

LESSON 3: SIN/FORGIVENESS

“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be as red as crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Talking about sin is difficult. Talking about forgiveness is comforting. The object of this lesson is to give a better understanding of what sin is and how God forgives sin.

Thoughts for you to consider:

The question, *Are you a sinner?*, must first be examined in light of the definition of sin. Sin is described in the Bible as not obeying God. We first read about this in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first disobeyed God. (Please read Genesis chapter 3). And since the time of Adam, everyone has sinned. I know what you must be thinking, “That applies to other people but not me. I’m not that bad of a person.” That might be true. However, King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:20, *“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”* The New Testament writers understood the same truth as Paul states in Romans 3:23, *“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* King David gives us more insight into the extent of our sin. King David, in Psalm 51:6, said, *“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight. . . .”* Our sin is against God! The Hebrew for “sin” is *chattath* which means to “miss the mark.” What does that mean? This might be a new concept to you. Sin is not making a mistake. Sin is “missing the mark” in terms of disobeying God - not living up to God’s standard. What is God’s standard?

Questions to consider:

1. Do you believe that God has given us a standard regarding how we can live our lives?
2. If you answered, “yes,” have you lived up to God’s standard?
3. If you answered, “no,” do you have your own standards for your actions?
4. Do you believe that God has a right to judge us on that standard?

Thoughts for you to consider:

What are the consequences for sin? You might be thinking, “So what? Everyone sins. God even knows this.” That’s correct; God does know that everyone sins. However, you might never have considered the consequence of sinning against God. The reality is that sin has caused a separation between God and man. The Prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 59:2, *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”* God is holy; we are not. We cannot live up to what God wants. Further, we cannot live our lives without understanding there might be consequences for making our own decision regarding this fact.

Paul in the New Testament writes of these consequences in Romans 6:23, *“The wages of sin is death.”*

Therefore, many of us are unhappy with our lives. We lack peace in our souls, and that lack of peace is a result of our broken relationship with God.

The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom.” You might think this word means “hello.” However, the true meaning of “shalom” is “repairing that which was broken; to make complete.” The bad news is that sin has caused our relationship with God to be broken. The good news is that He has provided a way to bring us back into relationship with Him.

Questions to consider:

1. As you view the problem of evil, human suffering, and experience an overall lack of peace, what are some alternatives to the Biblical view?
2. What is your view regarding the resolution of sin?
3. Has your view kept you from personal pain and broken relationships?
4. Do you think you have hurt God by your own sin?
5. Has anyone hurt you? How has that impacted you?

Thoughts for you to consider:

How does God forgive our sins? Many of us have attempted to make amends for wrongs we have committed through personal effort. Personal efforts may have included volunteering to a worthy cause, sacrificing our time or giving to charity. There is indeed merit attached to these endeavors; however, does God forgive us based on our good works? The Prophet Isaiah tells us how God looks upon our good works, *"We are all become as one that is unclean. And all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment. . . ."* (Isaiah 64:5).

We have this sense that God judges us by our actions. We envision God weighing our good deeds against our bad deeds on a scale, and making a decision as to our passing or failing.

Over the years, the Rabbis have explained that on Rosh Hashanah God opens up the Book of Life. We have ten days for our names to be inscribed in the Book of Life before He closes the Book at the end of Yom Kippur/The Day of Atonement. We try our best to get our names written in the book of Life. It is as though we are working out our own atonement. Have you ever thought what this word "atonement" means? We know that the Rabbis encourage us to fast, attend services, and cry out to God for forgiveness. However, the answer is revealed in the name of the Holy Day itself, *Yom Kippur*. Kippur means "to cover" – specifically to cover with the blood from the sacrifice of an innocent animal. In the Torah, God is very specific regarding what happens on the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 16:21 we read, *"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israe, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness."*

In the New Testament we read in Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us."*

Questions to consider:

1. Do you pray to ask God to forgive you?
2. Do you think it's odd that God would sacrifice an animal (goat or lamb) to forgive you of your sins?

3. Why do you think God designed the system of forgiveness in this way?
4. Why is there the need for the sacrificial system in Judaism?
5. Do you think it's possible that God would reveal His plan for forgiveness to the Jewish people through this system?
6. If you can work to atone for sins, why would there be the need for the Messiah?

Final thoughts for you to consider:

In this lesson we have looked at the concept of sin and how God forgives. Whether you consider yourself a sinner or not, we have seen from the Scriptures that all have sinned and fallen short of God's standard. Therefore, every human being needs God's forgiveness. His forgiveness is not based on our good deeds or our prayers even though these are admirable. However, isn't it significant that on the Day of Atonement we find forgiveness through the death of a goat who carried all of our sin? This was done for a purpose. You might find what Yeshua said to the Jewish leadership quite insightful, "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*" (John 5:39)

In our next lesson we will examine what the Scriptures say about the Messiahship of Yeshua.

E-mail this lesson to studies@isaiah53.com to receive feedback and correspond with someone in person.

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