

Anthropology and Hamartiology 7 The Distinction Between Sin and Unrighteousness

a study for the Bible Institute of Gulf Coast Baptist Church Fall 2022 by Steve Thomas

Introduction

Every word of the scriptures is inspired in its original writings. When God chooses a word in a particular scripture, it has significance and meaning. For a long time, the main word for something that is offensive to God has been “sin”. This fact is one reason why this class is called hamartiology or a study of sin. A better word to describe the major category of things that are offensive to God would be unrighteousness. There is a distinction between the words sin and unrighteousness. Why should the believer make this distinction? For one reason, God makes the distinction so it should be important to the believer. Another reason would be the fact that there are things the believer is commanded to do when sin takes place, yet not when unrighteousness takes place. These things will be explored in a later lesson. The word unrighteous or unrighteousness is only used 30 times in the Bible. The adjective is used in the OT more predominantly and the noun is used more often in the New Testament.

Definition of Unrighteousness

Unrighteousness can be defined as that which is not right according to God’s standard, but falls short of God’s measurement of sin. Strong’s lexicon defines unrighteousness as: “(legal) **injustice** (properly the quality, by implication the act); **moral wrongfulness** (of character, life or act): translated as - iniquity, unjust, unrighteousness, wrong. Thayer’s lexicon defines it as “**injustice** of a judge; unrighteousness of heart and life; **a deed violating law and justice**, act of unrighteousness.” It is a broad word that includes many different types of behavior that is considered offensive to God. Many of these different words will be explored in the next lesson. Paul describes the group at the Tower of Babel in Romans 1 with many words that fall under the broad umbrella of unrighteousness.

In Romans 2:8 and 1:18 Paul describes unrighteousness in relation to the truth. In chapter 1 Paul states that the unrighteousness of men “keeps back” or “hinders” the truth. The word truth with the article here could be defined as the way things really are as opposed to the way things have been made to look by Satan in the World System. God is seeking to reveal the way things really are, and Satan has veiled this revelation. Man’s unrighteousness is hindering the process of God revealing the way things really are. In chapter 2 Paul says that men actually obey unrighteousness, wrath, and indignation instead of the truth.

Use of Unrighteousness in the Old Testament

In the OT the Hebrew word for unrighteousness is “*eh-vel*” which means injustice, wrong; violent deeds of injustice (of speech). Unrighteousness is used four times in the Old Testament to describe unright behavior in judgment by the nation Israel.¹ Unrighteousness is used to describe the behavior of one in the nation of Israel who uses underhanded methods to accomplish personal ends.² The word is used in Ezekiel 28 to describe the thought in the mind of

¹ Leviticus 19:15,35

² Jeremiah 22:13

Anthropology and Hamartiology 8 The Words for “Unrighteousness”
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I. VARIOUS TERMS REPRESENTATIVE OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN SCRIPTURE.

A. Old Testament Terms.

1. **Sin** - (chata) 2398- to sin (see above for definition) (213 times- sin in the Old Testament had a variety of uses. The meaning, as is the case with all words, is dependent on the context. Noun forms aj.x e- (chet') 2399 sin

a. Non technical usage, Judges 20:16.

b. Sin against Jehovah (A.V. “Lord”) or Elohim (A.V. “God”), forty-six times.

1) Idolatry, Ex. 23:33; 32:30-33; Hos. 13:2; cf. Ex. 20:3. 6

2) Not fulfilling God’s requirement, Num. 32:23.

3) Transgression against God’s commandment, I Sam. 15:24.

4) Disobedience to His laws, Isa. 42:24.

5) Provocation of Jehovah in the wilderness, Psa. 78:17.

6) Sin of ignorance of law, Lev. 4:2, 3, 13, 22, 27.

7) Lying to his neighbor, Lev. 6:2; cf. Ex. 20:16.

8) Stealing, Lev. 6:4, cf. Ex. 20:15.

9) Eating blood, I Sam. 14:33, 34, cf. Lev. 3:17.

10) Adultery, Lev. 20:20; cf. Ex. 20:14; II Sam. 12:13.

11) Speaking against Jehovah, Num. 21:5-7.

2. **Evil** (ra- noun) 7451; (raa- verb) 7489- evil, calamity. (Verb, 80 times; noun, 623 times).

a. Used of God bringing calamity (evil) in judgment on Israel and others.

1) Do them “hurt” (verb) for serving strange gods, Josh. 24:20.

2) Will “break” (verb) the Gentiles with a rod of iron, Psa. 2:9.

3) The Lord thought to do evil (noun- calamity) to the people, Ex. 32:14.

b. Used of the evil of man.

1) Pharaoh’s evil (calamitous) (verb) treatment of the Israelites, Ex. 5:22,23; Deut. 26:6.

2) Bring physical “harm” (verb), I Sam. 26:21.

3) The evil activity (verb) of idolatry, I Kgs. 14:9.

4) Tree of the knowledge of good and evil (calamity) (noun), Gen. 2:9,17; cf. 3:5, 22.

5) The evil (noun) done by Joseph’s brothers against him, Gen. 50:15, 17, 20.

6) Israelites did evil in the sight of Jehovah, Num. 32:13; Deut. 4:25; Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1, etc.

7) “Wickedness” of different individuals in Judah, Jer. 44:9 (five times).

3. **Perversity** (awon, noun) or (awen, noun) 5771- perversity, (depravity- used of the sin nature; which results in acts of sin) guilt, etc.; (awah, verb) 5753- to curve, twist, distort; to act perversely, be perverse. The noun is translated “iniquity” 223 times out of 230 occurrences.

- a. Men bear the consequences of their perversity (A.V. “iniquity”), Ex. 28:38, 43; Lev. 5:1, 17, 18; 16:21, 22; 17:16, etc.
- b. These were to be confessed, Lev. 26:40; Neh, 9:2, etc.
- c. These needed to be forgiven, Num. 14:18, 19, etc.
- d. The thing behind the sin, I Chron. 21:8, Jer. 14:7.
- e. David’s desire to have them blotted out, Psa. 51:9.
- f. Used in context of sins and transgression, Job 13:23; Psa. 32:5; Jer. 33:8; Ezek. 18:20; 21:24; Dan. 9:24.
- g. Christ was bruised for the perversities of Israel, Isa. 53:5, 6.

4. **Transgress** (pesha, noun) 6588, or (pasha, verb)- transgress, transgression, rebel, rebellion. (A.V. noun-“transgression” 84 times out of 93 occurrences; verb- “transgress” 18 times, “transgressor” nine times, “rebelled” six times, “revolt” six times, “offend” once- out of 93 occurrences). (Also cf. the verb (avaar) 5674- to pass over- used in a wide variety of ways including “transgression.” cf. II Kgs. 18:12; Jer. 34:18; Dan. 9:11; I Sam. 2:24).

- a. Transgressions needed to be pardoned, Ex. 23:21.
- b. Transgressions needed to be forgiven and blotted out, Ex. 34:7; Psa. 51:1.
- c. Transgression accompanied sin, Lev. 16:16,21; Psa. 25:7; Amos 5:12; (they sinned by transgressing, Jer. 33:8- used with #s 1 and 3).
- d. Transgression needed to be confessed, Psa. 32:5.
- e. Christ was wounded for Israel’s transgressions, Isa. 53:5, cf. vs. 12. f. Israel transgressed against God, I Kgs. 8:50; Jer. 2:29.

5. **Wicked** 7562 (resha, noun- masculine) or 7564 (risha, noun- feminine); 7563 (rasha, adjective); (rasha, verb)- wicked, wickedness, to act wickedly. (The adjective is translated “wicked” 251 times out of 262 occurrences; the masculine noun is translated “wickedness” 25 times out of 30 occurrences; The feminine noun “wickedness” 14 times out of 15 occurrences; the verb translates the concept “to do wickedly” 17 times out of 34 occurrences).

- a. To sin is to do wickedly, Dan. 9:5,15.
- b. Korah and his cohorts were wicked men and consumed in their sins, Num. 16:26.
- c. Murderers are wicked men, II Sam. 4:11.
- d. The wicked (A.V. “ungodly”) are contrasted with the righteous, Psa. 1:1, 4, 5, 6. (Also cf. “ungodly” in Job 16:11; 34:18; Psa. 3:7; 73:12).
- e. The wicked transgress, Psa. 36:1; Prov. 29:16.

f. The wicked have perversities (# 3) and sins (# 1), Prov. 5:22, (cf. 10:16); Psa. 141:4; Isa. 13:11; Ezek. 3:19; 18:20, 24; 33:8, 12; Jer. 14:20.

g. The work of the wicked is deceitful, Prov. 11:18; as well as their thoughts, 12:5; desires the calamity of his neighbor, 21:10; his ways are evil, Ezek. 33:11.

6. **Iniquity** (ewen- noun) 205- trouble, vanity, affliction. (A.V.- “iniquity” 47 times; “vanity” seven times, “wickedness” seven times, etc. out of 78 occurrences). (Cf. “workers of iniquity” 19 times; “works of ...” four times).

a. Connected to trouble (A.V. “perverseness), Num. 23:21.

b. Workers of “iniquity”, i.e. vanity, Job 34:8,22; Psa. 94:4 etc.

c. Goes together with mischief and falsehood, Psa. 7:14.

d. Words of “iniquity” and deceit, Psa. 36:3; devises “mischief”, 36:4; Mic. 2:1; speak “vanity”, Isa. 58:9; Zech. 10:2.

e. Heart may devise “wicked”, i.e. vain, imaginations, Prov. 6:18.

7. **Trespass** (asham, masculine noun) 816 (asheem, adjective) 818; (ashaam,verb) 816- trespass, offence, guilt.

a. “Guiltiness” (A.V.), Gen. 26:10.

b. “Trespass offering” for sins, Lev. 5:7, 15, 16, 18, 19. (34 times out of 44 occurrences).

c. “Trespass” used with the term sin, Lev. 19:22. (six times out of 44 occurrences).

d. The verb carries the idea of being guilty, Lev. 4:13, 27; as a result of sin, Lev. 6:4. (13 times out of 32 occurrences) (“trespass,” four times; “offend,” 8 seven times; “destroy,” six times, in the sense of bear the guilt).

8. **Mischief** (amaal, masculine noun) 5999- labor, mischief, trouble.

a. Those who plow in perversity sow in trouble (“wickedness”) reap in the same, Job 4:8.

b. Travails with vanity (#6) and conceived trouble (A.V. “mischief”) and brought forth falsehood, Psa. 7:14.

c. God does not look favorably on trouble (A.V. “iniquity”, note other terms for unrighteousness in the verse), Hab. 1:13.

9. **Unfaithful** (ma’aal, verb) 4603; (maa’aal) 4604- to be treacherous, unfaithful, done covertly by stealth; unfaithful, treacherous. (A.V. -“trespass 23 times out of 35 occurrences; transgress, etc. twelve times.

a. The verb is translated “trespass,” etc.- to commit a trespass, Lev. 5:15. (goes on to sin in ignorance; this treachery is a trespass (# 7).

b. The Jews trespassed against God, Lev. 26:40; Num. 5:6; Ezek. 39:26; the land sinned by trespassing, Ezek. 14:13.

10. **Injustice** (awaal, verb) 5765; (awel, masculine noun) 5766, cf. 5767- to distort, turn away, to perform injustice; violent deeds of injustice, injustice in general. (A.V.- “iniquity” 36 times out of 53 occurrences; wicked, nine times; unjust, three times.

- a. The unjust knoweth no shame, Zeph. 3:5.
- b. Used of unjust judgment, Psa. 82:2. 1

11. **Backslide** (mishbah) 4878- turn back, return, a falling away, backslide.

- a. Israel’s backsliding in returning back into idolatry, Jer.3:8.
- b. The people of Jerusalem slid back by backsliding, Jer. 8:5.

12. **Sin of Ignorance** (shagaag, verb) 7683; (shegagah, feminine noun) 7684; (shagah) 7686- go astray, sin ignorantly, inadvertently; a sin of error, committed through inadvertence. Only in the O. T. under law.

- a. Sin through ignorance brought guilt, Lev. 4:13.
- b. To make the blind wander out of the way, Deut. 27:18.

13. **Foolishness** (iweleth, feminine noun) 200- foolishness, folly. (A.V.- “foolishness” ten times out of 25 occurrences, folly 13 times.

- a. Connected to sins, Psa. 69:5.
- b. Descriptive of the speech of fools, Prov. 15:2, 14
- c. Such a man perverts his way, Prov. 19:3.

14. **Treacherously** (bagaadth, verb) 898- act or deal treacherously. (A.V.- “treacherously,” etc. 28 times out of 46 occurrences, “transgression,” etc. 13 times).

- a. “The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously,” Isa. 21:2; 24:16; 33:1.
- b. Connected with being a “transgressor” (#3), Isa. 48:8.
- c. The divided kingdoms, Israel and Judah were behaving treacherously against Jehovah, Jer. 5:11, cf. Jer. 3:20; Hos. 5:7; 6:7.

15. **Pervert** (awah- verb) 5753- to bend, curve, twist, distort, to act perversely, to pervert, make crooked. (A.V.- “perversity” five times out of 16 occurrences, “iniquity” four times).

- a. David sinned and had “done wickedly,” II Sam. 24:17, cf. I Kgs. 8:47; II Chron. 6:37; Job 33:27; Psa. 33:27; 106:6; Dan. 9:5.
- b. Used of idolatry, Jer. 3:21.

16. **Abomination** (toebah, noun) 8441- abomination, something abominable, disgusting.

- a. To Jehovah, Prov. 3:32; 11:1, 20.
- b. Of idolatry, I Kgs. 14:24; II Kgs. 16:3; 21:3; Ezra 9:1; Ezek. 16:2.

B. New Testament Terms.

1. **Sin** (hamartia, feminine noun) 266- sin; (hamartolos) 268- sinner; (hamartema, noun) 265- a sin, result of an act; (hamartano, verb) 264- to sin.

- a. Definition, I Jn. 3:4 (see Greek above).
- b. Sin is unrighteous, cf. I Jn. 5:17 above.
- c. All are under sin, Rom. 3:9; cf. Eph. 2:1.

- d. All have a sin nature dwelling within, Rom. 7:17, 20, 23.
- e. All (Jew and Gentile) have sinned, Rom. 3:23.
- f. The wages of the sin (nature) is death, Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:15.
- g. Salvation is from sin, Mt. 1:21. (Here of Jews).
- h. Sins need to be forgiven.

- 1) Only God forgives sin, Mk. 2:5, 7, 9, 10; cf. Lk. 7:47-49; Acts 13:38.

- 2) To the Jews, Mt. 9:2, 5, 6.

- 3) To the Church.

- a) Judicially, Col. 1:14.

- b) In a family sense, I Jn. 1:9.

- i. Christ dealt with the problem of sin.

- 1) As the Lamb of God, Jn. 1:29; cf. II Cor. 5:21.

- 2) Christ came to save sinners, I Tim. 1:15.

- 3) Christ died for our sins, I Cor. 15:3; cf. Gal. 1:4.

- 4) Christ died for sinners, Rom. 5:8.

- 5) Christ purged our sins, Heb. 1:3; cf. 9:26, 28; 10:12; I Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Rev. 1:5.

- 6) The blood of Christ keeps on cleansing us from all sin, I Jn. 1:7.

- 7) Sin needs to be confessed to God.

- a) Jews during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus, Mt. 3:6.

- b) The Church for forgiveness on a family level, I Jn. 1:9.

2. **Lawlessness** (anomia, feminine noun) 458- lawlessness; (anomos) 459- without law, a lawless one; (anomos, adverb) 459- lawlessly.

- a. Definition: Lawlessness is acting as if God has no requirements or restrictions. The lawlessness is the sin, I Jn. 3:4. (See above).

- b. The law was made for lawless people, I Tim. 1:9.

- c. Lawlessness (A.V. "iniquity") needs to be forgiven, Rom. 4:7.

- d. Christ gave Himself to redeem us from lawlessness (A.V. "iniquity"), Tit. 2:14.

3. **Trespass** (paraptoma- neuter noun- result of an action) 3900- trespass, offence; (parapipto, verb) 3895- to fall alongside, to deviate, to fall away.

- a. Definition: A trespass is a falling alongside, an offence.

- b. Through Adam's trespass (A.V. "offence") many died spiritually, Rom. 5:15, 17, 18; Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13 (A.V. "sins" in Eph. 2:5 and Col. 2:13). 10

- c. Trespasses can overtake a Christian before he sins, Gal. 6:1.

- d. Trespasses need to be forgiven.

- 1) Under law, Mk. 11:25,26.

- 2) Under grace, Eph. 1:7. (A.V. "sins").

e. Christ was delivered over because of our trespasses (A.V. “offences”), Rom. 4:25.

4. **Transgression** (parabasis, feminine noun) 3847- a going over, transgression; (parabates, masculine first declension noun) 3848 (parabaino, verb) 3845- to go over, to go alongside, to transgress.

a. Definition: Transgression is a crossing over a line, a rule.

b. Adam transgressed when he sinned, Rom. 5:14; cf. I Tim. 2:14

c. Law was added because of transgression, Gal. 3:19.

d. A transgressor (A.V. “breaker”) was one who crossed over the line and broke the law, Rom. 2:25, 27.

e. Transgression is not possible under grace, Rom. 4:15.

5. **Unrighteousness** (adikia, feminine noun) 93; (adikos, masculine noun) 94; (adikos, adverb) 95; (adikema, neuter noun) 92; (adikeo, verb) 91- unrighteous, unrighteousness, to be unrighteous, behave wrong.

a. Definition: Unrighteousness, is that which is not right, that which fails to conform to God’s absolute standard of righteousness.

b. Unrighteousness is made up of many bad things, Rom. 1:29f.

c. Unrighteousness shares the same quality as sin and is the larger term, I Jn. 5:17.

d. Men suppress the truth by unrighteousness, Rom. 1:18.

e. The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God (salvation), I Cor. 6:9.

f. Unrighteousness brings penalty.

1) A quality of God’s wrath, Rom. 1:18; 2:8.

2) Brings its own reward, II Pet. 2:13.

3) The unrighteous are reserved unto a day of judgment to be punished, II Pet. 2:9. g. Christ suffered for sin as the righteous One suffered for the unrighteous, I Pet. 3:18.

h. The grace believer and unrighteousness.

1) Can yield members of the body as implements of unrighteousness that can be carried out in sin, Rom. 6:13.

2) Need to be cleansed from all unrighteousness, I Jn. 1:9.

6. **Malignant evil** (poneria- feminine noun) 4189; (poneros, adjective) 4190- evil, malignant evil.

a. Definition: This is one who lacks in character who wants to drag others into the same behavior. (Cf. evil fruit, Mt. 7:17, ruins other fruit). It is unrighteous, Rom. 1:29.

b. The kind of thing an evil man brings forth out of his malignantly evil treasure, Mt. 12:35; Lk. 6:45.

c. Can be thoughts that come out from the heart, Mt. 15:19.

- d. Deeds that come from within a man, Mk. 7:22, 23.
- e. Need to be delivered from this evil, Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4.
- f. Men's deeds are evil, Jn. 3:19, cf. 7:7; Col. 1:21; II Jn. 11.
- g. Christians are to abhor such evil, Rom. 12:9.
- h. Christians are to abstain from the very appearance of evil, I Th. 5:22.
- i. The Lord is faithful to establish the believer and keep him from the evil one, II Thess. 3:3, cf. II Tim. 4:18.

7. **Bad** (kakos, adjective) 2556; (kakia, feminine noun) 2549; (kakos, adverb); 2560; (kakoo, verb) 2561- bad, lacking in character.

- a. A quality or act that constitutes one to be less than they ought to be, to be lacking in character.
- b. This evil is unrighteous, Rom. 1:29, 30.
- c. Can be thoughts, Mk. 7:21.
- d. Can be deeds, Acts 9:13; III Jn. 11.
- e. Is worthy of judgment, Rom. 2:9.
- f. The Christian is to be simple, i.e. without mixture, in this evil, Rom. 16:19.

8. **Ungodliness** (asebeia, feminine noun) 763; (asebes, neuter noun) 765; (asebeo, verb) 764- ungodliness, ungodly, to act ungodly.

- a. Definition: Not giving to God what is due Him in conduct. A lack of the manifestation of the life of God by activity.
- b. Ungodly equated with sinners, Jude 15; I Pet. 4:18 (G# rule).
- c. Brings wrath and judgment, Rom. 1:18; II Pet. 3:7.
- d. Christ died for the ungodly, Rom. 5:6.
- e. Christians are declared righteous from ungodly, Rom. 4:5.
- f. Christians are to say no to ungodliness, Tit. 2:12.

9. **Disobedient** (apeithes, neuter noun) 545; (apeitheo, verb) 544- unpersuaded, disobedient, to be un-persuaded, to be disobedient.

- a. Definition: To be un-persuaded; to refuse to believe and obey, disobedience.
- b. The unbelievers are sons of disobedience, Eph. 2:2.
- c. Disobedience brings God's wrath, Eph. 5:6; Jn. 3:36.

10. **Amiss** (parakoe, feminine noun) 3876; (parakouo, verb) 3878- a hearing alongside (amiss), disobedience, to hear aside or amiss, to be disobedient.

- a. Definition: A failure to listen to what God says resulting in disobedience.

- b. Through Adam's disobedience the many were made sinners, Rom. 5:19.

11. **Unfaithful** (apistia, feminine noun) 570; (apistos, adjective) 571; (apisteo, verb) 569- unbelief, unfaithful, unfaithfulness, to be unfaithful, not dependable.

- a. Definition: A refusal or failure to take God at His word.

- b. Can have a malignantly evil heart of unbelief, Heb. 3:12
 - c. Paul persecuted the Church ignorantly in unbelief, I Tim. 1:13.
12. **Err** (plane, feminine noun) 4106; (planos, masculine noun) 4108; (planoo, verb) 4105- to err, to be led astray.
- a. Definition: Deception that causes one to be led astray morally or doctrinally,
 - b. Men will deceive and be deceived, II Tim. 3:13.
 - c. We can deceive ourselves, I Jn. 1:8.
 - d. We can be deceived by others, I Jn. 2:26; 3:7.
13. **Worthless** (phaulos, adjective) 5337- worthless (A.V. “evil”). 12
- a. The one practicing worthless things hates the light, Jn. 3:20.
 - b. There is a resurrection to judgment for those who have practiced worthless things, Jn. 5:29.
 - c. Worthless speech, Tit. 2:8.
 - d. Worthless work, Jas. 3:16, cf. II Cor. 5:10 (textual problem).
14. **Rotten** (sapos, adjective) 4550- rotten, putrid (A.V. “corrupt communication”), Eph. 4:29, elsewhere of rotten trees or fruit, Mt. 7:17, 18; 12:23; Lk. 6:43; bad fish, Mt. 13:48.
15. **Blasphemy** (blasphemia, feminine noun) 988; (blasphemos, adjective) 989; (blasphemeo, verb) 987- blasphemy, attributing things to a person that are not true of that person; to speak reproachfully.
- a. God and His Word can be blasphemed, Rom. 2:24; Tit. 2:5; Jas. 2:7.
 - b. Christians are to put away this kind of activity, Eph. 4:31.
16. **Idolatry** (edololatreia, feminine noun) 1495; (eidolon, neuter noun) 1497- worship of idols; an idol.
- a. Idolatry is a work of the flesh, Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5.
 - b. Christians are to flee from idolatry, I Cor. 10:14.
 - c. Christians are to keep themselves from idols, I Jn. 5:21.
17. **Profane** (bebelos, adjective) 952; (bebeloo, verb) 953- accessible, permissible to be trodden upon, profane; to profane.
- a. Used of men who are profane, I Tim. 1:9; Heb. 12:16.
 - b. Used of Jewish myths, I Tim. 4:7.
 - c. To be avoided and shunned, I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 2:16.
18. **Unclean** (koinos, adjective) 2839; (koinoo, verb) 2840- common, in a bad sense- unclean; to render unclean, to defile.
- a. To the one who reckons something to be common or unclean, it is unclean, Rom. 14:14.
 - b. The things that come out of a man defile or make him unclean, Mt. 15:11, 18; Mk. 7:15, 18, 20, 23.

19. **Abomination** (bdelugma, neuter noun) 946; (bdeluktos, adjective) 946; (bdelusso, verb) 948- a foul loathsome detestable thing, abomination; abominable, detestable; to render foul, to cause to be abhorred.

a. Those are defiled who deny God and who are disobedient, Tit. 1:16.

b. Those who are unbelieving and will stand before the Great White Throne to be cast into the Lake of Fire, Rev. 21:8.

Satan before he actually acted upon it. It is our word “eh-vel” translated iniquity. Unrighteousness was found in Satan before he sinned. Lucifer’s thoughts were offensive to God before he acted to overthrow God’s authority and led the portion of angels astray.³

Use of Unrighteousness in the New Testament

The greek word for unrighteousness “*adikos*” is defined as to act in a way that is inconsistent with a standard of right behavior. This word describes things or people that are contrary to God’s character or offensive to God. It is used in the gospels to describe wealth that is obtained in unjust ways.⁴ It is used in Romans 3:5 to describe behavior that is not consistent with the character of God. God’s character is used as the standard here for what is right. It is used in multiple passages to describe the unbeliever.⁵

The Distinction Between Sin and Unrighteousness

In 1 John 5:17 the lack of the article tells us that all unrighteousness has a quality of sin. They are not equal, but one has a form or quality of the other. In Hebrews 8:12 Israel is accused of committing both unrighteousness and sin. Both of these terms being in the same verse draws attention to the distinction between them. In the following passages the word for sin is used in conjunction with different terms, marking it as distinct from unrighteousness - Eph. 2:1; Lev. 6:2; 2 Chron. 33:19; Job 13:23; Matt. 12:3.

In Romans 1:29, Paul is describing the group at the Tower of Babel. He uses many different words which we will define next week in conjunction with unrighteousness.

The Significance of the Distinction

When studying a topic, it is wise to see what marks it as different from other topics. Just because something is similar, doesn’t mean it is the same. Similarity is not identity. In order to fully understand something, one must grasp what makes it unique and different. Sin and unrighteousness are similar but not the same. The Bible does not ask the believer to confess unrighteousness, even though it is offensive to God. Unrighteousness in the mind can keep the believer from the benefits associated with present tense salvation, and it should be forsaken. But sin is to be confessed to restore fellowship according to 1 John 1:9. When the believer agrees with God about the action taken, not calling it a mess up, or a faux pas, or a misstep, God will cleanse the mind of the believer of the unrighteous thoughts that led to the sin. The attitude will be adjusted along with the restoration of fellowship. There is so much that falls short of God’s standard of holiness, yet does not quite meet the standard that God sets for sin. God’s gracious actions take care of this mess. God has made a decision to put the sin of the believer behind Him.

³ Ezekiel 28:15

⁴ Luke 16:11

⁵ Matt. 5:45 (God lets rain shine on) Acts 24:15 (will be a resurrection of); 1st Co. 6:1 (believers not to take arguments before) 6:9 (they shall not inherit the Kingdom of God); 1st Pet. 3:18 (Christ suffered for); 2 Pet. 2:9 (reserved to a day of punishment)

Hebrews 8:12, 10:17, Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 38:17, Micah 7:19 all describe actions that God has taken regarding the sin of man. Some of these passages apply to Israel, and some are prophetic. But they describe how God chooses to look at man when the blood of Christ is applied. Jesus's blood is said to have taken away the sins of the world.⁶ This blood is applied to all who will believe. Romans 1:16 says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. God has said that he will remember the sins and iniquities no more. So judicially these have been taken care of. But sin has a residual stain and corrupts. God does not see this stain, because the blood of Christ cleanses the believer from all sin - positionally.⁷ The believer still faces consequences for sin in this life. His body will face the results of bad choices. The mind is contaminated with unrighteousness that leads to sinful actions. However, when the believer confesses his sin, the Lord will cleanse the mind of the unrighteousness that led up to the sin. This is significant.

Conclusion

When the Bible uses a different word to describe something that seems similar, the believer should sit up and take notice. There was a good reason for the use of the different vocabulary. Unrighteousness is a broad term that is used to describe anything that is offensive to God, anything that will fall short of God's holy character. Sin however, is describing action that crosses a boundary. Sin is acting as if God has placed no restraints upon the behavior of man. Sin fits inside all unrighteousness. All sin is offensive to God, but not everything that is offensive to God can be defined as sin.

⁶ John 1:29 John the Baptist's cry.

⁷ 1 John 1:7