



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 4.8 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin

### Original Sin and Actual Sins

Besides being guilty of Adam's sin by imputation (original sin), we are also all guilty of actual sins, that is, sins that each one of us commits in thought, word, and deed. We sin by our thinking, by our speaking, and by our doing. Jesus said: **"Out of the heart (original sin) proceed evil thoughts (thought), murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts (deed), false witness, blasphemies (word). These are the things which defile a man"** (Matthew 15:19-20).

The apostle Paul often gives lists of actual sins. These lists are not intended to be complete lists, but rather examples of various kinds of sins. Such lists are found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 3:5-11, and Colossians 3:5-10. Actually, everything that is done by an unbeliever is a sin, because **"without faith it is impossible to please"** God (Hebrews 11:6). Cain's offering to God did not please God because Cain did not bring his offering in faith. The prophet Isaiah tells us that God is not pleased with offerings that He Himself has commanded if they come from those who are continuing in evil as unbelievers without repentance. **"Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates,"** he says. **"They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood"** (Isaiah 1:14-15). Actual sin begins with the first desire to sin, as James says: **"When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin"** (James 1:15).

The Bible speaks of some actual sins as unintentional or involuntary. These sins may be sins of weakness or sins of ignorance. After the great Genesis flood Noah **"began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent"** (Genesis 9:20-21). This was most likely a sin of weakness and not an intentional sin to defy his Maker. When Jesus' disciples were asked in the Garden of Gethsemane to **"watch and pray,"** they did not watch; they did not pray, but they fell asleep. Jesus recognized this as a sin of weakness, not as an intentional sin, for He said: **"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"** (Matthew 26:41). The apostle Paul confessed that he often committed unintentional sins, doing what he did not want to do: **"What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do"** (Romans 7:15).

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's escape with his two daughters, these two daughters **"made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose"** (Genesis 19:33). Lot's sin of incest with his daughters was a sin of ignorance on his part, since he did not know what was going on. The Old Testament regulations allowed for special sacrifices **"if a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them"** (Leviticus 4:2; Numbers 15:27). Such sins of ignorance are indeed sins which need to be forgiven, as Jesus prayed from the cross: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"** (Luke 23:34).

On the other hand, many sins are intentional or deliberate sins. The Old Testament laws made a distinction between involuntary sins and intentional sins. We read in Numbers 15:30-31: **"The person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him."** For example, when Absalom, David's son, plotted against his father over a

long period of time and then stole the kingdom from him, this certainly was a deliberate sin on his part. He had planned it and then he carried it out. There is no sign that he ever repented (2 Samuel 15). The betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot was certainly also a sin committed willfully and with malicious intent (Matthew 26:14-16).

All sins deserve eternal punishment. All sins are dangerous. But those who sin continually, and defiantly flout God's grace in their lives, do so at grave spiritual risk to their souls. Paul warns the Christians in Rome: **"If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live"** (Romans 8:13). In the Christian there should be a continuing struggle against the flesh and the sin it desires to do. There are setbacks along the way, but it is always dangerous to plunge ahead on a sinful path when one knows that it is a sinful path and a path that is contrary to God's clear will.

As long as God's Holy Spirit is in us and at work in us through God's Word, the struggle continues. But it is possible for a believer not only to grieve the Spirit but even to drive Him out. We all need to pray with David: **"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me"** (Psalm 19:12-13). We need the forgiveness for the sins we do not understand – the sins that are hidden even from us. But we need God's special help to fight against deliberate sins, so that they do not have dominion over us. That is why Paul instructs us: **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts... For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace"** (Romans 6:12-14). Paul continues with this warning: **"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"** (Romans 6:16).

All sins committed by unbelievers are sins leading to death, for without faith it is impossible to please God. Even those deeds that look like good deeds to human eyes are not good in God's eyes. Only those who believe in Christ can do things that God considers good. Remember the difference between Cain and Abel, as explained in Hebrews 11:4.

By faith in Jesus Christ, who has paid the penalty for all sins, the believer is a forgiven sinner. Like David, the believer says to God in his words or thoughts: **"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin"** (Psalm 32:5). Our God is not a God who is eager to remove us from His flock. **"A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench"** (Isaiah 42:3). The apostle Paul assures us: **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1). **"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"** (1 John 2:1-2). We should not forget that Jesus, who died for our sins, is now at God's right hand interceding for us. **"It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us"** (Romans 8:34).

God's strong warnings are given to believers to help them fight against the sins that are always threatening to take over and drive out the Holy Spirit. **"Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). A similar warning is given in Galatians 5:19-21, concluding with these words: **"Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."**

We usually think of sins as acts that are wrong. But in addition to these sins of *commission*, there are also sins of *omission*, that is, sins where we do not do what we ought to do. James says: **"To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"** (James 4:17).

## Questions

---

1. What is the difference between original sin and actual sins?
2. Why is it impossible for unbelievers to do good in God's sight?
3. Why did God accept Abel's offering, but not Cain's offering?
4. Give an example of a sin of weakness.
5. Give an example of a sin of ignorance.
6. What is the difference between involuntary sins and deliberate sins?
7. What must believers in Christ continually do every day of their lives?
8. What does it mean when it is said that sin has dominion over you?
9. What comfort do believers have when they fall into sin?
10. What is the difference between a sin of commission and a sin of omission?
11. Which sins are prevalent in your locale?
12. How must Christians struggle against these sins?