

WHAT IS SIN?

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What is sin? Sin may be doing wrong; equally, it may be not doing right. While being tempted is not sin, both doing wrong and contemplating wrong could be sinful. While this first answer might sound a bit vague, the Bible is very specific about what sin is. That detail is provided by the Bible's simple descriptions of sin.

First, "all unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). The statement sounds simple, and really, it actually is as simple as it sounds. That which is not righteous is necessarily unrighteous and all that is unrighteous is, therefore, sin. The word unrighteousness, the Greek *adikia* (ἀδικία), is defined by Strong as "(legal) injustice (properly the quality, by implication the act); moral wrongfulness (of character, life or act): - iniquity, unjust, unrighteousness, wrong." Thayer more succinctly defined it "unrighteousness of heart and life." 1 John 5:17 reveals that doing wrong is sin.

Second, "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). This is another statement which sounds simple, and really is as simple as it sounds. This differs from the first, though, by showing that there is a standard at play. There is a Divine Authority, God, and that Divine Authority has revealed to man the Standard under which man must live and by which he will be held accountable, the Bible. Sin is going beyond the law of the Standard. Worthy of note is this point, however: Not all of the Bible serves as man's Standard today. The Bible student will remember that there have been three time periods in man's history: first, that from the Creation to the giving of the Law of Moses; second, that from Sinai until the Law of Christ was put into effect (Jos. 8:31; cf Acts 13:38,39); and, third, the current one under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Man is only amenable to the Law of Christ; however, the Old Testament retains great value (Rom. 15:4; cf 3:1,2)--albeit without authority over Christians (Col. 2:14). 1 John 3:17 reveals that violating God's law is sin.

Third, to know to do good, but not to do it is sin (Jas. 4:17). This also is as simple as it sounds. Doing wrong is wrong, and doing that which is forbidden is wrong; James added another important element: Not doing right is also wrong. Man has not only received "Thou shalt not's" but also "Thou shalt's"; to not do the "Thou shalt's" is equally sinful as committing the "Thou shalt not's"! The sinful world has "clearly seen" "the invisible things of [God] from creation," but does not know Him, has not glorified Him, and has not been thankful [none of which are violations of "Thou shalt not's"]; rather, their lack of positive obedience has manifested itself in their disobedience--but even at the outset, they are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20-23). Matthew 25:41-46 well establishes the great necessity of doing good by imposing the penalty of eternal punishment for doing it not. James 4:17 reveals that not doing right is sin.

Fourth, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). In a context on conscience and scruples, there are instructions on how to handle the subject of eating meat which has been offered to idols [ultimately, in a companion passage, Paul concluded such eating was fine, since the idols were nothing and the false gods were nothing (1 Cor. 8:4)]. Two things are especially important for the one considering eating of such: first, one must try not to "put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:13)--that is, not be the reason that the brother

would sin or be weakened (Rom. 14:21); second, one must make sure that he has not violated his own faith (Rom. 14:22)--that is, if the one thinks there may be something wrong with eating such and would be violating his own conscience by doing such, he needed to avoid it (Rom. 14:23). When one is not sure whether a certain course is safe or not, he should avoid it altogether if for no other reason than conscience-sake! Romans 14:23 reveals that violating one's conscience is sin.

Sin is doing wrong; sin is violating God's law; sin is not doing right; and sin is violating one's own conscience. May these simple principles always be in the minds of the righteous.