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HAMARTIOLOGY – THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

There is a very real power that has affected the heaven and the earth, angels and men. It is the reason for the ruin of nations and people. It is the reason man loses harmony and fellowship with God. It is the reason Jesus Christ came into this world. This power is called “sin”!

All have been affected by sin, but few actually know much about sin. Philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists have tried to figure out what is wrong with society. Many have invested a lifetime of study trying to explain man’s condition. Those who are honest must admit something is drastically wrong with mankind. A journey through a daily newspaper or a simple watching of nightly news or an honest analysis of one’s own personality clearly testifies that man is depraved.

There is no doubt that Satan does every possible thing to hide the doctrine of sin. As Dr. Chafer so forcefully wrote: “Where sin is minimized, redemption is automatically impoverished since its necessity is by so much decreased. The worthy approach to the doctrine of sin is to discover all that is revealed about the sinfulness of sin and then to recognize that God’s provided Savior is equal to every demand which sin imposes. It is one of Satan’s most effective methods of attack upon the saving work of Christ to soften the voice which is set to proclaim the evil character and effect of sin. Apparently not all who are known as teachers of God’s truth are awake to this satanic strategy. It is too often assumed that it is wiser to leave this loathsome monster called sin to lurk in the dark, and to dwell on the more attractive virtues of human life” (Vol. 2, p. 224).

There is only one book that can give us a true perspective of sin. There is only one book that can come to the rescue of an evil, broken, hurting, sinful society and give concrete answers and solutions to this worldwide epidemic. It is God’s book - the Bible. The Bible does not mince words when it comes to the subject of sin. When it comes to giving explanation for why so many in the world are unhappy, rebellious, hurting, and broken, the Bible goes straight to the source of the problem - sin!

It is possible, through knowledge of the Word of God, to develop and mature to the point where sin does not have dominion over us. It is possible through the knowledge of the truth of sin to be set free and ridded of guilt and heavy burdens. A thorough understanding of God’s Word is able to do this and this is why we study Hamartiology - the doctrine of sin.

QUESTION #1 – What is sin?

Although there are slight differences in theological definitions of sin, there is a general consensus that connected to a definition of sin is the idea of missing the mark of God’s holiness and a failure to conform to God’s standards and character.

The word most often used for “sin” in both the O.T. and the N.T. means to miss the mark. The Hebrew word most often used is “chata” which means to miss the mark by not hitting the target. It was used of an archer who shot at something and missed by having his arrow fall short of the target (Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 271). The Greek word most often used is “hamartia” which means the same thing. This is the word used to name the doctrine.

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The idea of shooting at something and missing is clearly seen in **Judges 20:16** where the Hebrew word “chata” is translated “miss.” “Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not **miss.**”

The idea of shooting at something and not reaching the target but falling short of it is clearly seen in **Romans 3:23** where in the Greek word, “hamartia” is translated “sinned” - “For all have **sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.”

Based upon these words and concepts, we may define sin in the following way: **Sin is any act or attitude that misses the mark and falls short of God’s Holy standards and character.**

When we fail to meet up to the standards of God, when we come short of what God’s Word wants us to do, when we do not conform to what God wants us to be, we sin. There are many ways that it is possible to sin - to miss the mark of God’s holiness:

(Way #1) - **I John 3:4** To do something that God’s Word classifies as lawless is sin.

(Way #2) - **I John 5:17** To do anything that is unrighteous or against God’s standards of righteousness is sin.

(Way #3) - **Romans 14:23** To do something you believe is wrong to do in your own conscience is sin.

(Way #4) - **Romans 13:1-4** To refuse to submit to human law established by government is sin.

(Way #5) - **Proverbs 21:4** To have a proud, arrogant spirit is sin.

(Way #6) - **James 4:17** To know what is the right thing to do and not do it is sin.

These are just some of the ways that it is possible to sin against God.

QUESTION #2 – How serious is sin?

We must realize that God takes sin very seriously. Sin is not something He overlooks or tolerates. He has made a gracious provision whereby men and women may be delivered from their sin and He expects His people to develop into living lives that are consistently healthy and godly. Having a precise knowledge of the seriousness of sin should cause each person to realize just how serious sin really is. God hates sin and He has given a gracious provision in view of sin. Dr. Chafer writes: “The worthy approach to the doctrine of sin is to discover all that is revealed about the sinfulness of sin and then to recognize that God’s provided Savior is equal to every demand which sin imposes” (Vol. 2, p. 224).

There are certain Biblical observations we may make which show us just how serious sin really is:

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Observation #1 - Sin caused the highest created angelic being and one third of the angelic world to be expelled from heaven. **Revelation 12:4, 9**

It would be well to remind ourselves that the sin that caused all of this was a proud attitude, which shows us just how serious this sin is in the mind of God (i.e. **Ezekiel 28:15-17**).

Observation #2 - Sin caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from Eden and brought a penalty to all mankind and all creation. **Romans 5:12; 8:21**

Observation #3 - Sin put God's own Son on the cross. **II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:3**

Observation #4 - Sin will be the reason people will be sentenced to eternal damnation. **Romans 6:23**

Neither God nor His Word views sin in a light manner. The more we realize the seriousness of sin, the more we are thinking in a way that pleases God.

QUESTION #3 – What are some dangerous false ideas concerning sin?

There are several very dangerous and very wrong misconceptions about sin. Sin is a literal, undeniable reality in this world. Unfortunately most won't acknowledge sin the way God wants it acknowledged. As a result, several false concepts concerning sin are believed and defended.

(False Concept #1) - Sin is okay.

As we have already established, sin is very serious in the mind of God. There are even some professing believers who take a nonchalant attitude concerning sin. There are those who actually present the idea God is so understanding of sin that it is actually okay and that there is nothing wrong with it. The Bible is very clear; God hates sin. He is not pleased with any thinking or lifestyle that maintains the idea that sin is okay. He expects people to acknowledge and see sin for what it is and deal with it. Those who refuse will end up in eternal fire. Sin is never okay in the mind of God, and God demands people turn away from their sin.

(False Concept #2) - Sin is a sickness.

There are many who like to view sin or explain it as a sickness. The reason why many take this approach to the subject of sin is because humans are not responsible if they have a sickness. Therefore, one who views sin as a sickness is one who is not responsible to make changes in order to get better.

There are several contemporary illustrations of this mindset. Some view drunkenness as a sickness; it is termed the "disease of alcoholism." Alcoholism is never viewed in the Bible as being a sickness; it is identified as sin (i.e. **Galatians 5:21**). Another such illustration is homosexuality. Many view homosexuality as some chemical imbalance of hormones. This

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enables the homosexual to claim he/she is not responsible for the way he/she is. The Bible, in very specific language, classifies homosexuality as sin. It is a very serious sin that will bring the abandonment of God (**i.e. Romans 1:26-28**) and it is a sin that can be forgiven and is to be stopped (**I Corinthians 6:9-11**).

If sin is viewed as a sickness it enables the sinner to live with himself with a sense of false security, for the reality is, he is heading toward the severe judgment of God. This is why it is so critical that sin be seen in exactly the way God sees it and deal with it in exactly the way God says. In matters of sin, eternity is on the line and any failure to face sin God's way will bring serious eternal ramifications.

(False Concept #3) - Sin is an accident .

There are some who sin and claim they have no control over what they are doing and it is really just an accident. Some try and explain their sin as being an unfortunate happening.

There is no question that man can be overtaken by a sin (**Galatians 6:1**). It is also true that some people are more apt to deal with sin immediately and get on with life, while others continue to dabble in the same type of evil time and time again. But it is not true that sin is an accident. Whenever a person sins, he chooses to do so. It is not an accident; it is not a coincidence; it is a choice. The sooner we are willing to admit this to God, the quicker God can and will deliver us. No one will ever get anywhere in a relationship with God by trying to excuse sin as being an accident. Sin is a choice and all humans have made sinful choices.

(False concept #4) - Sin is nonexistent .

There are those who actually believe there is no such thing as sin. There is really no such thing as right or wrong. As unbiblical and as ridiculous as this may seem, there are many who hold this idea. Several suggest there is no such thing as morality or a standard of what is right or wrong and that each individual determines it for himself. This type of thinking usually suggests that emotional problems are caused by guilt and that no person should ever feel guilty about anything.

The weaknesses with this line of reasoning are many, but the greatest danger of all is that unless a person is willing to admit that he is a sinner, he will never come to terms with his need for Christ and will be forever condemned.

(False Concept #5) - Sin is a mistake .

There are several who hold to the belief that sin is nothing more than a mistake. It promotes the idea that everyone makes mistakes and to "err is human." We would not deny that every human being does make mistakes; but to classify sin as nothing more than a mistake is very dangerous, because it diminishes the gravity of the specific nature of sin and basically neglects to promote that sin must be faced.