

What Is God's Definition Of Sin?

This sermon is about Christians behaving badly. It is not about the unsaved who know no better, it is about Christians who should know better. As Derek Prince says repeatedly in his sermons; "When Christians are not preparing themselves for Christ's second coming, their level of holiness is below what it should be."

What does God mean when we read in Romans 6:23 about 'the wages of sin is death?' God means that the price we pay for sin is eternity in the lake of fire, also known as the second death. We know that God is a holy God and as such, He has set a benchmark or a standard for all of His created beings to follow; both angels and humans. The word 'sin' simply means to 'miss the mark'; therefore God's definition of sin is to fall short of God's benchmark or His standard. It is to behave in a way that is 'worldly' and He calls it sin. There are hundreds of ways in which we miss His target of holiness. We all need to try our best to be holy, because God is holy (Leviticus 11:44 & 45; 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16). We cannot be holy in our own strength, but if we ask our Lord for His help, He will show us what He expects of us. God said we have all sinned and fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23). If we say we have not sinned then we are deluding ourselves and are liars (1 John 1:8 & 10).

The Lord's high level of behaviour is very hard to maintain, and the only way we can be as pure as He expects of us, is to take up our own cross and deny ourselves (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23) and if we don't, Jesus said we are not worthy of Him. We need to conform wholly to His example of living and live a higher life (Matthew 10:38 & 39). To deny the flesh and cleanse ourselves, is to walk in holiness and fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1). To give in to the flesh is to sin. If we combine scattered scriptures, we can see that the Lord expects us to clothe ourselves with Jesus and make no provision for indulging the flesh; we must walk in the Holy Spirit so we do not gratify the flesh; those who belong to Jesus should have crucified the flesh with its desires; we are to abstain from the sensual urges that wage war against the soul; since Jesus suffered in the flesh for us, so we have to arm ourselves with the same thought. Whoever has suffered in the flesh is finished with sin, so that he can no longer spend his life living by his own desires but for what God wills, and the Lord knows how to rescue us out of ungodly passions (Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16 & 24; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 Peter 4:1 & 2; 2 Peter 2:10 and 1 John 2:16).

We have been given freedom from sin – not the freedom to sin – and there are many Christians who really do not know the difference and they continue in their sin and think it is okay because God will forgive them. That way of thinking is very carnal and immature. In Romans 6:15 to 23 Paul is speaking to Christians, and he says; "What then? Shall we sin because we do not live under the law but under God's mercy? Certainly not! God forbid!" Verse 18; "And having been set free from sin, you have become the servants of righteousness (to conform to the divine will of God in thought, purpose and action)." Verses 22 & 23; "But now since you have been set free from sin and you have become the slaves of God, you have your present reward in holiness and its end is eternal life; for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The death God is talking about here is not physical death but eternal death; spiritual death; also known as the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8).

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: do we want to go to be with the Lord in heaven or not? Are we prepared to sacrifice the comforts of our own lives in order to live wholly for the Lord, whatever that may bring? There are several ways of describing our way to heaven: Inheriting the Kingdom of God; sharing in the Kingdom of God; going to be with the Lord and going to glory all mean the same thing. Salvation is a free gift, but once

we are saved, we need to allow God to purify us from the inside so we can be more like Jesus. The Bible says in several places that believers miss out on heaven because of their sin. Believers will cry out to God but will be rejected because of sin (Matthew 7:22 & 23). We know Christians will be rejected because in Matthew 25:30, Jesus says, "Throw the good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." A servant of the Lord is a believer; so is a friend. In Matthew 22:12, Jesus called the man "Friend."

Our aim is to warn Christians about sin. When Paul said the wages of sin is death, he was talking to Christians. We know that because in the previous sentence he said, "You have your present reward in holiness and its end is eternal life." He was warning Christians to lift their level of holiness or the result – the wages – would be eternal death or missing out on heaven. If we are to be ready for Jesus' second coming and be as pure as God expects, then many of us are going to have to change our ways. In Matthew 5:19 to 48 Jesus pointed out the ways in which we can identify God's standard so we can see the areas where we go wrong. At the end of His discourse Jesus said we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. That is a very high standard indeed!

There are many sins listed in the Bible that are not considered all that bad in this modern world but God doesn't change and what He defined as sin in the Hebrew scriptures, is still considered sin in His eyes today. Just because the level of behaviour has lowered dramatically, does not mean that God has lowered His standards. On the contrary; He expects our behaviour to be holy and we have to lift our standards, not expect God to lower His. The sins listed here are spoken of in the Bible and all bring with them severe chastisement and judgement from God ... and were written to believers and Christians, not to the unbelievers.

Reading from Mark 7:20 to 23; "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of the hearts of men come wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, dangerous wickedness, deceit, indecent conduct, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evils come from within and they render the man unclean."

Romans 13:13; 'Let us live and conduct ourselves honourably, not in revelling, carousing and drunkenness, immorality, debauchery, licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy'.

1 Corinthians 6:9 & 10; 'Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the impure and the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, nor cheats and swindlers, nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foul-mouthed revilers, and slanderers, nor extortionists and robbers will have any share in the kingdom of God'.

Galatians 5:19 to 21; 'Now the practices of the flesh are clear and obvious. They are immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger and ill temper, selfishness, divisions, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you beforehand, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God'.

Ephesians 5:3 to 7; 'Immorality and all impurity or greediness must not be named among you. Let there be no filthiness, obscenity, indecency, nor foolish and sinful talk nor coarse jesting. For be sure of this: that no person practicing sexual vice or impurity in thought or in life, or one who is covetous – for he is in effect an idolater – has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one delude and deceive you with empty excuses and groundless arguments for these sins, for through these things the wrath of God comes

upon the sons of disobedience, so do not associate or be sharers with them. Look carefully then, how you walk!

The sins mentioned here are often ignored by professing Christians who don't like to be told that we have to live under God's rules; His regulations for His people. They often make empty excuses and groundless arguments for these sins. The sins carry with them severe judgement from God; even resulting in the person missing out on heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, that our righteousness must be higher than that of the Pharisees or we will not enter the Kingdom of God. That means we could miss out on heaven and end up separated from God in the lake of fire for all eternity. Jesus words were strong and sure and must be listened to and acted on if we are to secure our salvation. Just because we no longer have to adhere to the sacrificial law given to Moses, doesn't mean we can live our lives by doing our 'own thing'. We need to understand that the laws of God were given to Moses for one reason – it was to make mankind conscious of sin (Romans 3:20).

Romans 7:7; "What do we conclude then? Is the law identical with sin? Certainly not! Nevertheless, if it had not been for the law I should not have recognised sin. I would not have known about covetousness and I would have had no sense of guilt if the law had not said; you shall not covet."

We will attempt to itemise and explain the sins written in the verses above, that are obscure, misunderstood or ignored in our modern world. Remember all these sins were illegal in Moses time. Some were punishable by stoning to death! We have used modern descriptions of 'old' sins so they can be more easily understood.

Extortion and swindling are serious crimes and are sin, but there is a way people extort that is sin but not a crime. One true example is about an elderly widow who had a very expensive vehicle her husband had bought shortly before he died. A couple in the church offered to buy the car from the widow. She was still grieving, and not being familiar with the market value, agreed to accept a much lower price for the car. The Christian couple bought the car then sold it at market value, making a substantial profit. The elderly widow was devastated when she found out how the couple had swindled her. What they did was not illegal, but it was immoral. Christians do that kind of thing all the time. That is what this sermon is about ... Christians behaving badly. People who should know better and should act in a manner that glorifies God, not in a way that turns the unbeliever away from God.

Wicked thoughts are sin. Sin is not only action; you can sin in your thoughts too (Mark 7:21 & 23). One example of this is found in Matthew 5:28; 'Everyone who so much as looks at a woman with evil desire for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart'.

By far, all kinds of sexual immorality and lust angers the Lord most. Sexual immorality is the one and only sin, where the sin is against one's own body, which should be treated as the temple of the Holy Spirit and should not be defiled. All other sins are outside the body (1 Corinthians 6:18). Here is a list of sexual sins quoted in the scriptures: fornication [unmarried sex such as in a de facto relationship]; adultery [sex with a married person other than your own spouse]; indecent conduct and impurity [pole dancing, stripping, nudity etc]; licentiousness [disregarding rules of sexual conduct which would include rape, incest, paedophilia, etc]; filthiness and obscenity [pornography and nude 'art']; foul-mouthed, indecent foolish talk and coarse jesting [dirty jokes, double entendre comments, swearing] 'Let no foul or polluting language or worthless talk ever come out of your mouth' (Ephesians 4:29); sexual vice [sexual vices are exactly what it says ... plastic devices used in the sex act]; impurity in thought [sexual fantasies] homosexuality, lesbianism and

prostitution (Romans 1:24, 26 & 27). Just looking at a woman with an impure thought - in God's eyes - is as sinful as adultery (Matthew 5:27 & 28). In the Old Testament, adultery was a crime punishable by death (Leviticus 20:10). Masturbation is a difficult topic but one we are not afraid to speak about. There is only one reference to it in the Bible and it does not specifically say it is sin. In Leviticus 15:16 to 18, it just says the man has to wash afterwards. In verse 18 it says both the husband and the wife have to wash afterwards. However, if a person is engaged in sexual fantasies and is obsessed with sex, then that would be sin.

Stealing, theft and robbery are all sins. In Ephesians 4:28 the people were told to stop stealing and work for a living and give to those in need. Accepting too much change after paying for a purchase is theft and God sees even if the cashier doesn't. Taking 'perks' such as pens from the workplace is theft. Refusing to pay income tax is theft. Not repaying a loan is a form of robbery.

Murder is sin – we all know that, but people don't need to kill each other to commit murder. Just hating your neighbour or holding malice are as evil as murder in God's eyes (Matthew 5:21 & 22). Abortion, although acceptable in the modern world, is actually murder. It is the deliberate killing of another human being.

Greed, selfishness and greediness are all sin. Hoarding is sin. Keeping an abundance of items just for the sake of having them is sin, so that would include so-called 'collectors' (Matthew 6:19). We cannot serve two masters, and collectors are bound by their possessions (Matthew 6:24). They need to sell what they have and give to the poor if they want to show that they really are not bound. The young man with many possessions was so bound up, he went away grieved when Jesus told Him to sell what he had and give to the poor (Matthew 19:21 & 22). Luke 12:15 and Colossians 3:5 say we are to guard ourselves from all greed and covetousness.

Dangerous wickedness. This is really obscure but can be explained. A student who takes a rifle and shoots at classmates with the intent to harm them, is dangerously wicked.

Deceit is exactly that. It is sinfully deceiving another person. Modern words for deceit would be fraud, ruse, deception or scam. 'Like a madman who casts firebrands and arrows, so is the man who deceives his neighbour then says, "Was I not only joking?" (Proverbs 26:18 & 19).'

Envy, jealousy and covetousness are all sin. One of the Ten Commandments tells us not to covet anything that belongs to someone else. Exodus 20:17 says; 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house, wife, servant, ox, donkey or anything that is your neighbour's'. The Lord says it is a form of idolatry. 'The man who envies is one who is covetous for he is an idolater' (Ephesians 5:5). As we read earlier, Luke 12:15 and Colossians 3:5 say we are to guard ourselves from all greed and covetousness.

Slander is not considered a serious crime in our modern world, but in the Bible it was considered as serious as extortion and people who slandered would not have any share in the Kingdom of God – or in other words, they would not get into heaven (1 Corinthians 6:10). That is serious.

Pride was the sin that caused satan to be cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:11 to 16 and Ezekiel 28:14 to 19; 1 Timothy 3:6).

Foolishness is the opposite of wisdom and in 1 Corinthians 3:19, God says the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. Mark 7:22 & 23 says foolishness is evil.

Revelling, carousing, drunkenness, debauchery and a party spirit are all sins and are activities Christians should not participate in. These actions are all self-explanatory. Christians should never party on, get drunk, revel and carouse. Drunkenness and overeating are equally serious sins in God's opinion. 'Do not get drunk for that is debauchery' (Ephesians 5:18). Do not associate with winebibbers; be not among them or among gluttonous eaters, for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty (Proverbs 23:19 & 20). Compulsive eating, which God calls gluttony is so serious, the drunkard and glutton were once stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:20 & 21).

Quarrelling, enmity, strife, ill temper, anger, divisions are all sins. Bad temper and nastiness are both sins. 'Let all bitterness, indignation, wrath, rage, resentment, anger, animosity, quarrelling, slander, abusive language be banished from you with all malice, spite, ill will of any kind' (Ephesians 4:31). Verbal abuse is sin. Telling someone they are stupid and calling them insulting names is sin (Matthew 5:22). The hard one to explain here is 'divisions'. That means to cause factions or dissent. To start off a new church with the blessing of your pastor is good. To break away with ill feeling and take some of the flock with you is sin because it is dissent.

Idolatry and sorcery are sins: We are not to make graven images; this means idols of any type and we are not to bring idols into our homes (Deuteronomy 7:26). Buddha's, wooden masks, Egyptian gods etc are all idols and even the people who make idols are cursed by God (Deuteronomy 27:15). We are not to worship or bow down to anything or anyone. Only the Lord God is worthy of worship. There are other idols that are not as obvious as the ones mentioned here. If you love anything more than God, that is an idol (Matthew 10:37), whether it be mother, father, son or daughter. Some people love their pets more than what is healthy. If you stay home from church because your dog is ill, then you are putting that dog before the Lord. Worse still, if you bring your dog to church then you have made your dog an idol. If you have a pet that takes the place of a child, then that pet is your idol. If you spend an hour applying make-up and beautifying yourself before you leave your home, then you have made yourself an idol. Putting anything at all before the Lord is making that thing an idol and that is sin.

Witchcraft is sin. Idolatry and witchcraft go hand-in-hand with rebellion and stubbornness (1 Samuel 15:23). In Exodus 22:18, witches were to be put to death. Witchcraft in any form is a terrible sin against God. He calls it an abomination (Deuteronomy 7:25; 17:4; 25:16; 29:17). Witchcraft includes sorcery, tarot cards, magic, horoscopes, freemasonry, wicca, crystal balls, tealeaf reading, fortune telling and anything that is considered supernatural. If you are or have ever been involved in any form of witchcraft, you need to repent and be delivered of the evil spirits that come with such practices.

Stubbornness is sin and is as evil in God's eyes as witchcraft (1 Samuel 15:23). Deuteronomy 21:18 says the stubborn man should be put to death. If you are stubborn, you are living with sin.

Blasphemy – taking the Lord's name in vain is sin. People actually use the name of Jesus as a swear word. Even using shortened or altered versions of Jesus' name is blasphemy. Unless one is praying and is speaking to the Lord, using the phrase 'O my God!' is blasphemy. If you continue to blaspheme, then you could be turned over to the devil (1 Timothy 1:20).

Not honouring your parents is sin. Ephesians 6:2 & 3 says to honour your parents so you may have a long life and all may be well with you. If you do not honour your parents, all will not be well with you from God. Committing your elderly parents to a nursing home then forgetting them is not honouring your parents. Shouting at them, abusing them, ridiculing them and generally treating them with disdain is not honouring them and it is sin.

Lying is sin. Psalm 116:11 says all men are liars, but we still need to concentrate on being truthful, sincere and honest (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Unforgiveness is sin. If we don't forgive others then we will not be forgiven – and if we are not forgiven we can not enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:22 to 35).

Taking other Christians to the Court of Justice is sin (1 Corinthians 6:1 to 8). Sometimes forgiveness is needed more than 'winning'.

Many Christians conform to the world and will not stand up for righteousness. They prefer to be friends of the world and accept wicked behaviour because that is easier than losing friends, having their family reject them or losing their jobs. They think it is okay to smoke, drink alcohol, worship sport, swear, speed while driving, evade taxes and party on like the world does, but they are walking on dangerous ground and are in danger of losing their salvation. The Bible says we are not to conform to the world, but are to be transformed by renewing our minds so we may prove what is the perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2). James 4:4 says; 'Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God'. How can an enemy of God get to heaven? We are not to associate with the world. 1 Corinthians 15:33 & 34 says evil companionships corrupt good character. Awake to your right minds and sin no more'. If we are ashamed of God here on earth, then on Judgement Day, He will be ashamed of you! ... (Hebrews 11:16)'.

There are some who may complain that there is nothing but rules and regulations and they protest at the strict rules we have to follow. Firstly, that is rebellion, and secondly, holiness is what God expects of us. In general everyday life, we must adhere to rules like; don't speed; don't yell at police officers when they pull us over; don't be late for school/work; don't beat your children or anybody else. That is the way life is in general, so how much more self-control should we have in preparation for eternity? God's standards are very high indeed and it takes a great and constant effort, and it is a battle to maintain the level of behaviour God expects from His people. We have the assurance though, that when we do sin we can confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just and He will forgive our sins (1 John 1:9).

2 Peter 3:18 says we need to grow in grace. Let us all walk in the grace of God, in His holiness and peace.

Amen and God bless you. <http://www.bibleabookoftruth.com/>