

Foundations Lesson #11

Sin, Part 1

The people of this world minimize the idea of sin by laughing at it, sluffing it off as insignificant, calling it an illusion, or considering it the invention of some “religious fanatics.” They even cloud it over in acceptable language (“alternate lifestyle” for homosexuality, or “retroactive fertility control” for murdering precious human babies in the womb). Among those few who actually acknowledge the existence of sin, most continue on in their sin with little or no thought of its penalty.

To God, however, sin is extremely important and it carries **great** consequences. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of sin. Saul was rejected as king; David was plagued with the sword; Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land; and Ananias & Sapphira dropped dead; all because of sin. God says, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and, from Ezekiel 18:20, “the soul who sins is the one who will die.” **God hates sin**. The presence of sin cannot be escaped in this life, but the Christian can overcome sin by the power of God.

In everything, Jesus is our example. Jesus came into a sinful world and lived among sinful humans. Yet he remained completely sinless. All the sin of the people around him was powerless to make him sin. Because the Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in us who believe, we are empowered to live holy, upright, godly lives, and we can't use the excuse that everyone around us is sinning. I've heard some Christians say, “It's hard to soar with the eagles when you're flapping with the turkeys.” Those believers need to realize who's living inside of them and how powerful he is.

As we've just read, the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. I once saw a bumper sticker that read, “Despite inflation, the wages of sin is still the same.” When someone works at a job for an employer, they receive wages – usually money – in return for their work. When anyone sins, they also receive wages in return for their sin. Those wages are death, even though that death usually isn't physical. For example, when the sin of lying is committed, a portion of someone's integrity dies. When the sin of adultery is committed, a part of that marriage relationship dies, and with the sin of unforgiveness, the bitterness toward the other individual poisons the soul of the person holding on to that unforgiveness. Sin is much, much more complicated and more destructive than we realize.

As the outline says, God hates sin. How much do you think God hates sin? How serious is sin to **The Almighty**? Let's consider physical sickness for a moment. When someone's physically sick, the remedy that's necessary gives us a good indication of how serious that sickness is. In other words, if you see someone taking two Tylenol, you understand that he probably has a headache or some muscle ache – nothing serious. But if you see someone in the hospital who has over a dozen tubes coming out of his body and he's hooked up to all kinds of beeping monitors, and that wing of the hospital says “ICU” on it, you realize that whatever's wrong with him is far more serious than a little ache. What's required to fix the sickness, reveals how serious that sickness is. So let's apply that principle to sin. The medicine necessary for sin to be cured was nothing short of the pure and holy Son of God having to die the most cruel, horrible, and painful death ever invented by the depraved minds of twisted humanity. Not to mention he'd been betrayed by one of his closest followers, deserted by them all, and beaten and whipped so thoroughly that his back probably resembled the appearance of bloody hamburger, all after pulling an all-nighter of being falsely accused and condemned, though he was completely innocent. That's the remedy that was necessary for sin to be dealt with. Do you see how serious sin is to God? Do you see how much God hates sin?

Another truth we need to appreciate is that all sin is ultimately and primarily against God. Why? Because God has created and designed everything, and he's determined how everything is supposed to function. When we sin, our actions are declaring that we don't care about what God has designed, what God wants, what God expects; we're gonna do things our own way! So if someone steals \$5,000 from his neighbor, he's certainly sinned against his neighbor. But he's primarily sinned against God because God has created and designed the world in such a way that humans are not supposed to steal. This also explains why Jesus was able to tell people that their sins were forgiven, without

ever checking with all the people who'd been wronged by those sins. He, Jesus, the Creator, was the One who was chiefly impacted by all sins. As David, praying to God, declared in Psalm 51:4,

Ps. 51:4a Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,

David understood that all sin is ultimately and primarily against God. So even though Uriah had been sinned against – he was murdered – and even though Bathsheba had been sinned against – she got pregnant – it was God who was chiefly affected by all David's sins.

With that in mind, let's go to Roman Numeral number one on our outline, where sin is defined, described, and explained. Sin is defined as anything contrary to the nature or desire of God. In a nutshell, sin is anything that God isn't. So if God desires you to make a left turn and you make a right turn, you're sinning. It's not that making a right turn in and of itself is wrong or evil, but doing anything contrary to the desire of God is. Or if you make a business deal and you're not faithful to keep your end of the bargain, you're sinning. Why? Because God is faithful, that's his **nature**, and if you act contrary to that nature you're sinning. I believe we also need to point out here that sin is not limited to what we do. Thoughts, attitudes, or beliefs can be sinful.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain words from the original languages of Scripture which give us a better, fuller, description of what sin is. From the Old Testament, the Hebrew word **hattat** means to lose the path, miss, or miss the mark. It can be used as an archer's term, as when an arrow misses the mark.

Ro. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

With this word-picture, we get the idea that the bulls-eye which the arrow is supposed to hit is the glory of God, but it's fallen short. It doesn't seem to matter all that much if it's fallen short by miles or millimeters; if it doesn't hit the bulls-eye of the glory of God, then it's identified as sin.

The next word, **awon**, means iniquity or deviation. It carries the idea of crookedness, of twisting away intentionally from God's straight path of righteousness.

Mt. 7:13-14 [Jesus speaking] "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Here we get the picture of God's Highway of Holiness, with people taking left turns or right turns rather than proceeding on the path of the straight and narrow. Any such deviation, any such turning away is sin. Here there seem to be many, many different ways of missing the path, but only **one** way of staying on it. That way, of course, would be to love God wholeheartedly.

Then **pasha** means rebellion, transgression. It carries the connotation of rebellion to a superior or unfaithfulness to an agreement. An illustration of this is found in Ezekiel 17:19 which says,

Ez. 17:19 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, I will bring down on his head my oath that he despised and my covenant that he broke.

What had happened? Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had come to Jerusalem and conquered the city. He deposed King Jehoiachin and replaced him with his uncle, Zedekiah, who swore an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. But several years later, Zedekiah sent to Egypt to get horses and a large army in an effort to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. What I find so striking about the verse we just read in Ezekiel 17 is that God takes Zedekiah's rebellion, his unfaithfulness to the oath he swore, personally. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says that it was **my** oath that he despised and **my** covenant that he broke. Again, such unfaithfulness, such rebellion, is sin.

The New Testament uses one primary word for sin, the word **hamartia**. It's a theological term. It can refer to a single act, a state, a condition, or a power. It appears over 150 times in the New

Testament.

We can also be grateful for the various ways sin is explained in Scripture. As we've already mentioned,

Ro. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

So we can see here that sin is explained as anything which falls short of the glory of God. We can also see that **all** humans are guilty of sinning, or falling short of God's glory. There are several other verses which also tell us that all humans have sinned.

1Jn. 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Ecc. 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Scripture also lets us know that whatever is not of faith is sin.

Ro. 14:23b ...and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Sin also includes things that we should have done but didn't do. Those are generally referred to as sins of omission.

Jas. 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

A wonderful illustration of this truth has been given by Jesus in Luke's gospel chapter 10. Here Jesus was explaining what it meant to "love your neighbor as yourself." He talked about a man who fell into the hands of robbers. They beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Two men, a priest and then also a Levite, passed by on the other side of the road instead of helping him. But a person of an ethnic minority that was despised, helped the man lying on the roadside. The point of Jesus' story is that the man who did the helping was a true neighbor to the man in trouble. The other two had not "loved their neighbor" as they should have. We could say that they knew the good they ought to have done but didn't do it.

Then also, sin is lawlessness.

1Jn. 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

Here, lawlessness is a matter of not adhering to **God's** law. Honoring the civil law is usually a good idea, but it's always possible for humans to make bad laws. God never makes bad laws, because he's perfect. As Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." So sin is explained here as breaking God's law.

Have you ever stolen anything? ...even something as small as a one-penny piece of bubble gum? I imagine that everyone probably has. Such actions make us sinners, because the law of God is clear that we must not steal. Have you ever told a lie? ...even one you thought was insignificant? Most likely, you've done that. That makes you a sinner because God's law says that we should not lie. Let's appreciate the truth of the Bible that **all** have sinned. **All** have violated God's holy law.

The next verse on our outline is very similar.

1Jn. 5:17a All wrongdoing is sin,

Before moving on to the next section, I want to read some verses that show us that sin is not restricted to actions.

Ps. 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

Heb. 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Jas. 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

The Bible says that man looks at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart. So pleasing or displeasing God is not just a matter of what we do, it's also a matter of our motives, our priorities, our attitudes – things that people looking at us from the outside wouldn't be able to detect. In Matthew's gospel chapter 6, Jesus calls some people hypocrites. Outwardly, they were doing three things: giving to the needy, praying, and fasting. Since these three things are activities that all true believers **should** be engaged in, why did Jesus so strongly condemn these folks as hypocrites? The answer is found not in **what** they were doing but **why** they were doing it. They did what they did to be seen by men, to be honored by men. In other words, they gave, they prayed and they fasted not because they cared about God, but because they wanted to have a wonderful reputation here on earth. They cared about themselves. Their hypocrisy was a matter of motive. Sin is not restricted to actions.

A second grader was misbehaving in class and so the teacher told him he had to sit in the corner. Usually, he would've raised a great fuss and voiced many objections, but this time he went peacefully and sat on the chair in the corner without any resistance. A little while later, a friend of his asked him why he'd been so compliant, to which the second grader responded, "I may be sittin' down on the outside, but I'm standin' up on the inside." Again, man looks at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart. Sin is not restricted to actions.

Before going on to the next section, I'd like to issue a warning that we humans have a tendency to excuse our sin, to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. That's one reason Scripture tells us plainly that we **shouldn't** think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Romans 12:3). Richard Owen Roberts in his book entitled Revival, has this to say about sin, and I quote:

QUOTE Have you faced the fact that the great error of all sin is exactly this: it is against God. Oh, how we need to feel deeply that the greatest evil of every sin, no matter how small man may judge it, is that it is against God. Joseph, in fleeing the temptation of Potiphar's wife, was able to pinpoint the evil in the proposed act by asking, "*How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (Genesis 39:9b). Do you realize the great evil of all your sin? Have you faced with trepidation the realization that it is against God that you have sinned, and in the face of His mercy committed all your evil?

Perhaps, like other deceived persons, you are satisfied that all your sins are of very minor proportion, especially when compared with David's. While you are ready to acknowledge an occasional and unimportant infraction of the law of God, do you doubt seriously that your sins are bad enough to constitute a major problem? How big does sin have to be in order to be heinous? Consider these sobering words, *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all* (James 2:10). Do you realize that if you just break one tiny fraction of the law of God – one least point – your guilt before God is as great as if you broke the entire law? You may say, "I consider such a view unjust and I refuse to accept it." Such a response reveals, at best, the great deception under which you live. You have learned to accept this very principle in many insignificant areas of life. All games and sporting events have rules. How far out of bounds does a basketball player have to be before the play is voided and the basket not counted? How far off sides must the football player run before a justified penalty occurs? Many a score has been voided by a minor infraction of the rules and many a game has been lost because the least of the laws was violated. Surely, the God who made man has more right to make and enforce laws than do the designers of mere games.

Face it honestly, even the tiniest infraction of God's law has earned you the permanent brand of **desperately wicked sinner**.

But are you really such a *little* sinner as you pretend? Are not your sins far more grave and more numerous than you have yet admitted? Didn't you arrive at this view of the insignificance of your sins by comparing yourself with someone else? Nearly everyone can find someone who looks worse than they do. A businessman, who faithfully supports his wife and children, can compare himself with a drunkard lying in the gutter and congratulate himself on his outstanding life of uprightness, but let that same man compare himself with the absolute standard – Jesus Christ the Lord – how will he then measure up? If the housewife, who has never actually cheated on her husband and has only occasionally considered it and not all that seriously, compares herself with the worn-out prostitute plying her trade downtown, she will look good indeed, but if she stands beside Christ, she will appear so shabby and unworthy that she will burst into tears. The drunkards and prostitutes and murderers of this world are not the standards of righteousness. God set the standards. Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, fleshed these standards out and showed us in His own life how God expects us to live. No one has any right to compare themselves with anyone other than Christ, and no one can compare themselves with Christ and come away looking or feeling good.

So let's remember that God hates sin, that **all** have sinned, and that for most people, our sin is far more serious than what we realize.

Foundations Lesson #11

Sin, Part 2

Roman Numeral two on our outline deals with the origin of sin, which is something that people have debated and discussed for thousands of years. Some find it difficult to reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God. They reason that if God is completely holy, then he couldn't have created sin. But God created everything. So where did sin come from? Fortunately, the Bible gives us insight and understanding as to how and why sin exists.

The first place where sin entered the universe was into the angelic realm. In Job 38:4-7, the LORD says to Job,

Job 38:4-7 “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

We see from this passage of Scripture that the angels were present when God created the earth, so God's creating the angels must have taken place before he created the physical world we now live in. The angels were created to glorify God. They were created not to sin. But they were also created with a will – a will that was independent from the will of God. In other words, each angel was created to obey and glorify God, but each one also had the capacity to exercise his own, unique will. A high-ranking angel, Lucifer, decided to turn his will **from** the way it was intended to function by submitting to God, **to** self. It was in the turning of Lucifer's will **from** God **to** self that sin first entered the universe.

In Scripture, two passages from the Old Testament give us some insight into what took place. They're found in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. Although they're prophecies about the king of Tyre and the

king of Babylon, respectively, they've been understood, for thousands of years, to refer also to the fall of Lucifer.

Ez. 28:12b-19

“You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. ¹⁵You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. ¹⁶Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. ¹⁷Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. ¹⁸By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. ¹⁹All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.”

Is. 14:12-15

¹²How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” ¹⁵But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

In this last passage of Scripture, Lucifer five times says, “I will...” He'd been created to have a will that would delight in doing whatever **God** wanted, whatever **God** had created him for. But somehow, somewhere along the line, he must have become unsatisfied with living the noble, holy, and beautiful way he'd been designed by God to live, and so, in rebellion against God, he asserted his own will rather than following the Lord, with disastrous consequences. Again, it's in the turning of his will **from** God **to** self that sin enters the universe, and that the angel Lucifer (rendered “morning star” in some translations) becomes Satan, a name meaning adversary, or accuser.

Apparently, those angels who chose to follow Lucifer in his rebellion against God were transformed into demons, which is still their identity today. But none of this explains how or why sin entered the human realm. To understand that, we need to turn to the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, which is in the very beginning of the Bible. Here we read that God made a beautiful and wonderful environment which lacked nothing. He then created humans – a man and a woman – in his own image and likeness to live in that perfect environment. They, like the angels before them, were created to love and obey God, to submit to his desires, and to enjoy fellowship with their God. But they were also given the power to make their own choices, to exercise their own will. Without an independent will there can never be genuine freedom or true personality, both of which God in his lavish goodness and tender care wanted to make sure that those humans had. God is not a control freak. If he were, he would have created beings like robots that only do what they're supposed to do. It seems that God's nature desires obedience to his will from individuals who are not **forced** to follow him, but who, having been given an alternative, have voluntarily chosen to love, obey and follow him.

In the middle of the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden, God placed two trees, one of which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God clearly commanded that the fruit of this tree was not to be eaten. In fact, he even said to the man, “for when you eat of it, you will surely die.” The presence of this tree provided a test for the humans. What they would do with the fruit of this tree would reveal whether or not they preferred God's ways to their own ways.

With this background, we see in Genesis 3:1-5 that temptation now falls upon the humans. The serpent, who's apparently just an embodiment of Satan on this occasion, says to the woman, “Did

God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The main tactic here, is doubt. The devil knows that if he can get any human to doubt what God has said, he's already won a victory. I want to be very clear: **never put a question mark where God has placed a period.** The truth is that God is 100% reliable. He always speaks the truth because he is the truth. So when we entertain the notion that something God has said isn't reliable, we're actually questioning the integrity of the One who made that statement. That's a huge mistake with disastrous consequences. But we also see that the devil is attempting to **blur** the clear command of **The Almighty** by perversion or twisting. Satan's question, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" could have been answered most accurately with a blunt "No." God had not said that. He had said that it was permissible to eat from any tree in the garden **except** from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So here we see two tactics which the devil still uses today, namely those of trying to get humans to doubt and trying to blur or twist what God has clearly said.

The woman replies to the serpent by setting him straight about what God had said, but she then adds a condition to what God had originally instructed. She tells the serpent that God had also said that they were not even to touch the fruit of that tree. The problem is that God had never said that. In our zeal to please God, it's interesting to see what rules we humans concoct. Motivated by our own fear of failure, or by the silly notion that we can somehow improve upon what God has said, or perhaps by some other insecurity, history reveals that our race is quite capable of adding conditions and regulations to what God has said. Let's be careful not to fall into that trap.

The serpent then replies to the woman with a bold-faced lie. He says, "You will not surely die." Jesus informed us that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. But then the serpent goes on to try to make God look bad. He says, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Here the serpent tries to get the woman to feel like God is needlessly withholding something from her – something that would be oh, so beneficial! The truth is that God won't withhold any good thing from those who walk with him. You can read that in Psalm 84:11. But we also get some insight here into the nature of the devil. In the passage we read earlier from Isaiah 14, five times Lucifer said, "I will." In the fifth and last of those boasts he had said, "I will make myself like the Most High." He had wanted to be just as powerful, just as exalted, just as glorious, just as wise as the Most High God. That which caused his own downfall is the same desire he tempts the woman to fall into – wanting to be **like God** without God's help. The truth is, God loves to transform us, bit by bit, more and more, into his nature and character. But that only happens as we yield to him, as we joyfully follow him, as we trust him, and as we worship him. It's completely impossible for us to make ourselves more like God. Self-transformation is an exercise in futility. It does not work! But God will incrementally transform us to become more and more like him, if we die to self and let him do the work. We should remember, wanting to make self great is nothing more than the ugly sin of pride. But wanting to reveal the greatness of God, with no desire for self-glorification, that's humility. More about that in lesson #18.

So far, the serpent has tempted, but the woman hasn't fallen into sin. It's important for us to understand that temptation is not sin; yielding to temptation is. Jesus himself was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, but Jesus remained sinless. He never yielded to the temptation.

Tragically, both the woman and the man chose to eat the forbidden fruit and disobey God. God had said that the day they ate of it they would die, and that day they did indeed die. They didn't drop dead physically, but they died to their purity. They died to their innocence. An aspect of their relationship to God died. And they died physically in that now they had to experience aging and physical decay, which means they would eventually die physically. Life became radically different for them. I want you to understand something: sin defiles, destroys, and cheapens whoever engages in it. No one can sin without paying a terrible price. Sin does not show favoritism. Sin degrades; sin twists and contorts; sin mars and scars; sin distorts; sin repulses; sin disfigures; sin maims; and sin uglifies. Now I don't think "uglifies" is an actual word, but it so wonderfully describes what happens as a result of sin that I just couldn't resist using it. Whoever sins really does become ugly in one way or another. And we have to understand, sin doesn't just affect us physically, it also affects us mentally, emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and in every other way. As we've already quoted from Romans 6,

the wages of sin really is death.

Because of sin, the interior makeup of the man and the woman was altered. They were now sinners **by nature**, and, because everything reproduces according to its own kind, all of their offspring from then on would be born with a **sin nature**.

The result of the man and the woman now having a sin nature manifested itself right away. Verse seven tells us that they sewed fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves. How many people do you know who've done wrong and then have labored long and hard just to cover up their sin? We see here that that's a result of the fall. Then the next verse tells us that the man and the woman hid from God. Previously, walking with God in the garden in the cool of the day had probably been the highlight of their existence. After falling into sin, they were avoiding the One who alone could help them. Unfortunately, we humans still have the same tendency today. When we sin, the best and wisest course of action is for us to run **to** God, confessing our wrongdoing and asking him for mercy and forgiveness. But often we find ourselves doing the opposite, in our guilt hiding from him or avoiding him. That kind of behavior just makes matters worse; it compounds the problem.

The ensuing conversation between the LORD God, Adam, and Eve reveals even more results of sin having entered the human realm. When God asks the man if he'd eaten from the tree that he was commanded not to eat from, Adam says that **the woman** gave him the fruit, so he ate. Not only did he implicate his wife, he even hinted that God himself may have been partially at fault. He says, "The woman **you** put here with me..." Let's be clear. No one forced Adam to do what he did. Adam **chose** to disobey God by eating the fruit. When confronted, the man who now had a sin nature tried to deflect the blame; he tried to make others look guilty so that he wouldn't appear to be quite so bad. His wife used the same tactic. Again, that just makes matters worse. We find redemption, healing, and forgiveness when we honestly admit our wrong, forsake our sin, and ask for forgiveness. Please remember, God forgives **sins**, not **excuses**.

I've had people tell me that they couldn't help their anger problem because they were German, or because their father was a mean alcoholic, or because they were abused as a child. Although I don't want to be insensitive to the pain anyone has suffered, those people have believed a lie. The truth is that they **can** help their anger problem. The truth is that we have control over our actions today. The truth is that for us believers, we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, empowering us to live a godly life. The truth is that we have the word of God, telling us that man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:20), and telling us to get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger (Ephesians 4:31). Again, making excuses for our sin grieves God and makes matters worse. Turning to the Lord in confession, repentance, and humility, hating our sin as God hates it, and asking for his forgiveness, brings healing and transformation from the Lord.

Going back to Genesis chapter three, let's look at how God handles the situation. We have to understand that God knows all things. He knew when the woman and the man were being tempted. He knew what they were thinking and feeling every step of the way. He could even have intervened, but he chose not to; he chose to allow the humans he created to make their own choice. I'm sure he would've helped them if they'd asked for his help, but they didn't. So what did God do once the man and the woman fell into sin? In his great love, he went after them! Verse 9 tells us that he called out, "Where are you?" It's amazing to me that God desires fellowship with us humans so much that he'll initiate relationship between himself and us, even when we've fallen into terrible sin. Of course, he knew exactly where they were. He's God. I imagine he handled the situation the way he did because he wanted to give the man and the woman a chance to come clean, to come forward and confess their sin. But they didn't do what was best. We should be profoundly grateful that the God of the universe longs for intimacy with us, and he longs to fix us, if we will let him.

Next we see that the God who has a great longing for intimate relationship with the humans he's created is also the God of justice. Sin cannot go unpunished. There are **always** consequences. The serpent, who started the whole disaster by tempting the woman, gets judged first. He's cursed above all animals. He must now crawl on his belly, and he's sentenced to eat dust all the days of his life. God next turns to the woman, who was the first to eat of the forbidden fruit. Her judgment includes greatly increased pains in childbearing, and that her husband will now rule over her. God then judges

the man, who now has to experience painful toil in working the ground, because of the thorns and thistles it will produce for him. He'll eat his food by the sweat of his brow, and he'll eventually die, because he was created from dust and to dust he will return. In addition to these judgments, the LORD God also banishes the humans from the Garden of Eden, and they're not allowed to eat from the tree of life.

We also read that the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife. Scripture doesn't give any details here but likely, an animal was killed in order to provide the garments of skin. If so, this would give us the first instance in Scripture which reveals that – in the way God has designed his creation – it's necessary for innocent blood to be shed for sin to be dealt with. Hebrews 9:22 puts it this way:

Heb. 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

It was a dark and painful day when our ancestors chose to disobey God in the garden. But please remember, whenever the problem of human failure raises its ugly head, God always provides a solution. We see this beautifully in Genesis 3:15. In the midst of God's judgment upon the serpent, God says that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent, but that the serpent would strike his heel. When Jesus was crucified, he crushed the serpent, Satan, even though the Roman nail went through his feet. So even as **The Almighty** was pronouncing judgment on the horrible day when sin first entered the human race, he was also speaking prophetically of the grace which was to come, bringing light, forgiveness, and life to all who would believe.

Foundations Lesson #11

Sin, Part 3

Going on to Roman Numeral number three on the second page of our outline, we now turn to the subject of overcoming sin. As we've already mentioned, God has given us abundant provision to be fully victorious over sin. He's blessed us with his word, which is very powerful. He's blessed believers with the indwelling Holy Spirit, who empowers us to live a holy life. He's also provided the church, other Christians who can help us love God and walk in his ways. He's made himself personally available to us at any time, so that we can ask him for help in prayer, and those are just some of the main ways he's empowered us to be victorious over sin.

Despite God's power and abundant provision, experience shows us that most followers of Jesus have had some genuine struggles in trying to overcome sin. Even the Apostle Paul, who authored about half the books of the New Testament, had intense battles against sin. He writes,

Ro. 7:19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

Perhaps, like Paul, you've found that some of your sinful habits are tough to break. If that's the case, this section has been designed to help you.

In overcoming sin, the first mindset we need is to **hate** the sin, to have an attitude of **desperation** in wanting to be free of it, and to see how deeply God is hurt by our committing that sin. All of life is about God. We need to love what he loves and hate what he hates. Since God hates sin, it's appropriate for us to have a holy hatred of sin as well. Years ago, there was a woman who ministered in a large city where she encountered many homosexual youth. She said, "I once kept a record of

how many homosexual kids really wanted to be free. Only about two percent of them ever clearly said, 'Yes, I want out.' That's why we can't help much. Most of the homosexuals just don't want help."

A long time ago there was a man in our church who told me that he'd be delivered from smoking cigarettes as soon as God did the work. I told him that with an attitude like that, he'd be smoking cigarettes until the day he died of lung cancer. There was no passion, no desperation, no commitment in his heart to be free. He had no sense of alarm or outrage in his soul over how that smoking habit was grieving God or how it was tainting the Lord's reputation by the way he was living. There needs to be a holy cry that comes out of the depths of our being that says, "No more!! I will be free because it doesn't glorify my Lord & Savior for this ugly, horrible sin to be in my life. I belong to Jesus. This sin has to go!"

As long as the adulterer enjoys his adultery, he'll never forsake his sin, no matter how much God has provided for him to be set free. As long as the man looking at the pornography doesn't really want to stop, he'll keep defiling his soul and suffering the consequences of his sinful behavior. I've known some people who claimed that they hated their sin but they actually only hated the results of the sin. What they hated was the broken relationship, or the feeling of being dirty, or the boss getting angry at them for their poor performance because of their sin. Until we desperately hate the sin itself, no matter how pleasurable it's been, we won't get set free.

Ps. 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Ps. 142:5-6 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

Sometimes we may need to pray that prayer a little differently. Instead of praying "rescue me from those who pursue me," we may need to pray, "rescue me from my own carnal habits that are too strong for me."

Ps. 61:1-2 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Am. 5:15 Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

When Amos here tells us that we need to hate evil, I believe he meant we should hate evil without being biased. It's easy to hate the evil that others commit, especially when we have to suffer because of their actions. But we need to hate evil every bit as much in our own lives as we do in others or in the world.

Heb. 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

Because God is not glorified by his sons or daughters living in bondage, being enslaved by their own passions or lusts, let us, for his great name's sake, press through until we come into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Then we'll be examples to a lost and dying world of how wonderful it is to live under the mighty delivering hand of our Father God.

The next mindset we need in order to overcome sin is that of having zero confidence in self to get free from the sin. One author has said,

QUOTE How often have people told me of their efforts to break bad habits. They had

fasted, prayed, promised, chastised themselves, vowed to turn over a new leaf, devised a dozen ways to keep themselves from the source of their troubles. And yet, more often than not, they fell back. They just didn't have the resources. "My sins have overwhelmed me," said King David. On his own, he was powerless before sin, as are we all. If you want to break a habit, don't make any more promises, for promises are just another way of reaching for victory all by yourself.

One minister in the South tells people to resign from what he calls the "white knuckle club." That's the club where you hold on for dear life so hard that your knuckles turn white. His point is simple; endless strivings of the flesh will never bring us closer to God, nor will they be successful in getting us free from the things that are enslaving us. When we got saved, it wasn't because we tried harder; it was because we cried out for Jesus to save us from our sins. We knew we needed a savior. We trusted him to do what only he could do. The same applies to being free from our sinful habits.

Ps. 60:11-12 Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

We get victory **not** when we try harder, but when we trust more fully.

Jer. 48:7a Since you trust in your deeds and riches, you too will be taken captive,

Pp. 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh –

To the degree that we believe we can do better, to that degree we will fail because our confidence is in the wrong place – it's in our own ability rather than in the power of God.

The third mindset we need in order to overcome sin is that of trusting in God's mighty deliverance, realizing that **He** is in the life-transformation business. Said another way, **expect God to do a miracle!** Expect him to come through for you. Rely on his great faithfulness.

This is where our faith has to kick in. We look at our situation and we acknowledge that we're in deep trouble. We cry out to God for all we're worth, and then there needs to be a quietness in our heart that says, "Now just watch what He's gonna do! He'll take care of business." Let's be reminded that without faith it's impossible to please God. Many people, when you ask them if they believe God's going to set them free, reply, "I hope so." I believe we **can** do better than that and we **need to** do better than that. God is more powerful than we can imagine, and he loves to deliver his children. Expect him to come through for you. Rely on his great faithfulness.

Eph. 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

For those of you who are carpenters, these verses invite you to get out your tape measure. The distance you're invited to measure starts with a concept. It starts with what you can possibly ask or even just imagine God is able to do. In your wildest imagination, what's God powerful enough to accomplish? That's the starting point of your tape measure. Then you need to measure the distance between your starting point and what God is actually able to do. If you measure accurately, you'll find that the distance is so great that it's immeasurable! As the Scripture says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..." Billions of trips to the sun and back would not even be enough to measure the distance between our limited imagination of what God can do and what he's actually capable of doing! Never limit God's power in your heart or in your mind.

Heb. 11:1-2 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

The ancients believed God against overwhelming odds. You can, too.

Someone who despondently says, "I've always been greedy all my life and I'll always be greedy for the rest of my life" is not believing God. They need to realize that anything that doesn't come from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). They're not believing that God's power can and will rescue them from their greed. That's a huge mistake. I realize we all have emotions. I realize that on some days we may not **feel** like we will ever get free. But we are not called to live by our feelings. We are called to live by faith. Do yourself a favor: Don't keep looking at the failures of your past. Look to God! Expect him to do a miracle in your life. You'll be glad you did.

Ps. 31:1 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

Ps. 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

Ps. 34:19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Ps. 50:15 [God speaking] and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Ps. 79:9 Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

Let's remember that God is a great deliverer, who loves to act on behalf of those who trust him and cry out to him.

Before leaving this section, I'd like to make one observation. I've found over the years that the more deeply people have loved God, the quicker and more completely they were delivered from their sin. So I want to remind everyone that the first and greatest commandment always has been to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. If we do that, sinful habits will be conquered, because God himself will see to it that they fall before his hand of power.

On our outline, we have three closing Scriptures.

Pr. 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

1Jn. 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Mk. 9:43-48 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

I want to finish this lesson with a little story. There was a wealthy man who lived on a high mountain. The road to his mansion, on one side, dropped off sharply, way down the mountain. On

the other side, it was up against the steep mountain itself. The man needed to hire a driver for his horses. So he went into the town below to interview the candidates. He asked each one, "How good a driver are you? How close to the edge of the road can you get, and how fast can you ride the horses?" The various candidates made their claims, but finally one man declared, "I can get you within three inches of the edge, and I will gallop the horses." The rich man was impressed, but there was one more candidate left. So the rich man asked him, "How close to the edge of the road can you get, and how fast can you ride the horses?" The man replied, "Sir, I have a wife and three children who need my income. If you want me to drive your horses, I'll stay as far away from the edge as I possibly can, and I will **not** gallop the horses." The rich man looked at him and said, "You're hired."

Why did I tell you that story? Some people want to see how fast and furious, how close to the edge of life they can live without falling off the cliff into sin. But the secret of pleasing God has nothing to do with how close to sin we can get without falling off the edge, it has to do with how far away from the edge we can stay. I exhort you, steer clear of sin as far as you possibly can. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. If you find that you've fallen into sin, repent quickly. Run into the arms of God. Confess your wrongdoing to him and ask for forgiveness and mercy. Then, as needed, make it right with anyone you've wronged. Live your life with a passion to please **The Almighty** with every breath you breathe. If you do that, you'll have nothing to be ashamed of when you look back. Amen. God bless you all.