

The Sure Word Bible Studies *Lesson 5*

Calling Sin By its Right Name

In our study we have seen the word "sin" a number of times in the scriptures and it is important that we understand exactly what it is. When asked what sin is, many people immediately think of I John 3:4 which in the King James Version Bible says:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

"Sin is transgression of the law." Because this verse sin is commonly thought of as breaking God's law. And even though it doesn't specify any particular law, for most people, when the word "law" is seen in the Bible, the Ten Commandments immediately come to mind. But when the Bible uses the word "law" it is not always referring to the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments do have the distinction of being the only words written by the finger of God Himself, however, God gave many other laws as well. In looking at the following passages, we see that in the "law" can be placed into any one of at least five classifications.

1) Health law – Laws given to ensure physical health:

Exodus 15:26 *"If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."*

Remember, we learned in a previous lesson that to many of the writers of scripture, what God does not prevent He causes. God did not afflict the Egyptians with disease, they were diseased because of poor health practices. To avoid that God gave the Israelites many of the "clean and unclean" regulations which were meant for the prevention of diseases.

2) Civil law – Laws given to govern civil society and act as a deterrent to crime:

Deuteronomy 21:21 *"Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear."*

The civil laws in the Old Testament applied only to the people of Israel and ceased to be in force when ancient nation of Israel ceased to be an independent nation. Laws like stoning people to death became obsolete long ago.

3) Ceremonial law - Laws governing the services and ceremonies at the Sanctuary:

Numbers 9:2,3 *"Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it."*

The ceremonial laws expired with Christ's death and the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people back in the First Century.

4) Moral (right) law - Laws that deal with individual behavior:

Psalm 119:172 *"My tongue shall speak of Your word: for all Your commandments are righteousness."*

Moral means right, doing the right thing. The moral law is an eternal, never changing law.

5) Law as a principle or a force:

Romans 7:23 *"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."*

This is speaking about the force, or the power of good or evil within the human heart that compels a person to behave in a certain way.

We should always consider the setting in which the word "law" is used to properly understand which class of law is being referred to. Otherwise we might "throw the baby out with the bath water" so to speak, as some have done with the Ten Commandments, thinking they were discarded along with other laws given to the ancient nation of Israel.

The four-word phrase "*transgression of the law*" in the KJV Bible was translated from one Greek word, "anomia," which means "without law." The modern versions of the Bible translate this word "*lawlessness*" or "*lawless*." It means more than breaking this or that law. It is an attitude that is rooted in selfishness, one that is determined to have its own way no matter what. Without any law everyone would be doing whatever he or she wanted to do regardless of the consequences – this is known as anarchy. Anarchy is a serious problem in a world of self-centered people who always insist on having their own way. Thus it is a problem in this world. The Bible says "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.*" (Isaiah 53:6)

The Old Testament tells us Moses cautioned the "stiff-necked," rebellious children of Israel he had just brought out of Egypt about this attitude:

Deuteronomy 12:8 *"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today--every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes"*

Later Moses was recorded as commending the same people saying:

Deuteronomy 13:18 *"Because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God."*

When we keep God's commandments – we are doing that which is right in the eyes of God. But why should we do what God says? Why should we keep His law? Some say because God is the Sovereign – He is the most powerful being in the universe and that gives Him the right to tell us how to behave and punish us when we don't. You may have seen the bumper sticker that says: *"God said it, I believe it, and that's all there is to it!"* But is that all there is to it? Is there is no better reason to keep God's law?

We will begin to answer this by looking at three verses that tell us why God gave the law in the first place.

Romans 3:20 *"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."*

According to this verse by the law we know what sin is.

Galatians 3:19 *"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."*

This verse tells us the law was added because of transgressions or sin. The verse that follows will make that plainer:

I Timothy 1:8,9 *"But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate."*

This verse tells us that the law is not for the person who does what is right, he doesn't need it. But the person who is not doing what is right, either willingly or in ignorance, does need it. If done in ignorance, the law informs them of what is right so that they may change their behavior. But if done willfully, the law brings unpleasant consequences or punishment for disobedience. For example, when kids are being disorderly and misbehaving, the parents must "lay down the law" with warning of unpleasant consequences if not obeyed. There is nothing arbitrary about

this, this is done for the safety and welfare of the children as well as the entire household.

In a similar way our Heavenly Father has had to do this with the human race for our own good. If everyone always did the loving and right thing, there would have been no need for God to *"add the law,"* but few were and to preserve the human race God gave His law.

Deuteronomy 6:24,25 *"And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day."*

God is not arbitrary – He does not have a “my way or the highway” attitude. God wants only our good and His moral laws are given to help us. The universe was founded on physical and spiritual laws - the law of “reaping and sowing” or “cause and effect.” Bad actions normally result in bad consequences. Right actions normally result in good consequences.

It is important for us to realize that God's laws are expressions of natural principles rather than arbitrary rules meant to control us. And because God's laws are expressions of natural principles, the principles themselves inherently have their own consequences for compliance or violation. There is no need for external imposed punishment under God's system. So, if God does not get angry and punish us in some way if we disobey His law, then what can we expect if we ignore or refuse to follow His laws? Galatians gives us the answer:

Galatians 6:7,8 *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."*

The law of gravity is an example of this. The law of gravity is God’s law. He put it into place and it serves for our good. But if a man ignores the law of gravity and jumps out of an airplane at 12,000 feet without a parachute he would be killed. Was God punishing him because he violated His law? No, he died because the natural effect of the law of gravity caused him to be pulled rapidly to the earth with such force he could not survive the impact. His death would be the natural consequence of violating the law of gravity and not because God punished him for disobedience.

It is the same whether it be physical or moral law. If we ignore or refuse to abide by God’s moral law as stated in the Ten Commandments bad things happen as the result. For example, if a man commits adultery, his wife gets hurt. If we bear false witness against our neighbor, our neighbor gets hurt. And every time someone violates one of these moral principles it hurts God because it hurts us.

There are natural and unpleasant consequences that follow every violation of the moral law of God. Understanding this can help us understand how the Apostle Paul could claim to be free from the law:

I Corinthians 10:23 *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful: all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify."*

Paul is saying we are really free to do anything we want - but - there will be consequences, either good or bad, depending upon our actions. Note carefully the next two verses.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 *"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."*

Some people think that if some sort of consequence does not follow soon after they have committed some wrong act that they have gotten by with it. But note what the next verse says:

Numbers 32:23 *"But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out."*

We can count on it, the consequences of our sin will come. It may be years but sooner or later it will find you out! And the only way to stop the consequences of sin is to stop the sin and that of course is the big challenge for us.

The word most often translated "sin" in the original biblical languages of Hebrew or Greek means, "to fall short" or "to miss the mark." So as sinners, what do we "fall short" of? What is the "mark" we miss?

The Bible says: *"For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;"* (Romans 3:23) According to this text the mark we all fall short of the "glory of God." Now we need to know what the "glory of God" is that we come short of. The following verse has the answer: *"to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (II Thessalonians 2:14)

The latter verse tells us we are called *"for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* In other words we are called to be like Jesus. And while it is true that all of us do fall short of this lofty goal, the good news is that we can obtain it.

II Corinthians 3:18 *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

Being like Jesus is our goal, our target – and by beholding Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to work in us and we are slowly changed into His likeness! However, we need to realize that this work is a life-long process. We must "abide" (stay) with Him:

I John 4:13 - 17 *"By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world."*

In these verses we have the promise that we can be like Jesus in this world!! That is good news!! The Bible says we can actually partake of His nature!

II Peter 1:4 *"by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

That is awesome! And it is true that during the life-long process of change we may from time to time fall short and miss the mark. We will not do everything perfectly right, but if we continue to listen to the Spirit speaking to our hearts and allow Him to continue to work that transformation in us, we are accepted by God just as if we were perfectly righteous, like His own Son.

In this way we are not *"under the law,"* but rather we *"agree with the law."* We agree that the moral law is good and we will not willfully rebel against it.

I John 3:7 *"Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous."*

We no longer keep the law because God said to and we are afraid of what He will do to us if we don't. We keep it because it has become natural for us to behave according to the principles of unselfish love! Remember, love is not simply a characteristic of God, but love is His very essence. The universe God created is founded on the principle of love. Everything God says and does is motivated by love. This means that God's moral law is based on the same principle, love. Therefore, in reality God's law is the law of love!

The word "love" used most often in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word "agape." Agape' is not the warm affection we feel towards family or friend, but is unselfish benevolence, a willful decision to be concerned about the welfare of another, no matter what they've done or who they may be, spouse, friend, family or even an enemy. Agape' is the unconditional love that originates with God and is demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

When we look at the Bible as a whole we can see that God's law forms a pyramid. In the book of Exodus we read that after bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, because their poor spiritual condition, God saw it necessary to them many laws and

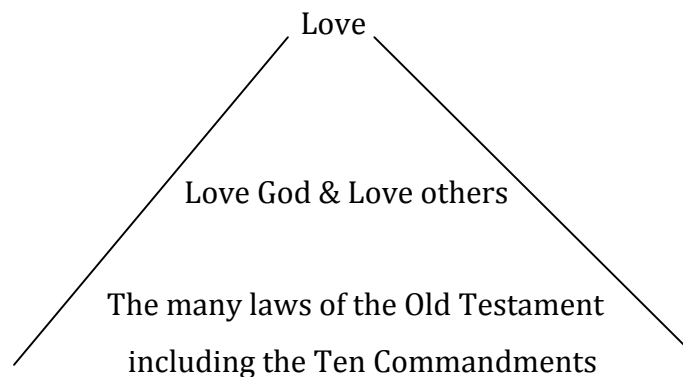
commandments. Later in the New Testament, Jesus lumps all the law into two commandments:

Matthew 22:36 - 40 *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

But then, as we get deeper into the scriptures, as we come to the book of Galatians we find all the law is condensed down into one word, love:

Galatians 5:14 *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; you shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

As we move through the Bible, we come from many "laws" and "commandments" to only one. So the abiding, eternal principle of God's law of love – formed by the many, the two, and then the one, make up a pyramid of love.



Some Christians have misunderstood this concept and teach that Jesus replaced the Ten Commandments with a "new commandment" found in John 13:34 where Jesus says: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

But in saying this Jesus did not do away with the Ten Commandments, but rather He magnified them! It is not God's desire that the law of Ten Commandments be abolished – but rather that they are moved from the tables of stone to the tables of our hearts.

Hebrews 8:10 *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

To illustrate: A loving parent doesn't need a law written on the wall or in a book to tell them they are not to steal from their children. Why? Because they love them and wouldn't think of doing such a thing. In the same way, when we come to love God and one another unselfishly we won't need the Ten Commandments to tell us how to behave towards God and one another, it will come naturally. That is what it means to be written in the mind and heart.

So now we come back to our original question "what exactly is sin?" In the book of James we find what may be the best answer:

James 4:17 *"Therefore, to him that knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin."*

Sin is simply actions that are the result of a rebellious attitude that compels a person who knows what is good and right to deliberately chose their own selfish way regardless of who may get hurt because of it.

Remember what Satan told Eve back in the garden when tempting her to eat of the tree? He said, *"God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* In other words, Satan was saying "you can be like God, knowing good and evil; you don't need God telling you what's right and wrong."

As much as we may want to deny it, the human race has bought into that lie as can be seen in the fact that many churches that claim to be followers of God have thrown out or changed God's law thinking they are wise enough to do that. (We will take a closer look at this in a later lesson). But regardless of what Satan has said or men may think to do, the truth is that man, of himself, is not capable of knowing right from wrong. And if we really believe that God is who the Bible says He is: The Almighty Creator - all wise and all knowing even knowing the end from the beginning. That God is good, that He is love, and His love is an unconditional love that gave itself up on the cross for us. If God is all that - wouldn't it be wise to listen to what He says? Wouldn't it be best to do those things He says we should do? Wouldn't it be foolish not to?

The opposite of sin is faith, a true faith that trusts God enough to do those things He says are good and right. And as long as we do not rebel against God's word and do the best we can to follow it we have the assurance of eternal life.

God hates sin, but not because He wants things done His way. God hates sin because sin hurts and destroys His children! Don't let sin destroy you - God will help you overcome. And while it is true we have a sinful nature and are prone to sin, according to the Bible God can fix all that is wrong in us. Do you believe what the Bibles says? If so, then you must believe the following:

Jude 1:24 "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,"

Ephesians 3:15 - 21 "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Many are concerned and worried about God's forgiveness of their sin. Some are concerned about the "unpardonable sin" worried that they may have committed it and not know it. We will take a closer look at forgiveness and the unpardonable sin in the next lesson.

Response Questions:

- 1) Is it clear to you that sin is simply rebelling against what God, who is all-knowing and cannot lie, says is good and right? Yes ___ No ___
- 2) Is it clear to you that sin hurts and destroys? Yes ___ No ___
- 3) Will you take a closer look at God's law of love and see if there is some area in your life that needs improvement? Yes ___ No ___