



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 4.3 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin

The Concept of Sin

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they became aware at once that something had changed in their lives. Instead of welcoming a visit from their Lord God Creator, they were so afraid of Him that they tried to hide from Him. They became conscious of a sense of shame and guilt in being naked, and so they tried to cover themselves. Their changed condition also became obvious in their foolishness in trying to hide from God. It also soon became clear that Adam and Eve no longer had the same love towards each other, for Adam blamed Eve (and God, who had given Eve to him) instead of taking the blame himself and sheltering his wife. Eve did not blame herself either, but pointed the finger of blame at the serpent.

All of this shows that Adam and Eve were now sinners. They had become mortal beings, subject to death and everything leading up to death. They had become subject to the devil and were in bondage to him. This brought about a fear of temporal death and also eternal death, which is the punishment facing all sinners. God had said to them: **"In the day you eat of it you shall surely die"** (Genesis 2:17), and now indeed they were already dead spiritually. From this time on, the devil **"had the power of death"** over them, and they **"through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"** (Hebrews 2:14-15). This was true not only of the two of them, but of all their descendants.

The reason that everyone in the world has this natural fear of death is that everyone in the world has a consciousness of sin. The apostle Paul said that the heathen Gentiles **"show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them"** (Romans 2:15). But in many cultures this consciousness of God and its accompanying sense of guilt before God has been so suppressed (Romans 1:18) that the concept of sin has almost been erased. For that reason, in addition to writing His law in their hearts, God has written and distributed His Law in the Bible. It is only when human beings have a knowledge of their sin that they see a need for a Savior from sin.

As we study the Scriptures to learn more about sin, we notice that the Holy Spirit uses many different words to describe sin in both the Hebrew and Greek languages. In our English translations we also have different words used to convey the concept of sin in its various aspects. For example, the psalmist David said: **"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit"** (Psalm 32:1-2).

Transgression or trespass is the idea of stepping somewhere outside boundaries that God has set in His Word. We know what a "No Trespassing" sign means: it means that we must stay off the land; it is forbidden territory.

The meaning of the word "sin" means "missing the mark", as when an archer misses the target. Our moral target is God's law written in our hearts and in the Bible. We miss that mark, and thus we sin. **"Sin is lawlessness"** (1 John 3:4). The apostle Paul describes sin as not doing what you should do and doing what you should not do: **"For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice"** (Romans 7:19).

Whether it is called sin, iniquity, unrighteousness, transgression, disobedience, trespass, error, evil, malice, wickedness, rebellion, or revolt, it is contrary to the will of God and brings the perpetrator under the wrath, anger, and judgment of the holy God.

In Psalm 38 David gives expression to the effect of sin in our lives: **“There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness”** (Psalm 38:3-4).

Sometimes the Bible uses the word **“flesh”** to describe man’s sinful nature. Before the Genesis flood God said of man: **“He is indeed flesh”** (Genesis 6:3). Jesus used the same term in referring to all mankind: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh”** (John 3:6). Even after Paul became a Christian, he said: **“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells”** (Romans 7:18). In his letter to the Galatians Paul made a list of some of the **“works of the flesh”** (Galatians 5:19).

Questions

1. What changes took place in Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God’s command?
2. How did Adam and Eve die in the day that they ate from the forbidden tree?
3. What does it mean that Adam and Eve became mortal beings?
4. What is meant by accusing and excusing thoughts, and when do they take place?
5. What are some of the different terms the Bible uses for sin?
6. What did Jesus mean when He said that what is born of flesh is flesh?
7. What words for sin are used in your native language, if it is not English?
8. Do the persons in your locale have a strong sense of guilt when they sin?
9. Why is it so important to have a concept of sin?