

HAMARTIOLOGY

“The Study of Sin”

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What is Hamartiology?

Definition

Hamartiology (Greek: αμαρτια, hamartia, "missing the mark," "sin," + λογια, logia, "sayings" or "discourse") can be defined as a branch of Christian systematic theology which is the study of sin, its origin, nature, transmission, effects, and judgment.

The word "sin" means to "miss the mark." We all missed God's mark of righteousness (Romans 3:23). Hamartiology explains why we miss the mark, how we miss the mark, and the consequences of missing the mark.

Importance of Hamartiology

The study of Sin can have a profound effects on soul and mind of every believer. It is important for the life of a Christian to realize the seriousness and the ugliness of our sin that we have committed against the character and the commandments of God. Our understanding of sin should give us a right perspective on the reality of this world in the matter of evil and suffering. You don't have to look far to see the whole spectrum of transgressions committed and the same time neglected by society. Christians must be more than anybody else, aware of sin and be serious about sin. There is no room for carelessness or neglect in the subject of offense against the most High God.

"Thou dost not play in convincing me of sin, Satan did not play in tempting me to it, I do not play, when I sink in deep mire, for sin is no game, no toy, no bauble; Let me never forget that the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against." ~ Valley of Vision, p. 143.

Let our study of sin have a profound affect on our sanctification and not just give us an academic knowledge of definition and effects of it in this world. It is more than any, a heart-searching matter of a student, rather than academic requirement.

Definition of Sin

Biblical Definition

Scripture gives us a whole spectrum of words and terms used to describe and define sin. The Bible is not leaving us in doubt of what is meant by “sin” and the depth of its offense.

Concerning the terms that are used in the Bible to describe the subject, let me present to you a list of the most common terms:

- Sin - means to miss the mark. Used about 800 times.
- Evil - to break up, or to ruin, or to cause a calamity. Used about 400 times.
- Transgression - to rebel against God.
- Inequity - to be guilty of breaking God’s law.
- Lawlessness - I John 3:4, Isa 53:6, Num 15:30-31, Mt 13:31, I Tim 1:9.
- Unrighteousness - exact opposite of righteousness. Rom 1:18
- Ungodly - giving no regard to God. I Pet 4:18

Those are just a few of examples used in the Bible to show the variety of divine language concerning the offense of the Divine character.

Nevertheless, this list does not exhaust the images that Scripture gives us concerning the subject. Let us also consider some metaphors that Bible uses to describe sin:

- Darkness – Jn 3:19. Jn 8:12 - Sin is blinding
- Leaven – Mt 16:6 – Sin is influential, it spreads.
- Sickness or Disease – Isa 1:4-6, Eccl 6:1-2 – Sin is corrupting.
- Wide gate or Broad Way – Mt 7:13-14 – Sin is always inviting.
- Cords or chains – Pr 5:22 – Sin is binding.
- Fire – Eph 6:16, Pr 6:27, Pr 26:20 – Sin is consuming.
- Poison – Ps 58:4, Rom 3:13, Jam 3:8 – Sin kills.

God paints us a vivid picture of sinful behavior and how bounding it is to the soul and to the body of the sinner.

Other Definitions

In search for a definition of sin, you will meet many people suggesting a wide variety of thoughts on this topic. Under the strong influence of humanism, some suggest that sins main effect from one man toward another man without any consideration to the character and nature of God. Westminster confession of faith suggests following definition: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."

Sin not only includes individual acts such as stealing, lying, or murdering, but also includes attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes God requires of us.

Wayne Grudem in his "Systematic Theology" defines sin as following: "Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature." ("Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem p. 490)

To define sin as failure to conform to the moral law of God, is to say that sin is more than simply painful and destructive - it is also directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God. This kind of definition puts God and man into a right perspective of authority and offense. God has created us and set things in a certain order. He is the one who gave law and who gave life. All sin is ultimately against God and his character and as a by-product of this, is our offense toward other people and toward ourselves. As we know more of a character of God, the more we find out about our sin. As Christians, God ought to be our chief pursuit, and when we have God in his rightful place in our heart we will have right attitude and understanding of sin. We often are only willing to think of sin as detrimental to body and to our neighbor. We tend not to consider "victimless" sins as important. Sins as lust, covetousness, jealousy, discontent, complaining, pride, gluttony, are not considered to be worthy of fighting and mortification. When we put God in the definition of sin it is impossible for us to neglect sins like that, because His character demands seriousness toward it. For one sin God slew nations, for one sin God kicked Adam and Even out of the Garden, for one sin God destroyed families and cities, for one sin God brought nations into captivity, and the same time we commit dozens of sins every day without real recognition of it. May Christians be the most aware of their sin and be most zealous about purging it.

The Measure of Sin

Is there degrees of sin? Are some sins worse than others? Is God offended more by idolatry rather than “white” lie? Those kinds of questions constantly arise in the mind of people who try to comprehend the measures of sin. This question can not be answered with strong yes or no. We must consider several aspects of the effects of sin.

Concerning our legal standing before God, any one sin, even the one that is considered to be a “very small” sin, makes us guilty before God and therefore worthy of eternal punishment.

James 1:9-11 states:

“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”

Paul writes in Romans 5:16 “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.”

Concerning results in life and relationship with God, some sins are worse than others because they bring more harm in our lives, in lives of people around us, and into our personal relationship to God as our Father. Certain sins pour out God’s displeasure more and bring more serious interruption to our fellowship with God. In Ezekiel chapter 8, we see several times God speaks to Ezekiel saying: “You will see still greater abominations” (Ezek. 8:6,13,15). When Jesus was before Pilate, he said “He who delivered me to you has the greater sin.” (John 19:11) This gives us reason to say that some sins have more serious consequences than others, in that they bring more dishonor to God and more harm to ourselves, to others and to the church.

Unintentional sins are still sins. Ignorance toward the Law has never been a reason for sin not to be counted. Leviticus 5:17 says: “And if any one sin, and do any of the things which Jehovah hath commanded not to be done; though he knew it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.” Nevertheless, the penalties and the degree of God’s displeasure that come from ignorant sins are less than in the case of intentional sin.

What can be considered to be the greatest sin? We often think of the greatest sin is the one that effects most people with the most harm. I would like to argue with this kind of thinking by giving personal meditation on the subject. Let us consider the Greatest Command given in the

Bible: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10:27) This is the greatest of all commandments that is a sum of all commandments. I believe that it would not be wrong to say that the Greatest Sin is the breaking of the Greatest Commandment. This is the commandment that lays the foundation for all the rest of the commandments and points to the root of every sin. When God is not loved properly, sin is present. Does the love to God absorb us so much that we have no heart, no soul, no strength, no mind left to ourselves? I often love things of the world more than I love God. I often care more for my will than for God's will. I often love other people more than God. I commit the greatest sin of breaking the greatest commandment every day of my life. As concerning unbelievers, every hour of every day they commit this greatest sin. They do not consider God neither give any regard to his commandments. They live faithless life, and anything not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23). So how do we measure sin? As quoted earlier:

"The heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against." ~ Valley of Vision p. 143

The awful harm of sin is measured by the dignity of the "Person" sinned against. The dignity of God is infinitely high, our every sin against God is infinitely great.

The Origin of Sin

The First Sin

When and where did the sin begin? Who was the first sinner? It was before the existence of time or matter, man or nature, that sin entered into being. It is widely agreed that Satan was the first sinner of the universe. As a popular opinion, Isaiah 14:11-15 describe the fall of Satan into sin:

"Thy pomp is brought down to Sheol, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars

of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to Sheol, to the uttermost parts of the pit.”

This is often considered to be the account of first Sin. Lucifer, as the angelic name of Satan, desiring to be higher than Almighty, desiring to be exalted above the stars of God committed sin of pride. Desire to be like God and have preeminence saturated the essence of sin from the first account to this present day. Pride can be named as a crown of all sins. (Proverbs 16:5)

This was the beginning of the unfolding Drama of Redemption and bringing all things under the subjection and kingdom of God. Sin of Satan and his work of temptation will lead to the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

The First Human Sin

The record of the first human sin is given to us in the Bible in Genesis 3:1-8. Adam and Eve were created in perfect harmony with God and with nature. They had direct fellowship with God and access to his throne. God gave them a freedom of choice that they have violated by breaking the only commandment that God gave them. They were told: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16)

They sinned by eating this forbidden fruit: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” Genesis 3:6-7.

Was the fruit sinful per se? Why is it such a big deal to eat the fruit? The answer points back to the character and nature of God. It is not the act itself that made it sinful, but rather the attitude of Adam and Eve toward the command of the Most High God. They had no regard to God and His Word. They desired preeminence for themselves. Again we see pride stepping in, they desired to be like God and know good and evil.

From this time forward the human race became bound to the chains of sin. Sin affected their soul, their body, and nature around them. Let us now consider some of the affects of sin.

Affects of Sin

On Nature

Let us consider that sin had its profound affect not only on the spiritual being of man and Satan, but it also had its bearing on the nature. The key passage is Romans 8:18-22:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

Paul shows us that all creation is involved in groaning, frustration, and corruption, and suffering. He says it three times in three different ways. “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” (v. 22) The "whole creation" is groaning. The creation is in slavery to corruption. (v. 21) There is a decay, a ruin, a dissolution, a perishing in the world of nature. There's something out of order and harmful about our sin.

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." (v. 20) It's the creation that is in the grip of futility, and not just mankind.

On Human Race

It is important to know the depth of the affects of sin on human nature. We must discern in ourselves the corruption of sin and inclination toward sin to properly deal with it. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26) They have transgressed against God and that affected their whole being. Their minds became corrupt (Rom. 1:28, 8:7), their hearts became deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), their bodies were subjected to death (Rom 6:23). Romans 3:10-18 describes it like this:

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open

sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Does every man inherit Adams sin? The great debate among Christian church today is weather we are sinners because we have sinned, or we sin because we are sinners. Is that a matter of me choosing to sin makes me dead in my trespasses or rather my human nature inclines me toward sin? I am suggesting, that I inherit my sin from Adam and I sin because I was born a sinner. Psalm 51:5 says that we all are born as sinners: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Ephesians 2:2 says that all people who are not in Christ are "sons of disobedience." Ephesians 2:3 saying that we are all "by nature children of wrath." If we are all "by nature children of wrath," it can only be because we are all by nature sinners, for God does not pour His wrath towards those who are not guilty. God did not create the human race sinful, but upright. But we fell into sin and became sinful because of the sin of Adam.

Romans 5:12-21 makes it clear that through the sin of Adam many were made sinners: "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v. 19). God counted Adam's guilt as belonging to us, and since God is the ultimate judge of all things in the universe, and since his thoughts are always true, Adam's guilt does in fact belong to us.

We did not actually decide to sin, then how can we be counted guilty? Is it just for God to act this way? If we think it is unfair for us to be represented by Adam in our condemnation, so we should also think that is is unfair for us to be represented by Christ and to have his righteousness imputed to us, since this is the main point of argument of Paul in Romans 5.

On God

Genesis 3 gives us a great picture of the affect of sin on our relationship with God. "They heard the sound of the Lord God and the man and his wife hid themselves" (Genesis 3:8). And man has been running from God with his guilty conscience ever since. A youth who has said to his father, "I don't want your counsel, I don't want your authority, I don't want your help," cannot bear to be in the presence of his dad. We are homeless refugee, always on the run until we give

it up and come home to God. We were created solely for the glory of God the Creator. When we have sinned, we walked away from the purpose of creation, and tried to substitute it with our own goals and our own purposes.

As the consequences of sin, God must exercise wrath and damnation. God is absolutely holy and just. There is no unrighteousness with Him. He is perfect in all his ways and there is no shadow of turning with Him. To sweep sin under the rug of the universe would be of a highest measure of injustice on the part of God. God should and must punish sin with a righteous wrath. (Deut. 32:41) Hell was prepared for Devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41), but sinners also secure their place there for eternity.

II Thessalonians 1:7-10 says:

“when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”

Was sin planned by God? If God knew that we are going to sin, why would He create us?

God is all knowing and all powerful. He saved us “to the praise of the glory” (Eph 1:12). God’s highest goal is the pursuit of His own glory. Before creation and sin, God was totally satisfied in the fellowship of the Trinity (John 17:5). He was fully glorified by the host of angels, but there was a number of God’s attributes that were not glorified before the creation and fall. Grace, mercy, forbearance, forgiveness, love, compassion, care, wrath, justice, longsuffering had to be directed toward an undeserving sinner to be fully glorified. Without sin there would be no forgiveness. Without transgression there would be no grace. In that case God had His glory in mind, creating the world and knowing that we are going to sin.

What God does when a saved person sins? One of the greatest displays of God’s love toward his children is a loving chastening. Hebrews 12:10 says “but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” It is one of the surest proofs of our family relationship with God is that He rebukes and disciplines us for the sake of our sanctification.

The Mortification of Sin

Let's not finish our study of sin with affects and definitions, but rather let's finally consider some of the reasons and ways to mortify sin. It is a responsibility of every believer to fight for sanctification and purity. I would like to suggest to you, the communion with God the Father is at stake in our war against sin. God is the greatest good of the universe, when we are in deep and sincere communion with Him we are experiencing the greatest joy and He gets the most glory. He created us to glorify Him in everything we do with all of our heart, soul and strength, so let's not give any part of our being to the dominion of sin.

Lets mortify sin with God's Word. Let us take Bible passages and preach to ourselves in times of temptations and struggles. Psalm 119:9 asks "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." John 17:17 says "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Scripture is saturated with the Gospel. Jesus Christ died for our sins, to purify His people and to make us zealous for good works (Titus 2:13-14). The Gospel is our strongest weapon in fighting against the temptations of Satan and attacks of Sin. In James 1:22-15 Bible is presented to us as a mirror. We must look in that Mirror and see the dark dirt of sin that stains our heart and our mind. But let us not walk away from it, but purify ourselves.

Lets mortify sin by meditating of its nature and affects. Christians must not be playing games with sin. We should have a deep examination of our motives, desires, attitudes, and actions in the light of God's Word. Let us look at ourselves and honestly discern sins that are hidden in the deepest parts of our hearts.

Let us mortify sin by separation from sin and temptation. Paul gives a valuable advice to Timothy "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." (II Tim 2:22) We are to stay away from temptations, and keep ourselves far from the way of sinners (Psalm 1:1). Christians must purpose in their heart to be vigilant in their fight with sin and take it with all diligence.

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