

## Lesson 7: What is Sin?

**Introduction** Thus far, we have looked at how much good God wants to do for us. The biggest enemy towards all this good is Sin. Sin destroys everything that God wants to give us, and under our own strength we do not stand a chance against the death grip of Sin. Jesus came to free us from the slavery of Sin. He does this by saving us and making us His disciples. In order to live a victorious life of faith as a disciple, we need a clear understanding of what Sin is. Only then can we understand and value the salvation that Jesus offers us.

**The origin of Sin** In order for us to understand what sin is, we must first know where sin came from. However, it is important to remember that we can never fully understand how sin could develop in the heart of a perfect Angel, who dwelt in a perfect environment with a perfect God. However, one thing is clear: the rise of sin was not the result of failure on God's part.

**Quote #1** "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. Yet enough may be understood concerning both the origin and the final disposition of sin to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with evil. Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin." (*The Great Controversy, p. 493-494*)



Even though we cannot give a full explanation for the origin of sin, the Bible gives us enough information to help us understand its beginnings and its characteristics.

Read the following texts and write down what they tell us about the origin of sin!

Isaiah 14:12-14: \_\_\_\_\_

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Ezekiel 28:11-18: \_\_\_\_\_

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John 8:44: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Ellen White  
on the origin  
and character  
of sin**

Beyond these simple explanations in the Bible, God also gave Ellen White many dreams and visions revealing the origins and character of sin. In her books *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy*, she describes what God showed her regarding the origin of sin. Please read carefully the following quotations and underline or highlight those parts which clearly explain to you how sin came to be!

**Quote #2**

“There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, ‘son of the morning,’ was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled. He stood in the presence of the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glory enshrouding the eternal God rested upon him. “Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering...Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.’ Ezekiel 28:12-15.” (*Patriarchs and Prophet, p. 35*)

**Quote #3**

“Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35*)

**Quote #4**

“The angels joyfully acknowledged the supremacy of Christ, and prostrating themselves before Him, poured out their love and adoration. Lucifer bowed with them, but in his heart there was a strange, fierce conflict. Truth, justice, and loyalty were struggling against envy and jealousy. The influence of the holy angels seemed for a time to carry him with them. As songs of praise ascended in melodious strains, swelled by thousands of glad voices, the spirit of evil seemed vanquished; unutterable love thrilled his entire being; his soul went out, in harmony with the sinless worshippers, in love to the Father and the Son. But again he was filled with pride in his own glory. His desire for supremacy returned, and envy of Christ was once more indulged. The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as God’s special gift, and therefore, called forth no gratitude to his Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God. He was beloved and revered by the heavenly host, angels delighted to execute his commands, and he was clothed with wisdom and glory above them all. Yet the Son of God was exalted above him, as one in power and authority with the Father. He shared the Father’s counsels, while Lucifer did not thus enter into the purposes of God. ‘Why’ questioned this mighty angel, ‘should Christ have the supremacy? Why is he honored above Lucifer?’

“Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to

diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. He worked with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealed his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God. He began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that though laws might be necessary for the inhabitants of the worlds, angels, being more exalted, needed no such restraint, for their own wisdom was a sufficient guide. They were not beings that could bring dishonor to God; all their thoughts were holy; it was no more possible for them than for God Himself to err. The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor. If this prince of angels could but attain to his true, exalted position, great good would accrue to the entire host of heaven; for it was his object to secure freedom for all. But now even the liberty which they had hitherto enjoyed was at an end; for an absolute Ruler had been appointed them, and to His authority all must pay homage. Such were the subtle deceptions that through the wiles of Lucifer were fast obtaining in the heavenly courts." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36-38)

**Quote #5**

"Taking advantage of the loving, loyal trust reposed in him by the holy beings under his command, he had so artfully instilled into their minds his own distrust and discontent that his agency was not discerned. Lucifer had presented the purposes of God in a false light—misconstruing and distorting them to excite dissent and dissatisfaction. He cunningly drew his hearers on to give utterance to their feelings; then these expressions were repeated by him when it would serve his purpose, as evidence that the angels were not fully in harmony with the government of God. While claiming for himself perfect loyalty to God, he urged that changes in the order and laws of heaven were necessary for the stability of the divine government. Thus while working to excite opposition to the law of God and to instill his own discontent into the minds of the angels under him, he was ostensibly seeking to remove dissatisfaction and to reconcile disaffected angels to the order of heaven. While secretly fomenting discord and rebellion, he with consummate craft caused it to appear as his sole purpose to promote loyalty and to preserve harmony and peace." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 38)

**Sin comes to earth**



After Satan was cast down to Earth, he placed all his focus on causing mankind to sin so that they would be drawn to his side. Surely nothing could hold him back if he could get those who were made in God's image to rebel against God!

Read Genesis 3:1-8 and then answer the following questions!

What strategy did Satan use to deceive Eve? (Verses 1-5)

**Genesis 3:1-8**

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What were the steps leading to sin? (Verse 6)

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What were the results of sin? (Verses 7-8)

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**The Definition of Sin**

Satan put his plan, the same one he used to deceive a third of the Angels in Heaven, in motion on Earth. He sowed his false ideas of God's character in the minds of men and enticed them into sin. Their sin was not just one act; it was a breach of trust, a disposition that turned their backs on God. What is the exact definition of sin? The Bible gives three.



Read the following texts and write down what the Bible defines as Sin!

1 John 3:4: \_\_\_\_\_  
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James 4:17: \_\_\_\_\_  
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John 16:9: \_\_\_\_\_  
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We find here three definitions of sin: lawlessness, to refrain from doing good, and to not believe in Jesus. These are actually not three different definitions of sin, as much as they are three different aspects of it. When I don't believe in Jesus, I turn away from His character. God's law is the expression of His character. That is why unbelief is lawlessness and vice versa.

**Quote #6**

"Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is 'the transgression of the law'; it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government." (*The Great Controversy, p. 493*)

**Sin and the Heart**

The main characteristic of sin is rebellion against God, the demand to live without His authority. The root of sin is not sinful *acts* but a sinful *heart*. That is where it began in Lucifer: "For you have said in your *heart*..." (Isaiah 14:13) "Your *heart* was lifted up because of your beauty..." (Ezekiel 28:17). Sin is much more than just an act. It is a heart condition, a disposition that makes us run away from God's character.



How do the following texts describe the fundamental problem of sin?

Matthew 15:19-20: \_\_\_\_\_

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Jeremiah 13:23: \_\_\_\_\_

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Jeremiah 17:9: \_\_\_\_\_

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Romans 7:14-20: \_\_\_\_\_

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Hebrews 3:8,10,12: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Our Sinful Nature**

We are not born guilty but we all have a sinful nature. Sin is not something that we just carry on the outside; it is deeply rooted in our hearts. It is like a virus that affects our whole being. This is why good works cannot solve the sin problem. The only solution is to be born again through the Holy Spirit, when God gives us the gift of a new disposition, a new heart.

**Quote #7**

"It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.' 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' (Job 14:4; Romans 8:7). Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness." (*Steps to Christ, p. 18*)

**Quote #8**

"God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man's judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are

especially offensive to God. For they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 30)



Because sin begins in the heart, the solution must also begin in the heart. How do the following texts describe this truth?

Ezekiel 36:26-27: \_\_\_\_\_  
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John 3:3,5: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### The Results of Sin

The Bible describes the results of sin very drastically. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were able to enjoy the presence of God because their characters were in harmony with His. But after the fall, they ran away from Him. They could no longer endure being in His presence. God's character and sin are like fire and water. They cannot exist together.



How do the following texts describe the results of sin?

Isaiah 59:1,2: \_\_\_\_\_  
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John 8:34: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Romans 5:12; 6:23: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### Quote #9

"In his sinless state, man held joyful communion with Him 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Colossians 2:3. But after his sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him. The sinner could not be happy in God's presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he be permitted to enter heaven, it would have no joy for him. The spirit of unselfish love that reigns there—

every heart responding to the heart of Infinite Love—would touch no answering chord in his soul. His thoughts, his interests, his motives, would be alien to those that actuate the sinless dwellers there. He would be a discordant note in the melody of heaven. Heaven would be to him a place of torture; he would long to be hidden from Him who is its light, and the center of its joy. It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven; they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 17-18*)

**Quote #10**

“Adam and Eve persuaded themselves that in so small a matter as eating of the forbidden fruit there could not result such terrible consequences as God had declared. But this small matter was the transgression of God’s immutable and holy law, and it separated man from God and opened the floodgates of death and untold woe upon our world. Age after age there has gone up from our earth a continual cry of mourning, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain as a consequence of man’s obedience. Heaven itself has felt the effects of his rebellion against God. Calvary stands as a memorial of the amazing sacrifice required to atone for the transgression of the divine law. Let us not regard sin as a trivial thing.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 33*)

**Quote #11**

“After Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, they were filled with a sense of shame and terror. At first their only thought was how to excuse their sin and escape the dreaded sentence of death. When the Lord inquired concerning their sin, Adam replied, laying the guilt partly upon God and partly upon his companion: ‘the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ The woman put the blame upon the serpent, saying, ‘The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.’ Genesis 3:12, 13. Why did You make the serpent? Why did You suffer him to come into Eden? These were the questions implied in her excuse for her sin, thus charging God with the responsibility of their fall. The spirit of self-justification originated in the father of lies and has been exhibited by all the sons and daughters of Adam. Confessions of this order are not inspired by the divine Spirit and will not be acceptable to God. True repentance will lead a man to bear his guilt himself and acknowledge it without deception or hypocrisy.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 40*)

**Sin is Never Harmless**

Sin is never harmless. It is not just a small act that God can turn a blind eye to. No, sin is horrific, destructive, and evil. Sin is a malicious cancer that spreads and kills the whole person. Who wants to have a malicious cancer in their body, even if its just a tiny little thing? We see clearly how horrible sin is when we look at the cross, where Jesus took the horrendous weight of sin upon Himself.

**Quote #12**

“Behold Him in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, upon the cross! The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of anguished cry, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ Matthew 27:46. It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its separation of the soul from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 13*)

**Quote #13**

“But let none deceive themselves with the thought that God, in His great love and mercy, will yet save even the rejecters of His grace. The exceeding sinfulness of sin can be estimated only in the light of the cross. When men urge that God is too good to cast off the sinner, let them look to Calvary. It was because there was no other way in which man could be saved, because without this sacrifice it was impossible

for the human race to escape from the defiling power of sin, and be restored to communion with holy beings,--impossible for them again to become partakers of spiritual life,--it was because of this that Christ took upon Himself the guilt of the disobedient and suffered in the sinner's stead. The love and suffering and death of the Son of God all testify to the terrible enormity of sin and declare that there is no escape from its power, no hope of the higher life, but through the submission of the soul to Christ." (*Steps to Christ, p. 31*)

**Christ is Our Only Hope**

By nature, we are fully exposed to the consequences and effects of sin and without the protection of Christ doomed for condemnation. We can try as hard as we want, but we cannot shake sin off. We cannot expel it from our bodies. It is an intricate part of our character just like blood is an intricate part of our body. We need help that we can only get from outside of ourselves. Christ came to offer us this help. He does not abandon us to our sin. He took on man's nature and conquered sin, thus creating a way of escape for us.



How do the following texts describe what Christ did for us?

Psalm 25:8: \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 1:21: \_\_\_\_\_

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Romans 8:3,4: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Quote #14**

"It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned." (*Steps to Christ, p. 62*)

**Jesus is the Answer!**

When we finally understand the true character of sin, we can better understand how urgently we need Jesus Christ as our Saviour and how thorough His Salvation is. We can be thankful that Jesus created a way of escape from hopelessness and damnation. In the next lesson, we will take a deeper look into the way of escape Jesus created for us.

