

ARTICLE 4

We believe that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.

Based on 1 John 3:4, we know that sin misses the mark by breaking the laws of God. In Scripture, we are taught that God's divine laws are in harmony with God's character. In a similar manner, Scripture teaches us about the nature of sin, demonstrating how sins are actions that are directly opposed to the nature of God. God says, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Sin is, therefore, contrary to God's character as well as His law, which is an expression of God's will and character. The sinner lives contrary to God's standards of human conduct and to God's holy character.

1. Definition of Sin

a. Sin entered the world with the decisions and actions of Adam and Eve.

According to the Bible, Adam and Eve were created with the freedom of choosing between right and wrong, between obedience to God or disobedience. They made the wrong decisions in response to Satan's instigation under the guise of a serpent, and sin with all of its dreadful consequences entered the world.

Scripture references: Genesis 3; Romans 5:12-21; 2 Corinthians 11:3

b. At the center of sin are human wrongdoing, imperfections, wicked actions, and selfish desires.

(1) In relation to God, sin is rebellion against Him.

Instead of loving and worshiping God, sin prompts people to disobey God's will and His commandments, which are to be the standards for human conduct (Deuteronomy 17:2; Isaiah 1:2; 63:10; Luke 15:18, 21; Romans 3:23).

(2) In relation to other people, sin expresses itself in immoral conduct, lack of love, discrimination, and injustice.

These actions involve a person's refusal to live by standards for moral purity and to show respect for the rights of others (Romans 1:18-32; 13:9-10; James 2:1-13; 1 John 3:15).

(3) In relation to oneself, sin expresses itself in pride, self-centeredness, exaggerated self-sufficiency, greed, and self-destruction.

Certain self-focused attitudes can lead a person to believe that his or her life and affairs can be managed without God. When this happens, individuals begin idolizing themselves, making themselves their own God, which often leads to greed, indulgence, self-destructive behaviors, and mistreatment of others (Malachi 4:1; Luke 1:51; Romans 1:18-32; 1 John 2:16; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:10).

Scripture references:

Sin as rebellion—Deuteronomy 17:2; Isaiah 1:2; 63:10; Luke 15:18, 21; Romans 3:23

Sin as it relates others—Romans 1:18-32; 13:9-10; James 2:1-13; 1 John 3:15

Sin as it relates to oneself—Malachi 4:1; Luke 1:51; Romans 1:18-32; 1 John 2:16; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:10

c. There is no area of human life that is untouched by sin.

From birth there is a tendency toward evil (Psalm 51:5), and we live in a society that tempts us to sinful action. Sin violates the divine pattern for life and shatters our relationship with God and with one another. Sin is by nature self-destructive and, even in this life, sinners are in a state of death (Ephesians 2:1-5). The only rescue from this sinful condition, which eventually leads to unhappiness and despair, is through repentance and faith in Christ.

Scripture references: Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-5; Romans 3:9-18; 5:12.

2. Universal Reality of Sin

a. The Bible states that all people have sinned.

According to Romans 3:12, "They have all gone out of the way; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one" (see also Psalm 14:3). The same point is made in Psalm 143:2: "For in Your sight no one living is righteous." In a similar vein of thought, the apostle Paul emphasizes that both Jews and Greeks (the whole human race) are under the power of sin (Romans 3:9). Men and women need more than forgiveness; they need deliverance from the dominion of sin. The apostle Paul summed up our condition by saying, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). The glory that all people fall short of is a right relationship with God, which Adam and Eve enjoyed before they sinned.

Scripture references: Romans 3:12; Psalm 14:3; 143:2; Romans 3:9, 23

b. All have done wrong, and apart from Christ the most moral person is still an unsaved sinner.

The bondage of sin is not something limited to a portion of the human race like cancer is. The whole human race is sinful by condition and act. Jesus addressed all people as sinners and called them to repentance. He told His disciples that they were to preach to all nations about everyone's need to repent for their wrongdoings and about God's remission (forgiveness and pardon) of sins.

Even so, our Lord realized that there are degrees of sin. He recognized that Nathanael was an Israelite "in whom is not guile" (John 1:47). Even though some people are not as bad as others, apart from Jesus Christ, people at their moral best still are sinners and need to be saved. Salvation is available to them only through the death of Christ.

No one has any means to receive salvation except through faith in Christ and His Cross.

Scripture references: John 1:47; Acts 20:21; Romans 10:1-15

3. Repentance

In order to receive salvation, that is, a new spiritual life of eternal joy, we must each respond individually to God's offer of salvation. Since we cannot save ourselves, in order to receive salvation we must repent (Acts 2:38) and have faith in Christ as our Savior. The necessary response in order to be saved from sin and its consequences is "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

a. The New Testament word for "repentance" (*metanoia*) means simply "to change one's mind."

This change of mind produces a change of attitude toward God and sin. It is a state of mind that leads to salvation and results in a change in the direction of one's life and the way one lives. "Godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10), but there is a distinction between sorrow (remorse) and repentance. A person may have remorse for sinning, but such remorse may not lead to walking away from wrongdoing and to being spiritually changed. Judas was an example of this type of remorse. He "repented" (or regretted his sin) only in the sense of having sorrow for what he did (Matthew 27:3). Unfortunately, there is no indication that his sorrow led him to abandon his sin. He experienced real grief over what he had done, but it was not followed by a change in his life, the evidence of true repentance.

Scripture references: 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Matthew 27:3

b. The Holy Spirit has an active role in our repentance.

Acts 5:31 and 2 Timothy 2:25 speak of God's giving repentance. The apostle Paul said, "God ... commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). God does not repent for us, but He does command and gives us repentance. He is the author of repentance, for God in His goodness tries to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, He gives us the power to repent. The Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to our hearts and enables us to see our need to repent. Therefore, repentance is a work of the Holy Spirit, yet it is also a human response to the Spirit.

Scripture references: Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4

c. Repentance toward God and faith in Christ go hand in hand.

Repentance and faith occur at the same time. Repentance is joined to saving faith and saving faith is joined to repentance. Faith resulting in salvation is permeated with repentance, and repentance is a believing and trusting experience. Faith and repentance precede forgiveness (Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:24), and so in experience, faith and repentance are bound together (11:21). The Holy Spirit is active in faith and repentance. He convicts us of sin and leads us to believe in Christ, but we ourselves must believe, submit, and receive. God does not believe for us. To receive forgiveness for our sins demands an authentic response on our part.

Scripture references: Acts 5:31; 10:43; 11:21; 13:24

Discussion

Definition of Sin

- 1) If God created the world and God is good, then how did evil come into this world?
(Read Genesis 3)
- 2) Discuss sin as it relates to God, to other people, and to oneself.

Universal Reality of Sin

- 3) Is there anyone who has never sinned? Explain your answer.
- 4) How is one delivered from the bondage of sin?

Repentance

- 5) Explain the difference between sorrow (or remorse) and repentance.
- 6) In repentance, what are the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Prayer

Father, Your Son came among us as the Friend of sinners to find those who are lost and to give them new life.

You proved Your love for all of us—in that even when we were sinful people who did not love You, You sent Your Son Jesus Christ to die for us. The Cross of Your Son is a constant reminder of Your unfailing love toward each of us.

We pray that You will help us to hold on to the Cross through all of the difficulties and temptations of life; and that You will help us to repent from our wrongdoings and failures.

Have mercy on us and pardon us from all of our sins. Confirm and strengthen us in all goodness. We want to live holy and blameless lives and finally enter into the life of heaven one day.

Amen.

Resources for Additional Study

Arrington, French L. *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective*, Vol. 2. Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway, 1992; pp. 117-155.

Berkouwer, G. C. *Sin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

Harvey, Edwin F., L. Harvey, and N. Woodhouse. *The New Creation: The New Birth*. Greencastle, Ind.: Harvey-Tait and Clowes, 1981.

Hoyt, Herman Arthur. *The New Birth*. Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Pub. Co., 1961.

Ironside, H. A. *Except Ye Repent*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1963.

Packer, J. I. *The New Man*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

Arrington, French L. *Understanding the "Declaration of Faith": Discussion of the Official Faith Statement of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)*. 2003.

Pieper, Josef. *Concept of Sin*. South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2001.

Ramm, Bernard. *Offense to Reason: The Theology of Sin*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.