

TEACHING GOAL

To study the doctrine of sin, in particular, its definition.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

Q. What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from their estate wherein they were created was their eating the forbidden fruit.

S.C. 14-15; L.C. 24; W.C. of F. VI; Savoy 6; Young 27-31

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: I John 3

Support Passages: Leviticus 4; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Romans 3:9-24; Hebrews 11:4; James 2:1-13

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 4:1-15: Cain sinned against God and against Able his brother.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

I John 3:4

⁴ Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

APPLICATION

Let us all examine our lives to discover sin in them. God's people must confess "the sin which so easily entangles us" (Hebrews 12:1-2) and those who are unbelievers must also repent, confessing their sins and believing that Jesus is Lord in order to become the Lord's people.

SUMMARY

This lesson is concerned with the nature of sin which the Bible simply defines as "lawlessness" (I John 3:4). This correctly translates the Greek word *anomia* which is translated in the Authorized Version (King James) as "transgression of the law." Lawlessness expresses the idea of living as if there were no law or living in the context of despising or disregarding the law of God. How different is this way of life from that of one who has been born again and redeemed by God's own blood. Such a child of God says with the Psalmist, ¹⁴ I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As *much as* in all riches.¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. (Psalm 119:14-16).

The Westminster Larger Catechism answers the question concerning sin in this manner: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable (rational) creature" (Question 24). Adam, you see, was a rational creature, whereas all other creatures were irrational. In other words, Adam had the ability to conceive of God, to worship Him, and to comprehend and perform God's laws. Thus are God's moral laws distinguished from the law of nature which would include instinct and natural physical law. Such law operates and exists quite apart from the rational activities of creatures. There is no moral responsibility involved with involuntary obedience to natural law. For example, it is not a moral issue when the heart skips a beat or an animal fails to do what would normally occur by instinct. Sin involves rational disobedience,²⁶ For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:26-27).

Now I John 3 contains some hard concepts concerning sin. In verse 6, for example, "No one who abides (continually) in Him sins; no one who sins (continually) has seen Him or knows Him," and here the Greek actually reads "has known Him." There are two present participles here; the word "abides" and the word "sins" in the second clause. The force of each of these is continual normal activity. So also in verse ⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin (as a way of life). John tells us clearly that we as Christians sin, but that there is forgiveness by confessing our sins to God. Furthermore, He has provided His own Son as our Advocate and Propitiation (I John 1:8-2:2), but make no mistake, that person who has been born again by God has been changed such that a different lifestyle is pursued.

Regarding our natural estate of sin Paul notes that it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not

known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:9-18) Such is the nature of sin. It is completely enslaving. It renders useless. It is poison. It is cursing and bitterness. It brings death and is death. It is godless and lawless. For the Christian, however, this abysmal estate is not a way of life. Even though the Christian has an abiding proclivity for sin, no one who is born of God practices lawlessness as a way of life.