

# Are All Sins Equal?

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Before Angela and I leave for a brief vacay celebrating our 30th anniversary, what a delight it is to be married for 30 years.

I'll tell you, it's only gotten better over the years. And it's just, yeah, it's just wonderful.

I'm so grateful. So grateful to God for my wife and for the years that we have had. It's a huge blessing. Well, I'm doing this podcast because someone messaged me probably two weeks ago asking simply, are all sins equal?

[1:41] And I said, that's a great question. That's a question I get a lot. I should do a podcast on that. And so I wanted to get this off of my to-do list before I left town. So the short answer is that no, all sins are not equal.

But let me go ahead and take a more careful and long route around this topic because I think there are several things to point out inherent in this question.

The first one is just that I want to remind you about the nature of sin itself. I was meeting with a group of guys this morning at McDonald's. We're reading through a systematic theology.

And in my opinion, not a particularly good one. It's good because it's got true stuff in it, but not the best one I've read. But anyway, we were laboring through, gosh, I think it was a 70-page chapter and it was on the attributes of God.

And one of the things that came through in that chapter that was a really good reminder was that we have a misconception or a common misconception about the nature of sin that is rooted in, well, really, in some sense, it's rooted in Platonic ideas.

[3:07] Plato had this idea that there were multiple gods, of course, in Plato's understanding and that there were these sort of moral virtues or forms that were sort of separate from everything else.

And these forms, these moral virtues just existed by themselves. So he had these sort of standards that existed. And you could measure the gods and their goodness by these standards.

You could measure human behavior by these standards and so on and so forth. But ultimately, those standards are the thing that everybody's using to compare everything to.

It's Platonic forms. And we, you know, if I spell it out like that, you would say, well, no, I don't think that. But honestly, most of the time when we think about sin, we think about breaking rules.

And that's not what sin is. The rules that God gives us are actually just a reflection of who he is. And so when we sin, we sin against God, not against rules. The rules come from God's nature.

[4:16] God is not announcing that, hey, I saw, I found, I found these Platonic forms floating out in the ether and I've conformed myself to them.

I think that this is actually kind of fundamentally what Mormonism is thinking. Because Mormonism has the God of this world as being a human at one point who conformed himself to these particular, you know, objective standards that just exist.

And as he became more and more conformed to these objective standards, he became more and more worthy of glory. And now, you know, we are all living on a planet of someone who was once a person, but eventually ascended the ladder of being and became a God.

So all that to say, when we talk about sin, one of the fundamental things that I want you to understand is, is that when you sin or when I sin, we are not simply violating a set of rules.

The rules are not the thing we're actually offending. The rules are actually just given to reveal who God is. When we sin, we're actually sinning against a person.

[5:31] So you're not in danger of hell for violating some arbitrary rules. You're not in danger of hell for violating rules at all. You're in danger of hell for violating God.

And when we sin, we don't sin against just these objectives, you know, these rules out there somewhere. We sin against God. All of the rules about righteousness, about goodness, what we're supposed to do, what we're not supposed to do, those are all just reflecting who God is.

And so sin is actually just offending God. And so in that sense, all sins are equal because all sins offend God. And the wages for all sins, Romans 6.23, is the wages of all sin is death.

God is inherently just. And therefore, when we violate him, he must vindicate himself. That's what God's holiness is.

It's God's for himselfness. And so when we violate him, he must vindicate himself in some way or another. That's inherent to his nature because he is just.

[ 6 : 36 ] And so we get the option of either Jesus paying for our sins or us paying for our sins. But so in some sense, all sins are equal. They are all against God.

And the wages of all those sins are death. James 2.10 says, For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. And he's not saying that, suppose theft is the only sin you'd ever committed.

He's not saying that you will be functionally counted as a murderer. But he is saying that this effect is the same. You've violated one commandment. You might as well have in the basic sense in terms of heaven or hell.

Or, you know, you might as well have violated them all. So it's also important to understand that, you know, fundamentally, God's character is so high and esteemed and glorious that even the smallest offense against him is a terrible thing.

He is glorious. And we tend to view sin sometimes as little or big. And that's one of the reasons why sometimes you'll hear people talk about all sins being equal is we're trying to give people who have a bit of a superiority complex the basic news of James 2.10.

[ 7 : 57 ] But in reality, you know, all sins are not equal. There are some that are far worse than others, far worse in a variety of senses. You know, the Old Testament, for instance, lays out different earthly consequences for different offenses.

Some sins warranted death and others involved an eye for an eye. Others required different forms of punishment or repayment. You know, if you were a thief, you could pay restitution.

If you were an occult practitioner, you might be stoned or cut off from Israel in some respect. So in the Old Testament, we even see hints of this, that there are different punishments or different consequences for different sins.

And Jesus really doesn't shy away from this at all. He tells Pilate that the one who was handed him over to Pilate is guilty of a greater sin than Pilate's sin.

Jesus, in one of his parables about heaven and hell, the day of judgment, in Luke 12, 47 through 48, says that some will receive many punches and others will receive a few punches.

[ 9 : 05 ] I think the language is many blows and few blows. It's like everybody's getting beat up, but everybody's getting punished. Cain, that's what, you know, whipped.

Everybody's getting whipped, Cain, punished, but not everybody the same amount. He routinely told the religious leaders that there was a greater judgment coming for them.

He often talks about, you know, their judgment is significantly increased because they knew more. They had the word. That's actually the proper position in terms of understanding, you know, the role of Judaism in the modern world. It's actually a greater tragedy because to them belong the oracles of God.

And every time Moses is read, a veil is placed on their hearts. The God of this world keeps them from seeing what they have unique access to. So the next question becomes, okay, so sins are not the same.

[ 10 : 06 ] Some are going to get punished more than others. What, you know, what decides what sin is bad and what sin is less bad? And, you know, how does the hierarchy work?

Well, one of the things that Matthew 5 does is it reminds us that the hierarchy is not always as we think it is. So you wouldn't want to use too much human reasoning to determine which sins are worse.

Because Jesus says, you know, if you've committed adultery, you know, if you've lusted after a woman, you've committed adultery in your heart. If you've been angry with your brother, you've committed murder in your heart. So he's not saying there that those things are, that a heart sin and an acted upon sin are the same.

But he is indicating that our way of judging degrees of sinfulness is broken. And he sees things quite differently. So generally, I don't think it's a good idea to build a hierarchy of sin.

But if you were, you know, managing a government or, you know, even caring for a local church, you probably have to think about this a little bit because you kind of have to decide, like, what should people do and what should be done to people in response to sin and so forth.

[11:15] Okay, so what makes one sin more serious than another? First is knowledge. The more someone knows about God, his ways, the more responsible they are.

In Luke 12, 47, Jesus says, From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. He tells Tyre and Sidon that they will be better off than Corazon and Bethsaida.

He says to these places, Tyre and Sidon are going to be better off because they're full of Gentiles, Corazon and Bethsaida because they're full of Jews who saw Jesus. He says, it'll be better for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you, these Jewish cities who have seen my work.

So one of the reasons why some sins become or elevated above others in terms of severity or how much worse they are has to do with knowledge.

Someone who is sinning and knowing that it's wrong versus someone who is not. It's a big difference. The second is intention related, but the more deliberate someone is in their sin, the more serious the offense.

[12:30] The Old Testament law had lesser punishments for unintentional sins and greater punishments for people who sin defiantly. And the third is probably the easiest to understand, and that is effect.

The greater the impact or sin, the greater the impact or the effect of the sin, the more serious it is.

That's why preachers will be judged more seriously as they can lead more people astray.

Committing adultery, for example, has far worse consequences than privately fantasizing about it.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians that sexual immorality is a unique sin because it's a sin against the body.

The sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Some sins are described as so serious that they are evidence that a person who claims to be a Christian may not be saved if they practice them thinking that they're acceptable.

And there are all kinds of verses like in Galatians and Ephesians and 1 Corinthians that say like, hey, there are these sins that if someone's practicing these, this is a strong evidence they're not even saved.

[13:37] Not every sin fits on that list, but some do. Allowing the practice of such serious sin in the church compromises, you know, the mission of the church and blurs the distinction between God's people and the world.

And that is why church leaders have to be above reproach, having no serious character flaws, because when they fall into sin, they cause more damage as a consequence of their sin.

So that's the idea. No, not all sins are equal. What makes one worse than another? Well, first of all, knowledge of the sin, intention, and effect. Those are three.

There are other potential, you know, answers to that question. When we look at the Old Testament, we see that God seems to just despise certain things more than others. But anyway, that's a brief answer.

In conclusion, you never want to minimize the offense of sin because it is against God. And all sin makes us guilty and puts us in danger of judgment.

[14:36] However, the Bible does teach that sins differ in their nature, intention, effect, and how heinous, and therefore probably how heinous they are before God. I think another way that I didn't mention is that, to evaluate this, is it like a really obvious sin against nature?

Those tend to be, in the Bible, highlighted as especially evil. Anyway, so to answer the question that I was asked, no, not all sins are equal. And maybe I've provided some evidence for why that is so.

All right, well, be well. May you have a wonderful week. Pray for Angela and I as we try to really pull the plug. Man, we have been running hard and need a break.

So pray that God gives us some good rest. This is mostly the Angela fantasy tour in the sense of she has all these things that she knows she wants to do, which is great because I don't really have any expectations at all on vacation.

So we're going to see the Grand Canyon. We're going to go to a Kenny Chesney concert in the Sphere. We're going to this museum that looks really lame to me that she wants to go to.

[ 15 : 47 ] It's like a pop art. I don't know what it is. It's some weird, you know, weird museum. We're going to do this aquarium where you go under the water and you get to see the sharks swimming above you.

Things like that. So hopefully it'll be a good time. Pray for my nerves as I endure the mindless cattle-like shuffle through the airports.

That's always so annoying. All right. Love y'all. I'm so grateful for each and every one of you. Just feel like I'm sitting on a mountain of riches at this moment in my life, getting the pastor at Providence, being married for 30 years, wonderful kids.

God has been very, very unfairly good to me. And I'm so grateful. All right. Have a good week. Bye-bye. . Thank you.