

What Is Sin?

I. Most of us know the Biblical definitions of **sin**.

- A. Breaking the laws of God (I John 3:4, Romans 5:13: without law there is no sin)
- B. Any thought, word, or deed that is unrighteousness (I John 5:17)
- C. Whatever is not of faith (Romans 14:23)
- D. Wounding of a weak conscience (I Corinthians 8:4-13)
- E. Knowing one ought to do something good, but not doing it (James 4:17)

II. Yet, the word of God indicates that **sin** is oftentimes a more comprehensive concept than we may have thought.

- A. For example, Samuel told Saul,
“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (I Samuel 15:22-23).
- B. Here we see that **sin is an attitude**, not just the breaking of a law, which follows the fact that an ungodly attitude normally precedes the breaking of one of His laws (presuming one knows the law, for “... *sin is not imputed when there is no law*”; Romans 5:13; see also Romans 4:15).

III. Definitions of **sin**.

- A. **Old Testament**. Of the many places **sin** is mentioned, in all but four cases the word *chata*, or its slight variants, is used.

- 1. **chata** (2398), a verb, “to miss; hence (fig. and gen.) to sin; by infer. to forfeit,



This archer “sinned” by missing the target.

lack, expiate, repent, (cause) lead astray, condemn.” The meanings can be broken down as follows:

- a. In most cases, *chata* means **missing the mark or road**, such as in Judges 10:16: *“There were 700 left-handed Benjamite soldiers who could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss [chata].”* This meaning is extended in Proverbs 19:2: *“He who makes haste with his feet sins.”* A more intensive form of *chata* is used in Genesis 31:39: *“That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto you; I bore the loss [chata] of it”*

- b. From the basic meaning of *chata*, in point a, comes the word’s chief usage to indicate **moral failure toward both God and men, and certain results of such wrongs**. We see the first occurrence of this verb in Genesis 20:6 when God spoke to Abimalek after he had

taken Sarah: *“Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart, for I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I suffered you not to touch her.”* Then, sin against God is defined in Joshua 7:11: *“Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them”* This sin can be without knowledge of the sin as well, as expressed in Leviticus 4:27: *“And if any of the people of the land sin through ignorance, while he does something against any of the commandments of the*

- Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty*"
- c. This verb may also refer to **the result of wrongdoing**, like in Genesis 43:9: *"Then let me bear the blame forever."*
 - d. More consequences of wrongdoing from sin are pointed out in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: after forbidding adultery, God says, *"... for this is abomination before the Lord, and you shall not cause the land to sin"*
 - e. Those who pervert justice are described as *"... those who by a word make a man out to be guilty"*: Isaiah 29:21. This leads to the meaning in Leviticus 9:15, that those who are wicked can atone for sins through offerings, as in Leviticus 9:15: *"And he ... took the goat ... and slew it, and offered it for sin"* The effect of this offering was to cleanse a person from sin, as in Psalm 51:7: *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean"*
 - f. The word refers to **effects of bad moral decisions** in Habakkuk 2:10: *"You [Babylon] have sinned against your life."*
 - g. *Chata* can also refer to **acts committed against people**, as in Genesis 42:22: *"Spoke I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child ...?"* Note also I Samuel 19:4: *"Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you"*
 - h. People are urged to turn from sin ... a life-style that deviates from God's direction. See I Kings 8:35: *"When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You, if they pray toward this place, and confess Your Name, and turn from their sin, when You afflict them"*
2. **Chet** (2399), from 2398, "a crime or its penalty."
 - a. The word means "sin" in the sense of **missing the mark or the path**. This may be **sin against another person** (as in Genesis 41:9) **or against God** (as in Deuteronomy 9:10).
 - b. This word can also mean **the "guilt" of such an act**, as in Numbers 27:3: *"Our father died in the wilderness ... but died of his own sin, and had no sons."* In Psalm 51:5, the mother was said to be in a condition of **sin** (*chet*) and guilt when the person was conceived.
 3. **Chattah** (2402), which corresponds with 2401 (*chataah*), and is the feminine form of *chet* (2399); "an offense, and the penalty or sacrifice for it."
 4. **Chattaah** (2403), a noun, from 2398, "an offense (sometimes habitual sinfulness) and its penalty."
 - a. This word again means **missing the mark or the road** in 155 cases in the Old Testament.
 - b. The word can also refer to **an offense against a man**, as in Genesis 31:36: *"And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass, what is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued after me?"*
 - c. *Chattaah* also can mean **a sin against God**: I Kings 8:35 shows that men are to return from *sin*, which is a pathway or lifestyle, or an act of deviating from that which God has worked out. See also II Kings 10:31 (depart from sin), Psalm 38:18 (be concerned about sin), and Numbers 5:7 (confess sin).
 - d. This noun first appears in Genesis 4:7, where God warns Cain that *"... sin lies at the door"* ... so *chattaah* means **sin in a general sense**. See Psalm 25:7, where this noun indicates rebelliousness to God: *"Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions"*

- e. A few Bible passages use this word to infer **a condition of sin**, such as in Genesis 18:20: *“The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and ... their sin is very grievous.”*
 - f. *Chattaah* is used 135 times to refer to a **sin offering**, like in Leviticus 4, 5, and 6.
 - g. The word can also mean **punishment for sin**: Leviticus 20:20.
- B. **New Testament.** The New Testament meanings for the Greek words used for *sin* are nearly identical to those in the Hebrew. Three words are used for sin in all but one instance.
1. **Hamartano** (264), a verb; “to miss the mark, and so not share in the prize, i.e. to err.”
 - a. It is a commonly used word that means **sinning against God by angels** (II Peter 2:4), **and by man** (Matthew 27:4; Luke 15:18, 21; Romans 2:12; 3:23; I Corinthians 7:28; etc).
 - b. It can mean **sinning against Christ**: I Corinthians 8:12.
 - c. *Hamartano* can also mean **sinning against man**, such as a brother (Matthew 18:15 [“trespass”] or a father (the prodigal son in Luke 15:18, 21), or against the Hebrew law (Acts 25:8 [“offended”]).
 - d. This word can connote **offenses against one’s own body**: I Corinthians 6:18.
 - e. Also, **earthly masters may be sinned against**: I Peter 2:20 (When you are buffeted” means “having sinned”).
 2. **Hamartema** (265), a noun that comes from *hamartano* (264) and means “a sin”, or literally “an act of disobedience to the divine law”. See Romans 3:25 and I Corinthians 6:18 for examples of this word being used.
 3. **Harmartia** (266), a verb, “sin”. As for the other two words above, this word means “a missing of the mark”.
 - a. It is a comprehensive term for **moral deviations from God’s ways**. Note Romans 3:9: *“What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Judeans and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.”* Note also Romans 6:6: *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* Here, sin is shown to be **an organized power, whose seat is in the will of man and which acts through the body’s members**.
 - b. *Hamartia* is also used as a generic term. In Romans 8:3 Christ is shown to have a human nature but, thankfully, a nature that never sinned: *“God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh”* I Corinthians 5:21 indicates that Christ was made to be sin, showing that Christ fulfilled what was typified in the offerings for sin.
- IV. We see sin — *missing the mark or path* — as **breaking the laws of God**, whether intentionally or unintentionally, but also **deviating from any moral principle that God desires us to follow**, whether these ways are specifically codified in His Word or not.
- A. We saw the case of Saul failing to heed Samuel’s words as being sin (I Samuel 15:22-23). This attitude of rebellion and stubbornness was sin.
 - B. In I Samuel 19:4, Saul was admonished by Jonathan to not sin against David by killing him (I Samuel 19:4).
 - C. Pharaoh sinned by not heeding the words of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 10:16-17).

Yet, we realize also that God indirectly was the cause of this sin because He it was that “*hardened Pharaoh’s heart*” time and time again (Exodus 7:22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:20, 27). [While James 1:13-15 states that God does not tempt any man, but it is man’s own lust that brings forth sin, God still can put certain people into situations and foster attitudes where He knows they will sin, to carry out His will.]

- D. King David sinned exceedingly by having illicit relations with Bathsheba, and then by arranging that Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, be killed in battle. Yet, David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), for he repented deeply of his errors.
- E. Solomon was given great wisdom and prosperity as king of Israel, but then sinned grievously when he took many wives that led him astray: Nehemiah 13:26: “*Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things [taking foreign wives that led him into idolatry]? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was loved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin*”. The Israelites were required to put away their *strange* wives because they sinned in marrying them (Nehemiah 13:27; *strange* (5237) = *nokriy*, “strange, foreign, non-relative, etc.”).
- F. We all sin, and when we do Satan is right there to accuse us before the Father for our errors (Revelation 12:10).
- G. For many sins — *missing the mark* — there are no specific laws mentioned, but still the principle of what is right or wrong is usually clear.



Solomon had 1,000 women at his disposal, far more than the one wife God directed a man to have. He missed the mark.

1. **Taking drugs.** The Scripture condemns *pharmakeia* (Strong 5331: Revelation 18:23; 22:15), and we know that the body is God’s temple in which He dwells (I Corinthians 6:19-20). What about consuming foods which harm the body, such as sugar, aspartame, Splenda, horse, pork, shrimp, food additives, colorings, emulsifiers, GM foods, and so forth? Is it sin to do anything that harms the proper functioning of the body, to keep it as free of disease as possible, if we are aware of that knowledge? See Exodus 15:26 and James 4:17.
2. **Watching television or movies, or reading books and articles that are harmful.** Are we not to bring every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 10:5)? Did not God warn His people to “... *stop his ears from hearing of blood, and shut his eyes from seeing evil ...*” (Isaiah 33:15)?
3. **Throwing cans, bottles, and wrappers out of car windows** certainly breaks the spirit of God’s laws and can be classified as sin ... “missing the mark”.
4. **Driving at a high rate of speed**, above that which is safe, could also be classified as sin since it endangers the lives of others as well as oneself.

V. In fact, one could say that doing anything contrary to God’s will is *missing the mark*, and therefore can be called sin.

Doing good
God's will
Selflessness
Love
Fruits of the spirit

Obedience to God
(hitting the mark or path)

Doing evil
Satan's will
Selfishness
Lust
Fruits of the flesh

Sin against God
(missing the mark or path)

VI. Sin is an attitude of disobedience to our Creator, which manifests itself through words and actions that contradict His will.

VII. We can be sure that the Almighty will help us to overcome sin through the indwelling spirit He has given us, that, together with the Word of God, instructs us in the ways of righteous living ... *"being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform [finish] it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6).

VIII. Each of us has specific responsibilities to which He has called us in this life:

"For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ But now has God set the members everyone of them in the body as it has pleased Him" (I Corinthians 12:12, 18).

- A. We know that our calling for this responsibility was predestined *"... according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will"* (Romans 8:11).
- B. Above all, we can rejoice in the fact that, as the ecclesia, our sins have been forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5), and we no longer walk in the way of *missing the mark or path*, but in the footsteps of our Saviour Jesus Christ (I John 2:6) ... who never missed the mark or path even once during His 30 years on this earth.

"For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15)

...

... for as we know, had He sinned even once during His physical life the entire plan of God to multiply His spirit creation — bringing many sons [us] to salvation — would have been destroyed. Let us thank our Almighty Father for the strength He gave Jesus Christ to utterly overcome sin and Satan, the same strength He grants us to overcome sin and Satan as well so we might sit alongside Christ on the throne of our Father in heaven.