

# What We Believe: Solid Doctrine for Everyday Life

## The Doctrine of Sin.

“The biblical truth we are considering here lies at the very epicenter of Christian doctrine. Along with the existence of God, it is a significant worldview watershed. If you believe there is no such thing as sin, in the way the Bible describes it, you then see no need for God’s moral law, the wisdom of Scripture, dependency on God, the rescuing grace of the Redeemer, the ministry of the church, or the bright hope of eternity. There are really only two groups of people when it comes to the human drama; those who put their hopes in human systems of redemption and those who see that human hope requires a Redeemer.” (Do You Believe?, Paul Tripp, p.266)

**Definition** (From the Westminster Larger Catechism, WLC)

Q. 24. *What is sin?*

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.

**Note:** Absent Scripture, humans think themselves capable of being “good”. Sin is not just an action, it is anything less than holiness. Actions that defy God’s revealed law therefore, are clearly sin, too.

*Example of “pure” water & Jesus’ teaching on adultery and murder (Matthew 5:21-28)*

### A partial overview of what the Bible reveals about the origins and nature of sin:

1. God is not the author nor the origin of sin. James 1:13; I John 1:5; Psalm 5:4; Luke 16:15.
2. Sin began with Adam. (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:12-13; Rom. 5:19, I Cor. 15:21-22)
3. Lucifer also rebelled (apparently through the sin of pride. I Tim. 3:6; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-18) and he is the father of lies. (John 8:44)
4. Through deception based upon lies, the serpent deceived Eve to desire to take and eat forbidden fruit. Gen. 3:1-6; I Tim. 2:13-14.
5. Sin entered the world because the first man, created first, knowingly ate of fruit he knew he was expressly forbidden to eat. (Gen. 3:6-8, 13; Eccl. 7:29; I Cor. 15:21-22; 2 Cor. 11:3)
6. Sin not only began with Adam, sin became characteristic of all humans from Adam, onwards, with all creation under the curse of sin. (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18, 5:12-14, 8:22)
7. From Adam’s sin, death – spiritual death, specifically and most importantly – is the state of all humanity. (Rom. 1:18-32, 3:10-23, 5:12-14, 6:23, 7:18-23, 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1-10; Heb. 2:14-15)

**In summary:** A biblically based understanding of sin does not mean believing that all people, everywhere, are as bad as we possibly can be, at all times. By means of common grace, God’s mercy and providential rule restrains our predisposition to sin much more than we know. Genesis 11 demonstrates how God restrained and continues to restrain human capacity for great evil through confusing our ability to be in full agreement with one another and accomplish whatever we set our minds to do. At times, our plight as fallen creatures may become more awful and obvious (Genesis 6:5), and always even our best efforts fail to be holy or pure. Even those empowered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, seeking to do God’s will, do not contribute one bit to holiness. God is holy. God is the perfect standard for all. (Matt. 5:48; I Peter 1:15)

**Paul's testimony, in I Tim. 1:12-17 applies here:** <sup>12</sup> *I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,* <sup>13</sup> *though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,* <sup>14</sup> *and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup> *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*** <sup>16</sup> *But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* <sup>17</sup> *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul uses three specific sins as synonyms for all sin:

1. Blasphemer – to treat what is holy with contempt or disrespect. This was clearly true for Saul, but also for anyone outside of God's mercy and grace.
2. Persecutor – to torment or treat with cruelty that which is innocent. Jesus asked Saul on the Damascus Road "why do you persecute me?" but it is a question each person who is in sin could be asked prior to being made alive to belief in Christ as Redeeming Lord. Sin is why Jesus died.
3. Insolent opponent – Saul was a rude and arrogant enemy of God, and so too is anyone who is not made alive in Christ. That a person might say to God "how have I done anything needing Your forgiveness?" is an example of just such insolence and arrogance. (Prov. 30:20).

**So what? For the Unsaved:** The doctrine of Sin shows how unbelievers cannot, in any way, make themselves holy, or in any way "make themselves alive to God or in Christ". Without a Savior, we are without hope of salvation from our state of spiritual death and separation from God.

**For the Saved:** The doctrine also makes clear that holiness is found only through Christ, that our Spiritual life is due to Christ at work in and through us, not just when we first start to follow Him, but every day, every moment ("Christ in you, the hope of glory" Colossians 1:27). Though we are no longer in bondage to sin (sin is not our only option) we can, nevertheless, still sin, and do. (Gal. 5:19-26; Eph. 2:1-10; I John 1:10 & Col. 2:6.)

**Even more soberingly, we who are being saved can still be deceived,** and the most troubling of all possible deceivers is ourselves. Self-deception is still possible for believers and that deception enables our continued sin, even though we are not slaves to sin.

1. II Tim. 3:16 & 17 – without the revelation of Scripture, human thought is incorrect, human thinking needs correction and instruction, and we are unable to be righteous.
2. Jesus' rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, demonstrates that people who have the scriptures and read them religiously can, nevertheless, be "blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:24)
3. Paul makes clear both weak & strong believers are prone to self-deception (Gal. 6:1-4)
4. Scripture shows us that even people with the Scriptures can misuse it, distort it, deceive others, and even deceive themselves (we can make the Word of God mean what we prefer it to mean). Gal. 1:7, James 1:22.

Our hope is not in our best efforts – Proverbs 3:5-7 is wise counsel.