

Foundation Study 7: Sin

What does each of these verses say about sin?

1. 1 John 3:4

Sin is anything wrong. It encompasses any action, word, or thought contrary to the character of God (1 John 5:17). In the simplest terms, it is disobedience to God. In both testaments, it carries the idea of missing the mark (and hitting a wrong mark). It is used of an archer who misses the target and, by default, hits a wrong area. The idea is not just to passively miss the right target but to willfully hit the wrong area. Sin is not just not doing what is right; it is deliberately doing what is wrong. We sin by not doing what we know we should do (James 4:17) as well as by doing what we know we should not do (Romans 7:19).

2. Romans 3:23

Sin affects all humanity. All human beings are sinners (Romans 3:10–12; Proverbs 20:9; 1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 143:2). With respect to doing what God considers wrong, everyone must say, “I am guilty.” Timothy Keller writes, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”¹

3. Romans 5:12

Sin first entered humanity through Adam. When Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, his very nature became corrupt. He became sinful. Because all humans trace their origin to Adam, they are all corrupt in their nature as well. He passed his sin nature on to all humanity. The transference of sin from Adam to every human being is called imputed sin.

4. Psalm 51:5

Sin is also transmitted to each person at conception (Job 14:4, 15:14; Psalm 58:3; Ephesians 2:3). Our sinful nature began the moment we became human. This

¹ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, locations 574–76.

transmission of sin is called inherited sin. Therefore, mankind's sinful nature is the result of both imputed and inherited sin. The result is that we cannot sin. It's our very nature to sin. Humans are born sinners. We don't become sinners owing to our surroundings. Imputed sin is replaced by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). Inherited sin is overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Personal sins are forgiven upon confession (1 John 1:9).

5. Romans 6:23

Sin is deadly. It fatally sickens all humans. Everyone is incredibly spiritually sick. Humanity is not just a little bad but totally depraved (Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21–22; Isaiah 1:4–6; Romans 3:10–18). The human heart is desperately sick. In medical terms, the human spiritual condition is terminal. Charles Ryrie says, “Every facet of man's being is affected by this sin nature. (1) His intellect is blinded (2 Cor. 4:4). His mind is reprobate or disapproved (Rom. 1:28). His understanding is darkened, separated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). (2) His emotions are degraded and defiled (Rom. 1:21, 24, 26; Titus 1:15). (3) His will is enslaved to sin and therefore stands in opposition to God (Rom. 6:20; 7:20).”² He continues: “Total depravity must always be measured against God's holiness. Relative goodness exists in some people. They can do good works that are appreciated by others; but nothing that anyone can do will gain salvational merit or favor in the sight of an [infinitely] holy God.”³ Brackets added.

6. John 8:34

Sin enslaves. Not only does sin terminally inhabit every human soul, but it also exercises power over those very souls as well (Romans 3:9, 6:16; 2 Peter 2:19). The more one commits a specific sin, the more enslaved to that sin he or she becomes. A sin when first committed seems weak and unable to bind. But like a single thread that is repeatedly wound around two fingers, eventually binding them together, sin

² Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 252

³ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 253.

binds (enslaves). The ultimate expression of the power of sin is death (Romans 6:23, 5:21).

7. Sin can be overcome.

- Romans 8:3. **Sin is overcome by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ** (Galatians 3:13). The penalty, the power, and eventually, the very presence of sin is removed by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Adam's sin was imputed to us in the garden. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us upon belief.
- Galatians 5:16. **Sin is overcome by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.** The power of sin is overcome by allowing the Holy Spirit to occupy the mind and guide our actions (Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:6).
- 1 John 1:9. **Sin is overcome by confession.** Admitting wrongdoing to God is the ongoing practice of healthy Christians (Psalm 32:5). Confession is agreeing with God on a specific wrongful matter. Failing to admit wrongdoing brings about spiritual separation as well as physical and relational poverty (Psalm 32:3; Proverbs 28:13).
- Psalm 119:11. **Sin is overcome through interaction with the Scripture** (Psalm 37:31, 40:8). Memorizing, dwelling upon, reading, and applying the Scripture are key elements in living the victorious Christian life.

What was the most important verse you read in this study? Explain.