



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 4.4 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin

The Universality of Sin

Every sin is a sin against God. God has written His law in the hearts of all human beings. This law is called the natural law. This law corresponds to the moral law given in the law of Moses. It is explained in the New Testament. This law does not include the ceremonial laws and civil laws that were given only to the children of Israel. These ceremonial and civil laws were in force only until the coming of the Messiah. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul lists **“those things which are not fitting,”** such as **“unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, ...envy, murder, strife, deceit, evilmindedness, ...whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.”** He adds that the Gentiles know **“the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death”** (Romans 1:28-32). Even without any written law, the Gentiles (that is, the non-Jews) know that these things are sinful and against the will of whatever god or gods they can imagine. Nevertheless, although they know these things are wrong, they **“not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them”** (Romans 1:32).

The children of Israel, in the days before the coming of the Messiah, committed sin every time they disobeyed the laws God gave them through Moses. This included the civil and ceremonial laws that no longer apply to Christians living in the New Testament. For us Christians today it is certainly true that every transgression of the moral law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments and as explained in the New Testament, is a sin against God.

Since God has placed superiors over us in the government, in the home, and in society, any disobedience or lack of respect toward these authorities is also sinful, except when these authorities demand something that is contrary to God's law. The apostle Peter wrote: **“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”** (1 Peter 2:13-15). Likewise, the apostle Paul wrote: **“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God”** (Romans 13:1). The same holds true for authorities in the home and authorities in the workplace.

Nevertheless, it is permissible and even mandatory that we disobey these human authorities when they contradict God's law. In such cases we need to follow the example of Peter and the other apostles in saying: **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). When they were commanded **“not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,”** Peter and John replied: **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”** (Acts 4:18-20).

Sin therefore is as common in our world as air. Paul concludes: **“We have...charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin”** (Romans 3:9). **“By the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:20). **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). The apostle John agrees, saying: **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us”** (1 John 1:8-10).

Sometimes we know when we are sinning. At other times we are unaware of our sins. David says: **“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults”** (Psalm 19:12). Before he was converted to faith in Christ, Paul was unaware of his sin. **“I did it ignorantly in unbelief,”** he said (1 Timothy 1:13).

In our modern world sin is commonly excused or minimized. Instead of admitting that we are sinners, we often attempt to blame our sins on others, on our upbringing, on our surroundings, on our government, on our lack of education, or on anything other than ourselves. This is the same thing that Adam and Eve did when they blamed each other, the devil, and even God for their sin, rather than taking responsibility for their own actions.

Questions

1. What is meant by the natural law?
2. Where in Scripture do we learn about the natural law?
3. Of what are all people aware, because of the natural law?
4. What laws were the children of Israel obligated to obey?
5. Which part of the written law applies to us Christians today?
6. Why is it sinful to disobey human authorities, such as the government or our parents?
7. When would it be right for us to disobey governmental authorities?
8. Who is guilty of sin in our world today?
9. How would you prove that someone is a sinner if they deny it?
10. If we deny that we are sinners, whom are we calling a liar?
11. Is it possible to sin without realizing that we are sinning? Explain.
12. How do we attempt to evade responsibility for our sins?