

A Gift From Heaven

The Bible Abused

What Is Sin?

Easter

Lesson 21

REFORMED
EVANGELISM
TASKFORCE

The Bible Abused

It is not very difficult at all to use texts from the Bible to defend your own point of view. Every heretic can "prove" his theory from the Bible by waving around separate isolated texts. In that way, you can even use the Bible to support a lie. It is so easy and sometimes even tempting to misuse the Bible. Needless to say, it is strictly prohibited.

Satan Uses the Bible Too

Satan, the leader of the fallen angels, knows the Bible thoroughly, but he does not use his knowledge to promote the truth. On the contrary, he uses the Bible to make his lies seem like the truth.

In a discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus says, "When he (Satan) lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (*John 8:44*). The expression "father of lies" means that Satan was the first to bring the lie into the world. This first lie was a misuse of God's Word. Already in the first chapters we see how cunning Satan is (*Gen. 3*). By means of a snake, he talks to Eve in paradise, but before he deceives her by twisting the truth, he confuses Eve with a very sly and ambiguous question. "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" This question calls for a confirmation. Satan knew God's command very well. There was one tree in the garden of which Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat (*Gen. 2:16,17*). However, Satan presents the question in such a manner that it implies that God was restricting Adam and Eve, when in reality He was being very gracious to them. It is the first, but certainly not the last, time that you can read in the Bible how easily and also how subtly God's Word can be misused.

The people who rebelled against God and went to Satan's side have obviously followed his example. Lamech, for instance, was in a boisterous mood one day and bragged to his two wives about his craving for power (*Gen. 4:23,24*). He emphasized his words by quoting the promise which God gave to Cain "If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." (*Gen. 4:15*) God said this to show that He does not tolerate murder. He would not permit Cain to become a victim of revenge. Lamech applies this promise to himself, as an expression of his pride and insolence. He is saying that he will have his revenge whether God likes it or not.

Taken Out of Its Context

Bible texts are also quite often taken out of their context. The connection of one text with that which surrounds it is ignored. Texts are used to justify a personal opinion or a certain attitude, even if it is a flat contradiction with what the original text teaches. For example, imagine a student who is so hungry that he can not wait for lunch and quickly sneaks a good bite of his sandwich during class. When the teacher reprimands him, he quotes *Prov. 9:17*, "Bread eaten in secret is pleasant". That student may or may not be joking, but his misuse of the Bible is obvious.

The Bible is also abused in other ways, and Satan knows every trick and method. There are methods which are so subtle that he even used them to tempt Jesus (*Matt. 4*). He took Jesus to the high roof of the temple and told Him that by jumping off the roof He would be able to convince the Jews that He was the promised Messiah. He did not have to be afraid, for surely, what *Psalms 91* says applied to the Son of God? The angels would carry Him down safely. It all seems to be true and Biblical, but it is not so. If Jesus had listened to Satan, He certainly would not have come down safely because that is not what the Psalm says. The promise applies to whoever trusts in the Lord, not to whoever follows Satan's advice.

Jesus sees right through Satan's deceit and condemns it sternly. Jesus quotes another Bible text. By doing so, He shows that He is held responsible by God for His own actions even though He is the Son of God. As a child of God, Jesus is

supposed to trust in His Father, just like any other believer. God will protect Him even in the greatest of dangers. The promise of *Ps. 91* applies to everyone who trusts in God, but that promise does not mean that you can dare your heavenly Father to show His power.

Some people leave you with the impression that they are very good Christians simply because they have memorized a lot of the Bible, but these same people may very well twist the Bible. Certainly Satan belongs to this category. He knows the truth but abuses the truth.

Infant Baptism

There are also sincere people who accept the Bible as God's infallible Word but who take texts out of their context. For instance, many people claim to have biblical grounds for rejecting infant baptism.

They usually start the argument with the gospel according to Mark. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." (*Mark 16:16*). Using that text as a basis, they appear to have reached the right conclusion. It says there in plain English that you have to believe first before you can be baptized, and since babies cannot believe yet, they are not allowed to be baptized. Can this be called misusing the Bible? If so, why? The text in Mark is part of the command Jesus gave His disciples to go out into the world and spread the Gospel. In that situation the sequence is logical. Baptism follows conversion. Adults are in view here and not children. Approached from such an angle *Mark 16:16* receives a very different interpretation than when it is looked at by itself.

What is the answer to the question of infant baptism? There are texts which speak of households being baptized, but we can only answer this question by checking in the Bible as to what baptism means. That involves a lot more than playing off the one text against the other. The Heidelberg Catechism, a summarization of many Biblical truths, has a correct and truly Biblical answer. The following is an excerpt from Lord's Day 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

"Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?"

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults. Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the old covenant by circumcision, in place of which baptism was instituted in the new covenant." (*cf. Gen. 17:7, 12; Acts 2:39*)

God promises children the same things as adults (*Matt. 19:4; Luke 1: 15; Is. 4:1-3*). That is why children are ingrafted into the Church by baptism, the sign of God's covenant with us. In Old Testament times this was done by circumcision, but now in the new covenant baptism has replaced circumcision (*Col. 2:11-13; Gen. 17:13*).

Wrong Usage

"But I say to you, Do not swear not at all" (*Matt. 5:34*). "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation." (*James 5:12*)

Many people refer to these and other apparently conclusive texts when they reject the practice of swearing. Again the rule holds that the Bible is a unity. We cannot take sentences out of their context or use them as independent statements to defend a human point of view. Indeed, you can gather from these texts that the Bible prohibits swearing, but if that were an absolute prohibition, then how is it possible that in this same Bible Paul relates to us how he supported his words with an oath? (*Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23*) In another place in the Bible God himself swears an oath (*Heb. 6:16-18*). We also read about an angel who swears by God (*Rev. 10:6*).

Why do Jesus and James prohibit swearing? An answer to that question will also help solve the apparent contradiction between their admonitions. If you read the context in which the texts of Matthew and James are set, then you see that Jesus and James object against the wrong use of God's name just to emphasize and underline your own words or opinions.

You are not to use the Bible for your own purposes. That happens when you misuse the Bible by taking texts out of their context. The differences of opinion that can be created in that way are not to be blamed on obscurity or contradictions in the Bible. They must be blamed on the sinful readers who think they know it all. Unfortunately, we people are often guilty of using Bible texts wrongly.

Always remember that the Bible never contradicts itself. Therefore, read everything in the Bible in its immediate context, and in the framework of the whole Bible. Let God's Word mold your opinions, not the other way around.

What is Sin?

Article 10

The word sin has occurred many times in the lessons of this Bible course. We often use the word "sin" in a vague way, but what exactly is the meaning of sin in the Bible?

The Word Sin in the Bible

Whoever thinks that sin is of minor importance is seriously mistaken. Any word that occurs in the Bible as many times as sin does is worthy of attention. The word sin has a terrible connotation in the Word of God. It indicates a rebellious attitude, a defiant act or deed of a person against God. Sin in the Bible means defiance of God.

The first sinner was Adam. He refused to be obedient to God. He did not accept God's love, but he wanted to be like God himself. By one man, the first man, sin entered into the world and death through sin (*Rom. 5:12*). God said to Adam, "For in the day that you eat of it (that is the tree of knowledge of good and evil) you shall die" (*Gen. 2:17*). Still Adam ate of the fruit of that tree, resulting in both a physical, temporary death and a spiritual, eternal death. In other words, it meant dying and having to be without God's favour (*Eph. 2:1,12*). It was surely the worst thing man ever did to himself.

Sin and death are mentioned in one breath in the Bible (*Rom. 6:23*). Sin has caused a separation between God and man. For man the result of that separation was "death".

Sin Is Being Without Love

Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is doing your own will against God's. When man sins he displays hate instead of God's love. That is quite clear from the first time the Bible uses the word sin. It is in the fourth chapter of Genesis. God had accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's. Therefore, Cain harbours feelings of hatred for his brother Abel. Sin turned love into hatred and Cain killed Abel. As a result of sin man hates God and hates his fellow man instead of loving God and his neighbour. Sin brought a chill into the world. Suddenly, the relationship between God and man became very cold.

Sin Is Unfaithfulness

After God had freed the Israelites out of Egypt He led them into the desert. After many years of oppression Moses finally liberated his people. Still, we should not regard that nation as a victim of the cruelties of others. They were also hard, obstinate, and loveless. They were quick to grumble and complain as soon as anything threatened to go wrong. No matter how often they experienced God's goodness, they hardly ever asked Him respectfully for His help. In their hearts the Israelites were not a stitch better than the Egyptians. Still, God always forgave their sins. He did so because He had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God points that out when He calls Moses in the desert, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (*Ex. 3:6*). My name is I AM WHO I AM! I am faithful, I will do what I have promised.

God Does What He Has Promised

Since He had made the covenant He pardoned the sins of His people time and again (*Ex. 34:6,7*). He taught His people what He demanded of them by His wondrous acts of mercy. It was like God saying to them, "Listen carefully to what I

say. Do everything I tell you to do and I will not send any of these diseases upon you which I have brought upon the Egyptians. For I am the Lord your physician. I want to make this people well, and healthy of heart, soul, and body."

That was the love of God, the God who did everything for them, who always saved and helped them. And how did they respond? Their answer was infidelity. The Bible uses the word "adultery" (*Hos. 2:2; Ezek. 16:23-29, 23:29,30*). As in marriage one partner can have an affair with another man or woman, so the people of Israel turned their backs on God to serve idols. But the Israelites are not the only guilty ones.

Do You Know Yourself?

God is always the same. Therefore, the commandments which He gave to His people are also in force today and tomorrow. Everyday again, we all do things which are contrary to what God has commanded us. There are many such things. Even in our thoughts we do them. Jesus said that whoever is angry with his brother, his fellow man, or who looks with more than normal interest at a woman or a man, is already guilty of trespassing a commandment of God (*Matt. 5:22,28*).

Every covetous thought goes against God's commandment. The Bible teaches you how sinful you are (*Rom 3:10-19*). Paul writes that the power of sin in your life is immeasurably great. Sometimes it seems as if the Bible is exaggerating that power, but also in its description of sin the Bible is completely trustworthy.

We need help. We need Christ to cure us of sin. As a physician He first gives His diagnosis by pointing at the sin in our lives. Whoever laughs off His diagnosis, without realizing his sins, obviously does not need a physician. That is what Jesus once told the Pharisees (*Matt. 9:9-13*). They thought themselves to be "healthy". They did not need a doctor who would cure people of their sins, for they were sinless, were they not? They thought they were good enough without Christ. They brought many sacrifices and they adhered to all the rules (*Matt. 23:23*).

God does not want sacrifices, though. He wants your heart. He asks for love and obedience. You are allowed to live in a world that belongs to God. He made us, we are His (*Ps. 24:1*). God, the Creator, has given us the possibility to know Him. He gave us a heart to love Him; He gave us a mouth to thank Him, and to pray to Him. What does God expect in return? That is expressed in His law. His law gives an image of man the way God has created him to be. At creation man was blameless with respect to God's commandments. He loved God and walked and talked with him. The fact that our present world is anything but loving and faithful to God shows us the reality of sin.

Whoever knows himself and applies the commandments of God to his life, acknowledges his sins to God.

The Results of Sin

The result of sin is the total failure of real life, ending in death. That goes for Adam's life, Cain's life and that of the first nations that perished in the flood. Jerusalem was destroyed because of sin. Israel was led away in exile because of sin. For the same reason Jerusalem was destroyed a second time, and the Jews were scattered over the entire world (*Matt. 23:37,38; 24:2*).

In your own life and in that of others you see the result of sin. All misery, trouble, sorrow and suffering in this world are caused by the sins of man, by the same man who still dares to ask why God permits all the suffering and injustice in our world. Man asks, but at the same time he merrily disregards the diagnosis of the Physician Jesus. Marriages break up; relationships between parents and children are poor; there is friction between governments and subjects; nations deny each other the right to exist. There is hunger, poverty, pain, and death. People are being murdered; unborn life is sacrificed for one's own "well being"; planes and trains are hijacked; people close their eyes to the needs of others. Complete the list yourself. The papers are full of it everyday. It is all the result of sin. When God turns man over to his own desires this world turns into a nightmare (*Rom. 1:18-32*).

Many people think it is not as bad as all that. In fact, they think that within themselves they actually do not regard God and their neighbour with enmity. They put a list of good and beautiful things alongside the negative list mentioned before. It cannot be denied that the good and pleasant things do exist, but sin is even found in them. The Bible is very specific about that. Man as he is by nature, is an enemy of God. In Biblical terms, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (*Rom. 8:7*).

There are people who consciously rebel against God, and then the enmity is very evident. But it is not always so obvious. It also exists when people do not take God and His Word into consideration, when they act as if He does not exist. Sin is not only expressed in theft, adultery, and murder. Sin can also be present in an impeccable life. The Bible lays down a very distinct line. "...Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (*Rom. 14:23*). Our whole existence is sin, as long as we continue to assume a negative or hostile attitude towards God.

A person who has learned to recognize his sins through the law of God, longs for deliverance from those sins. It is not hard to imagine that person's joy when he discovers that such deliverance does exist.

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (*Rom. 7:24,25*).

Easter

John 20-21

The disciples of Jesus had very high expectations. They had visions of Jesus setting up a political kingdom on earth. Confidence soon turned to dismay. Jesus was sentenced and crucified. Soon after His death they had to bury their Saviour, and all their dreams disappeared. It was a nightmare which left them completely bewildered. It was all so tragic! It looked like Golgotha had put an end to all the high expectations of His followers. But then dismay turned to joy. They did see Him again, and He was alive! Suddenly everything was no longer dark for the disciples. Now they saw everything in a different light. The death of Jesus was not the end, but the beginning. His death was necessary to conquer death. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Peter 1:3,4*). The disciples became different people. They saw everything with new eyes. Their sorrow was changed to joy, and they had perspective, expectation, and hope. They were "born again" for Christ was alive!

He Is Alive

The disciples had heard rumors that Jesus was alive, but it was hard to believe such an incredible tale. Yet even they could not deny the facts. Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, Peter (that is, Simon), and the two men on the road to Emmaus (*John 20:11-18; Luke 24:13-35*). Finally the disciples exclaimed, "The Lord has risen indeed!" The Saviour had conquered death and He was alive! The tremendous event of Jesus' resurrection filled the disciples with amazement. It was very difficult for them to accept it just like that. Even when Jesus showed Himself to them, they still doubted (*Luke 24:25,26*). Certainly they were exceedingly happy to see Jesus, but they could not believe it yet. So Jesus asked them if they had something to eat. They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. After He ate it they were convinced He was real and not an hallucination. He really had risen from the dead (*Luke 24:42,43*). Now they also realized He was much more than an ordinary human being. Paul writes about that later: "...and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Rom. 1:4*).

The Bible puts a lot of emphasis on Jesus' resurrection. He said to His disciples, "but after I am raised up..." (*Mark 14:28*). And the angels said to the women who came to His grave "He is not here; for he has risen..." (*Matt. 28:6*) The resurrection was an act of God. God gave the human Jesus the gift of eternal life. That was in response to all that Jesus had done on earth until his crucifixion. On the cross Jesus completed His task on earth. Therefore, God opened His grave and gave Him freedom. The resurrection meant that God declared Jesus to be free from guilt. It is like God said, "My son, come back to me. You have done your work. It is finished". (See also *Heb. 10:14*).

Many People Saw Him

Nobody saw Jesus rise from the dead, but immediately after His resurrection He appeared to many people. First, He met the women and said to them, "Hail!" (*Matt. 28:9*). As soon as the startled women recognized Him they grabbed His feet and worshipped Him. Jesus also showed Himself to Mary Magdalene. He says to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet

ascended to the Father..." (*John 20:17*). Also the disciples were allowed to see Him. He showed them the print of the nails in His hand and His pierced side. Why did Jesus appear to so many people after His resurrection? Even after His ascension He appeared to Paul. "Last of all, as to one untimely born he appeared also to me" (*1 Cor. 15:8, Acts 9*).

Jesus had a very good reason for appearing to so many people. Many people had to know, had to see with their own eyes that the same Jesus whom they had watched dying and whom they had buried, was alive. And the people who saw Him after His resurrection had to pass that fact on to others. The women, the men that went to Emmaus, the eleven disciples, and the more than 500 brethren could all testify that Jesus was living (*1 Cor. 15:6*). "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands,... which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (*1 John 1:1-3*). In other words John says, "I am telling you about the Lord Jesus whom I, together with the other apostles, have seen with my own eyes, whom I have heard with my own ears, and whom I have known intimately when He lived on this earth, so that you may know that everything has happened that way." This is the type of witness that all those who saw Jesus sent out. It is very clear now that Jesus' death was not the end but only the beginning.

That witness can still be heard today. Those people who saw Jesus for our sake also gave an account of the things that happened so that we would know that He truly lives. The heart of the good tidings in the Bible is that Jesus Christ died on the cross and lives again. Peter put it in the following words to the Jewish Council. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts 4:12*). And Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth, "...it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (*1 Cor 1:21*). The eyewitnesses' account of Jesus' resurrection was given so that we may believe in our salvation.

His Work Continues

On Golgotha Jesus finished His earthly task. Salvation came to a world lost in sin and guilt. But that was not all. From then on, Jesus started giving that salvation to a lost world. Immediately after His resurrection He began doing so. For another forty days He remained in the world to make the necessary preparations for what was to be done in our world after His ascension. During that period, while showing Himself to so many people, He gave His orders to the disciples (*Acts 1:4,5,8*). He spoke with them about many things that related to the Kingdom of God, and He gave them instructions for the work they were to start. He also told them what would happen. They would be witnesses to the ends of the earth because what Christ had done must be made known to the whole world. To that end they received the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost. From then on they were to witness everywhere about what they had heard and seen.

After forty days of preparation had passed, Jesus left the earth. Already before His death He told His disciples why that had to happen. "...I go to prepare a place for you" (*John 14:2*).

Now His task is to bring people back to God so that they can be with God forever (*2 Cor. 6:16-18*). People can return to God. They may live forever with God in His heavenly House, if they but repent and believe.

Questions 21

The Bible Abused

1. In *1 John 4:8* and *16* we read that "God is love", and in *Rom. 12:19* "Vengeance is mine" (*Deut. 32:35*). That seems to be a major contradiction. Can you prove from the context of both passages that this is not the case?
2. When Isaiah urges King Ahaz to ask for a sign from the Lord, the King answers, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." That seems to be a biblical answer, but it is not. Why was King Ahaz's answer a misuse of the Bible text? (*Is. 7:12; Deut. 6:16*)
3. Supporters of disarmament and pacifism often refer to the Bible. To defend their point of view they quote the sixth commandment "You shall not kill", and the words of Jesus "Love your enemies". Is the use of these texts correct? (*Matt. 5:38-47*)

What Is Sin?

1. Why was the Pharisee in *Luke 18:9-14* not "justified", whereas the tax collector was?
2. What does it mean when you claim that there are no sins in your life? (*1 John 1:8,10*)
3. What will God do for us if we acknowledge our sins to Him, and why does He do so? (*1 John 1:9, 2:2*)

Easter

1. Some members of the congregation in Corinth denied the resurrection from the dead. What was the result of that denial? (*1 Cor. 15:12-19*)
2. There are people who deny that Jesus rose physically from the dead. Can you name some texts from the gospel which prove that after His resurrection Jesus had a real human body, the same body with which He was buried?
3. One day we too will arise. After our resurrection from the dead our bodies will be like the resurrected body of Christ (*Phil. 3:21*). In *1 Cor. 15:35-58* Paul describes that resurrected body. What is the difference between the body before and after the resurrection?