

Transcript 166

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today, we're going to be kind of give an introduction to a doctrine that we receive a ton of questions about. We're probably going to be doing a few episodes where we going to be discussing sin. What does the Bible say about sin? What's the definition of sin? What are the different types of sin? But today we're focusing on what is the definition, what is sin?

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today is Jeff. He's the administrator of bibleref.com. And Kevin, who's the managing editor of Got Questions Ministry. So as you, both of you know, receive a ton of questions about sin. The most common is, is this a sin? Where they'll identify some activity that they're doing, something they're thinking about, something they're desiring, and they want to know if that is sinful. But before we jump into specifics, like in future episodes, let's get the core definition down. So Jeff, why don't you start us off, what are some of the terms that the Bible uses to describe or define sin?

Jeff Laird

While the terms that the Bible uses will vary by the translation that you're looking at. So we have different words in English or different languages that the Bible is translated into, and those come from Greek and Hebrew terms. It's important to remember that a lot of those terms have overlap to them. Scripture does not set out sort of a a mathematical approach to sin where it says that, you know, here's a very precise microscopic definition of the border between this and that. But we can we can see a little bit of a gradient that the Bible provides, and essentially that grading is about how deliberately are you defying God's will. Because the core of what sin is, is when we say or do or think anything that deviates from God's perfect nature and his perfect will. So that can mean a lot of different things. In the the simplest sense of that, it's it's sometimes referred to as missing the mark. Some of the words that are used in Scripture have that idea where, one of the analogies that's actually in the Old Testament that uses that word as it talks about marksman, who are so precise that they can fire their weapon at a hair and not miss the mark. And that same phrase is sometimes used for sin. So there's that aspect of it.

Jeff Laird

Sometimes you'll hear the idea of trespassing or a trespass our trespasses. That's the idea of when you've crossed a boundary. Where you've gone past something you should not go or gone to somewhere you should not go to. After that comes transgressing. Transgressing is when you are more actively doing something against it. Sometimes we'll talk about art or music as being transgressive. And that's where it's deliberately intended to sort of provoke or to go past a certain boundary. And then after that you have words like iniquity. And iniquity and things like that, that's a reference to something that's very deliberate. That's where someone is saying I know God doesn't want this. And I know it's not what I'm supposed to do. And I'm going to choose to do this anyway. And again, all of those terms have a lot of overlap. They're all broad. They're all sort of, they all apply in their own ways to most things. And as we talk about this, we're gonna sort of explore the idea that in one sense, it doesn't really make a difference what kind of sin it is. But then in some other senses, it does. And rather than getting hung up on the definitions, we can just use those as ways of seeing that there are many different ways that we

can commit sin. There are different ways that we can violate God's perfection in his law, and we need to be sensitive to any or all of those different ways that we might be sinning.

Kevin Stone

The Bible also helps us to understand what sin is by the use of metaphors. And in scripture we see sin is described metaphorically as a burden that is, is placed on the shoulders or a burden that we bear. Also a stain. Sin is pictured as a lion in Scripture. A, you know a ravenous beast that's gonna be hard to fight. A slave master, a debt that we owe, and leprosy is another common metaphor for sin in scripture. But these are all bad things. Whatever whatever aspect of sin you're looking at, these metaphors bring out the the horrible nature of sin. First, John, three and verse four says that everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, sin is lawlessness says that verse. And so there's a very short one word definition of sin. It's lawlessness. And so it's the law of God of course that we're talking about. The law of God is an expression of the will of God. And so when we violate God's law, we violate his will. And so the law of God is what measures our duty. It determines what is guilty and what is not guilty. And the level of our guiltiness before God, that all goes back to the law of God. So there is a law that governs mankind. It is the law of God.

Kevin Stone

And I think it's important to to always go back to God when we're talking about defining sin because nobody else has the the the authority to define sin. I cannot define it. My word as a human being is not binding, but God's word is binding. And he is the one who sets the standard that we have to meet. He's the one who has, has the authority to say this is right and this is wrong. And so God defines this. In fact, we could. We could take a look at sin from a theological point of view and say that sin is a lack of conformity to the character of God. So sin is sin because it is different from what God is, and God is eternally holy. He is perfectly holy. And since God determines what sin is, it's it's basically his nature, his character that is determining that which is sin.

Kevin Stone

So, for example, lying is wrong. How come? Well, because God says lying is wrong, right? Well, yeah, that's part of it. God does say that lying is wrong and that helps to make it wrong. But on a more basic level, lying is wrong because God is truth. Jesus is truth. John 14, I am the way the truth and the life Jesus said. And so when we lie, our character and our actions fail to conform to the character and actions of God who is the truth and who always speaks the truth. So we fall short of his nature and his, His action. Murder is wrong. How come? Well, because God said don't kill. Well, yeah, that's part of it. But more basically, murder is wrong because God is life. He's the giver of life. He's the sustainer of life. And when we murder, we do and become the opposite of who God is. We do the opposite of what God does, which is give life. It is a lack of conformity to his character. We don't steal because God said not to steal, and also because God gives. He gives and he gives and he gives. Everything that we have is a gift from God. And so when we steal, we become the opposite of who God is. We take things selfishly for ourselves, that things that don't belong to us. This is something that God never does. Never crosses his mind. It's not part of his nature. And so when we steal, we fall short of who God is and what we are called to be. And we could go on. Adultery is wrong. Why? Because God is faithful. And when we are unfaithful, we are not reflecting the character of God. And this is all very important because according to Genesis one and verse 27, we are created in the image of God and so it is our duty. It's our responsibility

to be reflecting that image of God in this world. Every time we don't, every time we fall short of that, we we become sinners, we we show ourselves to be sinners.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, I love that illustration. I was having a conversation actually just this morning at the gym about so often parents, when they tell their children not to do something, child asks why. And sometimes the parents as well, because they said so. And ultimately eventually that becomes not a good enough reason that if you're not actually meaning why this decision would be wrong for that child to make. Give them an understanding of why that action is wrong. Ultimately yes, if even if God didn't give an explanation, if God said don't do this, that that's enough for us not to do it. But having that explanation like you were giving that we don't murder because God is life. We don't lie because God is truth. We don't commit adultery because God is love and God is faithful, et cetera. Those are those powerful reminders of that sin is not just an arbitrary list of things God tells us not to do that. There are good reasons behind it. That they reflect God's characters and us as God's image bearers should be reflecting God. We are his likeness to the world. So powerful reminder.

Shea Houdmann

One thing that I found interesting and it was recently also reminded that of James, where he says that James 4:17, anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. So not only is sin actively doing something that you shouldn't, sin is also not doing something that you should. So this is an incredibly high standard we're held to. It's it's one thing to give someone a list of commands. OK. Don't break any of these commands, but ultimately that it's impossible for us to do. But at least that's a goal that we can proceed, but then always doing the good that we should do. Well, that's a whole another level. I I've struggled with that for a long time. Is how do I? I've seen many, many, many opportunities to do good that I don't do. It could become like a a guilt type of thing. So no God's standards are extremely high because of God's holiness, because of his righteous character, because of his perfection. Sin is anything that falls short of that. So that's a powerful reminder just from looking about the biblical definitions, I'll just understand what exactly sin is and why sin is so sinful.

Jeff Laird

There's there's so many branches that you can take on a subject like this because it's so fundamental, such a cornerstone. Some of the things that we're starting to explore I think are important. One is this idea of the reasons why something is sin. And Kevin, you were touching on the idea that sin is rooted in God's nature, and you use words like eternal. And that's really important because there's a famous dilemma from ancient Greek philosophy that talks about, you know, our good and evil defined as something that come from the gods and then they tell us. Or are good and evil, something that the gods hear and then pass along otherwise. And when they apply that to God, it's saying, you know, does is God telling us something is good because he is subject to some higher moral law? Or these moral laws, just something that God is making up? And that's a false dilemma because the actual answer is that no, what's right or wrong, what's good and evil is grounded in God's perfect, unchanging nature. So he is not inventing these ideas, nor are they subject to change at any point of time. They're just part of that.

Jeff Laird

And then there's the side of reason where we talk about why does God provide us with these rules? I used to be a mechanical engineer and I worked in industry, a lot of different industries and very often in factories we would put warning labels on things. We would put warning labels on chemicals. We put warning labels on machines. Some of them were pretty creative. We had some lathes and stuff like that that had stickers that said don't touch or not only will it kill you, it will hurt the whole time you're dying. And there are a lot of times people ignored those warnings. And at some point in time you have to look at those and you say why? Why am I being told not to do this? Why does it say stay inside the lines? Why does it say you must do this? You must not do that. Why do I have to wear safety glasses? Why do I have to wear steel toed shoes? Why can't I do this or do that? And ultimately it's easier in a factory setting for us to understand that the point is not to ruin your fun. The point is not to control you. The point is to save you from something. And even just in the practical sense of our lives, God gives us warnings about sin for the same reason. So many of the things that God warns us of is because he is the creator. And as the one who designed us and knows the way the universe is supposed to work and knows the way life works, a lot of what he warns us about he's warning us because if you don't do things according to the instructions per say, you're going to suffer consequences for it.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, that's good. Jeff, I've I've often thought every time I see the like a an electrical big transformer place, you know, where all the the high voltage wires are coming in there. There's always fenced off and there's always a sign. And the sign says something to the effect of keep out, stay away. And but that sign is there and the limit is there for a very good reason. It's for our benefit that this area is restricted from us. And only a fool would climb the fence. Only a fool would be a trespasser, right, to use the biblical term. One of the biblical terms for sin is trespass. So going someplace where you have been forbidden to go. And God's rules, God's fences, God's signposts are there for our benefit. We should not trespass against what he has told us not to do, because it would be injurious to ourselves.

Jeff Laird

Another thing that's good to keep in mind with that when we talk about reasons and I'm sure that we're going to explore this in more depth in a different conversation. But we look at things like the Old Testament law versus the new covenant, the New Testament and it's important to remember that when we talk about that, we're still talking about the idea that some of God's laws are moral, civil, ceremonial. So for example, when we talk about God's unchanging nature and somebody says, well, then why do Christians believe that they are allowed to eat non kosher foods now whereas in the past that would have been considered a sin? Well, and the the real key to that is to understand that if, say, I own a business. And I tell people our uniform is a blue polo shirt, which is what I'm wearing right now. If if somebody decides they want to wear a red polo shirt, which is what Kevin happens to be wearing, there's nothing in the wider world that's immoral about that. Right? And not necessarily, there's nothing immoral about having that different color. But the owner of the store for the purposes of his business, for the purposes of what he's doing, has a reason he wants his employees to wear that particular shirt. And if he says don't and you choose to defy that, then you are breaking his rules. You are defying his laws. So in the context of the Old Testament, those are things where God was saying, look for the nation of Israel this is how I want you to present yourselves. This is how I want you to be. This is what I want you to do. So in that sense, was it a moral sin if an Israeli deliberately chose to eat something unclean? Yes, because in that sense, God is saying you as a people, I don't want you to do this, but that doesn't

mean that it's a sin for all people, of all times. I know we'll have a chance to explore that in more depth, but it's a way for us to remember that the real core of what sin is gets to this idea of are you cooperating with what God has given you? Are you taking what he has told you, what he has said to you, and are you sincerely making an effort to follow that? Are you obeying God? Are you following his will, or are you not? That's really what the core of sin comes down to.

Shea Houdmann

Good, great points, both of you. I love the distinction between the moral law, the national law, the ceremonial law, etcetera. Not everything in the Old Testament law was ever intended to be universally, eternally for all people. Some of it was, and some people will point to OK, if I just obey the 10 commandments, that's all that God expects of us. It's like, em? There's old Sabbath command, which is a whole nother episode, but we also have in the New Testament we transitioned to the law of Christ. Which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And then to love your neighbor yourself. So in other words, the laws that Christ commands us to obey our love God with every fiber of our being to to our utmost and then do that for everyone else on the planet. Like Ohh wow, that's a lot more complicated than just following the ten commandments. So people look at the all the New Testament law so much easier than the Old Testament law. There's only two commands instead of 600 and and whatever it's like. Well, no, actually it's the whole switch of your entire motivation. It's not to be. I'm just God's law is not just to be a checklist. OK, here's all the things I have to do to check check done like the the rich young ruler when he when Jesus had the conversation with him said all these I've done since I was young and Jesus says well go sell everything, give it to the poor. And he walks away sad because he loved money more than he loved God which violates love your Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. So Jesus pointing us to a the higher law. So just to realize that sin is anytime we're falling short of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbors our self.

Shea Houdmann

So I was saying earlier this is a high standard. Sin is a violation of God's character. It's a violation of the image we represent of him. It's a violation of who he's called us to be and how he's called us to relate to one another. So sin is all-encompassing in terms of our day-to-day experience. If you really look at what the Bible says, sin is everywhere. Sin is always, wow. With that said, I mean, we're going to conclude this episode with a conversation on what is God's solution to sin? You can't talk about sin without talking about solution. But before we jump to that, there's two other things we receive quite a bit, quite a few questions about. It's like most commonly referred to as inherited sin and original sin. So Kevin give us a brief understanding. What do these two terms mean, both biblically and theologically?

Kevin Stone

Well, inherited sin goes back to Adam and Eve specifically Adam where, where his nature was passed on to all of his offspring. Adam was created in the image of God. But then when Adam fell, his nature was depraved. He had a sinful nature. And he passed that along to all of his offspring and we are all offspring of Adam. We have all inherited this sinful nature. So we have a, we have this tendency to sin. We want to sin naturally. We like to sin. And that all goes back to being a an offspring of Adam. We have inherited that sin. Original sin that very first sin that was committed by Adam and Eve. But the New Testament always specifies Adam as being the one who brought sin into the world. Romans 5 and verse 12 sin

entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way death came to all people because all sin. Romans 5 versus 17 and 18, then by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man. One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people. So this is a reference to original sin which was imputed to all of mankind. To impute is to reckon to one's account. So, theologically speaking, when Adam sinned, we sinned with him. We are reckoned guilty of Adam's original sin. So we are sinners, at least in those two ways we have an inherited sin nature that we've gotten from Adam that's been passed down through the generations. And then imputed sin. We are held responsible for that original sin. And that's not even dealing with our own personal sin that we just choose to disobey God, either doing things I shouldn't or not doing the things that I should. And so there's personal sin involved as well. So sinners three times over, I guess. And it's a we all fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3, verse 23.

Shea Houdmann

So with the original sin, so that would be the one that we received the most and not just us in the history of Christianity, there's been the most debate about original sin. It usually comes down to how is it fair for God to hold me essentially, hold me accountable for the sin of Adam. I wasn't there. I wasn't the one who chose to eat the fruit. Why am I being held accountable? Why is that sin essentially being imputed to my account? So what's the, Jeff? What's the theological answer to that? How is original sin as a concept, how is that quote on quote fair?

Jeff Laird

I'll give you the the more practical we'll call it the street fighting answer to that which is nobody cares. And what I mean by that is that, yeah, from a theological standpoint, original sin means something. It, you know, it affects a lot of things and questions that we have. But I can look at an individual person and say what, what difference does that possibly make for you? Are you telling me that you've lived your entire life in perfect sinlessness never doing something selfish, never saying something wrong, never doing it? I know what the answer is going to be, and the answer is going to be well, no. Well, that means that for you, at least, in particular, who cares? Nobody cares. It doesn't matter, you know, so as an argument for people who want to sort of break away from God's right to have that opinion, for him to be perfectly holy and to say that, look, this is a this is a creation that has now become corrupted from a practical standpoint, it just doesn't matter because we all sin by choice. We decide to do things that we should not do.

Jeff Laird

Now again, I'm not being dismissive. There are reasons why the concept of original sin matters because we talk about people who are intellectually or morally prevented from what we would think of as making good decisions. We talk about unborn children, we there's a lot of different topics that we can get into. But the basic idea is that sin in the sense that it matters when we're worried about original sin, is about you and your choices. Everything else like that falls under the umbrella of God and his grace, and what he's going to do or not going to do. But the part of original sin that really bugs us really bothers us, we can deal with basically by saying, look, we all sin by choice and that's what we really have to worry about. We have to worry about the rest of it, until we've dealt with that first, right?

Shea Houdmann

Great point. Whether or not there's original sin, we still have our personal sin, and then we'll talk here in the second, inherited sin. Christ had to die for our sin. So whether whether or not there is original that does not change the fact that we need Christ. We need his sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. But the one quick question about inherited sin and just because I've been in an e-mail conversation with someone about it and his question was essentially that he doesn't believe that we're born sinners. That that children are innocent until, they're free of sin, until they reach the point where they choose to sin. And ultimately, I go back to the many versus the Bible, whether it's in Genesis, where the referring death as a result of sin or Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death. Well who were talking about already a pretty depressing topic and how pervasive sin is, now we're going to talk about babies dying. It's very sadly, babies die in the womb. Babies die when they're extremely young. According to the Bible, death is the result of sin. So if a young child, a baby, was not infected was not impacted by sin, there would be no possibility of them dying. So I've been trying to explain this person and I I'm not not getting anywhere, so Kevin help me out. Is there a better way I can be explaining this is to the question of inherited sin. We all have a sin nature in terms of why do young people's babies die if they've not yet personally chosen to sin?

Kevin Stone

No, I think that's a good illustration. That's a good response to someone who thinks that there is no sin nature. The the fact that infants do die before they choose personal sin, they're still, they're still under the effects of sin. The sin of mankind, the the sin nature that's been passed down. Ephesians 2 and verse three says that we are by nature children of wrath. That is, people deserving of God's wrath by nature is what the passage says. And it's just clear in scripture. I mean we of of course, we'll have people that don't want to believe it, but Scripture is clear that we do have a sin nature and we're we're born with that and that's what gives us that predilection to commit sin.

Shea Houdmann

Even like a Psalm, I think it's 51:5 where David says, in sin my mother conceived me and most interpreters view that as David saying, I was sinful from the moment I was conceived. So if that is an argument for the sin nature, I don't know what it is. But let's let's close this episode with a conversation about hope. So Kevin, start us off.

Kevin Stone

Praise the Lord. God did not leave us in our sinful, hopeless, depraved condition. But he came to us. He sent the Savior, Jesus Christ, his only begotten son, in order to redeem us out of the prison cell of sin. He came to bear our iniquities. He came to set the captives free. And he was successful in his mission for which God sent him. I love the book of Ezra. I'm going through right now in our church. Ezra, 10 and verse two says this, we have trespassed against our God. Yet now there is hope. I love that. We've sinned. We've trespassed. We've done things that we should not do. We have fallen short of God's holiness. But there's hope. There is always hope in Christ. There is hope because God has provided the savior for our sins. Psalm 51, verse 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These oh God you will not despise. As we come to Christ in repentance and faith, he forgives us our sin and cleanses us from all in righteousness. Praise His name.

Jeff Laird

The most important thing for me when we talk about this topic is to keep that idea in mind, is that yes, God has this incredibly high standard for sin. And in that sense, every sin is this death penalty type of offense, and it seems unfair, and it seems impossible, and it seems ridiculous. But we gotta remember that with those high standards come exactly that. There's this deep grace. Book of Hebrews talks about how you know Jesus Christ lived as a human being but without sin. And that means that we as human beings should recognize that he fully grasps, understands what it means, and for that reason, when we go to him to ask for forgiveness, we can go there in confidence and not in fear. Because we know that he knows and he understands. First John says that if we confess our sins, he's going to forgive us. Matthew 12:31 talks about every sin will be forgiven and it gives an exception that I know that we'll talk about in a different different format, different time. But the idea is that God recognizes who and what we are. He does not set an impossible standard for us to be reconciled to him.

Jeff Laird

The the standard of being sinlessly perfect as a fallen human being that might be impossible, that might be beyond my ability. But God doesn't just leave us there. He gives us this unbelievably graceful way to be reconciled. Where he says if you are willing to accept, you recognize that you have sin. You know that you've fallen short and you believe my son, who said that he was sent as the cure as the solution for that. If you believe that he died and rose again in order to pay the penalty for that sin, then you're free from it. And there's where sincerity and all the other things come in. It's not about lip service. It's not a magical formula. You don't just get to say those words and have it work. But if you really want that, if you really pursue that. Then sin becomes something that someday, someday can't happen soon enough. But someday is going to be in our past that will be behind us. We don't have to live in that forever, and it's that God gives us that gracious way to get through that. I think that's really important because everything else about sin, like you said, Shea, can be depressing. It can be really heavy to think about, but to remember there is, there's hope. There is grace on the other side of that and that's what God really wants us to take away from that.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, both of you. First Corinthians 15, Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. That's what I want to conclude with Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death. Because of our sins, we will eventually die. Death is more than just the act of physically dying. It is a separation. Physical death is separation from the soul, spirit from the body. But there's more to that. Spiritual death is separation of us from God. And if we die in that state you will be eternally separated from God. Cannot possibly pay this debt because we are sinful and there's nothing that we can offer to God, that would be sufficient. But Jesus Christ, God in the flesh died for our sins. He died to pay the penalty that we cannot pay. His death on the cross was perfect, was complete, was sufficient to atone for the sins of the entire world, according to First John 2:2.

Shea Houdmann

So what does the Bible say? Says believe, trust, receive Christ as your savior. Trust in him alone is the payment for your sins. Trust in him for forgiveness. Ask him for forgiveness. Realize that his resurrection from the dead demonstrates his payment for sin and his death was sufficient. That's the message of salvation. That Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave, demonstrating his victory over sin and death. We can experience that too by believing in him, our sins will be forgiven. And we too will be

victorious over death through Christ. So this ending, this podcast episode about sin pointing to the solution, and that's Jesus Christ. And any questions about what that means, how to receive Christ, how he paid for sin, please ask us at gotquestions.org. This is truly our absolute favorite question to answer related to salvation. Point you to Jesus Christ is the ultimate solution for sin. The sins of the whole world, but for your sins personally and mine and Jeff's, and Kevin's. So this has been the Got Questions podcast on what is sin, what is the definition of sin? Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.