

Lesson 4: The Problem of Sin

- I. The fact that God created humankind in His own image and likeness - to have not just a physical body but to be endowed with an eternal spirit is something hard for us to fully grasp
 - A. We are quite familiar with the physical things, because each one of us has to deal with the harsh realities of life
 1. Acquiring food, shelter and clothing
 2. Coping with health, education, family and jobs
 3. These things are easy for us to relate to because we experience them in a real way each day of our lives
 - B. Our spirit and the spiritual aspect of our being are much more difficult for us to comprehend and appreciate
 1. It is, after all, more abstract, since the notion of a spirit is an obscure concept
 2. Remember, the only way we know of such things is through the revelation of God
 3. And yet, just because we struggle with the concept - that does not make our spirit any less important or real.
 4. The truth and reality of our spiritual nature do not depend on our knowledge and understanding
 5. Something isn't made false or insignificant just because we are unaware, uninformed or don't understand it
 - C. In fact, our spirit and the existence of the spiritual realm are actually much more important to us than anything in this physical world - most just don't realize it
 - D. In this lesson, we shall discover why that's true.
 1. To do that, we first must reconsider the nature of God
 2. Up to now, we have deduced the divine attributes of God based upon the work of creation
 3. That led to our understanding that all physical things came from something spiritual
 4. And that something was God - an eternal, all-present, all-knowing, all-powerful spiritual being
 5. Although this provides us with some insight into God's capabilities, it tells us nothing about the character or personality of God
 6. That information must be determined by what God has revealed to us through the written Word of the Bible; that source of truth was the topic of Lesson 2
- II. The Bible unequivocally describes God as a benevolent being, portraying every quality of what we associate with moral goodness, love, virtue, righteousness and justice
 - A. The Psalms praise God using many words to describe His nature:
 1. Good, righteous, gracious, merciful, loving, kind, patient (Psalm 145)
 2. Faithful, just, truth (Psalm 89)
 - B. In the New Testament, the Bible describes God as love (I John 4:16) and calls Him a God of "light" in whom "there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5)
 - C. God is the standard of perfection

- D. It is these traits that have established the moral code for our civilized society
- E. But, as wholesome as these qualities are, they still do not capture the essence of what makes the nature of God so unique
- F. That uniqueness comes from the fact that God is said to be "Holy" (Lev 19:2; I Pet 1:15-16; Rev 4:8)
 - 1. The word "holy" is one of those religious words that we associate with God but often have a hard time defining.
 - 2. Sometimes the same thing is expressed by using other obscure words like saying God is "sanctified", "consecrated", or "sacred"
 - 3. What do these words really mean?
 - a. The Biblical concept of a "holy God" means God is "set apart", "distinct", "dedicated", "totally pure"
 - b. In practical terms, it means God is one-sided, being solely a benevolent being, characterized by all the previously defined qualities of moral goodness, love, virtue and righteousness with no possibility of being to the contrary
 - c. God is capable of nothing else - it is this fact that makes Him "set-apart" from all opposing characteristics and behaviors
 - 1) That is the quality that makes God so different from what we encounter in this physical world
 - 2) We are used to dealing with flawed individuals who are capable of exhibiting both positive and negative behaviors
 - a) Good one minute and evil the next; or
 - b) Tell the truth now and lie later
 - c) Malicious today and loving tomorrow as the mood changes
 - 3) God can do no such thing - God is unchanging (Heb 13:8; John 14:9)
 - a) God always tells the truth - it is impossible for Him to lie
 - b) God always is good - it is impossible for Him to be evil
 - c) This is what it means for God to be benevolent and one-sided
 - d) It is impossible for God to be malevolent
 - e) God is "set apart" from all such things
 - f) And that is what makes God "Holy" and "pure"
 - d. Perhaps another way of saying this is to say God is always true to Himself - consistent - and He can never be anything else
- G. As we consider the concept of Holiness and how it applies to the revealed nature of God, sometimes the question arises:
 - 1. Why didn't God create humankind to be holy and good, just like God, endowed with that same benevolent nature of wholesomeness and purity?
 - 2. The answer is: He did
 - a. By God's original design and plan, He made humankind in His image/likeness
 - b. That included not only giving humankind an eternal spirit but endowing that spirit with a holiness patterned after the nature of God Himself
 - c. This is exactly what took place in the creation of Adam and Eve as described in Gen 1:26-27
 - d. During this initial period, Adam and Eve lived in a perfectly harmonious

relationship with God enjoying full fellowship with their Creator.

- e. As an aside, it is worth noting that despite all that has taken place since the creation of Adam and Eve, it always has been God's desire for humankind to choose to be Holy and live a pure and wholesome life
 - 1) God spoke these words through Moses to the nation of Israel saying:
". . . You shall be Holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy" (Lev 19:2)
 - 2) In the New Testament teachings, the Apostle Peter commanded the same thing citing Old Testament Scripture: "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be Holy, for I am Holy" (I Pet 1:15-16)
- H. So, if Adam and Eve were created Holy and God commanded humankind to be Holy just as God is Holy, what went wrong?
 - 1. What changed?
 - 2. The answer is Sin.

III. Now what exactly is sin?

- A. The word "sin" is used a lot among the religious communities
 - 1. It is found in the English translations of the Bible both in the Old and New Testaments
 - 2. People generally associate sin with conduct that is bad or evil in the sight of God
 - 3. These are things that God does not want us to do - and all this is true
 - 4. However, there is a much more enlightened understanding available to us by looking at the inspired Hebrew and Greek Bible manuscripts
 - a. There we can examine the meaning of the inspired words that are translated as "sin" in our English versions of the Bible
 - b. Interestingly enough, in the original languages the meaning of these words is "to miss the mark"
 - c. That means when we read about people sinning, God literally is telling us they were "missing the mark".
- B. Having said that, how do we relate the idea of "missing the mark" to our concept and understanding of what it means to sin?
 - 1. If sinning is missing the mark, then what is the mark we are missing?
 - 2. Based on God's original design and intent for humankind, that mark can be identified as the "Holy nature of God"
- C. In the beginning, when Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God, they shared all the qualities of His nature
 - 1. They were holy and pure because God created them that way
 - 2. Moreover, Adam and Eve had no awareness of missing the mark because they were completely in step with their Creator - following after His will
- D. It was never God's intent, however, to create a family of robots forced to be holy like Him
 - 1. Instead, God provided humankind with the intelligence and freewill to make individual choices
 - 2. God wanted us to love Him enough to choose to remain Holy and pure and

thereby be like Him

- E. Adam and Eve were given a choice based on the trees in the Garden of Eden
 - 1. God commanded them to eat freely from any tree in the garden
 - 2. Except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:16-17)
 - 3. They were forbidden to eat from that single tree under the penalty of death
 - 4. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they "missed the mark" and sinned
 - a. At that point, their eyes were opened
 - b. And they became aware of the alluring distinction between good and evil
- F. For us today, God's desire is unchanged
 - 1. He still wants us to be Holy as He is Holy (1 Pet 1:15-16)
 - 2. And through the teachings found in the Bible, God has revealed what it takes to be Holy and conform to His image and likeness
- G. The Bible even provides us with warnings about the different ways we can fall into sin and thereby miss the mark
 - 1. Perhaps the most common way is to break God's law and violate His direct commandments and teachings
 - a. Disobeying a commandment of God in an act of lawlessness (I John 3:4)
 - b. Things like stealing when God has taught us not to steal; or
 - c. Taking a life by committing murder when God says to love one another
 - d. These are rebellious acts defying God's will for us
 - 2. Another way we can sin is to go too far - that is, to go beyond the teachings of Christ (II John 9)
 - a. When we willfully act outside the bounds of God's nature following after our own selfish desires, we no longer have God - we have abandoned Him to go our own way
 - b. This is reminiscent of Prov 16:25, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"
 - c. This is true because our thoughts are not God's thoughts and our ways are not God's ways (Isa 55:8)
 - 3. A third example of sinning is when we do not do what we should (James 4:17)
 - a. This is sometimes thought of as the passive sin - sin by inaction
 - b. Adhering to the nature of God does not just mean avoiding actions contrary to God's will
 - c. Adhering to the nature of God also means doing what God expects us to do
 - d. In the example of James 4, it means including God and spiritual considerations in our life choices and decision making process.
 - e. This requires us to have a conscious awareness of our spiritual obligations to God and to each other
- H. Finally, there is another important reality of sin as it applies to all humankind
 - 1. It is the fact that ". . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23)
 - 2. Scriptures reveal that with the exception of Jesus Christ, all of us, everyone who has ever lived to an age of accountability has missed the mark and sinned
 - 3. None of us has ever lived a perfectly holy life

- IV. This reality now positions us to address the question we started with: "Why should I care about spiritual things?" or more specifically, "so what if I have sinned?"
 - A. The answer resides in something called "The Problem of Sin"
 - B. First of all, note, even in the physical realm, sin leads to consequences and hardships directly attributed to unholy conduct that misses the mark of God
 - 1. For example, when we break God's law and steal, we can be arrested and sent to jail
 - 2. If we commit murder, we might spend our remaining lifetime in prison or be executed for the crime
 - 3. By lying, we can destroy a friendship or be fired for falsifying a job application
 - 4. Fornication and adultery are responsible for emotional distress, broken families, divorce, unexpected pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases
 - 5. Drugs and alcohol can lead to addictions, financial ruin and serious health problems
 - 6. None of these are desirable outcomes
 - a. All are physical problems directly attributed to sin
 - b. And many can lead to life-changing harm, permanent disability, or premature death
 - 7. As bad as these things are, there is something much worse
 - C. For you see, sin also has consequences in the spiritual realm
 - 1. In Rom 6:23, the Apostle Paul tells us ". . . the wages of sin is death . . . "
 - a. The death that Paul is speaking about is not our physical death
 - b. Rather, it is a spiritual death that is here contrasted with the alternative: the gift of eternal life
 - 2. The greatest Problem of Sin is --> sin kills us spiritually
- V. To appreciate the significance of spiritual death, we must examine how and why sin affects our relationship to God
 - A. In the beginning, when Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God, they were Holy and pure just as God is
 - 1. In that state, there was a special relationship and bond between humankind and God
 - 2. Adam and Eve existed in full fellowship with their Creator
 - a. They were spiritually one with God
 - b. And in total conformity with His nature
 - c. This provided them with free access to their Creator as well as all the blessings that came from that relationship
 - 3. When they sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, that perfect bond was broken
 - a. They were alienated from God
 - b. This is what God had warned them would happen when He told them ". . . in the day you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17)
 - B. The same thing happens to us when by our own choosing we sin and miss the mark.
 - 1. Our spiritual relationship and fellowship with God is severed
 - 2. Sin produces a barrier between us and God

3. This is what is meant by the spiritual death and wages of sin referenced by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:23
 4. Isa 59:1-2 describe this state saying: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."
- C. This separation is not just a matter of God's own choosing
1. Rather, it is a necessity resulting from the Holy nature of God
 2. First of all, note that God cannot simply ignore our sin
 - a. Were God to ignore our disobedience (lawbreaking), He would no longer be just and righteous
 - b. That would be an unjust and unrighteous response contrary to His nature
 - c. Justice demands there be a consequence for sin
 3. Secondly, the consequence for sin is not arbitrary
 - a. It must result in a separation from God because a Holy God cannot continue in fellowship with sinners
 - b. Were God to do so, He would no longer be "set apart" or Holy
 - c. One might say, our sin would taint Him
 4. These things can never happen because by definition God is pure, always true to Himself and His nature
 5. God is now and forever Holy, set apart from sin
- D. There is still the question as to whether being separated from God is really all that bad
1. When we look around us today, we see a world filled with both good and evil
 2. Good people often are abused and suffer while trying to uphold Godly values
 3. In contrast, many who practice evil thrive in pleasure, power, fame and riches
 4. It might seem as though there is no great advantage in following after a Holy God
- E. To put this in proper perspective, however, we must take into account the unique and temporary circumstances active here in the physical world
1. In James 1:17, the Bible says: "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."
 - a. All the good things experienced in this world are provided to us by God
 - b. He is responsible for everything we need to sustain our physical existence
 - c. And His spiritual nature is seen in the elements of holiness visible among those who strive to conform to His will
 - d. God is responsible for all the Godly blessings of happiness, peace, joy, goodness, love, comfort, "light" and hope that exist in the world today
 2. So if God is responsible for all the Good in the world where does all the evil come from and why does God allow it?
 - a. Once again, the answer is sin
 - b. All evil in the world today arises from the consequences of sin
 - c. God allows it for now because He granted us freewill with the ability to choose for ourselves how we will behave

- 1) Unfortunately, we often choose poorly
 - 2) Not only does our sin lead to bad outcomes for us, but it also can affect the lives of countless innocent others.
 - a) Adultery and fornication can harm marriages, spouses and children
 - b) Violence and crime can destroy property and lives of entire families
 - c) Greed, pride and lust cause senseless pain in our society
 - d. To add to this mix, we are told there is a spirit actively opposing God and stirring up trouble in the world today
 - 1) This is the devil, who through the serpent, first deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:1-7)
 - 2) That is why he is called the serpent of old (Rev 12:9) and the father of lies (John 8:44)
 - 3) The Apostle Peter describes the devil as prowling about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour by leading them to sin (I Pet 5:8)
 3. In the physical realm of God's creation, good and evil are allowed to exist together
 - a. God ". . . causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45)
 - b. From this passage, Jesus makes it clear that God's earthly blessings extend to all humankind
 - c. Both the good and the evil people in the world are given the full benefit of all God has provided
 4. At first glance, this may not seem fair.
 - a. But we must not overlook the fact that God created humankind to be special possessing not only a body of flesh and blood but an eternal spirit
 - b. While it is true sinners may live and prosper for 80, 90 or 100 years, the body eventually withers and dies returning to the dust of the ground (Gen 3:19)
 - c. The spirit, however, is eternal and when the physical body dies that spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecc 12:7)
 - d. Therein lies the issue - what happens when our physical existence ends and our fleshly body dies?
- VI. The Apostle Paul taught us that there will be a day when Jesus returns dealing out retribution to those who are separated from God by sin
- A. In II Thess 1:9, the Bible says "these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"
1. There are two important points to be made here
 - a. First, the ultimate consequences of sin are realized in the spiritual realm not the physical realm
 - 1) These consequences are eternal
 - 2) Meaning they endure beyond all physical things when time itself does not exist
 - 3) This is the final (end) state that will never change
 - b. Second, this is a state of destruction which is known as spiritual death
 - 1) It involves a total separation from God in eternity

- 2) God's presence and influence are removed with no hope of ever being restored
2. Since God alone provides every good thing and perfect gift (James 1:17), then being separated from God also means being separated from every Godly blessing
 - a. This is equivalent to an existence without anything God supplies
 - b. That means all happiness, peace, joy, goodness, love, comfort, "light" and hope will disappear forever
 - c. That leaves only an unGodly environment with sorrow, conflict, weeping, evil, hate, torment, darkness and hopelessness
 - d. This is a state of unimaginable anguish with no prospect for relief
 - e. The Bible calls this Hell
 - 1) Please note, hell is not some contrived torture chamber designed by God to inflict pain and punishment on humankind
 - 2) It is a lost state resulting from the total absence of God
 - a) Futhermore, this lost condition is not the result of God leaving us
 - b) It is caused by our choosing to depart from Him and His ways
 - 3) This is the one and only occasion when humankind will be subjected to an environment totally without God
 - 4) Since we have always lived in a world with God present, we have never experienced a state of such despair
 - a) To help us grasp the severity of this condition, the Bible describes Hell using vivid physical terms we are more likely to comprehend so as to paint a picture of a place we would want to avoid at all costs
 - b) Hell is said to be a place of eternal fire (Matt 25:41), and outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12)
- B. Although those living in sin will be subject to eternal destruction when Jesus returns, those who die before then will experience it immediately.
 1. In Luke 16:19-31, there is an account of the deaths of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus
 - a) After death, the rich sinner was separated from God immediately
 - b) He was in a place of agony and torment, burning and pleading for mercy
 2. It is clear from these Scriptures that all will face the consequences of sin when they reach the spiritual realm - be it in death or when Christ makes His next appearance

VII. In this lesson, we have learned why we should care about spiritual things

- A. Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), the outlook for all humankind appears hopeless
- B. As sinners, we all face an eternal separation from God in the anguish of Hell
- C. As mentioned in Rom 6:23, however, there is an alternative to spiritual death; it is the gift of eternal life
 1. If our sins can be blotted out and Holiness restored, then the sin barrier separating us from God is removed.

2. Without sin, our fellowship with God resumes and we can look forward to an eternity with Him
 - a. Being in the presence of God means experiencing all the blessing that God supplies
 - b. This will be a Holy environment totally without evil since sin and all its consequences will have been permanently removed
 - c. The Bible calls this Heaven
 3. Revelation 21:2-4 provide a brief description of what this will be like: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."
- D. Fortunately for us, God is a benevolent God of Love
1. God wants to save us from the terrible outcome of hell
 2. He has no desire for us to be lost for eternity
 3. In God's eyes, we are all precious and special
 4. After all, we were created that way being given an eternal spirit and made in His image and likeness
- E. The question is: How can a Holy God restore us to fellowship with Him without violating His nature and holiness?
1. That will be the subject of our next lesson
 2. Please join me as we explore God's Solution to the Problem of Sin