



“Synonyms for Sin”

Part I

Kevin Presley

The Bible declares that all accountable men and women are sinners.

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

Romans 3:10 “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:”

But how do we become sinners? What does it mean to *sin against God*? If you ask any number of people that question, they would answer in many different ways: *To sin means to break one of the Ten Commandments, or to sin means to do harm to another person.* Many have summarily dismissed the whole idea of sin and you’d be hard pressed to get them to identify something as a sin, besides maybe murder or stealing or something horrific. Secular humanists reject the very word or concept of sin, of course, but surprisingly, the list of sins even among the religious world is growing shorter all the time. The word *sin* has all but disappeared from the world’s vocabulary today.

Up until about a hundred years ago, most religious people believed that men were sinners who need to repent. But during the twentieth century, the appeal of positive thinking and preaching took over, and the word *sin* began disappearing from pulpits. Preachers and church leaders began to emphasize the positive aspects of Christianity and the appeal of a light and happy *I’m good and you’re good* approach to spirituality that has erased sin from our collective conscience.

But sin DOES still exist. What God once called sin, He STILL calls sin. Sin has the same consequences in the eyes of God that it always has, so we would do well to understand what sin is and to avoid it. John gives us a simple definition of sin.

I John 3:4 “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

But again, what does that really mean? What does it take to sin against the Lord? Sometimes when the meaning of a word is unclear to us, it helps to look at its *synonyms—alternative words that mean the same thing*. The Bible illustrates sin in a number of ways. We’re going to look at some of the synonyms for sin in today’s lesson.

Sin is the source of all of the problems we deal with in the world today. We don’t just have economic problems; we have sin problems. We don’t really have a race problem; we have a sin problem. We don’t have a problem with disease and suffering; we have a sin problem because, you see, every problem that we encounter is ultimately the result of sin’s existence, going all the way back to the beginning. Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, and with it came death, destruction and degradation. Paul explains in **Romans 5** that sin entered the world with Adam, and that physical death was the result.

Romans 5:12 “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

That is to say, sin began with Adam and death was the penalty of his sin. Man was originally placed in the paradisiacal garden of Eden where he could eat from the tree of life and live forever. However, when Adam rebelled against God, he was driven out of the garden, cutting off man’s access to the tree of life and resulting in physical death. He introduced into the world what would ultimately lead to the ruin of man, because the Bible tells us that *all have sinned*.

Then Paul goes on to show us that death reigned from that point forward, even among those who did not commit the same sin as Adam. In other words, Adam was given a specific instruction not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the death penalty was attached to that law.

Genesis 2: 16-17 “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

It is impossible for you or me to commit the same sin that Adam committed for obvious reasons. But that doesn’t mean that we have not sinned. Between the time of Adam and the giving of the law of Moses, there was no law like the one given to Adam that specifically had the penalty of physical death attached to it. Nonetheless, the creation was universally cursed with death because of Adam’s sin. All men were, because of Adam, cut off from the tree of life. Notice what Paul says next:

Romans 5:14 “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression...”

Man could not commit the same sin as Adam committed and no sin like Adam’s was possible in that dispensation of time because men were under no such law, BUT that doesn’t change the fact that sin still existed in the world. There was still moral law that men repeatedly and increasingly violated. The point I want to draw from that for our study today is that while sin is sin, not all sin is the same. Sin takes different forms. It’s all still sin, but it takes different forms.

Yet, I think we've lost sight of the meaning and the Bible definition of sin today. If people even believe that sin exists today, they will define it quite differently. But how does God define it? What constitutes sin in the eyes of God? Is it only those things that the Bible expressly forbids? Is it like God's prohibition in the garden? Is it like the Ten Commandments? Is a sin merely something that God has expressly and adamantly forbade in His word? Or is the definition of sin more broad than that? For example, what if the Bible doesn't say NOT to do something—does that necessarily make it all right? What if it is not preceded by the words *thou shalt not*...reading like one of the Ten Commandments that Moses gave to the Hebrews? Does that mean we're at liberty to practice it if the Bible doesn't read in that way? As I said, I think it will help us to learn a lot about what sin is and how men commit it if we look at some of the synonyms of sin found in the Bible. We've already defined sin, according to John.

I John 3:4 "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

The word *transgress* simply means *to violate or go beyond* the law. In other words, *sin* encompasses *everything that violates or goes outside of the law of God*. It encompasses *anything that is wrong in the eyes of the Lord*. Obviously, the word *sin* would include *the act of violating a positive command*—doing something that God says NOT to do. If anybody believes in the existence of sin, they would likely acknowledge that a sin would be to violate a stated prohibition in God's word. Adam was guilty of violating a positively stated prohibition, so we'll note for our first synonym for sin, *prohibition*. That's a good word to remember, meaning *to do something the Bible prohibits*.

That brings up another question: are all of God's laws or commands positively stated? Do His commands all read like a legal code that begins with *you are not to do* such and such? Some expect the Bible to read that way if the Bible is to have any authority in our lives. The Old Testament law DID, in many respects, read that way, but Jesus later pointed out that the Pharisees and other people of His day were guilty of claiming to mind the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit of it. Friend, the spirit of the law did not negate the letter of the law. That is important to underscore. The spirit of the law did not negate the letter of the law. One is not really opposed to the other. Rather, the spirit of the law reinforced the letter of the law.

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cited the law of Moses then not only cast it in its rightful context, but then lays down His own law by His own authority that goes even farther and, you might say, spiritualizes the law's previous requirements. The law of Moses specifically forbade the act of adultery. Just as adultery has been wrong in every dispensation of time, the law of Moses specifically spelled out and forbade the act of adultery. Jesus quotes Moses' seventh commandment:

Matthew 5:27 "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:"

So, He is hearkening back to the Mosaic law. According to the law, adultery was a specific sexual act that was verifiable and punishable by death (**Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20:10**). Both Levitical passages spell out very plainly what constitutes the act of adultery and the penalty that was attached if one was caught within that act.

Jesus comes along in the Sermon on the Mount and broadens the scope of that law. Adultery may not have been specifically and expressly forbidden until Moses was given the law on Sinai, but it was still a sin, even before the law of Moses because it violated the very nature and design of the sacred marital

covenant that God established in the beginning of time. So, Jesus goes back even before the legal code of Moses and reinforces the very principle *behind* the expressed command by saying this in the next verses:

Matthew 5:28-30 “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

What’s He saying? According to the law of Christ, a person sins before the act of adultery takes place. Adultery stems from what? From lust. And sin begins when one allows his eyes to wander and linger in a place they don’t belong. So, let’s apply that idea. Is there a commandment in the New Testament that expressly says that it’s a sin to watch a dirty movie? To read salacious literature? To put oneself in a compromising place with someone else’s husband or wife? You know, you’d be hard pressed to find a verse that says that in those terms, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not a sin. Jesus said that it’s not just the act; it’s the very process of allowing the eye to lead us to offend. Paul commanded that we are to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report and virtuous (**Philippians 4:8**). It’s very difficult to do that when one sets wickedness before his own eyes.

What about gambling? We hear a lot about gambling and it’s a very hotly contested issue, even in religious circles these days. Is there a verse or passage that specifically addresses gambling? Does the Bible say *Thou shalt not play the lottery? Thou shalt not play a slot machine or bet on a race or a game?* I don’t know of a verse like that. I’ve never read a verse like that. But I DO read where I am to work for gain and not covet what someone else has (**II Thessalonians 3:10, Ephesians 5:3**). I know that when I gamble, I’m gaining from someone else’s loss. I’m not practicing the golden rule. I’m practicing stealing by consent. Just like a duel is murder by consent, in gambling, it’s theft or stealing by consent. I’m taking someone else’s money hoping to beat them so they won’t take mine. In fact, there’s not one single thing about gambling that is compatible with the teachings and principles of scripture regarding the Christian and how he deals with money and with other people. Therefore, I contend that it’s sinful to gamble. The Bible doesn’t say not to wear a bathing suit, but it teaches modest dress (**I Timothy 2:9**). It teaches me not to do something that would lead another to sin, which would include provoking unclean thoughts or lust in the mind of another. It teaches that nakedness is something to be ashamed of, not proud of (**Revelation 3:18**).

So, you see, the prohibitions of God extend much farther than express commands. Whatever I do and the way I live must fit within the parameters of not only the letter, but also the spirit of the law of Christ or else I am wrong in the eyes of God. Yes, *prohibition* is a synonym for *sin*.

Secondly, the word *omission* is a synonym for *sin*. It means *to leave undone* what God has commanded.

James 4:17 “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Did you know that it’s just as offensive to God to ignore His commandments as it is to actively violate them? But a person who doesn’t take God seriously and chooses to ignore what His word says to do—he is just as wrong as the thief, the murderer, the liar, the adulterer. The Bible tells the story of a man who was deposed as the King of Israel because he disobeyed the Lord. How did he disobey God? By NOT

doing what God had said TO DO. God dealt very harshly with him. In his arrogance, he thought he knew as much as God did about the matter, and he ignored the commandment of God and set it aside. I'm talking about King Saul. Let's read what happened.

I Samuel 15:1-3 “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

God's instruction here is very, very clear. There is no ambiguity whatsoever. Samuel began his instructions to Saul by saying *Listen up. Harken unto what God says. Be prepared to obey what God is going to tell you to do.* God didn't leave it to Saul's interpretation. He told him to destroy every living thing that belonged to the people of Amalek.

Please notice that Saul did not refuse to go and fight. He didn't say *I'm not gonna go and do that. I have nothing against the Amalekites. I won't go and destroy them.* No, that wasn't his reaction. In fact, he DID go, and he slaughtered the Amalekites. He laid their nation waste. But if you remember the story, he got over there and began to presume that he knew more than God.

I Samuel 15:7-9 “And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.”

Notice what happened here. He went and killed a lot of people. He absolutely devastated the Amalekites, just like God had said to do. EXCEPT did he REALLY do what God said to do? He destroyed most of them, but not all of them. What's wrong with that? Well, God said to destroy ALL of them, you see. So, did Saul sin? Listen to the next verse.

I Samuel 15:10-11 “Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments...”

There it is. God said, *He did not do what I said to do. He hath not performed My commandments.* Did he go to the Amalekites? Yes. Did he wage war against them? Absolutely. Did he kill Amalekites? Yes, he killed nearly all of them. But he spared the best in his own presumption, he kept the king alive, he kept the best of their animals to offer as a sacrifice unto the Lord. He did NOT perform the commandments of God. And God rejected him as king as a result.

Samuel goes and questions Saul about whether he completed the mission that God had sent him on, and Saul brags and boasts that *Yes! We went and did what God said to do (I Samuel 15:13).* Right about then, Samuel hears the lowing of an oxen and the bleating of a sheep, and he exposed the truth.

I Samuel 15:14 “And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

No, Saul really didn't obey the Lord because he left undone what God said TO DO. Therefore, God rejected him and condemned him. It did not matter that he did some or even most of what God said; in God's eyes, he disobeyed. He violated God's instruction. He knew to do good and did it not, and to him it was sin.

Sometimes today, people will reason about things like salvation. They'll say about another person, *They may not have been baptized, but they believe. Or, They may have a hard time repenting, but at least they believe. Sometimes we rationalize things like that and conclude that all is not lost because at least they believe in Jesus. At least they claim to believe in God. At least they have some good moral qualities about them.* Friends, that's not how it works. That's not how God looks at the matter. That's not the kind of obedience that God expects and requires. When it comes to salvation, Jesus said this:

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Now, that's very plain. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* Unfortunately, preachers by the multitudes stand in pulpits throughout the land, on televisions, over the radio, and everywhere they have the opportunity and tell people they can be saved by simply believing in Jesus and that baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with it. That is NOT what Jesus said. Jesus said, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* A man who refuses to submit to the Lord in baptism might as well not even believe because he is not obedient to God.

Likewise, it does no good to say that you believe, but not repent of your sin and give it up. It even does no good to believe and be baptized if one is not going to continue in faithfulness to Christ. In fact, do you know the most tragic and graphic pictures of those who will be doomed in the Day of Judgment are pictures of people, not who did what they weren't supposed to do, but who did not do what they were supposed to do?

II Thessalonians 1:8-9 “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;”

In **Matthew 25**, we're told the fate of a man who failed to invest his talent that the Lord gave him.

Matthew 25:30 “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Just a few verses later, Jesus says to those who failed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison:

Matthew 25:45-46 “Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

He's not talking to murderers, liars and thieves—these are simply people who failed to do these things. Why were they lost? Because they *did these things NOT unto me*.

Have YOU obeyed the Lord? Have you obeyed the gospel in baptism for the remission of sins? Are you active in His church and living a holy and faithful life for Christ? If not, you're in rebellion to the Lord. you can have all kinds of sentimental feelings about Christianity and about Jesus, but are you obeying Him? If not, you're living in sin. *Omission* is a synonym for *sin*.

I hope that you'll join us next time when we'll look at some other synonyms for sin. It may surprise you just what constitutes sin in the eyes of the Lord.

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