

Bible Studies for Adventists



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May 2–8, 2009

Commentary on “Sin”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, May 2, 2009

The Week At A Glance on page 65 of the teachers quarterly states: “Sin, and the results of sin, are a painful reality in human life. Thank God for Jesus, who has made a way of escape for us all.” The lessons for this week do not explain how Jesus is the escape for the “painful reality in human life.”

Today's lesson is a short statement on the results of the Fall. The sins of mankind are often equated to sinfulness. “Sins” and “sinfulness” are two different things. The sins of mankind are the symptoms of the much deeper problem—mans sinful nature. (Only as our sinful nature has been dealt with in Christ can our sins be dealt with. The subject of “original sin” will be dealt with in the lesson for Tuesday, May 5th.). The words that are used to describe the sinfulness of the world include, “war,” “terrorism,” “havoc,” “icecaps are melting,” “crime,” “little, if any, ... moral improvement,” “atrocities,” and “moral decay.”

This week's lesson begins with a verse from Romans, stating how sin came into the world and how righteousness came into the world.

Before we continue, please take a moment to read Romans chapter 5.

OK. Have you read Romans chapter 5? If you haven't, why don't you put this down and read it right now? We'll wait for you (we're not going anywhere without you!) This will be foundational for the remaining studies this week.

Issues

Romans 5:18 is quoted. Chapter five of Romans is an excellent study of the nature of sin, how it came into the world, its pervasiveness and how that sin has been dealt with (past tense) in Jesus Christ. Today's study does not deal with the issue of sinfulness. It only mentions the fact of the results of sin. Romans chapter five is a full treatise of how believers are reconciled to God through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There is nothing in Romans 5 to indicate that one's morality, being Christ-like or any other attribute allows us to be close to God, nor does it indicate that any of these attributes keep us from being reconciled to God.

Romans 5:10 says, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

As the lesson progresses through the week, the issue of obedience will be a major theme. Our obedience, as it will be shown, is neither the means by which we are reconciled to God, nor is obedience the means by which God's righteousness will be displayed.

Summary

1. Our sinfulness and our sins are two different things and should not be confused.
2. We have been reconciled (past tense) to God in Christ Jesus. Pointing out the evils in this world and equating those evils with our separateness from God ignores the fact that we have been reconciled, irrespective of the presence of evil in this world.
3. Romans chapter 5 is an amazing study of the sinfulness of humanity and the righteousness available in Jesus.
4. Read Romans 5.

Day 2: Sunday, May 3, 2009

Note: Although this day's lesson is short, this commentary will be slightly lengthier so as to identify some of the major issues that will be brought into focus throughout the week. This will provide the foundation for the remaining studies this week.

What is sin?

Today's lesson is titled, "Sin Is Rebellion." What or Who is this rebellion against? Everyone would agree that this rebellion is against the Almighty God. The Quarterly identifies passages that have been used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to define the essence of sin. First John 3:4 says, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (NIV) Sin is lawlessness. This lawlessness is not necessarily just the breaking of the commandments of the Old Testament. To identify lawlessness with the breaking of the Ten Commandments is a narrowing of the requirements laid down by Jesus Christ Himself.

The lesson states:

God has done for us all that infinite love could. In return He asks of us love and obedience. In a time in which the world is plagued by rampant lawlessness and a relativistic philosophy—which claims that good and evil depend simply on cultural circumstances and communal and personal preferences—there must and will be a people who will staunchly defend God's standard of holiness, the Ten Commandments.

All of the law and prophets of the Old Testament, up to and including John the Baptist, were in place to prepare the way for Jesus. In Matthew 11:13, Jesus says, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John." Once Jesus came, that which the Law and Prophets pointed forward to had come.

The Pharisees were guilty of continuing to point to the Law and Prophets at the expense of seeing that what they pointed forward to had come. Jesus said in John 5:39-40, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

Our Lord clarifies, through the Apostle Paul, how one is declared righteous. In Romans 3:20-22:

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference (NIV)

John 16:8-9 defines sin for us. Jesus is telling His followers about the work of the Holy Spirit when He comes into the world. In verse 9 Jesus tells us what the Holy Spirit will identify in one's life as sin.

8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; (NIV)

Jesus' definition of sin is when men do not believe in Him.

What is righteousness?

To identify specific sins in one's life and to be held accountable for those sins is an activity of the members of the Body of Christ. This is good. To identify those sins as the breaking of the Ten Commandments is to miss what the Ten Commandments, even the entire Law, were to point to – Jesus Christ. He is the standard. His standard is not the Ten Commandments, it is Himself. The Pharisees were experts in the Law, and while keeping the law perfectly, they were engaged in sin because they refused to come to the One to whom the Law and Prophets pointed.

Righteousness will not be, as is stated in the quarterly, by "a people who will staunchly defend God's standard of holiness, the Ten Commandments." Read Romans 3:4-11:

4 Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge. 5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved. 9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."

And then in verses 19-22:

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference (NIV)

Righteousness is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ. It is not according to the law, not even the Ten Commandments.

It is clear from this passage that the idea of a people who “staunchly” defend the Ten Commandments as God's standard of holiness is not scriptural. Christians are under the authority of Jesus Christ and taught moment by moment by the Holy Spirit. To revert to the letter of the law is to revert to a “ministry of death” (2 Corinthians 3:7) rather than to come to Him who is The Life.

God is not actively demonstrating His justice by producing a people who will end the “great controversy” by keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly. In Romans 3:19 it is clear that “every mouth may be silenced and the whole world [be] held accountable to God.” There will be no demonstration of God's righteousness apart from that which has already been demonstrated in Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. All righteousness before the time of Christ pointed forward to Him. All righteousness after the cross has always pointed back to Him. The ability to overcome the sin in the life of the believer is rooted in the supreme act of God's righteousness demonstrated 2000 years ago. That demonstration will not be repeated. Sin was dealt with conclusively once and for all time on the cross.

Hebrews 9:25-26 is clear about this.

25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with the sin by the sacrifice of himself. (NIV)

In question 2 of today's lesson is, perhaps the most quoted passage by the SDA Church, Revelation 14:12. To identify the “commandments” in this passage as being the Ten Commandments is to ignore the prevailing message of the New Testament as to the finality of God's righteousness in the person of Jesus Christ. Reading the word “commandments” as the “Ten Commandments” or even the Old Testament law is to ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given to every believer. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to every believer, just as our sin was imputed to Him on the cross. As we live, the Holy Spirit continually brings before us our sins with the only way of escape ever provided by our righteous Lord: as we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us from all sin unrighteousness (1 John 1:9.)

Sin is disbelief in Jesus. Righteousness is only given as a gift by Jesus, it is not something we do, nor a standard we live up to.

Summary

1. Sin is lawlessness, but that lawlessness is not the mutilation of the Ten Commandments—it is the refusal to believe in Jesus (John 16:9.)
2. Righteousness is not defined by the Ten Commandments.
3. There will not be a people who will staunchly defend the Ten Commandments at the end of time, constituting the people of God.
4. Our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly. (This does not mean that we should sin so that grace would abound more.)
5. The righteousness offered to us is only in the person of Jesus, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, not through our living up to a moral code.

Day 3: Monday, May 4, 2009

There are three points that are made in today's study, sins of thought, sins of omission and the lack of stewardship with that which the Lord has given us.

First, the quarterly asks the individual to think about what he/she has fantasized in the past 24 hours as an indication as to where the heart is. A Sabbath School class is, usually, an inadequate place to deal with these issues. Men need to be accountable to other men, women need to be accountable to other women, and husbands and wives need to be

accountable to each other.

For the believer, there will be an on-going battle with our old nature. The presence of this battle is an indication that one has been born again. Although non-believers battle with similar things, those battles are waged by the flesh against the flesh. This would be similar to a firefighter trying to put out a small paper or wood fire by using fire. A small paper or wood fire is quenched by water.

For the believer, the flesh is fought by our born-again spirit, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in Romans chapter 7, has shown that this battle between our old nature and our new nature is something that will continue until the redemption of our bodies. Believers have been born again. But we still live in these decaying bodies, which have yet to be renewed. After the clear picture Paul provides in Romans 7, he then says in Romans 8:3 what we are waiting for.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (NIV)

The sin of omission and the lack of stewardship by a believer are other sins mentioned in today's study. Jesus' forgiveness is mentioned and the question asked, "Why should this mean so much to us?"

Forgiveness has been provided for us in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Although forgiveness should mean much to us, the result of the forgiveness is what the believer must come to. Having been forgiven, it is now our purpose in life to glorify the Lord. It is this for which we were created, and it is this for which we have been recreated (born again.)

Summary

1. The believer will have a life-long struggle against the flesh. This is a war of the spirit against the flesh, not a fleshly battle. If we are not born again, we fight flesh against flesh, if we are born again, we fight spirit against flesh.
2. The sins of thought, omission and poor stewardship are not an indication that we haven't been born again. They are an indication that we live in bodies that haven't been glorified.
3. Jesus' forgiveness means so much to us, that believers seek nothing more than to glorify God. This is why we were created and this is why believers have been recreated (born again.)

Day 4: Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Today's lesson walks on both sides of the road regarding the topic of original sin, but fails to show how original sin has been dealt with. The quarterly states:

Theologians often distinguish between the sinful acts that we commit and the sinful nature that we possess. We all have been corrupted by Adam's fall; we all are deemed sinners even before we sin.

This clear and powerful statement then devolves into an argument against the practice of infant baptism. Over and against this practice, is the belief, held by some, that they have achieved a state of sinless perfection.

Both the argument for infant baptism, and the one against sinless perfection in this life avoid two beautiful teachings of Christianity.

First, infant baptism, for many non-Catholic Protestants is not based on the belief that the infant will suffer eternal torment if it dies before baptism—it is a belief grounded in the teaching that one has been elected by God in Christ from all eternity.

Notice Romans 8:28-31:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. 31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Please note: This writer is not arguing in favor of infant baptism. I am simply pointing out one of the main purposes for the practice of infant baptism by many in some Protestant Christian denominations. The infant is baptized because he/she has been born into the family of believers who will raise the child in the way he should go, resulting in the choice to believe God's promises in Christ Jesus.

A term that has been used through Christian history is that of "sinless perfection." As has been stated in Sunday's and Monday's lessons, this state is not one that the believer will achieve in this fallen world. However, sinful perfection is most definitely accomplished by everyone who turns to Christ. Although this sounds like a dichotomy, it is actually a paradox. A dichotomy is a statement that contains two or more contradictory statements that cannot both be true. A paradox is a statement with seeming contradiction that is nonetheless true.

The book of First John provides us with two statements. These statements are either contradictory, (one true and one false), they are both false (this cannot be the case if we have already accepted the Bible as God's word,) or they are both true (which must be the case if the Bible is God's word.)

First John 1:8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

First John 5:18a says, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin."

Original sin has been dealt with on the cross. The believer is transferred from Adam into Christ and no longer carries the guilt of the sin of being in Adam (if you haven't yet, please read Romans chapter 5.) The sins we commit (including sins of omission) will be with us while we dwell in these bodies. To deny this is to deny 1 John 1:8. To say that we continue to sin is to admit that we have not been born of God (1 John 5:18a.) For the believer to fall into either side of the road without the tension of the other side of the road is to miss the road. We have been (past tense) forever perfected in Him who gave Himself for us. In this life, we will continually deal with the pull of this world and our former self.

Neither infant baptism nor sinless perfection are issues the Christian need deal with. They may be great discussion issues, but neither provides a solution for the believer who struggles while living in this world.

Summary

1. Original sin is a fact, clearly stated in Romans chapter 5. Neither infant baptism nor sinless perfection offers a solution to the problem of original sin.
2. Original sin was dealt with once and for all on the cross.
3. Christians live within the tension of a paradox—we are sinful saints. This is not a dichotomy, it is a statement of fact.
4. If we have accepted the fact that God has dealt with original sin on the cross, we can be transferred from Adam into Christ. We cannot be in both places at once.

Day 5: Wednesday, May 6, 2009

Today's lesson is on the topic of "Corporate Versus Personal Sin." Before we begin today's study, it must be pointed out that the idea of corporate sin is rooted in God's condemnation of Israel at various points in its history. Other nations, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, etc. are also condemned in scripture. This has never meant that nothing good has ever come out of those places. As a group (corporation) of people has been identified and condemned in scripture, it is because of the sin of the individuals that make up that group, not just the group.

The writer of the quarterly states:

These facts raise many difficult questions. Foremost among these is whether we as individuals carry any responsibility for these things and if we should assume any guilt for this corporate state of sinfulness.

There is no such thing as corporate sin without individual sin. The priests in Israel are condemned in Ezekiel because they each are individually sinful. This does not mean that there are no true believers within these corporate groups. One may cry to God because of the sinfulness of his people, but one never assumes guilt for this corporate state of sinfulness. One only assumes guilt for one's sin.

This is the message of Christianity. As I recognize my guilt before a holy God, I accept His righteousness as He accepts my sinfulness, and deals with it once and for all on the cross in the person of Jesus.

The writer then states:

But also consider that we all have some influence. We can all make small decisions that at times may increase or diminish, however slightly, the evil in this world.

This suggestion is rooted firmly in Humanism. Everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, has some influence. It is not our influence that can diminish "however slightly" the evil in this world. The evil in this world was dealt with at the cross. It is only in pointing lost souls to the cross of Jesus Christ that we can ever affect the evil in this world.

The evil one will continue to do his work in this world until the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10 says:

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Corporate sin is not the objective of the cross—it is personal sin. Corporate sin is merely the sin of a group of people. Until individual sin is dealt with, there is no solution for corporate sin.

As is stated above, in 2 Thess. 2:10, those who are perishing are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

Any discussion of corporate sin is irrelevant until the individual sin has been dealt with. Once the individual sin has been dealt with, there is no corporate sin.

Summary

1. Corporate sin is irrelevant. This does not mean it does not exist, but it is only dealt with individually.
2. Having influence in this world can be understood to mean several things. As the lesson identifies it, this influence may mean small things that we can do to help lessen the evil in this world. As scripture states, lawlessness will exist in the world until the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
3. Our greatest effort against evil in this world is to help unbelievers come to “love the truth and so be saved.” (2 Thess. 1:10)

Day 6: Thursday, May 7, 2009

Today's study is titled “The Only Solution for the Sin Problem. It is the one bright point in this week's lessons from the Sabbath School Quarterly, that is, until Ellen White is quoted.

The primary issue with today's study is found in the quotes from Ellen G. White. She states in *Lift Him Up*, page 24: “The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God's perfect law.”

God did not require a sacrifice of “sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of [His] perfect law.” The law required the blood of bulls and goats. Hebrews 10:8 makes this clear: “First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made).”

Jesus' sacrifice was not merely sufficient to satisfy the claims of the law. Had this been the case, we would, to quote Paul, “of all men, be most miserable.” As is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (NIV)

Jesus did much more than just satisfy the claims of the law. He entered heaven itself and sat down at the right hand of the Almighty (Heb. 10:12.) He provided “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) for us and opened up a new a living way into the presence of our Father in heaven (Heb. 10:20.)

The next quote contains a troubling statement regarding Jesus. “He had power through His own divine perfection of character to atone for man's sin, and to elevate him, and bring him back to his first estate.”

Jesus' ability to atone for man's sin was and is based on the fact that He is a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. He can atone for us based on the power of his indestructible life. Heb. 7:15-16 says:

15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

Although EGWs statement comes close to the Hebrews chapter 3, there is an implicit SDA interpretation that Jesus did not know whether he would see the other side of the tomb, or even be able to endure the suffering that was about to come upon Him.

From *Desire of Ages*, chapter 74, we read:

As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness.

Jesus was never in doubt about His ability to endure the cross. He knew from early on that it was within His power to lay down His life and to take it up again. Although Jesus asked the Father to take “this cup” from Him, that in no way implies that He thought He could not endure the suffering. It is simply an indication that He saw the overwhelming immensity of the suffering that He was to endure, not that He might not endure it.

Jesus' death on the cross is most definitely the “only solution for the sin problem.” And it was on the cross that the “sin problem” was dealt with once and for all.

Summary

1. Jesus is the only solution for the sin problem.
2. The quotes from Ellen White are problematic. It is not the claims of the law that must be satisfied—it is the claims of God Himself that must be satisfied.
3. Jesus had power due to His indestructible life (Heb. 7:16,) not because He satisfied the requirements of the law. It is because He has an indestructible life that He was able to fulfill the requirement of the law.

Day 7: Friday, May 8, 2009

On this final study for the week, a suggestion is made to read "The Fall of Satan," "The Fall of Man," and "The Plan of Salvation" from *Early Writings*, pages 145-153.

Because this passage opens with an incredibly heretical statement, I will only address that statement and then provide an alternative suggestion.

The passage opens up with this sentence:

Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ.

The implication that Satan and Christ were both angels (Jesus being the Archangel Michael) in heaven and that the Father went to Jesus and not to Satan when deciding to create man, resulting in Satan becoming jealous, is blasphemous.

Inherent in this statement is the original Arian heresy James White was professing, and which Ellen White never directly addressed (although she did address it indirectly, much later in her life.) Most honest leaders in the SDA Church now openly admit the Arian origins within the SDA movement.

Rather than read *Early Writings*, may I suggest the following:

In a translation that is different from the one that you normally use when studying for the Sabbath School lesson, and one that is not marked up with notes/underlinings/etc., read the following:

1. Romans chapters 5-8 (hopefully, you've read chapter 5 as suggested earlier!)
2. Hebrews chapters 7-10.
3. First Corinthians chapter 15.
4. Second Thessalonians chapter 2.

Hebrews 4:12 provides an incredible insight. It says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Each chapter will only take a few minutes. But those few minutes will provide you with much more to deal with your personal sin, and provide you with the righteousness that is found in Christ alone, than is found in the lessons this week from the Sabbath School Quarterly.

When all is said and done, may you be found in Him alone!

Summary

1. The Quarterly suggests reading a few pages from *Early Writings*. That passage opens with a statement that denigrates the position of Jesus and elevates the position of Satan.
2. Rather than reading EGW, four scripture passages are suggested: Rom. ch. 5-8; Heb. ch. 7-10; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Thess. 2.
3. The word of God is powerful and can point to the righteousness that is found in Christ alone more clearly than anything this world has to offer.