

Bible Studies

Are all sins the same?

Traditional we have been told that all sins are equal before God. But is it really true to say that a person who lies is just as bad as a mass murderer?



What do you think?

Until recently I would have answered 'yes'. That is what I had always been taught, even though it seemed obvious that mass murder was worst! Then I noticed an interesting verse.

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." John 19:11



Who is Jesus talking too?

Who is the one guilty of greater sin?

Notice, Jesus talks in the singular. He is not condemning the whole Jewish people, many of whom supported Jesus, almost all of whom had no idea what was happening. The 'one' is surely the High Priest.

Is Jesus stating that some sins are greater than others?

Yes he is. This is also born out by the law which prescribed different punishments for different sins. The law differentiates between manslaughter and murder, Exodus 21v12-14. Restitution and sacrifice could be made for some sins, but for other death was decreed

So why has it been taught that all sin is equal?



For a very good reason. It is not that all sins are the same, some are obviously much worse than others. It is that the effects of all sins, large or small are the same.

God's standard is perfection. A lie, short of perfect or a murder, short of perfection, both miss the mark. To miss God's standard by an inch is just as much a failure as to miss by a mile. Both sins receive the same punishment from God. The danger is that people will excuse their small sins as not mattering before God.

Sin is breaking God's Law.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3:4

The soul who sins is the one who will die. Ezekiel 18:20

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

We earn death through sin. God does not give it to us.

We are given eternal life because of God's grace. You cannot earn it.

The danger in all this is that we will make a judgement about which sins are acceptable and which ones are not.

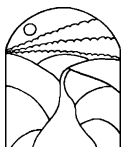
Do you think it is safe to make such a judgement?

Why?

I think this could get very dangerous. The whole thing will become very subjective. I think we are going to excuse a whole heap of things in us, that God says are unacceptable. I think we will excuse our actions and condemn other peoples. It can only get used as a cover for sin.

Does God Just condemn big sins?

If you arrive at judgement day have only committed one little sin, will you be treated any differently from a mass murderer?



Do you think our idea of which sins are more serious will always be the same as God's?

Very often the Bible gives an account of God punishing something that we would find trivial. The frequency with which people use God's name as a swear word is an example of this.



Is worry a serious sin?

Why?

Is unbelief a serious sin?

Why?

Are sins of commission (things we do wrong) worst than sins of omission (things we fail to do [James 4:17])?

Can a sin be more serious for one person than for another?

Can a sin be more serious under one set of circumstances than another?

Are there any sins that are not serious?

It is clear that we do not have the resources to evaluate levels of sin.

The important point here is that the eternal punishment is the same no matter what the sin is. All sin is serious!

We could develop a '*might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb*' attitude. Since we have committed a sin once, we are already guilty, so we might as well keep on doing it, it makes no difference.

Do you think this attitude is right?

Why?

Sin is not just breaking the Law, it is offending God personally. It does matter. Each sin stands by itself. Moreover this is a '*what can I get away with attitude*', an excuse. Perhaps we concentrate too much on not sinning instead of on being righteous.

Jesus addresses another area in the Sermon on the Mount, the sins of the mind and the sins of the body. Jesus came to a strange conclusion.



Read Matthew 5v21-22 & 27-28

It comes as a shock to discover we are all murderers and adulterers. But is lust really as bad as adultery?

What points do you think Jesus is making?

Why are mind sins so serious?



Read Matthew 11v20-24

Capernaum could not claim anything near the vices of Sodom. It was a respectable little town not a world centre of immorality.

Where the sins of Capernaum worst than Sodom?

What was it about Capernaum that meant it would be judged more severely?

Clearly it was not the sins of Capernaum that would incur God's wrath, but their failure to repent, despite their advanced knowledge. It had more to do with their attitude of heart, than their bodily sins. Romans 2v12-16.



Read James 2:10-11

What point is James making?

What implications does it have for us?

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Galatians 3:10

This was a widely held belief in Jesus day, that to break one part of the law was to be guilty of breaking it all.

What does this say about the idea that some people are better than others?