

Transcript 180

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. And joining me today is Jeff, the managing editor for bibleref.com and Kevin's managing editor for Got Questions Ministries. So gentlemen, thank you for joining me again today. We're going to be continuing our series in questions about sin. And we cover the the biggies. The what is personal sin versus imputed sin versus inherited sin versus original sin in our first episode. And today we're going to kind of jump into some of the most frequently asked questions we received about sin and covering each one in brief. Some of these we could probably do a whole episode on, but we're going to try to summarize them for you. So today we're going to be covering 9, maybe not most frequent, but definitely among the most frequent. And then we'll have a couple more episodes we'll do after this, this rounding out our series on most commonly asked questions we receive about sin.

Shea Houdmann

Then so let me start us off with the question, how can I know if something is a sin? Now this one's interesting in that just this morning someone submitted a question of is it a sin to grow this particular flower? I was like looking at the questions like I've never heard of this particular flower. So I, I Google it. It's just a flower. It's not smoked, it's not psychedelic, it's just it looks kind of like a a bird that's really, really pretty flower. Like so why in the world is this person even wondering if it's a sin? But this question, how can I know if something a sin well, clearly, if the Bible specifically says that it is the Bible commands you not to do it, it's a sin to violate that command. But so many questions that we deal with today are not issues that are found in the Bible. The Bible does not specifically say do or do not do this certain things. That's where some questions like this come up. I'm I'm often getting questions similar to this flower, one where someone's like really wondering is is this a sin or is this a sin? Some that I just have to ask them, well, OK, why is this even a question for you? Because clearly this is not a moral right or wrong issue. Why are you wondering if this is a sin?

Shea Houdmann

And sometimes in Romans 14 talks about this, sort of the violation of your conscience. If it's bothering you, you should examine why it might be bothering you. And that's a good clue. That's something you can use to help you determine. Romans 14 says that whatever it does not come from faith as a sin. So if you're not absolutely convinced this is the right thing to do, if you're questioning, if you're doubting it, you shouldn't participate in that until you are fully convinced this something that's right. This is something that's good. This is something that's God honoring. That's that's one principle. You can go by.

Shea Houdmann

Sometimes even a principle of caring for someone else, for example, with going back to this unusual flower question. If if your next door neighbor is deathly allergic to this particular flower, you planting it in your yard, knowing having this knowledge about your neighbor, that would probably be a sin because you are not showing love and care for your neighbors. So while planting a particular flower in itself not a sin, how that flower might affect other people very much could be a sin. So you're not showing love, you're not showing care.

Shea Houdmann

Sometimes you have to look to what are the laws of the land. There are many things the Bible does not directly address, but the the national law of the country you live in says that you're not to do this, Romans 13 tells us we are to obey the laws that the government puts in place unless those laws violate God's word. But with that set aside, if there's a law against it, you shouldn't commit it. I think speeding would be example of this. The Bible nowhere addresses driving a car above the posted speed limit. But since there's a government law saying do not do this. It therefore becomes a sin because you are violating a law that God has said we are to obey.

Shea Houdmann

So I could go on and on. There's lots of principles to God God's word gives us to help determine whether something's a sin when the Bible doesn't specifically address it. We don't have to ask questions about is adultery is sin, is lying a sin? Is violence, murder are those things sins? The Bible specifically says they are, but all these they call them gray areas or even not gray just areas the Bible doesn't address. So many more principles and we'll include a link to our how can I know if something is a sin article in the show notes or this episodes because it lays out more principles than I have time. But ultimately, what I would usually point back to James, 1:5 instructs us to ask God for wisdom. So if you ever have a doubt about whether something you're wanting to participate in is a sin, ask God. Ask God to give you his heart on this issue. Ask God to give you this sermon to make the decision whether this is something you should or shouldn't do, whether it's a sin or not a sin. That seems to be your prayer that God will always answer because God does not want us have any doubt about what's right and wrong. What honors and glorifies Him and what offends his holy character. So ask God for wisdom, ask God to reveal to you whether a particular actions is a sin. Maybe a couple other examples, some video games, a lot of questions about playing this video game is sin, is playing this video game is sin, is playing this sport a sin? So many questions like that the Bible doesn't directly address but the Bible gives us principles there whereby we can make these sorts of decisions. So there's it's super brief answer on how can I know if something's to sin when the Bible doesn't directly address it. Just jump to question #2 and Jeff, you take this one. Are all sins equal to God?

Jeff Laird

That's one of those questions that's a little bit loaded because there's more than one way to answer it, because there's more than one perspective to have on the question. The the simplest answer is to say no, not in the way that people typically mean it when they say are all sins equal. At the same time, all sins are equally condemning in the sense that they make us imperfect. So we don't want to have this simplistic attitude towards it. But when we do look at scripture, we do see plenty of evidence that, for example, God does not consider the white lie exactly the same thing as murder. God does distinguish between those things, but that does not mean that there are not consequences for all of those things we do. All sin separates us from God. So it doesn't matter whether it's big sin, small sin, perfect and imperfect or not the same thing. They were at different levels of sin and rebellion, but it's not necessarily the case that God looks at every single sin as exactly the same thing. We're all sinners. We have James 3:2, Romans 3:10, Ephesians 2:3, Psalm 51:5. Just some of the scriptures that make it clear that every single human being is guilty of sin. And in that sense we're all imperfect and in that sense every sin puts us in the same category. The white liar, the murderer, it's all in that same category of somebody who is imperfect. They've fallen short of God's standard. At the same time, scripture does tell

us that there's a difference of degree in sin, and that God recognizes that. We can go straight to Jesus's own words, John 19:11 he talks about two circumstances where he says this person is guilty of the greater sin. He explicitly indicates that there is one sin that's actually worse than another in that circumstance. In Matthew 22:38 mentions the greatest commandment and if something is greater, that means that there is a higher obligation towards that particular law than others. Matthew 23:23, he talks about neglecting weightier matters of the law. So there again, Jesus is not just putting priority on some sins being worse than others, but that some of God's commands have a higher priority than others in that sense.

Jeff Laird

In the Old Testament we have issues where the the Old Testament law talked about what we would sort of refer to as deliberate or willful, or sometimes the language used, is high handed sins. In other words, that's when somebody is making a deliberate choice, knowing it's a sin, knowing they should not do it, and purposefully choosing to do it anyway. For which under the Old Testament law there really just is no sacrificial option for that. You have to wait for the day of atonement when you can have those sins forgiven. But within that context that's considered very serious. Leviticus Chapter 4 offers references to accidental sins. If you do something that's against God's law without realizing it's a very different concept.

Jeff Laird

And then we see the same thing in the future. Jesus makes a reference in Matthew 11:12 where he says that there's going to be two groups of people in different circumstances. And he says, well, this group it's going to be more tolerable for them, on the day of judgment, than it will be for this group. So there again, he's talking about differences in degree. And revelation 20:17 talks about how people who are lost will be judged according to what they do. And when something is in accord or there's accordance, it means that there's proportion. It means that there is something coordinated with them.

Jeff Laird

So there's from a scriptural standpoint, we can see there's a lot of evidence that, yes, God does actually differentiate between different sins. He does not see every sin as being literally equal. One place where this comes up, for example, is when we talk about adultery. Jesus makes a famous comment where he says if you look at somebody with lust in your heart, you've committed adultery in your heart. And people say, well, does that mean that God considers lust in the in the mind exactly the same as adultery? And scripture like this gives us good reason to say no. He doesn't. But that doesn't mean that lust in the mind is not a sin. It is a sin. And it does have serious problems and serious consequences attached to it. So from a scriptural standpoint, all sin is not equal in the sense that God will judge some sins more harshly than others. He does think of some things as being worse or less moral than others. At the same time, every sin makes us separated from God. So every sin puts us in the category of a sinner who needs salvation. Even if not every sin is something that God looks at and says, oh well, the murderer and the the petty thief are identical.

Shea Houdmann

Now Jeff at the excellent point and I'm glad you brought up Matthew 5 in the adultery in the heart passage, but that's where I see this one coming up the most is someone's like Jesus says that if I look at

a woman lustfully, I've committed adultery in my heart. Is that the same thing as actually committing adultery? And you look at the Old Testament law where there were penalties for committing adultery. There is no penalty listed for having lust in your heart. So clearly in the New Testament we know both are a sin, but the way the Old Testament deals with it listing one of them in the 10 Commandments, the other one not the clear distinction between how God views sin. And Jesus also compares anger with committing murder. Anger can often lead to murder, but nowhere in the Old Testament is the sin of anger given a steep consequence. While murder is worthy of the death penalty in God's eyes in the Old Testament law. So there's clearly and seeing how God punishes different sins or requires certain punishments or restitution differently for different sin clarifies that no, and in that sense they are not equal. Kevin, next question to you, what is the sin unto death?

Kevin Stone

Yes, this is a this is a tough one and we do get this question quite a bit. We have an article online, of course about it, but I guess we should start with just taking a look at the scripture where this question comes from. First John 5, verses 16 and 17 say this. If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those who sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin and there is sin that does not lead to death. So what do we know? Clearly from this passage, first of all is that John does not name a specific sin. He is giving a general statement here. And in that general statement he makes the point that some sin leads to death. Some sin does not lead to death.

Kevin Stone

So then we're faced with the question what type of death are we talking about? We have two options. We'll talk about those in just a minute, but then we should probably also note that John does not specifically forbid people from praying for the sin unto death, he only says that he won't command that it be done. So it seems like you can pray for that sin unto death if you want, but probably not with the same confidence level that you would have in praying for the other types of sin. And John is not going to command such a prayer. That's as far as he goes there. Should also look at the context what comes immediately before these verses. I'll read verses 13 through 15 of First John Chapter 5. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God. That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we ask of him. So in the verses immediately preceding our passage here, he speaks of the assurance of salvation and the fact that God hears and answers prayer. And we can pray confidently as we are praying in his will. And then immediately following this passage that we're looking at verse 18 says this, we know that any one born of God does not continue to sin. The one who is born of God keeps them safe and the evil one cannot harm them. So John gives us the principle that the believer will not pursue sin in the same way that the unbeliever does. He will confess sin, be restored to fellowship. Believers still sin. But he's not going to be continuing to live in sin. He's not going to be practicing a lifestyle of sin. It's not going to be his go to behavior. It's going to be unusual for him to be in sin. He's gonna take care of it. He's gonna keep short accounts with God. I guess we could say.

Kevin Stone

So what about this sin unto death that John talks about and the sin that is not unto death? There are several interpretations. I've I've read at least four, but I'll share two of those that I think are both viable interpretations of this passage. First is that the sins are committed by believers. Both the sin unto death and the sin not unto death committed by believers. And in this view, the death referred to is physical death. So physical illness that would lead to physical death. And so the one that leads unto death would be a willful, premeditated, rebellious, unconfessed sin that a believer is just stubbornly holding on to. And so God disciplines that believer eventually with a removal from this world. And so we would be talking about the cases such as Ananias and Saphira in Acts Chapter 5, and some of the Corinthian believers and 1st Corinthians chapter 11 where there is a physical consequence to sin. The other in the same in the same view, the same interpretation, the other sin, the sin that does not lead to death, is the sin that a believer commits, that is confessed and forsaken. And so God does not discipline that sin with physical death because it is confessed, it's repented of. And so we pray for that sin, John says. We pray that the believer who's committing that sin would have godly sorrow leading to repentance, and that there would be forgiveness and restoration there. And that's what we're praying for. So that's the first interpretation.

Kevin Stone

The second interpretation that I think is actually a valid interpretation, would be that the sins that are being talked about here are committed by two different people, one believer and one unbeliever. And so in this view, the death being referred to is not physical death. And you'll notice that nowhere in the passage does it mention physicality. It does not mention illness or healing, physical healing, anything like that, it simply talks about the sin. And so if the death is spiritual death, that is eternal separation from God, ultimate death, then this is going to be committed by the unbeliever. And so the unbeliever's sin will eventually ultimately lead to eternal separation from God. And John says I'm, I'm not gonna tell you to to pray for that with the same level of confidence as you would a believer who is caught up in a sin. And for that believer that is not going to lead to eternal separation from God, but it's it needs to lead to repentance and and the forsaking of that sin. So John says, do pray for that and pray with confidence. My brother or sister is caught in this sin. Lord, please restore him to fellowship. We pray with confidence that God is gonna answer that prayer. It's part of part of God's will that that be prayed for and answered. And we know from verse 13 same context that the believer is not going to lose his salvation because we have that confidence that we can know that we are saved.

Kevin Stone

So the message is loud and clear that God answers prayer whether or not you go with either of these interpretations, the the fact remains that God answers prayer. John does give two conditions for answer prayer in his book. First one is in chapter 3 of of his epistle, and that is a heart that does not condemn us. So First John 3 verses 21 and 22, dear friends of our hearts do not condemn us. We have confidence before God and receive from him anything that we ask because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. So the first condition for answered prayer is obedience to God and a heart that's right with God, no one confessed sin. And then the second condition is mentioned right here in Chapter 5. The passage that we've been studying verse 14. If we ask anything according to his will. So we ask according to his will. Then John gives an example of praying according to God's will. Prayer that's going to be answered and that is pray for my brother or sister, who is caught up in sin. That this person would come to repentance and forsake that sin.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin I well said. I am familiar with both of those interpretations and probably some of the others and similar to the previous conversation we had about the unpardonable sin or the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This passage has led a lot of people to being very concerned like oh no have I committed thee sin unto death? Have I sinned so grievously against God that he is done with me, those type of things. And I think your explanation and the context that passage makes it clear it's not talking about any one certain sin that is unforgivable or that will definitely ultimately lead to your physical death and or spiritual death. Its talking about different quality of sin, different person committing the sin and that sort of thing. And so I think those explanations are are very, very helpful.

Shea Houdmann

So go ahead and jumping on to the next question. I'll take this one. The question is, what are the seven deadly sins? So both this one and the next one both have a little bit of a Catholic background to them. The seven deadly sins were actually not something in Bible. The Bible does not have a list of these seven deadly sins, nor does it ever describe any certain sins as the seven deadly ones. But the Pope Mcgregory very early in church history, about 6th century AD came up with this list. And the list of the seven deadly sins are pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth or laziness. So you look at this list and I think we would agree that all of these are sins and in various points in the Bible they are specific identified as sin. But to identify these particular 7 as the seven deadly sins, not biblical at all. Gluttony, it's a sin that's often overlooked. Sloth or laziness, another sin that people are often very willing to indulge in and don't see anything wrong with. So it's good for us to be pointed out to different things the Bible says are sins. But to identify these seven as being on a different level than all the others, not biblical at all.

Shea Houdmann

But what I would I want to point to someone to in proverbs Chapter 6 versus 6 to 19, it says there are six things the Lord hates. Seven that are abomination to him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that divides wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false false witness who breathes out lies, and when he sows discord among brothers. And so why come up with a list of seven deadly sins that the Bible identifies as sins but does not place on the special level when there's actually a specific passage in the Bible that identifies 7 sins that the Lord specifically hates. So seven deadly sins, it's something that's well known throughout church history, has a lot of background history to it, but it's not a list specifically identified in Scripture. And some people tend to think that one in Proverbs six I just read, those are the seven deadly sins. But two different things, two different lists, one Biblical, one not so.

Jeff Laird

So I think part of the point that's really intended when that list came up originally was just that those are those are seven things that are especially corrosive to your spiritual relationship with God. I don't wanna try to go back, you know, 14-15 hundred years and put words in somebody's mouth. But I can see somebody looking at those and saying, hey, these are these are 7 things to which we're prone that are especially damaging to our faith and our relationship with God. If you think about it in that sense then you know it's as long as you keep it in that context, it's fine. But we don't want to take it to the point of

saying these are seven things that are biblically identified as being somehow worse than or more serious than any other.

Shea Houdmann

Like using the term deadly kind of can makes us a little dangerous and that I was really lazy yesterday. Is that that a deadly sin? I mean corrosive like you said, dangerous. Something we should avoid. The Bible condemns laziness but so I put it on the list of deadly sins I think is maybe a little over the top. Maybe 7 corrosive sins would probably be more accurate. But again, the Bible identifies all seven of these as sins. But to place them on another level, not something the Bible does. And the second sort of Catholic related question, Jeff, I'll let you tackle this one. Does the Bible teach mortal and venial sins?

Jeff Laird

First we have to understand what we're talking about. In in a venial would mean something in the body, you know, mortal would mean something that's fatal. There's a lot of misunderstanding about this. And the the cartoon version of this is a suggestion that Catholicism teaches that if you commit a mortal sin, that it is unforgivable, and that you are permanently and forever separated from God. And that's not what Catholicism teaches about mortal and venial sins. The difference essentially between a mortal and a venial sin, in Catholicism is whether or not that is something that God is willing to forgive without confession, repentance, absolution, so on and so forth. So, for example, if a person commits a venial sin and then dies immediately afterwards, the teaching would be that that person can anticipate that God would be willing to forgive. That that wouldn't interfere with that person's eternal salvation. However, if a person were to commit a sin like murder, and then not confess that sin, not be restored to right fellowship, not repent of that and die that God would not choose to forgive that. That's the basic idea of mortal and venial sin. So in in even shorter terms of mortal sin is something that in Catholicism is so serious that if you do it and you don't confess before you die, then your soul is damned. Whereas a venial sin would be something that as long as you're in good standing with God to begin with and you commit that sin, then you can be forgiven of that.

Jeff Laird

From a biblical standpoint, that is a complete and absolute warped version of what salvation even is or even means. For mortal and venial sins to work that way would imply that we have to have participation from other people to be saved. That if I don't have a properly approved priest with whom to confess my sin and provide me with the right rituals and sacraments, that my soul is going to be forfeit on account of that. Or the flip side being that if I can have that rightly approved person say the right words and have me say the right words, that God will accept that as an acceptable forgiveness. There's just there's nothing in scripture that speaks to salvation that way. Either we are saved. Or we are not. If we are truly saved, God can and will forgive any sin that we commit. That doesn't mean that believers are going to be expected to act just like non believers, but it does mean that when we sin, we can expect that God will forgive. So there isn't. There's. Nothing as as blatant as this mortal and venial sin in scripture itself. It's a interesting idea that sometimes misunderstood but it is not biblical.

Kevin Stone

But praise the Lord for his grace and his forgiveness in Christ. Where would we be without that? The next question that I'll have here is what does it mean to have a seared conscience? And this is a good

question. And a seared conscience, I'll just say at the beginning is definitely something we want to avoid. We do not want to get to the place where our conscience is seared. And this wording comes from First Timothy 4, verses one and two, where Paul writes this. The spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

Kevin Stone

So what is the conscience? First of all, the conscience is the soul's early warning system. It's automatic. And it's something that God has hard wired into every person's soul. It's a part of who we are. And it's its job is to alert us of what's right and wrong. And the conscience doesn't really have an off switch. It is constantly running, constantly assessing the rightness or the wrongness of the things that we are considering, the things that we are seeing happen or the things that we're actually participating in, the things that we're doing.

Kevin Stone

But the warning here that we can draw out of this passage is that the conscience can be seared. And literally the word could be translated cauterized, as if with a hot iron. Just like a something hot can cauterize flesh. So there are ways that the soul, the, the or the conscience can be cauterized. In which case it would be rendered insensitive. Such a conscience would not work properly. Would not be working as designed. It's as if I mean, we could think of it as maybe a spiritual scar tissue has overgrown the conscience and has dulled it, has numbed it to the place where it can no longer sense right and wrong. Can't differentiate between the two.

Kevin Stone

So to keep this in context, Paul is referring specifically to false teachers in the last days and that these false teachers are characterized by three things. One is they are teaching the doctrines of demons. So false doctrine. And secondly they are hypocrites. So they're living a false life. And 3rd they are liars. They are characterized by lying. And so don't they know lying is wrong? Well, you know they do, but they don't care. And that's because of the seared conscience. Well, how can they stand in front of people and wear that mask? How can they? How can they be pretenders like that? How can they pretend to be righteous? And the answer is, you know, maybe they maybe it used to bother them, but not anymore because of these seared conscience. Their conscience is not working as it should. What used to produce guilty feelings in them is no longer producing those feelings. And their conscience has been numbed. So they can lie and lie and lie and lie. And they just don't care. It does not bother them. They feel no shame. They feel no guilt in what they're doing, because they've reached that place where their conscience has been seared or cauterized.

Kevin Stone

Paul contrasts the seared conscience in the same epistle. We go back to chapter one of First Timothy, verses four and five he says, that advancing God's work is by faith. And then verse 5, the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. So sincere faith. No hypocrisy. Pure heart. And there's no one confessed sin there. You're you're actually living a righteous. Life. And then, he says, comes from a good conscience. So the conscience still works. The

conscience still has the capacity to tell right from wrong. And the heart is free from guilt. This is what advances God's work. This is where the love comes from that we have for God and for others.

Kevin Stone

So how does a person actually end up with a seared conscience? Well, I think through repeated exposure to evil. Your sense of right and wrong can become numb to that point we can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. And also, if you over and over again are saying no to your conscience. The conscience is saying, hey, this isn't right. We should get out of here. We shouldn't be involved with this. And you and if your response is, you just need to be quiet. You ignore that conscience. You'll eventually get to the point where the conscience will shut up. It won't be alerting you anymore. That alarm's not gonna go off. So repeated repression of what the conscience is saying is a very big part of getting to that place of having a seared conscience. And, O Lord, have Mercy. Lord preserve us from getting to that point.

Jeff Laird

What's especially frightening about that is the idea that a seared conscience is truly insensitive is, it would be like having a smoke detector in your house and when you hear it beep you choose to ignore it, but then eventually what happens is it stops beeping. In other words you don't have the option to then start listening to it again. Once the conscience is seared. The problem is that that person is insensitive to it.

Kevin Stone

Right.

Jeff Laird

And that's a scary place to be when God just takes his hands off and says, well, then I'm not even gonna give you the capacity to recognize this anymore. That that's a terrifying aspect of a seared conscience.

Kevin Stone

Very true.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, I like your illustration of, like, a scar tissue where you have a wound, eventually the scar tissue covers over and in that sense it functions great. But scar tissue is less sensitive than regular skin. If you have a big scar from your body, you can touch it and it doesn't feel quite the same. It doesn't trigger your nerves the same, so it's there, but it's not optimal. It doesn't work as well as the original skin. And so you seared conscience, I mean to a point, it can still function until it ultimately it gets completely shut off, but it's no longer warning you like it should. I think that's an excellent way of looking at it.

Shea Houdmann

So. So, Kevin, Jeff, thanks for joining me for part one of this conversation of some of our most frequently asked questions about sin. We'll have a Part 2 where we cover several more questions we're frequently asked about sin. So I hope this conversation has been helpful to you. We covered various questions. How can I know if something's a sin? Are all sins equal to God? What is the sin unto death? What are the

seven deadly sins? Does the Bible teach mortal and venial sins? And what is a seared conscience and how can I avoid getting one? Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.