**Are All Sins the Same, or Not?**

 In our series on Christian Living in a Democracy, there is a prerequisite doctrine that we need to be solid on first.

 Some Christians teach that some sins are more serious than other sins. Other Christians say that all sins are the same. We are going to first see what Scripture says, and then we will look at what various people have said, and how in some cases they have mis-categorized and over-simplified types of sins.

**Salvation**

How many sins, or how severe would the sins need be, where under that limit a person could still get a “pass” to go to heaven?

Romans 3:22-27 says, “And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25God presented Him as the atoning sacrifice [\*](file:///C%3A%5CBibleQueryApp%5CeBibleHtmlInput%5CEnglish%20Berean%20Bible%5CROM03.htm#FN9) through faith in His blood, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had passed over the sins committed beforehand. 26He did this to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and to justify the one who has faith in Jesus. 27Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of works? No, but on that of faith. 28For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

 Let’s ask this same question a different way. How many sins could a child, or someone else commit where they could go to heaven apart from trusting in Jesus’ saving work on the cross? How many people will there be in heaven who will say, “It does not matter to me that Jesus died on the cross for my sins; I didn’t have enough sins to meet some threshold.”?

 Asked in this way, the answer is obvious. Zero. But what if it was just a small, insignificant-looking sin, like eating a piece of fruit?

In the Old Testament, Israelites could be executed for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-35), or rebelling against their parents (Deuteronomy 20:18-21)

 Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church has over-simplified this by categorizing all sin as “mortal” or “venial”. A Catholic committing a mortal sin would mean they would go to Hell, unless the repented and confessed their sin. Venial sins would not do that but could mean more time in Purgatory (a Roman Catholic concept). Eastern Orthodox believe that some sins are more serious than others, but they do not have the mortal/venial category, and they do not teach there is a Purgatory.

**Scripture Shows Varying Degrees of Sin**

 Notwithstanding the previous, Scripture also shows verses that demonstrate varying degrees of severity of sin.

 Romans 4:15 and 5:13 say that sin is not counted where there is no law. So God, being just overlooks sin that someone is genuinely and innocently ignorant of. So let’s restrict ourselves to just sin where someone knows (James 4:17).

 There is sin, where the person knows it is sin, but they did it unintentionally. In Numbers 15:27-31, they still had to make atonement for it, but it was in a different class than intentional, defiant sin.

 Matthew 11:21-24 On the Day of Judgment it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the people of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum who rejected Jesus where He grew up.

 Pilate sinned horribly by commanding that Jesus be crucified. But however wicked the actions of this ignorant pagan were, according to Jesus that sin was not as great as the Jewish leaders, who knew much more, who handed Jesus over to Pilate, in John 19:11b.

 In Ezekiel 8:6,13,15 God shows Ezekiel three visions of abominations the people were doing. Each sin was a “greater abomination” than the one before.

 1 Thessalonians 2:16 mentions wicked persecutors sinning up to the limit”. In Genesis 15:16, Abraham was not given the Promised Land in his time, because it says the wickedness of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure.

 1 John 5:16b-17 speaks of sin until death and therefore sin not unto death.

**Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit**

 In Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28-29; and Luke 12:10 Jesus differentiates between two specific sins: speaking against the Son of Man (Himself) and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Saul of Tarsus and others said and did things against Jesus. But they repented and were forgiven. But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occurred when some scribes and pharisees, seeing the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, and knowing it could only be from God, ascribed that work to demons.

**When Are a Pastor’s Sins so Serious they Should be defrocked?**

 There is a difference between a pastor being fired and being defrocked. When a pastor is fired, they can just pick up and become pastor of the church down the road. When they are defrocked, churches communicate with each other, and they are not allowed to be a pastor anywhere. But what if the pastor repents and confesses their sin. That is very good, and they should be allowed back in the church as a member. However, a key role of a pastor is to be an example for the flock to imitate (1 Peter 5:3: Hebrews 13:7) and they can no longer be a good example if they are not a one-woman man and not violent, quick-tempered, or a drunkard (1 Timothy 3:2-3,12; Titus 1:7-8). This applies to sins after they became a Christian, not to sins they did before they got saved.

 There are intellectual sins of the mind, as well as the heart and actions. A person is disqualified to be in any pastoral ministry if they teach heretical doctrines (2 Timothy 3:7-9; Titus 1:9,13-16). Unfortunately, many Bible-believing Christians in the Great Britain have been taught to tolerate heretical teachers within the church as “let the wheat grow with the tares”.

**When is a politician so wicked they should not have our support?**

 This was not much of an issue in Biblical times as people generally had no say in who ruled them. The only example in the Bible is that during the divided kingdom days, when Jeroboam led the northern kingdom into idolatry, the Levites and Benjamites chose to be in the southern kingdom, not the northern one. In early church times nobody left the Roman Empire, or the Persian Empire because one government was more wicked than another. When Jesus said to pay taxes in giving unto Caesar what is Caesar’s in Matthew 22:17-21; Mark 12:16-17; Luke 20:22-25, some of the Caesars ruling the Roman Empire were very evil.

 But today in many countries, people have the privilege of being able to choose their leaders. But with this privilege comes responsibility too. How should Christians go about choosing to support and vote for? First of all, realize the messages that are being beamed at us. In the eyes of many non-believers, making economic mistakes is the greatest “sin”. Many are strictly “single-issue” in other ways, such as foreign policy, balancing the budget, or monetary policy. We do not want to be single issue (after all Hitler would be against LGBQT+ and abortion of northern European babies.) But we need to be careful not to go to the opposite extreme of weighting each shortcoming the same.

**A Mock Election**

 Let’s practice with a mock election right now. Let’s say you have two candidates for office, and only two. Which one are you going to vote for?

**The first candidate** has generally sound, prudent, fiscal policy, is concerned about helping the country, and he or she, and the people under them, appear to all be honest. You are actually optimistic about the economy if they are elected.

**The second candidate** has a questionable economic policy of “spend, spend, spend”, does not seem to care about the country so much, and there are multiple charges of corruption. You are afraid that the second will take the country down the road to complete economic disaster.

Oh, and by the way

The first as a matter of principle believers strongly in killing pre-born babies up until the moment of birth. They want to tyrannize others, and they believe that certain people in this country should not have the same legal and court rights as others.

The second strongly believes pro-life, nobody should be discriminated against, and that there should be equal rights for everyone. He wants to defend the country, but he does not want to attack anybody.

 Don’t just say that somebody just is just “flawed” or has “shortcomings”; when you should call it what it is: wickedness. David is a real man after God’s own heart. But the Bible does not downplay David’s wickedness with Bathsheba, Uriah, or being a man of blood.

**So How Should We Decide?**

 One answer on whether to support a politician is when they are at least slightly less wicked than their opponent. So on a scale of -100 to +100, if one politician is a – 55 and the other is -60, do we like the -55 one because he is slightly less wicked? And how do you assign numbers anyway? I think we can be excited by a person who is not too wicked, even if they are not a believer, like Cyrus king of Persia.

**Who Would You Support Here?**

 We are going to pretend that you live at different times, and see if you would enthusiastically support, mildly support, or work for the opposition for the following.

 Charlemagne king of the Franks conquered most of western and central Europe. Charlemagne supported in his court Alcuin of York, a very learned English monk who did a lot to preserve learning, Christian and secular in Europe at that time. Charlemagne was very diligent to spread Christianity. – very diligent. In fact, when 12,000 Saxons who had surrendered refused to become Christians, he slaughtered them all. Charlemagne had about 10 legitimate children. He had from 11 to 70 illegitimate children.

 The French Revolution was a terrible time, with thousands being guillotined solely for the crime of being well off. Napoleon helped to put an end to executions in the French Revolution. He was actually quite good at having a competent government in France. But, in his greedy desire to conquer all of continental Europe, hundreds of thousands died for his empire. Would you support Napoleon?

 In the Bible, Jehu was told by a prophet of God to overthrow the king if Israel and rule instead. Jehu did that, halting Baal worship, killing all the priests of Baal and smashing all the altars to Baal that he could. But he was also brutal to the people, and he refused to take down the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. See 2 Kings 9:2-10:31 and especially 2 Kings 10:30-31 for more info.

**A Conclusion**

 There is no better conclusion than 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, forbidding us to be yoked with unbelievers. This verse can be applied to marriage, business partnerships, and politics too. If a Christian is tied to closely to a politician, as Billy Graham was famously the spiritual advisor to Richard Nixon, when that politician proves to be corrupt, it reflects poorly on the Christian. When a Christian church or denomination is closely tied to a political movement or government, then when that goes sour, as things without God generally do, then the church’s reputation is tarnished. We can vote on issues, but don’t be enamored with people, political parties or governments.

 We first saw this stumble in the time of Constantine. When Constantine not only legalized Christianity, but made it the official religion of the Roman Empire, things started turning really bad for Christianity which was spreading rapidly in the Persian Empire. But it is not just America. In Kazakhstan, some Muslims would not want to be Christians because, in their words, “Christianity is a Russian thing”.

 So do not get joined with unbelievers at an individual level. But do not have your churches and Christian organizations be joined to a mixed bag of a political cause at a corporate level either.

**Appendix: Early Christians Taught Degrees of Sin**

***The Shepherd of Hermas*** (c.115-155 A.D.) book 2 commandment 11th p.27 speaks of the heathen bringing greater sin upon themselves by idolatry. Book 2 similitude 7 speaks of sins that is great, but not great enough to be delivered over to a [punishing] angel.

**Clement of Alexandria** (193-202 A.D.) “For the law, in its solicitude for those who obey, trains up to piety, and prescribes what is to be done, and restrains each one from sins, imposing penalties even on lesser sins.” *Stromata* book 1 ch.27 p.339

Clement of Alexandria (192-217/220 A.D.) “John, too, manifestly teaches the differences of sins, in his larger Epistle, in these words: ‘If any man see his brother sin a sin that is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life: for these that sin not unto death,’ he says. ‘For there is a sin unto death: I do not say that one is to pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin; and there is a sin not unto death.’” *Stromata* book 2 ch.15 p.362

**Tertullian** (208-220 A.D.) “Jeremiah had been prohibited by God to deprecate (Him) on behalf of a people which was committing mortal sins. ‘Every unrighteousness is sin; and there is a sin unto death.’” *Tertullian on Modesty* ch.19 p.97. See also ibid ch.2 p.76

Tertullian (198-220 A.D.) “either to deny that adultery and fornication are mortal sins; or else to confess” *On Modesty* ch.19 p.97

Tertullian (200-240 A.D.) mentions mortal sins. *On Modesty* ch.3 p.77

**Hippolytus of Portus** (222-235/236 A.D.) (implied) “passed over to these *followers of Callistus*, and served to crowd his school. This one propounded the opinion, that, if a bishop was guilty of any sin, if even *a sin* unto death, he ought not to be deposed.” *Refutation of All Heresies* book 9 ch.7 p.131

**Origen** (225-253/254 A.D.) speaks of greater sin. “For we shall ask them if Pharaoh was of an earthy nature; and when they answer, we shall say that he who is of an earthy nature is altogether disobedient to God: but if disobedient, what need is there of his heart being hardened, and that not once, but frequently? Unless perhaps, since it was possible for him to obey (in which case he would certainly have obeyed, as not being earthy, when hard pressed by the signs and wonders), God needs him to be disobedient to a greater degree, in order that He may manifest His mighty deeds for the salvation of the multitude, and therefore hardens his heart.” [Greek] *de Principiis* book 3 ch.1.8 p.308

**Cyprian of Carthage** (250 A.D.) “For, as in smaller sins which are not committed against God, penitence may be fulfilled in a set time, and confession may be made with investigation of the life of him who fulfils the penitence, and no one can come to communion unless the hands of the bishop and clergy be first imposed upon him;” *Epistles of Cyprian* epistle 11 ch.2 p.292

Cyprian of Carthage (c.246-258 A.D.) “Let us look briefly into a few things out of many, that from a few the rest also may be understood. Adultery, fraud, manslaughter, are mortal crimes. Let patience be strong and stedfast in the heart; and neither is the sanctified body and temple of God polluted by adultery, nor is the innocence dedicated to righteousness stained with the contagion of fraud; nor, after the Eucharist carried in it, is the hand spotted with the sword and blood.” *Treatises of Cyprian*. Treatise 9 ch.14 p.488

**Athanasius of Alexandria** (318 A.D.) teaches that some sins are worse than others. *Athanasius Against the Heathen* part 1 ch.8.1 p.8

Quotes are from the Berean Bible.

by Steven. M. Morrison, Ph.D. Aug. 1, 2025