

## **Study Guide #3: The Nature of Sin**

### **Introduction**

Read Explorer II, Study Guide #2 for a review of how sin originated in heaven and then on earth. This Study Guide examines the nature of sin in some depth. Understanding the deep nature of sin is vital to comprehending God's plan of salvation, living the life of sanctification, and knowing the truth about Christian perfection. Therefore, this Study Guide is somewhat longer than most of our Study Guides.

### **Question #1: What is the doctrine of original sin, and is it Biblical?**

**Answer:** The term “original sin” does not refer to the first sin chronologically because that occurred in heaven, as we saw in the previous Study Guide. Original sin was Adam’s sin, not Eve’s, even though her sin preceded his. The apostle Paul distinguished these 2 person’s sins by saying, “**Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression**” (I Timothy 2:14, NKJV). In other words, Adam sinned with his eyes wide open.

The significance of Adam’s original sin is that (a) “**judgment,**” (b) “**condemnation,**” and (c) “**death**” (Romans 5:12, 14) came upon all of his descendants as a result (Romans 5:16, 18). In this sense, Adam was the representative of the entire human race even though no one had yet been born to Adam and Eve at the time. The words “**judgment**” and “**condemnation**” are courtroom terms. Thus, Paul was teaching that Adam’s willful sin brought a “**judgment**” and “**condemnation**” upon all mankind who came after him. As he put it in Romans 5:19, “**For as by one man’s [Adam’s] disobedience many were made sinners...**” (NKJV).

### **Question #2: That doesn’t seem fair. Why did God judge and condemn all people for the sin of one man when they didn’t even yet exist?**

**Answer:** The Scriptures teach a concept sometimes called *corporate personality*. It means that every individual in a unit is credited for having done what another individual has literally done. For example, Hebrews 7:9-10 says that Levi paid tithes to a priest named Melchizedek even though it was actually Abraham who did that (Genesis 14:18-20). But Levi, Abraham’s great-grandson, was credited for having done it because he was later part of Abraham’s extended family. This is particularly a foreign concept to modern Western mankind, who thinks of everyone as an independent individual. But that is a Biblical way of thinking.



Abraham and Melchizedek

Ephesians 2:12, 19 uses the citizenship metaphor to describe that God’s Christian people are citizens of God’s household, the Church. And Colossians 1:13 says that God transferred Christians “**into the kingdom**

**of the Son of His love”** (NKJV). Think about this illustration: A childless Russian couple immigrates to the United States and eventually become American citizens. Then they have a child, who is automatically an American citizen because of the earlier actions of his parents, even though he is a full-blooded Russian by ethnicity. In other words, the child is credited with having changed his citizenship through his parents even though he had not yet been born when they made the decision. Therefore, Ephesians 2 implies that we are born into Satan’s kingdom because of the decision that Adam made. So it’s not a matter of fairness or justice, but simply one of legal reality. In this way, “all sinned” in Adam (Romans 5:12).



Parents & Child

[NOTES:

- Some believers object to that last statement, insisting that all have sinned only like Adam in following his example. While we certainly have all followed Adam’s example, the very nature of Paul’s argument in Romans 5 makes it unmistakable that we are all credited with Adam’s sin—otherwise we could not be credited with Jesus’ righteousness, which is stated there as the opposite of what Adam’s sin did (Romans 5:18-19).
- The objection is made that each individual is judged by his own actions, not the actions of his father (Ezekiel 18:19-20). That’s true. But in Romans 5, Paul is discussing the collective, global implications of Adam’s sin. If it weren’t for God’s plan of salvation, we would all be eternally lost because we’d have been born into and permanently part of Satan’s kingdom. Thus, one truth does not negate the other truth.]

### **Question #3: Is there any other Biblical evidence for the “kingdom” metaphor being connected to Adam’s original sin?**

**Answer:** Yes. Adam’s original sin transferred the citizenship of the entire human race from God’s perfect kingdom to Satan’s kingdom. This is the reason that Jesus called Satan **“the ruler of this world”** (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, NKJV) and Paul called him **“the god of this age”** (II Corinthians 4:4, NKJV). Satan won the planet fair and square. For this reason, it appears from Job 1:6-7 and 2:1-2 that Satan had been the official representative of Earth in the councils of heaven—even though he had been expelled from *living* there earlier (see Explorer II, Study Guide #2). In any case, he was expelled a 2<sup>nd</sup> time at the cross, when **“salvation”** and the **“authority”** of Christ arrived in history (Revelation 12:10-12, NKJV). Jesus is now the legal representative of the planet, although Satan continues to operate as its ruler until Jesus removes him from the battlefield at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus (Revelation 19:11-20:3).

### **Question #4: If we were all judged and condemned for Adam’s original sin, then what was the legal sentence?**

**Answer:** We were all sentenced to 2 consequences. *First*, Adam and Eve lost their original perfection, and we are all born with a sinful nature. That is, we naturally go astray from God (Isaiah 53:6) because our **“heart is deceitful above all things”** (Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV). The result is that **“the natural man does**

**not receive the things of the Spirit of God...nor can he know them”** (I Corinthians 2:14, NKJV). In other words, our very spiritual nature that we are born with is naturally inclined to go its own way. [NOTE: Even though our conversion brings us the Holy Spirit, and we become a spiritual person (I Corinthians 2:15), both natures remain inside us so that a Christian is like a walking civil war (Galatians 5:16-17) until glorification at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14, 20-21). This concept of the sinful nature is also spoken of in Romans 8:3, Ephesians 2:2-3, and Galatians 5:16-17 as sinful desires that emanate from our sinful flesh.]

*Second*, we are all sentenced to death as a result of sin. Romans 5:12 says that **“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin”** (cf. Genesis 3:19, NKJV; I Corinthians 15:21-22). And Romans 6:23 declares that **“the wages of sin is death”** (NKJV). Note that wages are something that a person *earns*. [NOTE: Because God has a plan of salvation, our natural death is not the penalty for sin. The actual penalty for sin for those who insist on paying for their own sins—rather than accepting God’s plan to cancel their IOU—will result after the last resurrection and the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20).]

### **Question #5: Are there any other results of Adam’s original sin?**

*Answer:* Yes. According to Genesis 3, the (a) animals (v. 14), (b) soil (v. 17), and (c) plants (v. 18) were all negatively impacted by the original sin in Eden. Romans 8:20-22 takes it a step further by declaring that creation itself is being **“subjected to futility”** (v. 20) and to being in **“bondage of corruption”** (v. 21), thus **“groans and labors with birth pangs”** (v. 22). [NOTE: This is good evidence that disproves theistic evolution, that God “created” by the process of evolution so that death to animals and plants occurred repeatedly long before humans were created. See also Explorer I, Study Guide #19).]



Even the Earth itself Groans

### **Question #6: Does the sinful nature give us an excuse to sin?**

*Answer:* No, there is no excuse for willful sinning. God has given each of us an ability to choose Him, and when we do, He gives us the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey Him and to flee from sin (Romans 8:1-2, 5, 9-11; Galatians 5:16, 22-25). The fact that we continue to have the sinful nature until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus is not an excuse to continue a life of deliberate, habitual sin. The existence of the sinful nature *does* mean, however, that sin is *both* what we *are* as well as what we *do* or *don’t do*. God doesn’t condemn us for eternity because of our sinful nature because He has offered us a plan of salvation. See Explorer II, Study Guides #4 and #5.

### **Question #7: If Christians still retain the sinful nature, then is it only sin when we yield to the sinful nature and commit an actual *act* of sin?**

*Answer:* No. *First*, the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:17) calls coveting a sin, and to covet means to intensely desire something that one should not have or to desire something innocent to the point that you

are at least willing in your heart to act sinfully in order to possess it. Jesus illustrated this point in His Sermon on the Mount when He declared that **“whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”** (Matthew 5:28, NKJV; cf. vv. 21-22). Therefore, sinful desires are themselves sin and make a person as guilty as if he had outwardly committed the sin. Moreover, Jesus declared that **“from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts...”** (Mark 7:21, NKJV). This means that there’s something corrupted within our very nature that even precedes our evil thoughts. The sinful nature goes even beyond our sinful thoughts to some inner rotten core that contributes to those thoughts. This is how entrenched sin is in the human species.

*Second*, selfishness is at the heart of what constitutes sin, as we saw in the last Study Guide in the mind of Lucifer. Even though babies are innocent of conscious, deliberate sin, they still exhibit selfishness at times. Every mother knows the difference between the cry of her baby for its physical needs to be met and its temper tantrum cry. King David himself wrote, **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me”** (Psalm 51:5, NKJV). Since there’s no evidence that David was an illegitimate child, he was saying that he was conceived with a sinful nature, and that is sin.

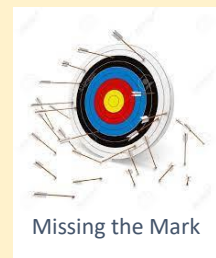
### **Question #8: Does the sinful nature affect anything else in human existence?**

*Answer:* Yes. The sinful nature has a detrimental effect on even the good things we think, say, or do. The apostle Paul declared that **“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23, NKJV). Note that he shifted from the past tense to the present continuous tense in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the sentence (**“come short”**). A more literal translation would be **“all have sinned [past tense] and continue to come short [present continuous tense] of the glory of God.”** This means that anything that falls short of God’s glory (perfection) is sin. By that standard, everything that even the best Christian thinks, speaks, or does would be judged as sin because it’s contaminated by our sinful nature. Think of a glass with dirt in its bottom. When you fill the glass with pure water, the water becomes contaminated. Likewise, even the best things a Christian does becomes contaminated with the spiritual dirt of our sinful nature. This is the reason that Isaiah 64:6 declares that even **“all our righteousnesses [righteous actions] are like filthy rags”** (NKJV). Thankfully, because God has a plan of salvation, the believer is not condemned by the fact that his good works are contaminated with sin. [NOTE: We must always remember that what sin actually is within itself is a separate issue from what God holds us accountable for—and that’s only because of the plan of salvation.]

### **Question #9: What then is sin besides the sinful nature?**

*Answer:* We can summarize sin as whatever falls short of God’s perfection and standards. This includes disobedience of His revealed will in the Scriptures. Those Scriptures themselves summarize the nature of sin in 7 specific ways:

**Sin is Separation from God**—When Adam and Eve sinned, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden, resulting in their separation from Him (Genesis 3:22-24). See also Isaiah 59:2. Romans 3:23’s verb **“have sinned”** comes from a Greek word meaning “to miss the mark.” This missing the mark constitutes a continual separation from God’s righteousness. Therefore, sin not only separates us from God, but it is also itself



separation from God. [NOTE: In fact, the most common Greek word translated “sin” in the New Testament is *hamartia*, which means “to miss the mark.”]

**Sin is Transgression of God’s Law**—I John 3:4 defines sin as “**the transgression of the law**” (KJV). The essence of committing sin is to do something contrary to God’s Law. See also Matthew 5:21-28; I John 3:15.



Rebellion in  
Heaven

**Sin is Rebellion Against God**—When Adam and Eve sinned, they rebelled against God’s authority (Genesis 3:5-6). Lucifer rebelled against God in heaven (see Study Guide #2). And when I John 3:4 defined sin as “**lawlessness**” (literal Greek), the apostle was declaring that a life of living outside God’s Law is a life of rebellion.

**Sin is a Lack of Love**—In the context of Romans 13:8-9, Paul says that “**love is the fulfillment of the law**” (v. 10, NKJV). This means that anything done without love is sin, even if it’s outwardly the right thing to do.

**Sin is a Lack of Faith**—In Romans 14:23, Paul declares that “**whatever is not from faith is sin**” (NKJV). This means that even when an action is not sinful in itself, if one takes such action apart from faith, it’s deemed sin for *him*. Therefore, he who doubts whether he should do something or not and does it anyway, it’s considered sin for *him*.

**Sin is Whatever Creates a Stumbling Block for Someone Else**—According to Romans 14:13, 20-21, any action that creates a stumbling block for someone else is “**evil**,” and thus sin. A stumbling block is any action that causes someone else to stumble back into sin. Therefore, the Christian should take care not to use his freedom to do that which is lawful if it’s likely to cause a fellow believer to slip back into a sinful habit. Christian freedom considers other people first.

**Sin is What We Do Not Do**—“**To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin**” (James 4:17, NKJV). If a person fails to do what he knows should be done, then God holds him accountable for it as a sinful act. Thus, sin is also what a person does not do (a sin of omission) as well as what he does do (a sin of commission).

## **Question #10: Are there degrees of sin, such as mortal versus venial sins?**

**Answer:** The distinction between mortal and venial sins that some churches make is not taught in Scripture. From the definition of sin as a continuous separation from God at the level of our sinful nature, we must conclude that sin is sin. In that sense, there are no degrees of sin, for there’s nothing in the Greek word “*hamartia*” that makes any distance (or degree) of “missing the mark,” or whether it’s missed intentionally or not, less or more sinful. At the same time, there are (1) degrees of responsibility and (2) degrees of earthly consequences for different sins. Murder has greater negative consequences than only having



murderous thoughts toward someone. Furthermore, in Jesus' Parable of the Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant (Luke 12:35-48), the servant who knew his master's will more fully was punished more severely than the servant who didn't fully understand his master's will.

### **Question #11: In your last answer you referred to “different sins.” What are the different types of sins?**

**Answer:** There are essentially 3 types of sins that can be derived from Scripture. We identify and describe them below:

**Unintentional Sins**—Leviticus 4 describes a type of sin called “**a sin through ignorance**” (KJV). The Hebrew word for “**through ignorance**” means “a mistake” or an “inadvertent transgression.” Numerous modern translations correctly render it as sins done “unintentionally.” This would include (1) sins that the person didn't know were sins when they were committed, and (2) sins that arose spontaneously without the person thinking about it and making a conscious decision to commit it. Examples of the latter would include sins of temperament, such as when anger or a flippant remark suddenly is expressed without thinking about it first. Note that Leviticus 4 regards these mistakes as *sins* because a sacrificial offering was required at the sanctuary (see also Numbers 15:22-29).

**Enticed Sins**—This type of sin is consciously committed by a person's choice, but the person is enticed through a series of deceptions or unawareness of his circumstances until the new circumstances made it extremely difficult to avoid the sin (although not impossible because it was still a choice). Eve's sin in the Eden is an example of this type of sin. Of course, it's still a sin, which means it can't be excused.



Eve Enticed to Sin

**Presumptuous Sins**—This type of sin is discussed in Numbers 15:30-31, Deuteronomy 17:18-30, and Psalm 19:12-13. A check of Deuteronomy 17:8-13 reveals that sinning “**presumptuously**” is that which is committed publicly and defiantly. This is a most serious type of sin.

### **Question #12: What is the unpardonable sin?**

**Answer:** In Matthew 12:31-32, Jesus told a group of Pharisees that anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (cf. Luke 12:10). Why is this true for the Holy Spirit when it's not true for Jesus Himself? I Thessalonians 5:19 teaches that it's possible to “**quench the Spirit**” (NKJV). It's the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin (John 16:8; cf. vv. 12-15). If one quenches the Holy Spirit and thus *sears* his own conscience (I Timothy 4:2), then he can no longer be convicted of sin. And when there's no conviction, the person can't repent; without repentance, there's no forgiveness. Indeed, God can even forgive first-degree murder (II Samuel 11; 12:13). But the only sin that He can't forgive is the sin that one doesn't confess. [NOTE: This is one reason it's so dangerous to ignore the Spirit's warnings through your conscience. Eventually, a person will reach the point of no return, where God can't do anything to win him back. Such a person has closed his own probation and is eternally lost.]