

What is Sin?

To some, pleasurable activities such as card-playing, dancing, and movie-going fall under a category called “sin.” To others, sin is any behavior society deems unacceptable. But are these descriptions in agreement with the Bible?

What does the word *sin* mean to you? To many people, sin is a relative term. Its definition depends upon “situation ethics,” or on any behavior or style of living that society considers unacceptable. Conversely, any behavior or style of living (though formerly unacceptable) that society considers acceptable is not sin.

Time was when “cohabitation” (couples living together out of wedlock) was taboo. Unmarried couples sharing the same living quarters were considered lewd, or immoral, and were often described with words such as “low-life.”

But times have changed! The socially “elite” can now adopt the lifestyles of the “low-lives” without jeopardizing their positions on the upper rungs of the socio-economic ladder. This “moralizing” of yesterday’s immorality is reflected in today’s entertainment: We now see some of the characters of prime-time “family” television shows involved in pre-marital sexual relations. And the message, which is reaching *millions* of impressionable young minds, is clear: “*Premarital sex is normal and natural and healthy; you need never feel any sense of shame or guilt for participating!*”

“No shame! No guilt! No regret! It’s okay—just make sure you practice ‘safe sex.’ That way nobody gets hurt.” Isn’t that the message that is coming across loud and clear in today’s world?

So do you see how changing times bring changing standards of morality?

But should we *accept* the “new” standards? Does God allow us to determine what is right and what is wrong? Does He permit us to decide for ourselves what constitutes sin?

On the other side of the coin, there are those who insist that sin includes “worldly pleasures” such as playing cards and going to the movies. They seem to believe that *sin* and *pleasure* are synonymous terms.

But are we to assume that God advocates a way of life devoid of fun and pleasure? What does the Bible say about this subject of sin?

The basic definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4 (KJV): “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law.*” Sin is not the “transgression” of man-made religious traditions; it is the transgression of the *law—God’s law!*

The law of God is God’s *standard* of behavior for human beings. Any time we transgress His law, we commit sin. This introduces two questions: What is God’s law? And, how does God make His law known to us?

Law Revealed in Nature

There are two basic ways in which God reveals His standards of behavior to mankind. The first is through *nature*.

The apostle Paul writes, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are *clearly seen*, being understood *by the things that are made*, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [the ungodly] *are without excuse*” (Romans 1:18-20).

Here, Paul is not speaking of the Israelites who received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai; he is speaking of mankind in general, and he says that man is *without excuse* because the “invisible things” of God—His righteous nature and standards of conduct—may be known “by the things that are made.”

What did Paul mean? How are God’s righteous standards revealed in the “things that are made,” or *nature*?

Consider this: In this world there are many primitive tribes that are far removed from civilized societies. They have not been “Christianized” through the efforts of missionaries; they have not been exposed to the outside world, but have existed from time immemorial in their own lands, with their own tribal laws and customs. Interestingly, many of these tribes have laws against murder, adultery, theft, bearing false witness, and dishonoring parents. They even have their own marriage ceremonies, and believe in one true God, the Creator of all things.

How did these primitive peoples, without the benefit of Bibles and missionaries, come to understand so many of the principles of God’s law? The answer is simple: Many of God’s standards of behavior are revealed in the *nature of things!*

Some erroneously believe that human nature is all *bad*. Nothing could be further from the truth! There is a natural law in human nature that tells man that certain types of conduct are wrong. And when men transgress this natural law, they commit sin.

Paul writes: “[F]or when Gentiles, who do not have the law [the law revealed through Moses (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5)], *by nature* do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law *written in their hearts*, their *conscience* also bearing witness...” (Romans 2:14,15).

If you read the entire first and second chapters of the book of Romans, you will see that Paul’s point is that *all* both Israelites and Gentiles, are guilty of *sin*—of transgressing God’s law. The law revealed through Moses at Sinai is a witness against Israel, while the law revealed in nature is a witness against the Gentiles.

The very nature of man, unless corrupted, tells us that murder, adultery, theft, and lying are *wrong*. Nature itself reveals that worshiping anything other than the Creator is *wrong*, that idolatry is *wrong*, and that speaking irreverently of the Creator—taking His name in vain—is *wrong!*

Most of us do not need a biblical commandment telling us that homosexual relations are sinful, for *nature itself* cries out against such things! Even carnal-minded human beings recognize that bestiality, incest, sadism, masochism, and transvestism are contrary to nature! The expression “*unnatural acts*” and “*perversion*” are commonly applied to such things.

The ancient Sodomites lived long before the time of Moses; they had not received the law. Yet, God destroyed them because of their wickedness (law-breaking). They were engaged in activities contrary to nature; they should have known better. The same is true of the ancient Ninevites. Because of their iniquity (lawlessness), God threatened to destroy them. They were without excuse; they knew, by the nature of things, that certain activities were immoral, unethical.

So, clearly, many of God's standards of behavior are revealed in nature. But there are certain points of God's law that are *not* revealed in nature.

This brings us to the second way God reveals His standards to mankind—particularly to those whom He calls for a special purpose.

Law Revealed in Scripture

To ancient Israel, God revealed His law through Moses. To His people today, He reveals His law through the *scriptures*. Many of the laws revealed in Scripture are revealed in nature. But some of God's standards of conduct and behavior are revealed *only* in Scripture, and without Scripture we would not be able to naturally discern these standards.

Take, for example, the Sabbath day. We would not by nature know that one day in seven is holy; nor would we know that a *specific* day of the seven-day week is holy. Knowledge of the Sabbath comes not by *natural* revelation, but by *special* revelation. Therefore, it is a mark, or *sign*, representing the relationship between God and His people.

Through Moses, God said, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a *sign* between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you'" (Exodus 31:13).

The Sabbath was intended to keep the knowledge of God in the minds of His chosen people. It points directly to the creation (compare Exodus 20:8-11 with Genesis 2:2,3), thus perpetuating the knowledge of the Creator. It was to continually remind the Israelites of the God who delivered them from Egyptian bondage (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Today, the Sabbath is still a sign between God and His chosen people—the church. It points to the God of the Bible, the Creator; and it perpetually reminds us of the *freedom* from sin (typified by Egyptian bondage) provided by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath is the Fourth Commandment of that portion of the law known as the Decalogue. And Jesus said in the clearest of terms that He did *not* come to do away with the law (Matthew 5:17-19). Therefore, if we break the Sabbath, we are *transgressors of the law*. Remember the basic definition of sin: "Sin is the *transgression of the law*."

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the *annual* Sabbaths are part of the law revealed only in Scripture. We would not know about God's annual holy days except through the revelation of Scripture. Nor would we know about baptism or the memorial of Christ's self-sacrifice except through the revelation of God's Word.

We can see, then, that there are two ways through which God reveals His laws to man—through *natural* revelation and through *special* revelation. God's chosen people are the recipients of both.

Now, let's consider some other ways the Bible describes sin.

All Unrighteousness is Sin

The apostle John writes, "All *unrighteousness* is sin..." (1 John 5:17). Essentially, this is another way of saying that sin is the transgression of the law—for the law not only defines sin, it defines righteousness.

The Psalmist writes, "...for all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172), meaning simply that God's standards of righteousness are revealed in His

commandments. His standards of righteousness require that we worship Him and Him alone (First Commandment); that we refrain from the use of idols (Second Commandment); that we speak reverently of Him, avoiding taking His name in vain (Third Commandment); that we keep holy His Sabbath (Fourth Commandment); that we honor our parents (Fifth Commandment); that we refrain from murder (Sixth Commandment), adultery (Seventh Commandment), theft (Eighth Commandment), bearing false witness (Ninth Commandment), and covetousness (Tenth Commandment).

Righteousness stands in bold contrast to sin and ungodliness. Peter says that Christians are “dead to sins” and should “live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24); and speaks of Noah, “a preacher of righteousness,” who lives in “the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5).

In 1 Corinthians 15:34, Paul exhorts, “Awake to righteousness, and do not sin,” showing that righteousness is the opposite of sin, or law breaking. In Romans 6, he expresses the same thought: “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?...And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of *righteousness*” (verses 16,18).

Is There an Unforgivable Sin?

Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31,32).

This passage raises several questions: How does “blasphemy against the Spirit” differ from all other forms of “sin and blasphemy”? What makes blasphemy against the Spirit unforgivable? Why can a person be forgiven for speaking against Christ, but not forgiven for speaking against the Holy Spirit? Does this mean that mentioning the name of Jesus in an irreverent manner is forgivable, but mentioning the Holy Spirit in an irreverent manner is not?

These questions can be answered by considering the situation that led Jesus to warn about blasphemy against the Spirit.

The Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of “Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (verse 24). Jesus replied, “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? . . . But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (verses 26,28).

The Pharisees’ accusation was not merely a misunderstanding about the Source of Jesus’ power, but was motivated by the hardness of their hearts. Jesus recognized that (in the case of the Pharisees) attributing the work of the spirit of God to Satan the devil could only come from a heart so hardened that it is impervious to the grace of God. The “blasphemy against the Spirit” Jesus mentioned is not so much an outward act as it is an inner condition. The *act* of attributing the work of the Spirit to the devil was the result of a spiritual *condition* that allowed no room for genuine repentance before God. Because the condition of the heart disallowed repentance, there could be no forgiveness.

But if a sinner’s heart is not so hard that he is incapable of repentance, then forgiveness is still possible. Some of the individuals who turned to God in repentance and received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost had spoken against Jesus several

weeks earlier (Acts 2:36-41). Peter himself had denied Christ the night before the crucifixion (John 18:17,25-27), but his denial was out of fear, not a heart so hard that the grace of God could no penetrate it.

Anyone who truly wants to obey God, and is eager to fully accept His provisions for salvation, *can be forgiven!* Such a person should not fear that he may have committed an unforgivable sin. □

(For a fully study on this subject, be sure to request our free brochure entitled *What is the Unpardonable sin?*)

In the book of Romans, Paul speaks of the “law of righteousness” and of the “righteous requirements of the law” (see Romans 2:26; 8:4; 9:31), showing that he understood that righteousness is defined by the law. And in 2 Timothy 3:16, he states that the Old Testament (which contains the law) is good for “instruction in righteousness.”

One scripture often misunderstood is Romans 3:21: “But now the righteousness of God *apart from the law* is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” If righteousness is defined by the law, how can Paul assert that the righteousness of God is “apart from the law”?

The answer is in verses 22 and 23: “[E]ven the righteousness of God, *through faith in Jesus Christ*, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; *for all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God.”

The law, as revealed through Moses and as magnified by Jesus Christ, is God’s *standard* of righteousness. But Paul is not speaking of the standard of righteousness; he is speaking of the *means* whereby law-breakers may obtain righteousness. He is saying that because we have all sinned (broken the law), we must obtain righteousness through a way other than the law—and that way is “grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (verse 24).

But does this mean that the law is “done away”? Paul explains: “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (verse 31). It makes no sense to assume that God, upon forgiving our sins, would do away with the law that defines sin—for if there is no law, there is no sin (Romans 5:13); and if there is no sin, there is no need for remission of sins!

The law, then, is God’s standard of righteousness. It tells us what kind of behavior is pleasing God, and, at the same time, tells us of the type of conduct that is displeasing to Him.

Let’s now consider yet another description of sin, which should help to further broaden our understanding of this subject.

Whatever Is Not of Faith

In Romans 14:23, Paul says that “whatever is not from faith is sin.” This simply means that any act that conflicts with *belief*, or *conviction*, is sin. For example, I *believe* that the Sabbath, like marriage, was instituted at creation; I *believe* that it was given to Israel as one of the Ten Commandments; and I *believe* that the Ten Commandments are to be kept by Christians today. Therefore, if I break the Fourth Commandment—If I disregard the Sabbath—then not only have I violated the law God revealed to Israel, but I have also violated the *law of faith*.

In the time of Paul, meat that had been sacrificed to idols was sold at the markets. Paul knew that idols were nothing and that they had no power to contaminate the flesh

that was offered to them. Yet, some of the Roman Christians were unable to purchase and eat the meat without associating it with idolatrous practice—thus, they were unable to eat in good conscience. Paul therefore admonished them not to eat—“for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

The same principle can be applied today to the use of alcoholic beverages. There is nothing wrong with the moderate use of alcohol. Jesus Himself drank wine. His first recorded miracle was turning water into wine. In addition, the ancient Israelites were told they could use their festival tithe “for wine or similar drink” if they so desired (Deuteronomy 14:26); and Paul advised Timothy to “use a little wine” for his stomach’s sake and for his frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23).

Yet, some Christians, because of their religious backgrounds and consequent inability to disassociate moderate drinking from drunkenness, are unable to use alcoholic beverages in good conscience. To them, even moderate drinking would be a sin—“for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

We see, then, that sin has a variety of definitions. It is (1) the transgression of the law, (2) all unrighteousness, and (3) whatever is not of faith. These descriptions have overlapping meanings, and help us better understand the nature and cause of sin.

But there is yet another biblical description of sin that, when understood, should give us a much fuller understanding of what sin is and where it originates.

The “Sin Nature”

In Romans 7, Paul explains, “For we know that the law is *spiritual*, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (verse 14). The context shows that the law Paul calls “spiritual” is the Decalogue (see verses 7-13).

He continues: “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good” (verses 15,16). Paul is saying that he occasionally stumbles; he makes mistakes from time to time; he is human, and being human, he is bound to have faults and shortcomings. Perhaps he fails to pray as he ought, or perhaps he occasionally harbors wrong thoughts, or sometimes allows anger to override his better judgment.

Whatever his specific faults may be, he tells us the source of the problem in the next verse. Notice carefully: “But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (verse 17). Here, Paul speaks of “sin” as if it were an indwelling spiritual entity. Sin, in this sense, is much more than the transgression of the law; it is that side of human nature that causes us to transgress the law.

This concept can be better understood by understanding the principle of cause and effect. There is no such thing as *effect* without *cause*. The specific sins we commit are effects; the “sin” (or *sin nature*) that dwells within us is the cause. Just as good works are the evidence of internal faith (Hebrews 11; James 2:14-26), so are specific sins the evidence of the indwelling sin nature.

In other words, all sins that cut a person off from God originate *in the mind*. When the Pharisees asked why the disciples did not follow the tradition of the elders, but ate bread with unwashed hands, Jesus explained that it is not that which enters into a man that defiles him; rather, it is that which comes from within a man that defiles him. “*For from within, out of the heart [mind] of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy,*

pride, foolishness. All these evil things *come from within* and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23).

The apostle Paul fully recognized that even though he was converted—even though the “old man” had been symbolically buried in the waters of baptism—nevertheless, the sin nature was still alive and well, still dwelling within him.

Paul writes: “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:21-23).

How Did Adam’s Sin Affect the World?

According to *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Tradition*, original sin is a “sinful condition common to every member of the human race since the sin of Adam. It is contrasted with actual sin, which is self-conscious rejection of God’s will” (p. 279). However, there are some major differences on precisely how Adam’s sin affected the human race. Some hold that the entire human race was declared guilty when Adam, the father and representative of the race, sinned by partaking of the forbidden fruit. Therefore, all humans are born guilty; all are sinners from birth. Others reject the theory that humans come into the world bearing Adam’s guilt, but affirm that Adam’s fallen nature was passed on to all his progeny. Humans are therefore born with a sinful heart, or proclivity toward sinful behavior.

The view that all humans are born bearing Adam’s guilt contradicts a principle that is clearly set forth in Scripture. In Ezekiel 18, God refutes the Israelites’ belief that the guilt of the fathers is passed on to the children. “The soul who sins shall die,” God declares. “The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son” (verse 20).

But, someone will ask, what about Exodus 20:5? Doesn’t God promise to punish the children of the wicked “unto the third and fourth generations”?

Indeed, He does, but only if the children of the third and fourth generations continue to the evil practices they learned from their fathers. If they repent of their sinful deeds and turn to God in heart-rending repentance, He will respond by “showing mercy to thousands, to those who love (Him) and keep (His) commandments” (verse 6). The guilt of the fathers begins and ends with the fathers. The punishment for that guilt continues with the children as long as the children continue the sinful ways of the fathers. This is consistent with Paul’s comments on how Adam’s sin relates to the human race. The apostle wrote, “Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, *because all sinned*” (Romans 5:12). When humans sin, they put themselves under the death sentence that was invoked when Adam and Eve sinned. But since infants and small children are incapable of comprehending what is morally right or wrong, they cannot choose to obey or disobey God; therefore, no one is born guilty.

It is also a mistake to think that Adam’s fallen nature was passed on *genetically* to all humans. There is no biblical or scientific basis for such a theory. Since acts of sin do not bring about genetic alterations in the person committing such acts, the fallen nature that results from sinful behavior is not genetically transferrable. However, sinful behavior can be *taught* to the next generation, whether by example or by direct instruction.

In the book of Romans, the term *sin* sometimes refers to the sinful *condition* of human kind in general. This condition is due, not to the genetic transference of Adam’s

fallen nature, but to (1) the state of being out of fellowship with God and (2) the influence of Satan the devil. When Adam and Eve sinned, the human race lost the fellowship it originally had with God, and from that time humankind in general has been out of fellowship with Him.

Man was designed for perpetual fellowship with God. Without the much-needed supernatural help that comes with being in fellowship with Him, man lacks the strength and direction he needs to accomplish God's will, and will inevitably fall into sin. This is how Adam's sin affected the world, and this is the condition Paul has in mind when he speaks of sin entering the world through Adam and spreading to all men. The fall of Adam resulted not in a change of human nature at the genetic level, but the loss of the supernatural element that is present only when man is in fellowship with God.

The basic components of human nature are not, in themselves, evil. However, human nature, left to its own, lacks moral strength and direction. Add the influence of the devil, and the universality of sinful behavior is no longer a mystery.

It is important to realize that Satan the devil was the original sinner. Satan "was a murderer from the beginning," and "is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Through his influence, sin entered the human world (Genesis 3). He "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9), and is "the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). It is a mistake to underestimate the devil's role in bringing about and perpetuating the sin-laden condition of the present world.

The good news is that God has provided a means whereby human beings can experience fellowship with Him and have the supernatural help they need to conquer sin and deal with its debilitating effects. Almost 2,000 years ago, God sent His only-begotten Son into this world to lay down His life for the sins of humankind. This awesome self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ is God's means of reaching out to and calling unto Himself the creatures He made in His own image. Anyone who turns to God in genuine repentance and puts his trust in Jesus Christ as personal Savior can experience fellowship with both the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit will help the repentant believer obey God's commandments, and serve as a guarantee on eternal life in the everlasting Kingdom of God. □

This "law of sin" is also described as the "old man" (Romans 6:6)—meaning the old, sinful self, which, upon conversion, is legally dead before God—and as "the flesh" (Romans 7:5; 8:1,4-9). It is the element within us that causes us to transgress God's law. We may call it the "sin nature," but the Bible has another term for it—the word *lust*, or *covetousness*.

Covetousness—the Root of Human Evil

The words translated "covet" (or "lust") in the Bible do not necessarily connote evil. One of the words is the Greek *epithumia*. According to Vine, this word "denotes strong desire of any kind, the various kinds being frequently specified by some adjective.... The word is used of a good desire in Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23, and I Thess. 2:17 only. Everywhere else it has a bad sense" (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 697).

Desire, in and of itself, is not evil. It is only evil when *misdirected*. And it is this misdirected desire, or *lust*, that lies at the heart of *all* sins!

For example, why would one worship and "god" other than the true God unless there were some underlying *desire*? Why would one knowingly break the Sabbath unless there were an underlying *desire*? Or why would one commit adultery, murder, or theft unless

there were some underlying *desire*? The truth is, *all* deliberate sins are motivated by misdirected desires!

James explains: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own *desires* [*lust*] and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to *sin*; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15).

Do you see how *all* sins emerge from the “sin nature,” or *lust*? This truth is revealed through a careful analysis of the Ten Commandments. Notice the logical order of the Decalogue:

First, God says we are to have no “gods” besides Him (Exodus 20:3). This commandment is first for obvious reasons. The Second Commandment, forbidding the use of idols in worship, logically follows the first—for idols falsely portray God. The Third Commandment, which forbids taking God’s name in vain, logically follows—for one cannot worship God as the Supreme Ruler and, at the same time, speak irreverently of Him. By obeying the Fourth Commandment—“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”—we acknowledge that God and God alone is the Creator, the Author of time as we perceive it.

Do you see the *logical* order of the first four commandments? They tell us that God comes first, and that true worship begins with our acknowledgment of and obedience to Him as Creator and Supreme Ruler. This is how we express love toward God.

The second way we express love toward God is by loving our fellow man. This is accomplished through forming proper human relationships. And human relationships begin with the basic *family unit*. The Fifth Commandment—the first dealing with human relationships—states, “Honor your father and your mother.”

Now, what are the worst crimes one can commit against his fellow man? The first worst thing (generally speaking) one can do is *murder*; the second is *adultery*; the third is *theft*; and the fourth is *bearing false witness*—in that order! Interestingly, the commandments forbidding these crimes (sins) are presented in just that order (Exodus 20:13-16).

This brings us to the Tenth Commandment: “You shall not *covet* [*desire*] your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (verse 17).

Isn’t it interesting that the commandment against *covetousness* is on the end of the list? Why? Because it is a *summation* commandment. The violation of any of the previous commandments begins with *covetousness*! Covetousness, then lies at the very heart of all human evil!

But how did we acquire this covetous nature? And more important, what can we do about it? How can we effectively deal with it?

Origin of the “Sin Nature”

Some believe that human nature is primarily *good*, and that it is continually “evolving,” becoming even better. This belief fails, however in view of the blood spattered pages of human history.

Others believe that human nature is essentially evil. This, too, is an erroneous view, for most people want to be good; they want to get along with their neighbors; they generally feel grief, or sorrow, when other people suffer.

The truth is, human nature is a combination of good *and* evil. We want to do good, to love and be loved, to be honest, caring, and law-abiding; yet, we cannot deny that the covetous nature resides within us.

But how did we acquire this covetous nature? Did God create it? Did the evil “pump” it into us?

Some erroneously believe that human nature is acquired *Satanic* nature. They claim that the devil is able to “broadcast” his nature into the minds of little babies. This suggests that the devil is omnipresent—at least in spirit—and that he has a “mind link” with all human beings.

The Bible, however, does not attribute to the devil such Godlike characteristics. Rather, it tells us that if we resist the devil he will *flee* from us (James 4:7).

To be sure, Satan has a powerfully influential role in the evils of this world, but the “broadcasting devil” theory simply is not supported by the Scriptures.

How, then, do human beings acquire the covetous nature that leads to so many sins?

To answer this question, consider the behavior of a small child:

Little Johnny, with barely more than one year’s experience in life, is on the floor one afternoon playing with his toys when a neighbor with her small child come over for a visit. The neighbor’s child brings his own toys so he will have something to do while his mother chats with Johnny’s mother. Of course, Johnny is not yet old enough to realize that all things do not belong to him. So when the neighbor’s child begins playing with one of his own toys, little Johnny decides that he wants to play with that toy. He crawls, over, reaches out, and takes the toy from the other child. The other child then attempts to retrieve his toy, and Johnny pushes him away, insisting upon his “right” to play with the toy. Within moments, the room is filled with the bawling and bellowing sounds of two small children.

How to Put Sin Out of Your Life

Breaking wrong behavioral patterns is hard to do, but no impossible. With a few simple steps, you can “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares” you (Hebrews 12:1). Let’s take a look at each of these important steps.

Identify Your Sins

First, it is important that you identify your faults. Some sins and weaknesses are obvious, and you wouldn’t think of pretending they don’t exist. For example, if you are a smoker, you do not pretend that you do not smoke; if you have a problem with lust, you probably admit it to yourself; and if you occasionally allow yourself to harbor hatred against a fellow human being, it is doubtful that you deny the existence of these feelings. But there are some sins that often remain hidden, unacknowledged. Chief among them is the sin of *pride*. Many people blind themselves to the destructive pride that underlies many of their actions. They fail to analyze their behavior. They avoid addressing the question of what motives underlie particular actions. But the follower of Jesus Christ must not hide his real motives from himself. If you are to be an overcomer (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), then it is imperative that you honestly admit to yourself and to God, in the privacy of your prayer closet, the real motives that underlie your actions.

Ask for God's Help

Second, once you have identified your faults, talk to God about them and ask Him to help you put them out of your life. Resolve to rise a half-hour or more earlier each morning, and begin each day with prayer. Be specific as you talk to God about your problems. Ask Him to give you the strength you need to get through the day—just that one day—without succumbing to the pulls of the flesh or whatever particular problem (or problems) you have. If you are struggling with lust, resolve that you are going to put thoughts of lust out of your mind as soon as they occur, and ask God to help you keep your resolution for that day. Then, the next morning, make the same resolution again. Take one day at a time. After a while, you will find that your former behavioral patterns have changed. You will have broken old addictive behaviors and bad habits.

Flee From Temptation

Third, resolve to immediately turn away from anything that causes temptation to sin. This is a key principle for overcoming the pulls of the flesh and influences of the world, and it appears several times in Scripture. Paul encourages the believers at Corinth to “*Flee* sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18), and to “*flee* from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14). Speaking of the “many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition,” the apostle encourages the youthful Timothy to “*flee* these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:9,11). In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul writes, “*Flee* also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). The key is to immediately *flee* any situation that may lead to temptation. By taking immediate action, you will not give temptation a chance to take root.

Read the Book

Fourth, devote at least a few minutes (preferably thirty or more) each day to Bible reading. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4, cf. Deuteronomy 8:3). The Psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17). These benefits are available to us only if we know what Scripture teaches. Filling your mind with the things of God will help you drive out those thoughts that lead to sinful behavior.

The Most Important Step

The above steps were written particularly for those who have already put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and in recognition of the fact that the struggle with sin does not end the moment a person receives God's Holy Spirit. Turning to God in repentance and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the *true* first step a person must take in dealing with sin and its effects. Scripture tells us that aside from the name of Jesus Christ, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Christ gives those who put their trust in Him a new beginning. Through Him, your past sins can be forgiven and you can receive the Holy Spirit as a “down payment” on eternal life and to help you in your struggle with temptation. All who put their trust in Him can “come boldly (confidently) to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Now, Johnny was clearly in the wrong. The toy did not belong to him. But is it fair to say that Johnny committed a *sin* when he took the toy from the other child? No, or course not—for Johnny was not old enough to comprehend right and wrong. He was merely acting according to his *desire*—and small children are motivated entirely by their needs and their desires. They do not have the benefit of a moral sense of right and wrong.

But the time will come when Johnny will understand the difference between right and wrong (some call it the “age of accountability”). When that time comes, and when he then chooses to do wrong, then he will have *committed sin*. But it is important to realize that by the time he reaches that age, the “*sin nature*” will have already formed within him.

The components of human nature are not in themselves evil. The human mind is a composite of intellect (with its power to make choices), drives, and emotions. All of these are *God-given* and essential to healthy relationships. None of the many human emotions and drives should be viewed as “sinful.”

The human capacity to express *hatred*, for example, is *not* in itself evil. God is fully capable of hatred, as many scriptures reveal; and He tells us to “Abhor [*hate*] what is evil” (Romans 12:9). So hatred in itself is not evil. *It is only when hatred is misdirected that it becomes evil.*

The same is true of other drives and emotions. Anger, unless misdirected, is not evil. The sex drive, unless misdirected, is not evil. Even jealousy has its place.

The problem is that the natural mind does not have the benefit of a divine will. The “fall” of man, or sin of Adam, did not result in a human nature so utterly depraved that it was altogether evil. It resulted in the loss of the supernatural assistance humans need in keeping their lives in harmony with God's standards. The natural mind—with the influence of a world of abundant ungodliness—inevitably develops patterns that conflict with god's behavioral standards. Thus, the natural mind *becomes* “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

God made man with emotions not so much unlike His own. One of the major differences is that God's emotions are controlled by His supreme will, whereas man has no supreme will. This does not mean that we have no power of will, but it *does* mean that our power of will is affected, sometimes overpowered, by our *desires*—by the powerful emotions and drives that make up human nature. This is what Paul meant when he said, “So then, with the *mind* I myself serve the law of God, but with the *flesh* the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).

Paul knew that the covetous nature was still with him, even though he had years earlier turned to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the desires of the flesh, Paul's overall intent was to serve and obey God—and he knew beyond the shadow of any doubt that God would supply the supernatural power he needed in dealing with “this body of death” (verse 24).

No Condemnation

Once a person understands the way of salvation, has sufficient understanding of God's standards, and acts on that understanding by turning to God through *repentance* and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then he is ready for baptism, which portrays the burial of the “old man” and the resurrection of the “new man in Christ.”

The “old man” is legally *dead* before God, but the “new man” is alive and well and legally *without sin*. God has declared him *righteous*—for his sins have been completely blotted out.

Now, think about this: Once a person has repented and accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, has been baptized, has received God’s Holy Spirit, and now stands before God cleansed from all unrighteousness, should he continue to identify himself with the “old man” who is legally dead and was symbolically buried in the waters of baptism?

Does it please God for His begotten children—precious in His sight—to carry around a gigantic guilt complex? Does He want his children to form a self-image based on the legally dead “old man”? Or does He want them to have a new self-image, based not on the “old man” but on the “new man in Christ”?

Notice again the words of the apostle Paul: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, *it is no longer I who do it*, but sin that dwells in me” (Romans 7:19,20; also, verses 15,16).

Paul knew that the pulls of the flesh were ever with him. But he also knew that, thanks to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, he was *without sin* in his legal standing before God, and that the supernatural power he had access to was much greater than any desire of the flesh. Therefore, Paul knew that he could disassociate himself from the “sin” that dwelt within him. “It is no longer *I* that do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

You, too, can have the kind of assurance Paul had. You can take on a new self-image, which will open before you brand new avenues of Christian growth and development.

But first, you must *repent* of your sins; you must humbly come to God through Jesus Christ, accepting Him as Lord and as personal Savior, acknowledging Him as the Source of your salvation.

Then, once you have turned to God through repentance and faith in Christ, and have been immersed in the waters of baptism, you can let go of your guilt, put it behind you, and rely whole-heartedly on the great truth of Romans 8:1:

“There is therefore now no condemnation [none whatsoever!] to those who are in Christ Jesus.” □

The Ultimate Solution

There is coming a time when sin and evil will no longer exist on planet earth. The elimination of sin has already begun with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and will come to completion once Christ “has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:25,26).

Paul writes, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (verses 23,24).

This is the ultimate solution to the problem of sin and evil in this world. The dead in Christ will rise to meet the Lord when He returns. He will establish His kingdom on the earth and, over time, bring all nations under His dominion. Under the righteous reign of Christ and His saints, the nations will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4). War will become a thing of the past. Righteousness will fill the earth.

But sin and evil will not be eradicated instantly upon the return of Christ. At the end of the millennial reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4,5), the devil will be released from his

prison and allowed to go out and influence the nations once again (verses 7-9). The devil's influence will result in the final rebellion, and will serve to expose those who had not voluntarily submitted to Christ's reign. As in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, fire will come down from heaven and consume the ungodly (verse 9).

After the Millennium, "the rest of the dead"—all those who did not rise to meet the returning Christ in the "first resurrection"—will be raised to life for the final judgment (Revelation 20:4,5,12). Ultimately, those who refuse to repent and accept God's provisions for salvation will be destroyed in a lake of fire.

God says, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:7,8).

Once the earth is purged of the ungodly, only righteousness will remain. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, or crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (verse 4).

And *that* is the ultimate solution to the problem of sin and evil. □