

CONNECT 3

A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

In the first study, we looked at a story about a father and his two sons which Jesus used to illustrate the way that we relate to God. We saw that both the sons treated the father with contempt and were only interested in what they could get out of him. By contrast, the father loved both his sons deeply and at every point in the story was willing to give them all he had. In this study, we'll explore further the fundamental problem in our relationship with God.

- How do you think our culture would define sin?

Romans 1:18-25 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise!

- What are God's actions and man's actions in these verses?
- According to the passage, how would you sum up man's attitude toward God?
- How have you seen these things reflected in our society?
- Can you see any of these things in your own life?

This attitude towards God, not honouring him, pushing him away and replacing him with other things, is what is meant by the word 'sin'. The heart of sin is rejecting God and ordering our lives around ourselves. The Bible teaches that all forms of evil flow from this source. The passage we looked at in Romans goes on to list some of those expressions of evil: greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious behaviour, gossip, backstabbing, God-hating, insolence, pride, boastfulness, refusing to understand, breaking promises, and being heartless and unforgiving (see verses 28-31).

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Psalm 14:1-3 Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good! The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!

Psalm 5:4-6 O God, you take no pleasure in wickedness; you cannot tolerate the sins of the wicked. Therefore, the proud may not stand in your presence, for you hate all who do evil. You will destroy those who tell lies. The Lord detests murderers and deceivers.

Psalm 36:1-2 Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all. In their blind conceit, they cannot see how wicked they really are.

- What do these verses teach us about man's attitude toward God?
- According to Psalm 36, why are people often unaware of the seriousness of their sin before God?
- How do you feel about the verses we've just looked at?

Isaiah 59:1-2 Listen! The Lord's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call. It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

- How do these verses describe the consequences of sin?
- Where does the problem lie?
- Can you see these attitudes in the world around you?

The Bible teaches that the ultimate consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Death is essentially separation. On a physical level we're separated from our bodies. On a relational level we're separated from other people. On a spiritual level we're separated from God for all eternity. The agony of eternal separation from God, the source of all goodness and life, is what the Bible calls hell. As we saw earlier, death and hell is not what God wants for people. However, death cannot be overcome unless the problem of sin is dealt with.

- How would you define sin in light of this study?

In the next study we'll look at God's solution to this problem of sin and its consequences.