

DISCOVERY

BIBLE STUDY COURSE

Lesson Seven: God's Remedy for Sin

In our last study, in which we surveyed the life and mission of

Jesus, we noted that Jesus died as part of the divine plan to

provide a remedy for sin. In this study, we will focus on the

concept of sin in an effort to better understand Jesus' sacrifice.

The concept of sin is often misunderstood. Both the Hebrew word (in the Old Testament) and the Greek word (in the New Testament) translated "sin" in our Bibles were used in secular society long before the Bible was put into book form. The root meaning of each word is "to miss the proper mark." The words were used in archery to describe misfired arrows, in society to describe one who had lost his way to a desired destination, and in intellectual circles to describe one who had reached an incorrect conclusion. The words were also used metaphorically to describe those who engaged in unacceptable behavior.

The Holy Spirit chose to use these words in Scripture to describe the behavior of those who fail to meet the behavioral standards prescribed by God. The idea is that God has set up a target—a standard of acceptable behavior—and we try to hit



LOOKING BACK...

The Bible tells the story of God's love for us and His desire to save us from our sin...

Objective evidence proves that the Bible is the Word of God...

God's Word is authoritative, providing needed direction for those who serve God...

The Old Covenant prepared a people for the Messiah...

The New Covenant teaches Christians what to believe and how to live...

Jesus, God's Son, came to earth to provide salvation for us...

the bull's eye. When we miss (and we all have), we sin. The target God has set up is comprised of various biblical instructions that define proper social and religious behavior. The Scriptures give a picture of what we ought to be, and our goal is to mold our lives to fit that picture. Sin occurs when we fail to accomplish this goal. John wrote, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), and "All wrongdoing is sin" (1 John 5:17).

➤ **The Origin and Effects of Sin**

Sin had its origin with Satan, the great power that is opposed to God and everything right. John wrote, "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). Satan introduced humanity to sin in the Garden of Eden when he convinced Eve to eat the fruit of a tree God had commanded to avoid. God had warned Adam, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Through lie and deceit, Satan convinced Eve to eat from the forbidden tree, and Adam followed her in the transgression. Thus, sin entered the world.

God had warned Adam that the penalty for disobedience would be death. At this point, we may wonder how much Adam understood about the concept of death. The day Adam and Eve sinned, they began to die physically. While in the garden, the tree of life sustained them; but after their disobedience, they were forced from the garden and thus were cut off from the tree of life (Genesis 3:23-24). Since that time, death has plagued our existence.

More significantly, when Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually. God is without sin, perfectly righteous. The relationship Adam and Eve shared with God was based on a shared nature of sinlessness. When Adam and Eve sinned, that relationship was severed. Consequently, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and from God's presence. Concerning the consequences of sin, Isaiah writes, "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will

not hear” (Isaiah 59:1–2). Sin brings about spiritual death because it separates us from God and His standard of righteousness. In the New Testament Paul writes, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a).

There were other consequences that followed the garden sin: pain in childbirth, tension between men and women over control of the home, hard work, and infertile land (Genesis 3:16–19). Indeed, all the pain, sorrow, and hardship that plague our existence can be traced to sin and its consequences. Therefore, sin not only affected our relationship with God, but also our relationships with people and the environment.

Ever since Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden, every individual has failed, in some way, to meet God’s standard of righteousness (except for Jesus—Romans 3:23; Hebrews 4:15). Summarizing the universal nature of sin, Paul writes:

There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no not one (Romans 3:10b–12).

Paul’s summation to this passage is found in verse 23: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Therefore, the issue is not whether we have sinned, but what we can do to avoid the consequences of our sin by mending our relationship with God. We will begin by noting God’s instructions to the Israelites under the Old Covenant relative to sin.

➤ Sin and the Old Covenant

The Old Covenant specified various kinds of sacrifices to be made to the Lord (see chart). When sin was involved, the Lord required an animal sacrifice (shedding of blood) to accompany the confession of the sin committed. If the sin was such that restitution was owed to another, the Lord required an animal sacrifice in addition to full restitution plus twenty percent. Of special interest to us are the sacrifices made on the Day of Atonement.

SACRIFICE	REFERENCE	ELEMENTS INVOLVED	PURPOSE
Burnt Offering	Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:8-13 8:18-21; 16:24	Bull, ram or male bird without defect; poor could use dove or pigeon as substitute	Act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin
Grain Offering	Leviticus 2; 6:14-23	Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, unleavened breads, salt (accompanied burnt offering or fellowship offering)	Act of worship; thanks offering in recognition of the Lord's provision
Fellowship Offering	Leviticus 3; 7:11-34	Any animal from flocks or herds without defect; baked breads	Act of worship; thanksgiving and fellowship
Sin Offering	Leviticus 4:1-5:13 6:24-30 8:14-17 16:3-22	Young bull: for high priest and congregation Male goat: for leader Female goat or lamb: for common person Dove or pigeon: for poor Fine flour: for very poor (burnt atop an animal sacrifice)	Atonement for certain unintentional sins; accompanying confession of sin; cleansing from defilement
Guilt Offering	Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6	Ram or lamb	Atonement for sin against a fellow, also requiring restitution; cleansing from defilement

The chart above, adapted from the NIV Study Bible, illustrates the various sacrifices God required of the Israelites. These sacrifices can be organized into three categories according to purpose: (1) sacrifices of atonement (sin offerings, guilt offerings), (2) sacrifices of worship (burnt offerings, grain offerings), and (3) sacrifices of communion (fellowship offerings). Some sacrifices were to be made regularly, some as the need arose, and others on special religious holidays. The student is encouraged to read Leviticus 1-16 to get a better picture of the many sacrifices that were to be made, most of which were in response to sins committed.

The Day of Atonement was the single most important day in the Hebrew calendar. On this day, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies (the holiest sanctuary of the tabernacle) to make an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the entire nation (Leviticus 16:29–34). Leviticus 16 explains the procedure. On this special day, the high priest took a young bull, a ram, and two goats. He first sacrificed the bull as an offering to atone for his own sins. Next, he selected one of the goats as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This goat was sacrificed in the Holy of Holies on the Ark of the Covenant (a golden box, the top of which was called the Mercy Seat). He confessed the sins of the people over the head of the second goat and drove it into the desert, thus symbolically separating the people’s sins from the community. This goat was called the “Azazel” (NIV) or “scapegoat” (NKJV). The ram was then sacrificed as a burnt offering in worship of the Lord.

In light of the daily sacrifices and the special offerings (such as on the Day of Atonement), one can readily see that many animals were sacrificed during the Old Testament period. Each time a person became aware of a sin he had committed, he was required to take an animal to the priest as a sin offering. Yet, such sacrifices had only limited effect. The Hebrew writer notes:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:1–4).

The sacrifices made under the Old Covenant did provide atonement for sin; but in reality, they looked forward to the sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross. Those who are guilty of sin deserve death (Romans 6:23). Atonement (payment) for sin can only

take place one of two ways: (1) the guilty person can pay the price for sin himself (resulting in eternal separation from God and suffering), or (2) an innocent person can pay the price of sin in his place. Under the Old Covenant, animals played the role of the innocent party, dying in place of those guilty of sin. Such sacrifices were imperfect because the animal, while able to die physically, could not pay the true penalty for sin—spiritual death, separation from God. While the animal was innocent of sin, it was innocent because it was incapable of sin. Only a man, who has an eternal soul and free will, can suffer the eternal consequences of sin. Thus, the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant were symbolic and looked forward to the true sacrifice Jesus.

➤ **Sin and the New Covenant**

When God created Adam and Eve, His goal was to create beings who, while having free will, would choose to do what was right. In this way, God is honored and glorified. We were created to bring glory to Him (Isaiah 43:7). When Adam and Eve sinned, the good relationship they (and humanity in general) shared with God was severed—sin separated them from their sinless God. From that moment, God began unveiling a redemptive plan He had conceived before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8). This plan was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross and thus provided the opportunity for mankind to receive the forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God.

When Jesus came to the earth, He became one of us—a human being, subject to pain, sorrow, and temptation (John 1:14; Hebrews 2:17–18; 4:14–16). This was important, for His goal was to pay the penalty for our sins—not just die physically, but to take upon Himself the sins of the world and suffer separation from His Father. This could only be possible if He were truly human. The sacrificed animals of the Old Covenant could not pay the penalty for sin (Hebrews 10:1–4); but as a human, Jesus could. Further, in order for His sacrifice to be effective in atoning for our sins, Jesus had to be perfectly righteous, without sin. During His time on the earth, though capable of sin and tempted to sin (Matthew 4:1–11; Hebrews 4:15), Jesus lived a righteous life. Peter wrote, “For Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Keeping the same thought, Paul wrote:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:8-10).

Therefore, Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice; in other words, He died in order to pay the penalty for our sins. Speaking of Jesus, John wrote, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Descriptive terms in Scripture are designed to help us understand the purpose and impact of Jesus' sacrifice. Consider the following as examples:

Redemption means "to pay a ransom in order to obtain one's freedom." Sin makes us slaves to Satan and subject to sin's penalty, spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Rather than requiring our death, God allowed a ransom to be paid for our freedom. Jesus paid this ransom by living a life of righteous perfection and shedding His blood on our behalf. We have been redeemed (purchased) from Satan's hold and death's door at the price of the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). In this redemptive process, we also become the servants of Christ (Romans 6:16-18; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Justification means "to be found 'not guilty' by a judge." The penalty for sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23), and we have all sinned (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10). Therefore, the only way we can be declared innocent (justified) is for an innocent person to pay the penalty of sin for us. Jesus did this (1 John 2:2). Through His sacrifice, we can have the forgiveness of our sins and thus be found justified in God's sight.

Reconciliation means "to make friends again." Sin severs the friendship and fellowship only the sinless can share with God. The only way this friendship can be mended is for the cause of the separation (sin) to be taken away. Through Jesus' sacrifice, we can receive forgiveness of our sins and be reconciled to God (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

AN ETERNAL HELL

Jesus' sacrifice was a priceless gift from heaven. We did not deserve God's favor, yet He provided for our salvation through the sacrifice of His own Son. Perhaps the most well-known passage in all of Scripture reads, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4–5, NIV).

But how do we take advantage of Jesus' sacrifice? Do we have any responsibility to God in order to receive the salvation He offers? The remainder of this lesson and the entire next lesson are designed to present what the Scriptures teach in response to these questions.

The New Testament introduces an eternal reward for those who serve God under the new covenant and an eternal punishment for those who reject Him. The place of eternal reward is called "heaven," and the place of eternal punishment is called "hell." In hell, the soul is separated from God, this being the natural consequence of sin. Separation from God's love and mercy results in misery and severe suffering. The New Testament often describes hell as a place of fire, torment, and sorrow (Matthew 10:28; 25:41–46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–10). Such a frightening fate for sinners should further encourage us to seek God's forgiveness.

ARE YOU SAVED?

Before proceeding, please answer the following personal questions:

1. Have you ever sinned against God? _____
2. Have you received the forgiveness of your sins? _____
3. If so, what were circumstances under which you received forgiveness?

4. Did you do anything in order to acquire the forgiveness of your sins? _____
If so, what? _____

God's Remedy for Sin

God has not left us to wonder what we must do in order to receive salvation. He is on our side; He wants us to be saved. Therefore, He has given us clear instructions regarding our salvation. If we will do what God wants us to do, then He has promised to extend His mercy and forgiveness to us. Let us consider what the New Covenant teaches we must do in order to receive the forgiveness of our sins.

One Must Hear God's Word. As we noticed in previous lessons, the New Covenant is based on an individual's understanding the covenant and choosing to accept it. In order to understand the principles of the New Covenant, one must first learn its teachings through hearing or reading.

In Hebrews 8:6–13, God contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The Israelites entered the Old Covenant through physical birth. As babies, they were ignorant of God and the covenant to which they were accountable. In contrast, before a person can enter God's New Covenant and become a part of God's family, he must first learn about God and His covenant. The teaching occurs before one enters the covenant, not after. Only after learning about God and His covenant can one choose whether to obey God. Knowledge is the raw material that forms the basis for our salvation. Paul said:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:14, 17).

God receives glory when we choose to serve Him. Before we can choose, we must understand our options. We must consider who God is, what He has done for us, what He will do for us, and what He expects from us. Only after considering these things can we make an informed decision. One cannot obey what he does not understand.

One Must Have Faith. Once we have learned about God and His will, we must decide whether or not we believe what we have heard. This is where faith enters the picture. Faith means "trust, confidence." If we have confidence that what we have

learned is true, then we have “faith.” If we do not have confidence that what we have learned is true, then we do not have faith. Thus, faith stems from a knowledge of God’s Word. Paul said, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). The Hebrew writer says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (11:6).

In order to receive salvation from God, we must sincerely believe in God and His ability to save the soul through Jesus’ sacrifice. Before ascending back to heaven, Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world. Explaining this process, He said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Jesus came to earth to provide a basis for saving faith: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

One Must Confess His Faith. Faith is the proper response to hearing God’s Word. It is an internal response; that is, faith happens in the mind. Faith is not an outward action or condition that is immediately observable. Once a person has heard God’s Word and has confidence in its truth, he must communicate that faith. This is what the Bible calls “confession.” Faith is an internal response to God’s Word; confession is an external expression of faith. Paul says:

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:8–10, NASB).

One Must Repent. Once a person develops confidence in God and His will, he must decide what he will do about it. The individual must ask, “How important is it to me to do God’s will? How much am I willing to sacrifice in order to please God?” If the

individual is willing to commit his life to pleasing God, making whatever changes are necessary, repentance has taken place. Repentance is a change of life that results from a change of mind.

When a person is convinced about what the Bible teaches, it naturally produces sorrow because of sin. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23), and our sin is what caused Jesus to die on the cross. A realization that we are each personally responsible for Jesus' death causes us sorrow. Paul said, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow, producing repentance, causes one to turn his back on sin and commit his life to pleasing God.

Repentance is necessary for salvation. The thrust of Jesus' teaching and of John the Baptist's before Him, was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Paul told the Athenians, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Describing God's love for men, Peter tells us that God wants everyone to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

One Must Submit to Baptism. After a person has learned of God and His will, after a person has accepted God's will through faith and communicated that faith through confession, and after a person has committed himself to God's service through repentance; he is then eligible for the final step toward salvation—baptism in water.

Baptism, by definition, means "to dip, to immerse, to submerge." Accordingly, Paul describes baptism as a "burial" (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Confidence in God's Word through faith and commitment to God through repentance leads one to obey God in baptism. Like faith, confession, and repentance, baptism is commanded in the Scriptures. Upon sharing the good news of salvation with the residents of Jerusalem, the people asked Peter, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Those who accepted Peter's word were baptized (v. 41). Baptism is a necessary step that allows us to receive the following blessings:

- Baptism puts us into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27);
- Baptism puts us into Christ's body, His church
(1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22–23);

- Baptism puts us into Jesus' death (Romans 6:3-4) where we can be cleansed by His blood;
- Baptism allows us to receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38);
- Baptism washes away our sins (Acts 22:16);
- Baptism saves us (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

From the above passages, we can see the importance and necessity of baptism. However, it is no more important than any other obedient response (such as faith or repentance). Each aspect of the conversion process is essential. Baptism just happens to be the final step in the process. After complying with God's will in these matters, God grants the forgiveness of sins and adds us to His family. We become His adopted children (1 John 3:1)! Having undergone a spiritual rebirth (John 3:3, 5), we enter into a covenant relationship with God.

➤ **All Things Become New**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The term "conversion" is often used to describe the process by which a sinner establishes a right relationship with God. Conversion means "a change." God gives each of us the ability to change our hearts and lives in such a way as to be found acceptable in His sight. Readers should note that the instructions outlined in the preceding paragraphs ("God's Remedy for Sin") describe a process of change. Let us review.

The process of hearing the message of salvation and believing it is designed to change our minds. As we ingest and digest the teachings of the New Covenant, our understanding and knowledge increases. Faith is the conviction that the knowledge we have gained is true. Together, these steps serve to mold the mind into what it ought to be in respect to God and His Word.

Repentance is designed to change our behavior. In repentance, we recognize the sin in our lives (that our past behavior has not been in harmony with our newfound

knowledge and conviction). This produces sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) and a commitment to change our future behavior into what it ought to be.

Baptism is not designed to change the mind or behavior. Rather, baptism is designed to change our relationship to God. Note that each passage describing the result of baptism describes a change in our relationship with God. Baptism removes our sin, puts us into Christ, puts us into the church, puts us into Christ's death, and saves us. All of these are changes in relationship. Baptism, then, is a spiritual cleansing demonstrating our submission to God and His Word. It changes our relationship with God, making us one of His children (Galatians 3:26-27) and members of His church (1 Corinthians 12-13).

Therefore, compliance with God's plan of redemption is designed to produce change in the mind, behavior, and relationship of those guilty of sin. For the purposes of this study, we have noted God's remedy for sin as individual steps. However, conversion is a fluid process in which we are molded into fit subjects of God's kingdom.

An Illustration. It should be noted that the process by which one enters into a covenant relationship with God is a natural one, and is similar to many other decisions we make in life. For example, consider the process by which one enters into a marriage and how each step is essential.

- There is first a period in which two people get to know each other (this corresponds with knowledge).
- If the two people are honest in their dealings with one another, they begin to develop a relationship based on trust (this corresponds with faith).
- As the relationship develops, both individuals begin altering their respective activities, behaviors, and desires in order to please their partner (this corresponds with repentance).
- At some point, the love and trust shared between the individuals will be expressed verbally, along with a desire to marry (this corresponds with confession).

- These steps will eventually lead them to the marriage altar where a formal ceremony seals the relationship. At this point, their relationship changes—they are now married (this corresponds with baptism).

Note that if any part of the courting process is omitted, the two individuals never make it to the marriage altar where the change in relationship occurs. Likewise, every part of God’s plan of salvation is essential in leading us to a proper relationship with Him. We are the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–32).

➤ **Conclusion**

Sin is a failure to comply with God’s standard of righteousness. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23). No one stands guiltless before God or is immune to sin’s effects on the soul. Therefore, the question is, How do we obtain forgiveness from God for our sins so as to obtain a right relationship with Him? God has provided a way. Through the death of His innocent Son who paid the price for our sins, those of us who are guilty of sin can stand innocent before God. But this blessing is only available to those who commit their lives in service to God under the New Covenant. In our next study, we will survey some examples of conversion in the book of Acts in an effort to establish how people of the first century entered the New Covenant.

Questions and Answers

1. What does the Bible word for "sin" mean? _____
2. Who were the first people to commit sin? _____
3. Name some of the consequences of their sin? _____

4. "For the wages of sin is _____" (Romans 6:23).
5. What religious holiday under the Old Covenant especially reminded the Israelites of their sins? _____
6. Could the blood of bulls and goats remove the sins of the Israelites under the Old Covenant? _____
7. To what did these animal sacrifices look forward? _____
8. Who made a sacrifice designed to atone for the sins of faithful people of all ages? _____

9. Define the following words:
Redemption _____
Justification _____
Reconciliation _____
10. What did we do to earn or deserve Christ's atoning sacrifice? _____

11. Why does one need to hear God's message of salvation contained in the New Covenant? _____

12. Why does one need to confess his or her faith in Christ as the source of salvation? _____

13. Why does one need to repent of his or her sins? _____

14. Why does one need to be baptized? _____

15. Define "conversion." _____

Thought Questions

1. Why can animals not die in our place in order to pay the penalty for our sin?
2. Describe the conversion process. In what ways are we “converted?”

Additional Study Goals

1. Why can animals not die in our place in order to pay the penalty for our sin?
2. Describe the conversion process. In what ways are we changed by the conversion process?

Your Questions

In the space below, write down any personal notes or questions that you had while reading through this lesson.

CHARTING THE COURSE

How did people of the first century become Christians? Are there any examples in the New Testament illustrating this process?

These important questions deserve the attention of every Bible student. In our next lesson, we will consider several examples of conversion found in the book of Acts.