



## Part 3

### What is sin?

What *is* sin? A Noun? A Verb? Singular? Plural?

Is sin a state in which we live or just a series of 'wrong' actions?

Can our *thoughts* be sinful?

Read through the document 'Part 3: Theologians and Thinkers on Good and Evil'

These academic discussions can affect us in different ways. How do you *feel* after reading these arguments and ideas?

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Is it better to try and find constructive approach to counteracting evil than to spend time building theories that, in the end, give us little help in dealing with evil in the world?

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Read this extract from Isaiah 5

Ah, you who join house to house,  
who add field to field,  
until there is room for no one but you,  
and you are left to live alone  
in the midst of the land!

The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing:  
Surely many houses shall be desolate,  
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.  
For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath,  
and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.<sup>[a]</sup>

Ah, you who rise early in the morning  
in pursuit of strong drink,  
who linger in the evening



to be inflamed by wine,  
whose feasts consist of lyre and harp,  
tambourine and flute and wine,  
but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord,  
or see the work of his hands!

Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge;  
their nobles are dying of hunger,  
and their multitude is parched with thirst.

Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite  
and opened its mouth beyond measure;  
the nobility of Jerusalem<sup>[b]</sup> and her multitude go down,  
her throng and all who exult in her.

People are bowed down, everyone is brought low,  
and the eyes of the haughty are humbled.  
But the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice,  
and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.

Then the lambs shall graze as in their pasture,  
fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.

Ah, you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood,  
who drag sin along as with cart-ropes,  
who say, 'Let him make haste,  
let him speed his work  
that we may see it;

let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfilment,  
that we may know it!'

Ah, you who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter!

Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes,  
and shrewd in your own sight!

Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine  
and valiant at mixing drink,  
who acquit the guilty for a bribe,  
and deprive the innocent of their rights!

What are we being called to do through these words of Isaiah?

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Reflect on this extract from Mark, Chapter 7.21-23

[Jesus said] For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

Does this demonstrate an Augustinian, Pelagian or Irenaeus theodicy? (Or none of them?)

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This passage is to think about after session 3. Paul writes an extensive passage in which sin plays a strong part. What are your thoughts after reading it?

Romans 3

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,

‘So that you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail in your judging.’

But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), ‘Let us do evil so that good may come’? Their condemnation is deserved!

What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who has understanding,  
there is no one who seeks God.  
All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;  
there is no one who shows kindness,  
there is not even one.’  
‘Their throats are opened graves;  
they use their tongues to deceive.’  
‘The venom of vipers is under their lips.’  
‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’  
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
ruin and misery are in their paths,  
and the way of peace they have not known.’  
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ[d] for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously



committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.