

Are There Degrees of Sin?

Question: Does God see all sins as the same? In other words, one sin isn't worse than another, is it?

Answer: Many people wrongly believe that no sin is worse than any other—that there are no degrees of sin. But that idea is not taught in the Bible. Referring to Judas's betrayal, Jesus said, "For this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin." (John 19:11) How could his betrayal be a greater sin if all sins are equal? Is stealing a paper clip the same evilness as betraying the Son of God? No.

All sins are bad but some sins are more perverted than others, have greater and more damaging consequences, and will receive a greater punishment of the Day of Judgment for those who have not been forgiven by God. Some people "will receive greater condemnation" for the things they do. (Matt. 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47)

Sin, Transgression, Iniquity

The Bible uses different words to describe the increasing degrees of offense—**sin, transgression, iniquity**. Several verses mention the words *sin*, *iniquity*, and *transgression*, and each word carries a slightly different meaning. When a sin is repeated against the knowledge of God, it becomes a transgression. If it continues long enough, it eventually becomes iniquity which perverts the flesh.

Psalm 32:5 "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.'"

Psalm 51:1-2 "According to the greatness of your compassion blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Daniel 9:24 "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy."

Exodus 34:7 "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Leviticus 16:21 "Then Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man that is in readiness into the wilderness."

These verses indicate that sin, transgression and iniquity are different in some way. In fact, they represent **increasing levels** of falling "short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Level #1 SIN

Sin means "to miss the mark" and is a general term for falling short of God's standard. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sins can be intentional or unintentional (Numbers 15:27). Sin is not just doing something wrong but also failing to do what is right (James 4:17).

Level #2 TRANSGRESSION

Transgression means to intentionally disobey or to willfully trespass a command. David was referring to this kind of sin when he wrote, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Psalm 32:1). Transgression is connected to a trespass, which is a willful violation of the law. The Law was given to show us how we transgress (Galatians 3:19).

After David sinned he prayed, “According to the greatness of your compassion **blot out** my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1) and “**blot out** all my iniquities (Psalm 51:9). To “blot out” means to obliterate or wipe out letters and words with ink as to render them invisible or indistinguishable. The idea is to erase the transgression that is written in God’s book of debts. Through the death of Jesus on the cross He blotted out our transgressions. Colossians 2:14 says, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

Level #3 INIQUITY

Iniquity is a perversion of the truth and a twisted attitude that premeditates and makes plans to commit sin. Iniquities are second nature tendencies that drive us to repeatedly commit sin and defile our character. These perverse attitudes apparently can be passed down from one generation to another. Exodus 20:8 says, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.”

Micah 2:1 says, “Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds.” David planned to commit adultery with Bathsheba and plotted to kill her husband Uriah. After he repented, David cried out to God, “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2).

Gossip, slander, cursing, and criticism are iniquities. James 3:6 says, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body.” Many words that we speak can cause roots of iniquity to flourish.

Iniquity leads to rebellion, no fear of God, unnatural affections, and a depraved mind (Romans 1:28-32). “For **rebellion** is as the sin of witchcraft, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23). Rebellion against godly authority is an iniquity that angers God.

An **abomination** is the worst kind of iniquity. The word is used exclusively to describe things that are disgusting, loathsome and absolutely intolerable—things that are unacceptable to God. Some notable abominations are listed in Proverbs 6:16-19, 12:22, 16:5, Leviticus 18:22, 26-27, Deuteronomy 7:25, 25:16, 27:15.

JESUS DIED FOR ALL SINS, TRANSGRESSIONS, AND INIQUITIES

Here is the good news. Jesus sacrificed His life to forgive all our sins, transgressions, and iniquities. “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities...But the Lord caused the iniquities of us all to fall on Him...yet He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:5-6,12). No matter how depraved a human heart may become, Jesus’ death on the cross was sufficient to cover all sin (John 1:29, Romans 5:18).

Even though He paid for your sins, **you must receive Him as your Lord** to be cleansed. The only sin that God cannot forgive is the final rejection of the Holy Spirit’s drawing to repentance (Matthew 12:32).

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