

Are all sins the same?

Q: Could you please tell me where I can find scripture where it states that all sin is the same? I would greatly appreciate it. A: Is all sin the same? Yes and no ? it depends on what you mean by "the same."

They ARE the same in that any one sin is enough to keep us out of heaven. James 2:10-11 would be a Scripture that teaches this. In this sense even the littlest sin makes us a lawbreaker (like Adam and Eve) and this is offensive to God who is holy, pure, and righteous. His justice demands punishment of even one sin. And God is so pure that He is unable to live in the presence of someone who has committed even one sin ? see Habakkuk 1:13. Other Scriptures along this line would be Psalm 130:3; 143:2; Romans 3:23. In this way, all sins are the same.

But all sins ARE NOT the same in their effects or their judgment. God clearly sees some sins as more wicked and heinous than others:

For example, there are eleven sins listed in the Old Testament that require the death penalty. Why did God tell the judges to give different punishments, if all sins are exactly the same?

There are also passages in the Old Testament which speak of "great sin": Exodus 32:21,30,31 and 2 Kings 17:21. "Great" is a comparative adjective. Apparently God's Word looks at some sins as "greater" than others.

In the New Testament Jesus talked about "least commandments" (Matthew 5:19) implying that although all commandments are important, some commandments are more important than others.

Jesus also talks about an "eternal sin" (Mark 3:29) which cannot be forgiven. This shows that Jesus makes distinctions in the penalties of sins. Why different penalties for sin, if all sins are the same? See also Matthew 18:6 ? the sin of hurting little children.

Finally, Jesus in speaking with Pilate says that others have the "greater sin" for His death (John 19:11). If all sins are the same, then why do others have a "greater sin" than Pilate?

I'll try to illustrate this with an example. Lusting after a woman who is not your wife is a sin (Matthew 5:27). It is enough to keep you from God's presence (without the righteousness of Christ) and lusting should be avoided with God's help. In this way, it is exactly the same as the sin of physically committing adultery (Matthew 5:28-30).

But lusting is NOT the same thing as actually physically committing adultery.

Committing adultery is an act with devastating consequences and greater penalties (1 Corinthians 6:9). The effects of lusting in my mind and physically going to bed with someone are very different. Their judgments are also different (Hebrews 13:4).

God also sees certain sins as being more wicked because of WHO commits them. For example, it is one thing for my 5 year old son to tell a lie and quite another for the president of the United States to lie to Congress. The president's lie has far greater effects than a lie told by my 5 year old and so people in positions of responsibility are judged more harshly by God (Luke 12:47-48; Luke 20:47; James 3:1).