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As of: Thursday, May 29, 2025

## NOTES ON "SIN" 🌀 LINGUISTIC AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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### FIVE CHALLENGES FOR BELIEVERS, THEOLOGIANS, AND OTHER RASCALS

- I. The Problem. If "sin" is defined as separation from the LORD God Almighty, how can "sin" also be the *cause* for separation from the LORD God Almighty? Sin cannot be the cause of sin. The sun creates heat; heat is not the cause of the sun.
- II. If sin is not a cause, but a result, then we need to identify the cause of sin. Evil is the cause. For example, disobeying the LORD God Almighty's character (i.e., **His** rules, norms, expectations) is evil. Thus, disobedience (evil) causes sin (i.e., separation from the LORD God Almighty).
- III. In most cultures using English, the word "sin" is cuter, tamer, more tolerable than "evil."
  - A. "Sin" has become an insipid synonym for "fault" or "shortcoming" or "vice."<sup>1</sup>
  - B. "Sin" thus is only understood as serious transgression by the person who respects the LORD God, one who feels guilt about said transgression.
  - C. Ironically, we even have a perfume called "My Sin."
  - D. Perhaps we simply do not like the thoughts and behavior which separate us from the LORD God Almighty to be understood as what they actually are—evil.
  - E. It has become far too useful<sup>2</sup> for people to equate "sin" merely with "fault" or "shortcoming."
- IV. When the church uses this linguistic shortcut, "sin," as a substitute for evil (the *cause* of sin; i.e., separation, *missing the mark*), then using a "street meaning"<sup>3</sup> of sin sends a message insipidly useful, but eternally false. Sin is serious. Sin is evil.



<sup>1</sup>See a 2024 download of an American English thesaurus: <https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/sin>

<sup>2</sup>**Porter's First Law of Human Behavior**—"Human beings see, hear, remember, understand, and do what they **want** to see, hear, remember, understand, and do." <https://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com>

Porter's First Law of Human Behavior—Simplified: "People believe what is useful to them."

V. Is how we use “sin” compatible with the Biblical construct (ἁμαρτία, [266](#))? Hamartia, “missing the mark,” is usually translated as “sin,” rather than “evil;” i.e., wicked, malicious, slothful (πονηρός, [4190](#)). With some exceptions, evil is a more accurate translation<sup>4</sup> than “sin.” Consider using **evil** in these situations:

- A. "Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin [**evil**] is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." –Genesis 4:6-7
- B. "When he is made aware of the [**evil**] sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect."  
–Leviticus 4:23
- C. "This sin [**evil**] of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt." –2 Samuel 2:17
- D. "Blessed is the man whose [**evil**] sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."  
–Psalm 32:2
- E. "This sin [**evil**] will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant." –Isaiah 30:13
- F. "True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from [**evil**] sin." –Malachi 2:9
- G. "And so I tell you, every [**evil**] sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the SPIRIT will not be forgiven." –Matthew 12:31
- H. "Can any of you prove ME guilty of [**evil**] sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe ME?" –John 8:46
- I. "But if CHRIST is in you, your body is dead because of [**evil**] sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." –Romans 8:10
- J. "All wrongdoing is [**evil**] sin, and there is [**evil**] sin that does not lead to death."  
–1 John 5:17<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>3</sup>This is similar to the use of the street meaning of “faith” (acceptance without proof) rather than the Biblical notion of faith; i.e., the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. πιστος (pistos) as in epistemology.

<sup>4</sup>Translations here are from the New International Version, 1996.

<sup>5</sup>Verses 16-17 discuss the kind of petition the LORD God will answer (see verses 14-15). Yet, there is “evil that leads to death.” In John’s letter directed against Gnostic teaching (denying the incarnation and eliminating moral restraints), it is probable the “evil that leads to death” refers to the Gnostics’ persistent denial of truth and shameless immorality. Unrepentant evil leads to spiritual death. Another view is this evil can result in physical death. Because a believer continues to sin, some hold that God in judgment takes his life (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30). In either case, “evil that does not lead to death” is of a less serious nature. Yes, there are different levels of evil

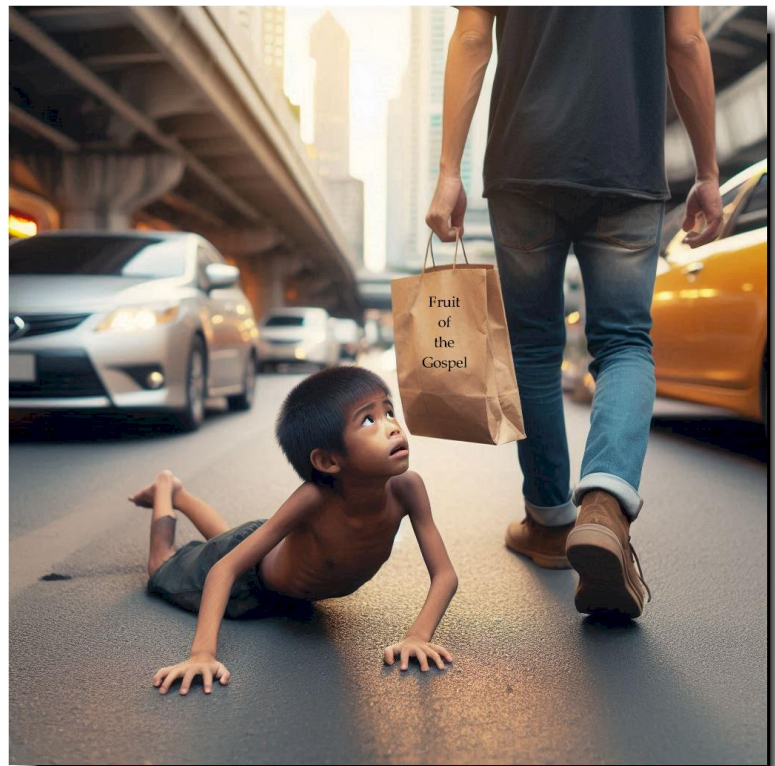
VI. Yet, there are examples where “evil” does not substitute well for “sin.” “Sin” is sometimes used as a verb—

- A. "No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and **sin** against God?" –Genesis 40:9
- B. "Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will **sin** against the LORD your God."  
–Deuteronomy 20:18
- C. "But they continued to **sin** against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High."  
–Psalm 78:17
- D. "And if your foot causes you to **sin**, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell." –Mark 9:45 (ESV, NKJV, NASB, etc.)  
Interestingly, the NIV, ASV, NASB, NRSV, etc. versions translate “causes you to sin...” from σκανδαλίζει (skan-da-liz-ay) as *should cause you to stumble*, [4624](#)). Perhaps the HSCB does a better job of translating the Christ’s message:

*And if your foot causes your downfall, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell—the unquenchable fire,*

VII. And, an example where “sin” is used as a verb **and** as noun in the same pericope—

“Therefore do not let sin [**noun, evil**] reign in your mortal body so that you obey its **evil** desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin [**verb, do evil**], as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin [**noun, evil**] shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” –Romans 6:12-14



(sin); see the Christ’s answer to Pilate regarding “who has the greater ‘miss the mark’ [sin] (cf. John 19:11).  
–Adapted and corrected by D. Thomas Porter, from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.



Pretending sin is not the result of evil is more than linguistic naivete. Acting as if sin were mere indiscretion, belies the reality not only of sin, but evil as well. Humans tolerate “sin” more more than “evil.” And, when the evil card is played, we add a joker’s face and call it sin.

Sin as mere shortcoming diminishes the reality, the tragedy of being separated from the LORD God Almighty. Sin is serious. Often eternally so. Such ignorance belies the power of evil, belies the implications of evil, and permits human beings to discount their evil as a shortcoming, a naughty fault which occurs naturally in the flow of human life. Most importantly, misunderstanding sin in this manner permits extraordinary evil, often tactfully overlooked, to be used as hubris of heirarchy, and as an excuse for hatred. Consider these examples:

1. Throw rocks at the windows of Jewish merchants—patriotic fervor.
2. I may have raped her, but I have never raped a child.
3. This is just the way God made me.
4. It is my body; do not tell me what to do with my body.
5. It is just a white lie; it does not hurt anyone, in fact it may spare some pain.
6. It is my life to live the way I choose, not what others choose for me.
7. They are gooks—enemies which need to be stopped, if not eradicated.
8. Since they have Japanese ancestry, we can incarcerate them without due process.
9. They worship Baal; kill them all, their children too, but keep the sheep.
10. The LORD God has especially blessed our country more than any other.
11. As Christians, we should do the following out of our fervor for the LORD God:<sup>6</sup>
  - a) "First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools ... This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians ..."
  - b) "Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed."
  - c) "Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them."
  - d) "Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb ..."
  - e) "Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside ..."
  - f) "Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them ..."

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<sup>6</sup>All quotes are from *On the Jews and Their Lies*, a 65,000 word treatise written in 1543 by one of Christianity’s greatest leaders. The author of this treatise had argued 34 years earlier: *Absurd theologians defend hatred for the Jews. ... What Jew would consent to enter our ranks when he sees the cruelty and enmity we wreak on them—that in our behavior towards them we less resemble Christians than beasts?* And then said in 1523, *If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian.*



- g) "Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow ... But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., ... then let us emulate the common sense of other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., ... then eject them forever from the country..."

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOWERS OF THE CHRIST

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1. We must communicate more accurately the reality of being separated temporally from the LORD God.
  - ⌘ Our mission must facilitate bringing people to a positive relationship with Holy Spirit, our counselor in daily walks of the human enterprise. This relationship is absolutely critical to understanding what the LORD God wants in the here and now. Life without meaning is mere biological existence.
  - ⌘ Our mission must facilitate people understanding experientially and explicitly the nature of Christ Jesus whose sacrifice while on earth demonstrated that the LORD God is worthy of worship, worthy of reverence, and worthy of obedience. This sacrifice was used to atone, cover, wash away our evil. The absence of the LORD God is evil. When we separate ourselves from His atoning sacrifice: we are evil, we do evil, we become evil, we honor evil. Hell is evil—eternal separation from the LORD God.
2. We must find new metaphors, new language, new idioms to communicate accurately the reality of hell—the reality of being eternally separated from the LORD our God.
  - ⌘ Hot sulphur, once a powerful idiom is no longer understood, and is associated with less than loving preachers and teachers of the Christ's message. Hell is worse than hot sulphur.
  - ⌘ Let us consider idioms and metaphors and narratives people can understand not only explicitly (lengthy separation), but also experientially (raw loneliness). If our brothers and sisters, our children and grandchildren do not fear being separated from the One who loves them the most—we have failed, failed immeasurably, failed eternally.
  - ⌘ Mercy will warrant all who will dwell eternally with the LORD God. But, make no mistake about it, one of the biggest theological challenges today is fearing how we will bear the knowledge when in heaven that one of our children or our spouse or our grandchild is now eternally separate from the LORD God—loneliness of the worst order. This author already grieves.
3. We must explore new avenues, the avenues people actually use to share new metaphors of hell.
  - ⌘ Our skills with "social media" are no longer a nice counterment. Just like reading and writing 200 years ago, the Christian must be able to communicate in this new environment. Teach & reach where the people are, not where we would like them to be.
  - ⌘ Until people understand the value of being within the LORD God's purpose and the consequences of being outside of the LORD God's purpose, we fail. Period.