



1 John 3:4

(4) Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

Ephesians 2:1

(1) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
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It is easy for us to think of [sin](#) only in terms of [1 John 3:4](#). It is, however, a good place to begin. Sin is directly connected to breaking laws. "Law," especially in the Old Testament, frequently means the broader term "instruction." Thus, we have more to consider as sin than just the breaking of a specific law. However, sin is not a complicated concept.

Numerous terms in both Old and New Testaments describe sin, but collectively they all give the same sense: to deviate from a way, path, or law; to fail to live up to a standard. We find two of these words, translated as "trespasses" and "sins," in [Ephesians 2:1](#): "And you He has made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins."

Trespasses, from the Greek *paraptoma*, means "to go off a path, fall or slip aside." When it is applied to moral and ethical issues it means to deviate from the right way, to wander. *Sins*, the Greek *hamartia*, is generally associated with military usage and means to "miss the mark." It indicates failing to make a bull's-eye. In moral and ethical contexts, it means to fail of one's purpose, to go wrong, or to fail to live according to an accepted standard or ideal. Sin is the failure to be what we ought to be and could be.

The Hebrew equivalents of *hamartia* and *paraptoma* are *chata* and *asham*, respectively. In Hebrew, *asham* comes closest to meaning the actual breaking of a law; in Greek, it is *anomos*. Both of these will sometimes be translated "iniquity" or "lawlessness." (See E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, appendices 44 and 128.)

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When we understand the terms [God](#) inspired to describe sin, we can easily see why sin is so universal. Because the robber, murderer, drunkard, rapist, and child-abuser are so obviously evil, we readily agree that they are sinners. In our hearts we consider *ourselves* to be respectable citizens since we do none of these things. These terms, though, bring us face to face with the reality of sin—that it is not always obvious. Sin is not confined to external conduct. Sometimes it is buried within one's heart and very cleverly concealed from all but the most discerning.

The ministry has not invented sin; it is part of the territory Christianity covers. Christianity is a way of life from God that reaches into every facet of life. The central idea of sin is failure. We sin when we fail to live up to the standards of this way of life that God established and revealed through His [prophets](#), apostles and [Jesus Christ](#), the Chief Revelator.

As such, sin reaches into marital relationships, [childrearing](#), cleanliness, clothing, hospitality, health, employment—even how we drive our automobiles. It involves itself in the entire gamut of human attitudes such as [pride](#), envy, anger, hatred, greed, jealousy, resentment, depression, and bitterness. In the New Testament, the biblical writers always use *hamartia* in a moral and ethical sense, whether describing commission, omission, thought, feeling, word, or deed.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[What Sin Is & What Sin Does](#)

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