

What The Bible Says About

Degrees of Sin & Hell



Good Hope
Baptist Church

Living Together In The Love Of God

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Are There Degrees Of Sin?

What you think about "sin" can be defined by how you answer these questions. First question:

Has it always been wrong to marry your sister?

Most of you will probably answer "yes" without thinking because we all know that a marital relationship with an immediate family member is wrong. This is why many people are puzzled when they read in the Scripture that **Cain the son of Adam and Eve:**

Genesis 4:16-17 (HCSB) Then Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. 17 Cain was intimate with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain became the builder of a city, and he named the city

Enoch after his son.



and ask the question, "**Who did Cain marry?**" The obvious answer is "**Cain had to marry a sister**". The Bible tells us that God

created ONE MAN and ONE WOMAN and told them "be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The Bible tells us that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Romans 5:12). Because of Adam's transgression Jesus Christ had to come and die on the Cross for your sins and for mine. If there was only one Adam and one Eve multiplying and filling the earth then Cain *had to marry one of his sisters*. THEN it was not wrong. But later in

Leviticus 20:17 ^(HCSB) **If a man marries his sister, whether his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be cut off publicly from their people. He has had sexual intercourse with his sister; he will bear his punishment.**

we see that such actions are sinful. NOW it is wrong.

Why was it *not* a sin for Cain to marry his sister, but *now* a sin to do so?

Second question:

Why did God commend Rahab the harlot for telling a lie?

The Bible tells us that Heaven will be a beautiful place, and that

Revelation 21:27 ^(KJV) **And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither [whatsoever] worketh abomination, or [maketh] a lie: but they**

which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Our Lord Jesus said that **the devil is the father of lies** (John 8:44) and that as Christians "we are to speak the **truth in love**" (Ephesians 4:15). Yet in **Joshua 2:4-6** we read how that Rahab the prostitute hid the spies of Israel from the King of Jericho, telling his guards:



Joshua 2:4-5 ^(HCSB) **... Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn't know where they were from. 5 At nightfall, when the**

gate was about to close, the men went out, and I don't know where they were going. Chase after them quickly, and you can catch up with them!

All along these men were hidden on the rooftop of her house. God commends Rahab by saying:

Hebrews 11:31 ^(HCSB) **By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.**

So is lying wrong?

Third question:

Is it wrong to kill a child who has done no wrong to you?

Most of us would automatically answer "**absolutely**". Yet when Israel went into the Promised Land they were ordered by Moses to:

Numbers 31:17-18 (HCSB) So now, **kill all the male children and kill every woman who has had sexual relations with a man, 18 but keep alive for yourselves all the young females who have not had sexual relations.**

and later we read that Moses' General Joshua:

Joshua 10:40 (HCSB) So **Joshua** conquered the whole region — the hill country, the Negev, the Judean foothills, and the slopes — with all their kings, leaving no survivors. He **completely destroyed every living being, as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded.**

and the Prophet Samuel tells the first King of Israel Saul:

1 Samuel 15:1-3 (HCSB) Samuel told Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people Israel. Now, listen to the words of the LORD. 2 This is what the LORD of Hosts says: 'I witnessed what the Amalekites did to the Israelites when they opposed them along the way as they were coming out of Egypt. 3 Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill

men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.' "

Joshua, Moses, Samuel, and Israel killing men, women, children, infants, oxen, sheep, camels and donkeys. How does that fit in with Jesus' teaching:

Matthew 5:43-45 (KJV) Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

1 First of all, let's define "Sin". What is "Sin" according to the Scripture? When people think about sin they think of it as an action, such as **lying, murder, stealing**, and so on. When people think about "sin" they think about the Ten Commandments. Violating the Ten Commandments is indeed sinful, but sin is not that narrowly defined in the Scripture. The Bible makes three direct statements about sin:



a Whatever does not have its root in *Biblical faith* is

sin. The Bible says:

Romans 14:23 ^(KJV) ... for whatsoever [is] not of faith is sin.

“Faith” doesn't just mean to believe in anything. Biblical faith is *believing in the Word of God*.



For instance, God has told us to

John 13:34 ^(KJV) ... love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

In Romans Chapter 14 the Apostle Paul was chastising the Church at Rome. Rome itself had a number of pagan temples that offered animal sacrifices to gods and goddesses like Zeus and Venus. Once the animal was sacrificed many of the temples sold the meat – perfectly good meat – on the open market at a very good price. Some of the Christians were purchasing this meat and eating it, though they knew that to do so was offending their other brothers and sisters in the Church. The Apostle said “**whatever is not of faith is sin**”.

Translation: “**What you are doing is hurting your brethren, and does not serve the Law of Love. Stop it!**” Paul went on to say:

Romans 14:15 ^(KJV) But if thy brother be grieved with [thy] meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

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MARKET RESEARCH CLEARLY SHOWS THAT OUR CORE AUDIENCE IS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SERMONS THAT HAVE TO DO WITH SIN, JUDGEMENT, AND THAT WHOLE HELL THING

It is sinful to purposely do something you know is offensive to your brother in Christ – especially if it will lead him away from a productive walk as a Christian. **Sin is a loveless action that violates the Law of love that the Lord has placed us under at this time.**

b The Bible also says that “all unrighteousness is sin”. We read:

1 John 5:17 ^(KJV) All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

To be “right” or “righteous” according to the Scripture is to be in *agreement with God*. God establishes what is right and what is wrong. My feelings do not dictate God's will.

Right and wrong is not based on what I think nor on what I feel, but on what God says is right. A good example is found in the life of **Cain**. If you remember, **Cain** was a farmer, and the brother of **Abel** the shepherd. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden the Lord showed them that the only way to cover the sin was to *shed the blood of an innocent*. This is why God killed animals and made **clothes of skins (Genesis 3:21)**. In **Genesis 4:4-5** we see that both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. God received Abel's offering – a slaughtered animal – but rejected Cain's offering which was crops from the field. God told Cain:



Genesis 4:6-7 (HCSB) ... Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? 7 If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Cain refused to **"do what is right"**, to do what *God said*. So many people do this today, and act like Cain. They say **"Well it's not fair! My offering is the best I have"**. Some even accuse God of being unfair. But what God says is right *is right*, regardless as to what we think. Rather than correct his offering Cain took his anger out on his brother and committed the first murder. **"All unrighteousness – not doing what God says is right –**

is sin".

C The Bible also says that sin can be an omitted act. We read:

James 4:17 (KJV) Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth [it] not, to him it is sin.

To know to do the right thing and to fail to do it is sinful in God's eyes. To withhold forgiveness from someone who wronged you is sinful, for God commands that we forgive. To fail to give to aid the suffering is sinful, for Jesus taught us that:



Acts 20:35 (KJV) ... labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Sin is lovelessness, refusing to do what God tells us to do when He tells us to do it. The people who ran the concentration camps in Germany in World War 2 were sinners, as were those who stood silently by and watched it happen. Sin ignores God and does what I want to do, regardless as to the consequences.

2 Though the Bible doesn't specifically talk about "levels" of hell, it does seem to teach that there are **varying degrees of punishment.**

a Some sins are "more tolerable" than others. Just

before the Lord Jesus sent His disciples out with the Gospel He told them:

Matthew 10:14-15 ^(HCSB) **If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.**

The Lord said that the town that rejects the Gospel of Salvation will find themselves in a worst place on the judgment day than Sodom and Gomorrah. To put that in perspective,



God considers homosexuality an **abomination** – literally **an idolatrous act, something disgusting (תועבה)**:

Leviticus 18:22 ^(KJV) **Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it [is] abomination.**

This was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah – widespread homosexual and heterosexual sin. God said that Sodom and Gomorrah would not be judged as harshly as the city that had the Gospel presented but who rejected it. The Lord also said:

Matthew 11:21-24 ^(HCSB) **Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe**

to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago! 22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. 24 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

The cities of **Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum** all saw the wonderful miracles that Christ performed while He walked this earth. The Lord said **"if this had been done in Tyre and Sidon as well as Sodom, they would have repented"**. Jesus walked and talked and taught and healed in their very midst – and yet they were so hard hearted these cities still rejected the Savior.

The phrase **"it will be more tolerable for them than for you"** seems to tell us that there are degrees of judgment.

b The Lord Jesus spoke of **"greater punishment"**, a **statement that makes me believe that there are degrees in hell**. Our Savior told the hard hearted Pharisees:

Matthew 23:14 ^(HCSB) **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and make long prayers just for show. This is why you**

will receive a harsher punishment.

and also told the self righteous Scribes:

Mark 12:38-40 ^(HCSB) ... **Beware of the scribes, who want to go around in long robes, and who want greetings in the marketplaces, 39 the front seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows' houses and say long prayers just for show. These will receive harsher punishment."**



Both the Pharisees as well as the Scribes were people who had memorized large portions of Scripture. As a result they couldn't plead ignorance when it came to doing what was right.

These Scribes and Pharisees lived their righteousness not to lead others to the Lord, but to show *how good they thought they were*.

The Lord made a very clear point when He said:

Luke 12:43-48 ^(HCSB) **That slave whose master finds him working when he comes will be rewarded. 44 I tell you the truth: He will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and starts to beat the male and female slaves, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 that slave's master will come on a day he**

does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 And that slave who knew his master's will and didn't prepare himself or do it will be severely beaten. 48 But the one who did not know and did things deserving of blows will be beaten lightly. Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more.

Our God is a just God, and He judges each person based on knowledge. If you **know to do well but do not** then you are judged harsher than **the one who did not know at all**. Jesus taught that the unknowing servant received fewer lashes – and therefore the lighter punishment.

Are There Degrees of Hell

The website *gotquestions.org* writes:

"The idea that there are different levels of punishment in hell derives primarily from the *Divine Comedy* written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and 1321. In it, the Roman poet Virgil guides Dante through the nine circles of hell. The circles are concentric, representing a gradual increase in wickedness, and culminating at the center of the earth, where Satan is held in bondage. Each circle's sinners are punished in a fashion befitting their crimes. Each sinner is afflicted for all of eternity by the chief sin he committed. According to Dante, the circles range from the first circle, where dwell the unbaptized and virtuous pagans, to the very center of

hell reserved for those who have committed the ultimate sin—treachery against God. “

Though the Bible doesn't state that there are *levels in hell*, it does tell us that there are degrees of sin.

If there are degrees of sin then it stands to reason that there are degrees of hell.

There are a few Scriptures that allude to this. For instance, the Scripture says:

Psalms 62:12 ^(HCSB) ... faithful love belongs to You, LORD. For You repay each according to his works.

Proverbs 24:12 ^(HCSB) If you say, “But we didn’t know about this,” won’t He who weighs hearts consider it? Won’t He who protects your life know? Won’t He repay a person according to his work?

God is just, holy, and righteous. He repays a person according to his works. The Bible says:

Colossians 3:25 ^(HCSB) For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.

Our God does not show favoritism, but gives to every person what they deserve. Does this mean that some will not suffer in the Lake of Fire? No, not at all. The most definitive Scripture in the Bible dealing with eternal punishment is found in **Revelation 20**. This is what is known as *the Great White Throne Judgment of God*.

1 The Great White Throne is frightening but inescapable. The Bible says:

Revelation 20:11 ^(HCSB) Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them.

The people who show up at the Great White Throne try to avoid it and try to run away, but they can find no where to hide. You cannot hide from God.

2 The Great White Throne is a place where spiritually dead unsaved people come to be judged. Neither the rich nor the poor, healthy nor unhealthy are exempted from this judgment.

Revelation 20:12 ^(HCSB) I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books.

A careful reading of this passage tells us that there are two types of books here. There is the **Book of Life** and the **Books of Works**. God looks into the **Books of Works** (note that this is plural) to show that every work that these dead people did was insufficient to give them entrance into Heaven.

Everyone standing before God at the Great White Throne goes into the Lake of Fire. Perhaps the purpose for standing before God and having their works evaluated is

to determine *where each person will be placed in the Lake of Fire.*

3 There is no possibility of parole at the Great White Throne Judgment. It is not the “works” that causes a person to be thrown into the Lake of Fire, but the fact that their names are *not written in the Book of Life.* We read:

Revelation 20:15 ^(HCSB) **And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.**

The **works** may have something to do with someone's placement in the lake of fire, but the **name missing from the Book of Life** is what actually sends someone to hell.

Who's names are *blotted out* from the Book of Life? Those who have rejected Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Apostle Paul said of those fellow Christians who worked with him:

Philippians 4:3 ^(KJV) **And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and [with] other my fellowlabourers, whose names [are] in the book of life.**

These fellow laborers are “**in the Book of Life**” because they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved. Their salvation was evidenced by their works (**you shall know the tree by the fruit it bears – Matthew 7:16-**

18). These are people saved from the inside out, and they walk the talk! Genuine believers are saved by faith – and their faith shows. Jesus said:

Revelation 3:5 ^(KJV) **He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**

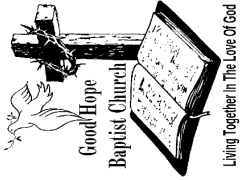


Those who enter Heaven have their names registered in God's Book of life (**Revelation 21:27; 22:19**). These are people who cherish the Word of God and hold it in high

esteem. The unbeliever and the pretend believer pay lip service to God's Word. They are blotted out of the Book of Life. Their works are judged and, based upon what we've seen in the Scripture, are punished accordingly. All are bound in flames of fire forever, but some are punished with greater punishment than others. I'll quote this in closing from *gotanswers.org*:

“The question one must ask is “which road am I on?” The “many” on the broad road have one thing in common—they have all rejected Christ as the one and only way to heaven. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). When He said He is the only way, that is precisely what He meant. Everyone

following another “way” beside Jesus Christ is on the broad road to destruction, and whether or not there are different levels of punishment in hell, the suffering is hideous, dreadful, eternal, and avoidable.“



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