



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 1

The Problem of Sin

Addiction to Sin

There is an addictive power in the lives of each one of us that none can resist. It is much stronger than addiction to alcohol, gambling or drugs; it is addiction to sin. The problem of sin is that it takes a terrible hold of us. Once we sin, it is difficult to stop, yet many people deny that they are addicted to it. Just as an alcoholic might deny his addiction to alcohol and refuse to face up to his problem, so people refuse to face up to their addiction to sin. This has serious consequences for the Bible tells us that the result of addiction to sin is death – it is a killer for ‘the wages of sin is death’. In the Letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul tells us of this problem in his own life.

“I am of the flesh, sold under sin.
I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out...
Wretched man that I am!”

Romans 7:14-24

This is one of the most heart-searching passages in the New Testament. Paul tells us that in his mind he wants to obey God’s laws but his actions are sinful. It is as if he is two different people; one is a man with a mind that understands that he must obey God, and indeed wants to do so, the other is a man who continually disobeys Him! This is one of the great problems of discipleship. Often we *know* what is right but we do not *do it* in our lives. Why are we like this? Part of the answer is that it can be a pleasurable thing to do! No one forces us to sin – we sin because we get pleasure from it even though we know it can only lead to the grave.

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,
choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

Hebrews 11:24-25

In Romans 6, Paul wrote of people being ‘slaves to sin’. It is a ‘master’. It reigns over people, it is a cruel tyrant and its effect in their lives leads only to death! On many occasions the Bible portrays sin like this, as a power that rules over us. We cannot escape from it by our own strength.

Another part of the answer is that we find it hard to obey God. Even when we know what is right and try to obey we frequently fail to do so. The desire to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ has to be in our hearts, if we try to follow him out of a sense of duty we shall fail. If we want to follow him because our hearts are full of love for him and his Father and for the salvation that God offers us, then we shall start our discipleship with the right motives.

“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”
Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Mark 12:28-30

What is Sin?

Sin is disobedience to God’s laws and the penalty for sin is death.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-...
For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”
Romans 5:12, 19

We need to go back to the Garden of Eden to see the origin of sin. In the beginning, when God had created Adam, He gave him just one law to obey. Adam was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). God told him that if he ate of it he would certainly die. Why was this law given? Adam and Eve were created to give glory to God by obeying His Word. They were created with free will; they could choose for themselves whether or not to obey God. The law tested their commitment to God, would they give faithful obedience to Him or would they disobey Him? Not only was God the Great Creator who had made the earth, He was also the Supreme Being whose word *must* be obeyed. When Adam obeyed God, he acknowledged and accepted this; when he disobeyed God, he denied God's power and authority over him.

In Romans 1 Paul describes the problems of sinful behaviour in his day. People had denied the power of the one true God and had turned to idols. This denial of God was followed by behaviour which was totally unacceptable to Him.

“For his (God's) invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!
Amen.”
Romans 1:20-25

Although these words were not written directly about Adam and Eve, many of the points made are applicable to their lives also and help us to see the way in which sin entered the world.

1. The power of God was shown to people in creation (Psalm 19). This was ignored by Adam and Eve.
2. Sin began in the mind of Eve as she decided that what she wanted was more important than obeying God's law. This temptation to sin touched her heart as well as her mind. She lusted after the fruit of the tree; she really wanted to eat it (Genesis 3:6).
3. Eve thought she could become wise through her own actions, by eating the fruit. In this she denied the power of God's Word to make her 'wise unto salvation' (2Timothy 3:15).
4. She decided that God's law was not really true but a lie, if she ate the fruit she would not really die. So she ate and gave the fruit to her husband who ate also.
5. By their actions they put themselves and what they wanted before the commandments of God. They should have worshipped God, the Creator, by being obedient to Him.

This last statement tells us a great truth. *Worship* of God is by being *obedient* to Him in our lives every day, not just by coming together to praise Him on a Sunday.

So sin is not just disobedience of God's laws; it is a denial of His existence as the Creator of us all. Once we realise this and accept it, it should change our whole attitude to life.

Blaming Someone Else!

Adam knew what would happen even before he sinned for:

"...through the law comes knowledge of sin." Romans 3:20

When God gave Adam that first law, He told him of the nature of sin and its consequence – death! Adam and Eve found it difficult to take responsibility for their own actions – and so do all of us. We all want to blame someone else for our problems. So Adam said:

"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

And Eve said:

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

False teaching about the devil or satan comes from this desire to blame someone else for our sins. When we do something wrong, it is much easier to blame a 'Devil' than to admit the problem lies within ourselves. We deceive ourselves that we are not really to blame and say that it is the 'Devil' who is responsible! No wonder Jeremiah exclaimed that 'the heart is deceitful above all things' (Jeremiah 17:9).

But the Bible will not allow us to deceive ourselves in this way. Look at these two passages:

"And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from **within**, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come **from within**, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is **lured and enticed by his own desire**. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. **Do not be deceived**, my beloved brothers." James 1:13-16

The serpent first put the idea of eating the forbidden fruit into the mind of Eve. Throughout the rest of the Bible the serpent then becomes a symbol of the power of sin and its effect on our lives. This desire to please ourselves rather than God drives us on to disobey Him, to sin.

Look at these three passages which tell us similar things about people who disobey God.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the **sons of disobedience**." Ephesians 5:6

"No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the **children of the devil**: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." 1John 3:9-10

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You **brood (offspring) of vipers (serpents)**! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matthew 3:7

In the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8 Jesus tells us that 'the seed is the Word of God'. Therefore those who take the Word of God into their lives and hearts can be described as taking 'God's seed' into their being. It is the influence of this Word which helps them to be 'born of God' and to start a new life committed to God rather than remaining slaves to sin.

However, each of these passages tells us about another class of people. They are those who ignore the truth of God's Word and go their own way in life. They are described as "sons of disobedience",

“children of the devil” and “offspring of serpents”. They are like Adam who turned away from God and deliberately disobeyed Him.

We have seen that death is the punishment for sin. Every day as we get older and our bodies begin to wear out we show the truthfulness of God’s word, we are dying! We might deny Him by our words and deeds, we might pretend that He does not exist, but we can do nothing by ourselves to overcome death, the sentence of God upon us for sin.

Sin separates us from God

However, there is another consequence of sin. It takes us away from God. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”
Isaiah 59:2

When Adam and Eve sinned, they were sentenced to death. They were also sent away from God out of the Garden of Eden. This is the real tragedy of sin. When Adam left the Garden he left the daily fellowship he had enjoyed with God. The influence of God, and His Word, on Adam’s life grew less day by day. His mind became more easily filled with his own desires and so it became easier to sin. This is why James talks about being ‘dragged away by evil desires’ – he means that sin drags us away from God.

When we come to realise this true teaching about sin in the Bible it will have a great impact on our lives. We can summarise it like this.

1. Firstly we will realise that, whatever terrible things we do to each other, ultimately sin is committed against God. It is His Word we disobey. David understood this after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah, her husband, murdered. He acknowledged his sin to God with these words:

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”
Psalm 51:4

This should have a very great effect on our lives. When we behave badly to other people, if we realise that we are really sinning against God, then perhaps we might stop and think about our behaviour more carefully.

2. Everything that is disobedience to God’s laws is unacceptable to Him and all of it is ‘sin’. A word that the Bible often uses for ‘sin’ means ‘miss the mark’. The ‘mark’ is the perfect example of Jesus, which we should aim for all the time. Whenever we miss that mark (whether we miss by a little or by a lot), it is a sin.
3. If we have committed our lives to God through His Son, Jesus Christ, we cannot ‘continue in sin’. This does not mean that we will become perfect, sinless people once we are baptized; only Jesus Christ was like this. However, God will not accept people who *say* they are disciples of Christ but who make no attempt to *follow* Christ in the way they live once they are baptized. Our lives must be changed by our knowledge of Christ.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 7:21

Finding the Way back to God

At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus went into a mountain and sat down to teach his disciples. He began with the lovely words that we know as the Beatitudes (the word means ‘blessings’). In the New English Bible, the first of these blessings is translated:

“Blessed are those who know their need of God; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”
Matthew 5:3

This is how our relationship with God must start. Once we understand our own hearts and how sin comes from within us and separates us from God, then we shall understand our need of Him in our lives. We shall be ready to begin the journey back to Him and to approach Him in prayer and seek His grace and forgiveness. If we approach Him like this then we know that He will accept us as His children through the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin will no longer be the master of our lives. At the end of that painful examination of his own conscience in Romans 7, the apostle Paul concluded with these words:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
Romans 7:24

The wonderful message of the Bible is of salvation from sin and its consequences through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will totally forgive the sins of those people who come to Him through His Son so that Paul went on to write:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
Romans 8:1-2

From our hearts we should thank God for this and rejoice! This is the Good News, the Gospel message of the Bible summed up in just one verse.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16

When we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as his disciples we begin a new life. Our sins are freely forgiven by a gracious and generous God who does not want anyone to perish but for all men and women to accept His Son and travel to His Kingdom.

The rest of this course explores Bible teaching about this ‘New Life in Christ’ and what it means for each one of us.

**“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;**

**The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD
is pure, enlightening the eyes;**

**The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and
righteous altogether.**

**More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and
drippings of the honeycomb.**

Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Psalm 19:7-11

Questions

1. Why do we sin?
2. What is sin? (there are two parts to the answer)
3. Where does the desire to sin come from?
4. What does the serpent represent in the Bible after the sin of Adam and Eve?
5. What are the consequences of sin?
6. How can we find the way back to God in our lives?