritists, and enchanters were to be put to death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26,31; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

The next six crimes pertain to sexual matters.

11. **Adultery** was punishable by death under the Old Testament (Leviticus 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 22:22).

12. **Bestiality**, i.e., having sexual relations with an animal, was punishable by death (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:15-16).

13. **Incest** was a capital offense in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:6-17; 20:11-12,14).

14. **Homosexuality** was a capital crime (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).

15. **Premarital sex** brought the death penalty (Leviticus 21:9; Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

16. **Rape** of an engaged or married woman was a capital crime in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

Clearly, these sins, in God's eyes were viler than other sins and deserving of greater punishment. Equally clear is the truth that the Bible teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin is sufficient for even the vilest of sins.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. NKJV

Nevertheless, the practical scars and consequences of these kinds of sins are more destructive and corrupting than other sins. In the life of the believer, there are sins that produce greater negative consequences than other sins. The sin of homosexuality is a greater perversion than adultery, but adultery is a greater sin than a lie. Sexual sins in both the Old Testament and New Testament are repeatedly denounced by God as particularly heinous.

Acts 15:19-20

19 Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. NKJV

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. NKJV

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. NKJV

Promoting and embracing false doctrine is far more destructive than the sin of disobeying God's leading to pray for someone.

Galatians 1:6-10

6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. NKJV

The degree of severity of the sin of a believer is directly related to the degree of privilege and opportunity that one has been given.

Luke 12:47-48

47 And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. NKJV

As to the practical consequences of sin I believe Scripture clearly teaches that there are degrees of severity or vileness of sin. In this area it cannot be said that sin is sin or that one sin is as bad as another. However, we must guard against the error of misapplying this truth to make excuse for carnality and self-righteousness that would cause us to judge ourselves and others with an unrighteous judgment.

Example: “My tendency to stretch the truth is not as bad as so-n-so’s adultery so that makes me more spiritual.” That is not the thinking of a spiritual person. A spiritual person does not try to measure his spirituality by comparing himself with others.

2 Corinthians 10:12-13

12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us — a sphere which especially includes you. NKJV

A spiritual person knows that disobedience to the revealed will of God in any degree hinders our walk with the Lord.

1 John 1:5-10

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him

and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. NKJV

The desire of a spiritually minded believer is not to only allow “little sins” in his or her life, but to be constantly and continually cleansed from anything and everything that is not pleasing to God.

Psalms 139:23-24

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

NKJV

May we desire to be a spiritually minded person for the glory of God and allow God to constantly examine our hearts and purify us of everything that would stand between us and being pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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