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## Psalm 32:1-11

### “Sin”

Most of the words we have explored are occasionally used in the modern world. For example, “Blessed” dominates southern culture (“bless your heart!”) and “glory” is associated with success and praise. But what about “sin?” For the longest time, theological talk of “sin” had been replaced with therapeutic talk of “self-esteem,” even among Christians. This transition from what is true to what I feel fits well in our modern therapeutic culture. Despite such efforts, Christianity requires a serious discussion on what sin is and how it can be remedied. But first, we need to know what the Bible means by that term.

Let us begin with the **Report** – that is, the meaning of the word itself. Few words are so essential to our understanding of ourselves, our world, and of grace than the concept of sin. Without a full understanding of sin, we cannot understand the mission of Jesus, the purpose of the resurrection, the Christian life, spiritual warfare, or even our neighbors. It is not surprising, then, that the Bible uses a rich vocabulary along with multiple literary devices in order to help us understand the depth of depravity.

Cornelius Plantinga wrote:

The Bible presents sin by way of major concepts, principally lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a beast crouching at the door. In sin, people attack or evade or neglect their divine calling. These and other images suggest deviance: even when it is familiar, sin is never normal. Sin is disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all, sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God.

As such, Scripture offers three dominate words for the single concept of “sin.” The first is *Failure*. The word means “to miss the goal.” The Benjaminites, for example, were so accurate in war that when they slung a stone, not a hair would be missed (Judges 20:16, see Proverbs 19:2 for another example). Sin, then, is the failure to fulfill a goal. But what is that goal? Loyal love of God and neighbor.

Secondly, the Bible uses the word *Iniquity*. Although “iniquity” is a good translation, it may not be the most useful given it is a word rarely used anymore. Translations often choose words like “wickedness,” “guilt,” or the generic, “sin.” At its core, this Hebrew word means “to bend” or “to make crooked.” For example, Psalm 38:6 laments, “I am utterly bowed down and prostrate” in

mourning (see also Lamentations 3:9b). This became a fitting metaphor to describe what sin is. Sin, then, is a perversion. It is crooked, distorted, and bent (see Jeremiah 3:21; Job 33:27).

Thirdly, the Bible uses the word *Transgression* which can also be translated as “rebellion” or even “trespass,” “treachery,” and “falsehood.” Combined, describes violating the trust of others. It is the betrayal of a relationship. For example, nations who enter into an agreement with each other are at peace until one party violates that treaty (see 2 Kings 1:1; see also Genesis 31:36). To “transgress,” then, is to violate trust in a relationship with someone else. This, of course, is a common theme throughout Scripture. Israel repeatedly transgressed against the Lord by worshiping and serving other gods. The prophets repeatedly condemn their treachery and call on them to repent.

Secondly, we must explore **The Range** of sin. Every little boy loves throwing rocks in a lake. The bigger, the better. It is even better when rocks are thrown in a quiet, still pond. Watching the ripple effects of the rock is particularly mesmerizing. That is how sin works.

First, *Sin is Theological*. In his Psalm of repentance following his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, David shockingly claims, “against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4) David is not suggesting he was innocent against either Uriah or Bathsheba, but that sin, at its core, is theological. Sin is cosmic rebellion whereby the sinner seeks to dethrone God. All sin stems from idolatry.

Secondly, *Sin is Personal*. The best evidence of the personal nature of sin is how often we try to justify our actions, mistakes, and sins by blame shifting, gaslighting, or by deluding our behavior and its effects. When Adam and Eve sinned, they began to blame one another. This pattern continues today.

Personal sin fits two categories. The first are Sins of Commission. This is usually what we think of sin – doing what we shouldn’t. Much of the law addresses the temptation toward commission sins – don’t speed, don’t steal, pay your taxes, etc. The other category are Sins of Omission. While sins of commission are often blatant and deliberate, sins of omission are often subtle and sneaky. Sins of Omission are when we fail to do things we ought to do. This is where indifference, cowardice, and apathy come into play. Sure, maybe I’m not guilty of adultery (commission), but failure to love my spouse in a God-honoring way (omission) is still wrong.

Thirdly, *Sin is Relational*. Following their rebellion, Adam and Eve are separated from each other and begin to blame one another. Likewise, the jealousy of Saul led him to seek the death of David. Rachel and Leah competed for Jacob’s affection. Judas betrayed Jesus leading to his arrest and execution. We cannot privatize our sin. Bitterness doesn’t stay in the heart. Unforgiveness fails to love. Hate doesn’t heal.

Fourthly, *Sin is Social*. Because sin violates peace both inwardly and outwardly, it will inevitably manifest itself in society. History is replete with countless examples of broken, idolatrous societies violating justice, truth, and goodness. This explains the justification of racism, discrimination, unjust courts, corrupt policies, social violence, victimizing the poor, etc. A “bent” society is a corrupt one and the innocent are always its victims.

Finally, *Sin is Lethal*. Adultery kills marriages, unforgiveness ruins relationships, greed destroys businesses, and covetousness and pride hardens the heart. Sin is more than a small mistake that can

easily be swept under the proverbial rug with no damage, it is a cancer that, left unaddressed, will metastasize and kill.

We must now explore **The Redeemer**. The Bible does not shy away from diagnosing humanity as cursed under the power and effects of sin. Sin cultivates guilts in the heart of the sinner. Guilt is the legal condemnation of sin. Maybe you think you can escape this guilt because you're a good person. Yet such "faith" doesn't work in human court. Judges care only about our guilt. The guilty must be punished no matter how good they may actually be. It is scary to stand before a judge knowing he has the power to punish as he seems fit and as justice and the law requires. How much more so does guilt before God? Our good works, religious upbringing, etc. aren't enough. You may even try to blame shift, gaslight, or ignore your sin.

This is why we need a redeemer – one who takes our sin and shame upon himself and sets us free. Being the case, an honest look in the mirror wherein we face our own depravity draws us to great appreciation of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished. He saved us! Yes, us! Despite our filthiness and rebellion, Christ redeems sinners.