

◆ ———— 2 ———— ◆

SOMEBODY LOVES YOU

The emphasis in this publication is on what *you* need to do, but I would not want to leave the impression that what we do in any way compares with what God has done for us. This lesson is on God's love. Although it will not exhaust the topic, it will at least introduce you to this exciting subject.

LOST IN SIN

To appreciate God's love for us, we must first see our need for that love. Before God showed His love, mankind was lost in sin—hopeless and helpless.

When I say "lost in sin," I refer to personal sin, not to the sin of Adam. Some believe that a child is born stained with the guilt of Adam's sin. The Bible, however, teaches that a baby is born pure. Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Again, referring to children, He said that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

The prophet Ezekiel emphasized that each person is responsible for his own sins—not the sins of his father, but his own sins:

The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

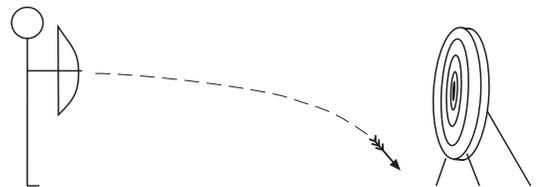
You can inherit the *consequences* of your father's sins, but you cannot inherit the *guilt* of your father's sin.¹ We suffer a consequence of Adam's sin—physical death (Genesis 3:3)—but

we do not inherit the guilt of his sin.

We are born pure. As we get older, we learn right from wrong. When we choose to do wrong, that is sin. Eventually, we become accountable for our sins. This "age of accountability" comes at different ages for different people, because of differences in background, training, and temperament. The Jews set the age at around thirteen years,² but this can vary a few years depending on the individual.

Thus, unless a person dies in childhood, he sins and is a sinner. "There is none righteous, not even one; . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23).

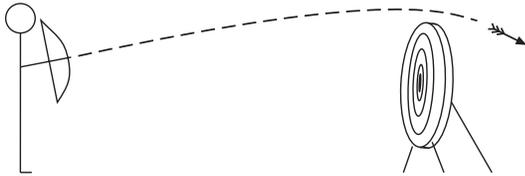
We need to define the word "sin." The Greek word translated "sin" means "to miss the mark." When a Greek archer missed the target, it was said that he had "sinned." To draw a spiritual parallel, think of the "mark" (the target) as the will of God. After Romans 3:23 declares that "all have sinned," it adds "and *fall short* of the glory of God."³



Another term used in the Bible for "sin" is "transgression." In our previous lesson, we noted that the Law "was added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19). The English word "transgress" (like the Greek word from which it comes) basically means "to step across."⁴ A passage that expresses this idea is 2 John 9a: "Anyone who *goes too far* and does not abide in the teaching of

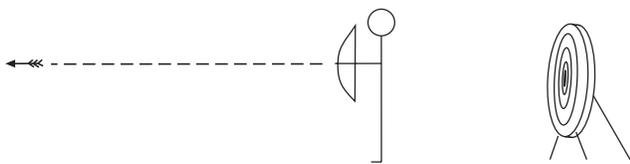
Christ, does not have God.” (Emphasis mine.) The KJV has “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.”

To continue the archery illustration, we might think of a transgression as shooting *past* the target—as going *beyond* the will of God.



Sometimes people speak of “sins of omission and commission.” A “sin of omission” is failing to do what we should do (falling short of God’s expectations). A “sin of commission” refers to doing what we should not do (going beyond the boundaries God has set for us).⁵

Another synonym for “sin” is “iniquity.”⁶ James 3:6 speaks of the “world of iniquity.” The word translated “iniquity” carries the idea of injustice. Isaiah 53:6 gives one expression of iniquity: “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Notice the phrase “has turned to his own way”: It refers to going one’s own way instead of God’s way. If we applied this to the archery illustration, we might picture the bowman completely ignoring the target as he shoots.



With some people, it is not so much that they are “aiming” to please God but fail. Rather, their problem is that they do not care whether they obey God or not. They are determined to live as they want to live. They stubbornly go their own way.

Stop and think about these three common ways of sinning: to fail to do what we should do, to do what we know is wrong, to ignore God’s will entirely. Add to that the fact that we can sin by what we *do* (James 4:17), by what we *say* (Matthew 12:37), and by what we *think* (Matthew 15:19). Putting all of this together, consider how

these truths apply to your own life:

- Have you ever failed to *do* what you should?
- Have you ever *said* things you should not have said?
- Have you ever had *thoughts* contrary to the will of God?

In short, are you ready to admit that you are a sinner? Until you can acknowledge your lost condition, you are not ready to be saved.

Confessing your sinfulness is important. It is also important to understand that there is no way *you* can remove the guilt of your own sin. A common misunderstanding is that if one has more good than evil in his life, the good cancels out the evil. Unfortunately, no amount of good can compensate for the fact that we have disobeyed God.

Imagine that you have not been paying your bills and have amassed a terrible debt. One day, you decide, “This is foolish. From this point on, I will pay all bills when they are due.” Now imagine that you faithfully carry out this resolve, year after year. This would be commendable . . . but what about the debt with which you started? Paying your current bills will never erase the debt of the past.

Even so, when you do good, that is commendable, but the Bible teaches that is what you “ought” to do (see Luke 17:10). This in no way compensates for all the times you did *not* do what you “ought to have done.”

Since we have disobeyed God, what do we deserve for our sins? The Bible is plain: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). The word “death” as used in the Bible implies *separation*. Physical death is the separation of the body from the spirit (see James 2:26). Spiritual death is the separation of man from God—because of sin (see Isaiah 59:1, 2). Eternal death is being eternally separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Sin in our lives results in spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1). If not removed by the blood of Jesus, that sin will ultimately result in everlasting death (Revelation 20:14, 15). Jesus told men that if they died in their sin, they could not go where He was going (that is, heaven; see John 8:24; 14:2–6).

The world has many needs today: peace, a

cure for cancer, a way to feed the starving. The world's greatest need, however, is its need for God. Until a man admits that he is a sinner and that he cannot save himself, there is no hope for his soul. I repeat that until *you* acknowledge *your* lost condition, you are not ready to be saved.

If you do understand your need for salvation, read on.

SAVED BY GRACE

"Amazing Grace" is a popular hymn, but many who sing it do not know what "grace" is. The word translated "grace" is related to the word for "gift." "Grace" refers to that which is bestowed as a gift—in other words, something not earned. "Grace" is sometimes defined as "unmerited favor." A definition I like is "what you need, but don't deserve."

Since we are sinners, we *need* salvation but do not *deserve* salvation. Thus, if we are to be saved, it must be through the *grace* of God. Ephesians 2:8 and other passages emphasize that Christians are saved "by grace."

The greatest expression of God's grace is the gift of His Son. You may have heard this verse quoted: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God loved the world so much—God loved *you* so much—that He was willing to give His Son Jesus to die for your sins. I have three daughters and two grandchildren, but I would not want to give up any of them. God had only one Son, but He gave Him for us.

Paul wrote, "For while we were still helpless, . . . Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6–8).

Jesus came into this world for many reasons: to teach us about God (John 3:2), to help people (Matthew 20:28), to give us a perfect example to follow (1 Peter 2:21). Most important, however, He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). To fulfill that purpose, He had to die on the cross: ". . . without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).

Why could there be no forgiveness unless Jesus shed His blood? The answer to that question lies in the nature of God. Since we cannot

fully understand God,⁷ we cannot completely understand His plans and purposes (1 Corinthians 2:16)—including all that was involved in the cross. Still, there is much value in pondering the question.

Consider these thoughts: God is a just God (Psalm 89:14). As a holy God, He cannot tolerate sin (Isaiah 6:3); to be just, He must punish sin. We should be thankful that God is also a God of love (1 John 4:8). If He were only a God of justice, we would all be lost, since all of us have sinned. As a God of love, He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9); so He sent His Son to suffer in our stead. By faith, I accept the fact that when Jesus died on the cross, He took the punishment for my sins—and yours.

. . . Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

He [God] made Him who knew no sin [Jesus] to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isaiah 53:6).

If Jesus had been just a man, even a perfect man, His death could never have atoned for sin. The only One who could take upon Himself the sins of all mankind was the sinless Son of God. There have been many great religious leaders, but there is only one Savior: Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am *the way*, and *the truth*, and *the life*; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6).⁸

Before you can be saved, you must accept these important truths: (1) Jesus is the divine Son of God.⁹ (2) Christ died on the cross for you. (3) You cannot save yourself; you can only be saved through the sacrifice of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

It makes no difference how educated or uneducated you are, how rich or poor you may be, how attractive or unattractive you think you are, whether your skin is dark or light, how successful or unsuccessful you are (by men's standards); *God loves you*. He loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you. If you have not done so before, you will want to stop and read the ac-

counts of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection (Matthew 26—28; Mark 14—16; Luke 22—24; John 18—21).

Paul wrote, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20b). Say these words out loud: "Jesus loves *me*, and He delivered Himself up for *me*." Savor those words. They are really true! ❖

¹For instance, if a man committed some terrible crime, his children could suffer shame and humiliation (a *consequence* of his act), but only he would have to go to prison for that crime. (Only he would be *guilty*.)

²A Jewish boy has his bar mitzvah celebration on his thirteenth birthday ("bar mitzvah" means "son of the Commandment [or the Law]"). At age twelve Jesus went to the Passover (Luke 2:41, 42).

³Emphasis mine.

⁴A variety of Greek words are rendered as "transgression" in different translations; but I am referring to the

Greek word used in Galatians 3:19, which means the same as the English word.

⁵See Romans 7:19, 20.

⁶Still another synonym for sin is "lawlessness." (See 1 John 3:4 in a modern translation.) This word means "to go contrary to [God's] law." There are other synonyms, such as "wickedness" and "disobedience"; but I selected the terms "sin," "transgression," and "iniquity" to illustrate the scope of sin.

⁷To understand God fully, we would have to be God.

⁸The emphasis indicated by the use of italics is found in the original text.

⁹This includes faith in the resurrection of Jesus (see Romans 10:9). Space will not permit our spending time on the resurrection, which is a thrilling study within itself. If you are not sure that Jesus is divine, you will want to study this vital subject. If you have not done so, read "The Challenge to Believe." Also, I encourage you to discuss this with the one who gave you this publication. Again, it is possible that your primary need is to become more familiar with what the Bible says about Jesus (see John 20:30, 31). To strengthen your faith in Jesus, spend as much time as possible reading the first four books of the New Testament, which tell about the life of Jesus.

©Copyright, 1999, 2002 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED