

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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**Broadcast Date:** 11 March 2018

**No.** T1032

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## Things which accompany salvation: Sin and Sins

Hello and good morning to all of you who are up and listening to this broadcast. I am going to start by congratulating you all on getting the correct time to switch on and listen. I doubt anyone listening checked which time zone it was when they decided the time to set the alarm this morning and if you are listening, thankfully it wasn't an issue for you. Such a concern over time zones is rarely a problem when you are staying in one place. It is similar to issues in Engineering and Mathematics when an assumption is made about measurement and units. Normally it is not a problem, and the same base units are used by two parties and no issues occur. There are however, a number of famous instances where this has been an issue. An engineer makes a measurement assuming the other person supplying equipment, or working with that measurement, knows what the unit is. Then when it all comes together it can be quite catastrophic. Perhaps one of the most famous errors was the Mars Orbiter. Millions of pounds were lost due to a mix up between the metric and imperial measurement units. An expensive mistake!

So, why the time zones and measurements? The subject that I am taking up this morning is "Sin and Sins". It is the continuation of the small series covering a number of topics that make up some chapters in the book entitled "Salvation", written by FB Hole (ISBN: 9780901860170). Very well worth reading if you can get the opportunity. The subjects of this current series are all couplets which in the most part have clear distinctions between them. On first reading, my subject couplet would not seem very dissimilar. It would not be a surprise if it was said that to have a whole talk on two words which only differ by a single letter was an exercise of splitting hairs or being a bit pedantic. Perhaps it may even be said that such a topic has no real bearing on day to day life and is therefore not really necessary. I have mentioned my two examples as a demonstration that, on occasion, issues that we may take for granted can actually be a problem in certain circumstances. So, the difference between Sin and Sins, although not something you may think about over your cereal, if misunderstood could be an issue of real difficulty for Christians.

Let us begin to consider what the difference is between Sin and Sins. Two simple analogies were given to me when I was younger that I feel make the difference more clear. The first likens it to illness where Sin is the Disease and Sins are the Symptoms. The second is the analogy of a tree where Sin is the tree and Sins are the fruit. These analogies try to point towards the idea of a cause and effect. Put simply, "Sins" are the things that we see in our lives and the lives of everyone around us which are wrong (such as being angry, telling lies, bad language, etc..) and "Sin" is the root cause within every person which causes us to commit such "Sins". It is worth stating that without "Sin" we would not commit any "Sins".

Now, can we turn to the Bible to support this view? In truth this can be difficult because the terms "Sin" and "Sins" are very frequently used words in the Bible. It has always been stressed to me that a good knowledge of the Bible is essential to understanding difficult topics, passages and issues. This topic is no different. Many of the uses of our terms this morning would not help us in understanding a difference. We have to know where to look. A helpful verse on this topic is Romans 5:12, which says: *"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."*

The two terms are used here in Romans 5:12. Adam when he took from the tree in the Garden of Eden sinned and this demonstrated that in him was the nature of "Sin" which would cause him to continue to commit "Sins". This characteristic he passed on to all of his descendants including you and me. The striking statement of *"because all sinned"* (Romans 5:12) is a complete and utter description of each and every one of us. We have all committed "Sins" and as such we have shown that we all have the characteristic of "Sin".

It will be of further help at this point to spend a little time considering this characteristic of "Sin" by looking at another verse, 1 John 3:4: *"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practises lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."*

Again we see that both terms are brought out here. Each of us "Sins" and we are inclined to do so again and again. Here it is brought out that lawlessness is "Sin" and this gives us an insight to what "Sin" is. When I type lawlessness into the internet, asking for a definition, it tells me that it means "a state of disorder due to a disregard of the law". Now what law is this exactly? We could suggest that it is the Ten Commandments of Moses. But what about all of those who lived before them? Romans 5:12 clearly says that this issue started with Adam. Therefore it can only be concluded that when it describes "Sin" as lawlessness, it means a disregard for the law of God Himself. The

characteristic of "Sin" is that complete disregard of God, His ways and His commands. It is an inbuilt desire to go our own way and not the way that God would want us to go. The term "Sinful nature" is often used to describe this. It demonstrates that tendency we have to ignore God for our own desires and personal gratification. This inevitably leads to us committing "Sins" in our lives.

It is also worth pointing out that this has an implication on what "Sins" are. Often we think of them as the bad things we do. But if indeed "Sin" is lawlessness, then when we don't do those things that we should do, those things that God would have us do, then we are also committing "Sins". The word "Sin", which translators used helps us to understand the original term. Sin was a term used in archery when the target was missed. If we do the wrong thing or do not do what is right, we have missed the target set by God. I do hope that this brief explanation gives a clear indication of there being a difference between the two that is worth noting.

If we now go back to Romans 5 and Romans 5:13-21 (I won't read it now), it is clear that both "Sin" and "Sins" are dealt with by the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. There can be no doubt from these words that this is the case and there is no sense where we need to do anything other than believe it to deal with the problem of "Sin" and our "Sins". But this is not the end of the discussion as the two are dealt with in different ways. When we go to a service or talk which presents the Gospel message to us we are often confronted with the need for forgiveness. This is perfectly good and correct. But this only deals with one of our couplets this morning. The Bible is full of instances where our "Sins" are forgiven. 1 John 1:9 is a prime example of this where it declares in the middle of the verse that "...he is faithful to forgive us our sins..." What does the Bible say about forgiving "Sin"? Put simply, it doesn't! Our sinful nature is never forgiven; in the Bible, it is condemned completely. This concept is similar to parents dealing with children when they have done something wrong. If the child is sorry for what has been done they are forgiven the wrong. But the parents would never say that the emotion or reason for the wrong was good and they would condemn it and look to correct that behaviour. So how does this compare with the fact that Jesus died for us if our "Sin" remains condemned? It is the fact that He died to "Sin". The Lord Jesus was condemned in our place when He suffered on the Cross; He did die. Our "Sin" which is every way against God must also suffer the same condemnation. Romans 6:10 is helpful in this by stating: "*For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.*"

This is why we need new life as Christians. Our old nature, a nature dominated by our "Sin", is condemned by God. When we believe the Gospel message, we associate with the Lord Jesus in dying to "Sin", condemning our old nature, and accept new life which allows us to live for God. This new life is free from "Sin" and allows us to finally live in a way which is pleasing to God and helps us to stop committing "Sins".

The obvious rebuff of this truth would be to state that we continue to commit "Sins" and we continue to do our own thing even after we have accepted the Gospel and have been given new life. Alas, this is a true and very real problem. Although we may have new life we retain the old life in our bodies while we live on this earth. The old nature, "Sin", will only be fully dealt with through death, or the renewing of our bodies for those who are called to be with the Lord at His return.

And so we continue our lives as believers with two conflicting natures. One that is perfectly in tune with the ways of God which would have us live such a life that would result in the declaration of "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (see Matthew 25:21) when our lives are considered by the Lord. The other is that old nature eagerly straining to make us live a life which is self serving, self seeking and utterly disregarding God, a nature that in itself could do nothing that would be pleasing to God.

Such considerations regarding our nature serve to remind us of the wonder of the Gospel message and the completeness of the provision of God in the salvation that He provides. As I have already stated, when we hear the Gospel message, particularly when we are first saved, we are chiefly concerned with forgiveness for the things that we have done wrong. The Gospel tells us that this is what is provided when we believe. There are many wonderful statements about our "Sins" being forgiven. A happy thought indeed! But God's salvation is complete and comprehensive. It does not merely mask the symptoms, but deals with the real issue at hand. We are renewed, made right, regenerated and given new life. A life that is fit for heaven! This is what John 3:1-21 tells us about. The need to be born again (see John 3:3) is to do with this issue. "Sin" is a much greater issue than our "Sins" and He has provided the most complete remedy by giving us new life, fit for His presence in heaven. How great is our God!

I would now like to digress slightly to a consideration regarding the Lord Jesus. The question of whether or not the Lord Jesus could sin is a point that a lot of people see differently. Many people believe that He could have committed "Sins". Often the only point of agreement is that despite everything He most certainly did not sin, as we know from Scripture. In the light of what we have been considering, it is my considered belief that that the Lord could not commit "Sins". This is based upon the difference between "Sin" and "Sins". "Sins" do not cause the characteristic of "Sin". It is the other way around. Therefore, if the Lord Jesus could commit "Sins" he would have to have "Sin", a sinful nature. 1 John 3:5 would support this view: "*You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*"

It does not say He didn't sin, although this is clearly stated in 1 Peter 2:22, but that there is no "Sin" in Him, implying that there simply is no nature that would cause Him to commit "Sins". Jesus was in every way God and therefore did not have the capacity to have "Sin" in Him.

The most common issue that people have with this is the thought that if Jesus could not sin, then the life that He lived was somehow not difficult. How for instance can it say that "*He was tempted in all ways as we are*" (see Hebrews 4:15) if He couldn't commit "Sins"? Well, my answer to that point is as follows. We have an odd idea of struggles and temptations. We think they are more difficult the more we want to give way to them. In reality the longer we resist the more we endure against it. This is what the Lord endured. He walked this world facing all its problems, issues and trials and never faltered. He outclassed us all in bearing with all of these things. Finally, when it comes to endurance, never let us think that the cross of Calvary was easy. He gave His life for us on that cross. Not only did He die in the physical human sense, but He gave his life to be punished in our place. Consider this for a moment; Jesus undertook the full punishment that we rightly deserved at that moment in time. We are told in the Bible that we deserve eternal punishment for our failure to live up to God's standard. So every person who has ever lived, their eternal punishment was given to Jesus at that point on the Cross. This is an astonishing fact and one that should always keep us mindful of the great sacrifice He made for us.

As I have already said, these are my thoughts in this short digression, I do not put myself down as an expert but it seems to fit with the thoughts on "Sin" and "Sins" more than any other theory. Whatever people may think, we can all agree that He did not have either "Sin" or "Sins". This is supported by those who declared in the Bible, "*in Him there is no fault*" (Luke 23:4, also see Luke 23:41). Because of this, He was able to take our place and provide the sacrifice that would allow us to enjoy the blessings of salvation. How thankful we can be for such a loving Saviour!

Let us now go back to our main subject. We have spent a little time considering the difference between "Sin" and "Sins" as well as the different way in which God has dealt with the two. I will now spend a little time considering the practical implications for us on a day to day basis. It may still seem that it doesn't really have an impact; yes, there is a difference, but both are dealt with by the Cross of Calvary; God may deal with them in different ways but for us they are dealt with. Perhaps we should not worry about it? But the truth is we do worry about "Sin" and "Sins". I actually think that Christians often worry about these things more than other people. We now know the seriousness of both and we also have a very real appreciation of the cost to make us right.

I believe that our subject this morning gives us a better understanding of "Sin" and "Sins" so that we may not be crippled with the worry of the "Sins" we continue to commit even after we have become Christians. So let us look at three points which I think are practical implications on our walk regarding this subject:

### **1. We have an explanation as to why we keep committing "Sins"**

My first point is that we have an explanation as to why we keep committing "Sins". Often there is a question as to why we keep doing wrong things in our lives. Even the Apostle Paul admitted that he did the things he didn't want to do and didn't do the things he wanted to do in Romans 7:15. This is a frank admission of "Sins" that he committed. But he goes on to say that this is not he in Romans 7:20. The "Sin" that dwells in Paul is causing this and this is the same for us. The fact that our "Sin" is still with us until we die or are called to be with Christ, becoming renewed, means that we will continue to commit "Sins". This is, of course, not an excuse but it is an explanation as to the cause.

### **2. We now have a demonstration that forgiveness is only a part of being saved**

The second point is that we now have a demonstration that forgiveness is only a part of being saved. There is sometimes a focus on the need to seek forgiveness from God to be right with Him. This is quite correct in the general case; seeking forgiveness is an essential feature of turning to Christ as it shows that we have acknowledged our failure and are looking for grace. But there is sometimes a thought that we need to spend the rest of our lives listing every possible misdemeanour in order to ensure that forgiveness is there for each one, otherwise we may not be saved. But how awful a state this is! If I think of God and His sovereignty and His righteousness, I cannot begin to think of how often I must fail. I don't think I actually am aware of all the times I have failed. The notion that I have to list every item and be specifically forgiven does not seem to be compatible with God's grace. If I was told I had 10 minutes to live, I would not have time to list the individual occurrences, let alone make sure I had asked for forgiveness for each one. Does that mean I would not be saved? Certainly not! I know this because I know that I am associated with Christ. I have condemned my old nature, full of "Sin". I have asked for my "Sins" to be forgiven, and God has forgiven them. If I drop down dead immediately with unconfessed "Sins" I will still look upon the Lord in glory. Our subject tells me this because it tells me that there are "Sins" to be forgiven and that my "Sin" is to be seen as dead, utterly condemned. Only new life given after trusting Him is needed.

I do not intend to promote any idea that we can do what we like or that we should not ask for forgiveness when we know we have done wrong. Such action is an essential part of our relationship with Him. But the general condition for

all those who have made a true step of faith is one which cannot be moved or lost by our efforts. Our new life, our new nature will cause us to seek forgiveness at such times when we clearly commit "Sins". But the fact that we have new life means that we are fit for His presence now, and that cannot be taken away. We belong to God and He will not let us go.

### 3. This subject provides a key lesson on how to avoid "Sins"

My third point is that this subject provides a key lesson on how to avoid "Sins". Throughout the last two thousand years there has been a drive to try and stop committing "Sins". It seems that people look to the Old Testament for inspiration when trying ways to achieve this. They look straight to the Ten Commandments and think "what a great idea". A list is drawn up; all the things that we must not do. Unfortunately, the Ten Commandments were a request of the people rather than something that God wanted to give. I have no problem with the Ten Commandments, but if I look at the 64 books of the Bible that follow, it only describes a long history of people failing to meet them. It is important for Christians to know what is right and wrong. We need to always be mindful of knowing what is pleasing to God and what is not. But our subject clearly shows us that we cannot control the "Sin" that is in us. Even God does not try! He has condemned it utterly and it will not last beyond death. He has given us a new life and new nature instead. One that is incapable of committing "Sins" and one that is always trying to lead us to please God in our lives. This is backed up by Romans 7 again. Paul, Romans 7:13-25, is telling us that there is this battle going on between the old and the new natures. It is not a case of improving our old selves; the two are there and they cannot be changed, one is for good and the other for evil. Therefore, we should not spend our time trying to tame our "Sin", our old nature. It simply will not work and history is a sorry demonstration of this fact. Our subject today should move us in a different direction. It should move us to nurture and encourage our new nature. If we fill our time trying to serve God, if we pray regularly, if we read His word, if we are with other believers worshipping God and stirring one another up, if we are concerned with His will for us, we will be nurturing our new nature and starving our old "Sin".

Paul tells his readers in Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

This is a good lesson for us. Filling our time with godly things is more productive in avoiding "Sins" than any of our efforts to try not to do them.

### Conclusion

I will just finish with a little thought for us all to take away. There is a brother in my assembly, who is always reminding us that the word of God is never an accident and it doesn't contain things that should not be there. Therefore if a word is different from others or is specifically written then it is written for a purpose. This I believe is the case for us with our subject today, as it is with all of the words used in this little mini-series. God in His sovereignty has made a distinction in His word regarding "Sin" and "Sins". He is telling us that this is something to take notice of. It is important that we take some time to consider these things because it helps us in our understanding of God and His ways, as well as helping us in our walk for Him. Let us be mindful of learning about the little details of God to help us know Him better.

I trust this talk has been helpful to all those listening and will stir each of us up to look into His word in order for us to know Him and His ways better, and to help us live our lives for Him.

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