

# What Does the Bible Teach About Greater and Besetting Sins?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

## Introduction:

A. Beginning tonight and for the next three weeks, we will try to understand the nature of sin. It is not a word that is used in public and secular discussion, and it is beginning to fade from our conversations in spiritual matters. Sin has not ceased to exist because we no longer talk about it. I believe part of the reason why we fear the subject so much is that we know so little about it, and what we think we know may be quite misguided. We will examine this from a Bible perspective, considering these four categories of sins:

1. Greater and besetting sins
2. Intentional, deliberate sins
3. Secret sins
4. Sins committed inadvertently and in ignorance

## B. The Bible speaks of various kinds of sins:

1. Secret sins; known only by God and the sinner - Psalm 19:12
2. Besetting sins; constantly attacking, ongoing temptation - Heb. 12:1
3. Presumptuous sins; shameless, careless, and irreverent - Psalm 19:13
4. Willful sins; deliberate, voluntarily, without consideration of others or consequences - Heb. 10:26-27
5. Weakness, ignorance, and inadvertence - sin that overtakes the vulnerable - Gal. 6:1; 1Tim. 1:13

## I. GREATER SINS

### A. What are "greater sins"?

1. John 19:11 - "Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.'"
2. While we may judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must trust judgment of persons and their sins to the justice and mercy of God

### B. The Bible affirms greater sins. The context of the phrase reveals much about its nature

1. Amos 5:12 - It takes advantage of the weak and vulnerable
2. Lam. 1:8 - It dismisses consequences
3. 2Kings 17:21; Ex. 32:21, 30-31 - It publicly defies God
4. 2Sam. 24:10; 1Chron. 21:8 - It involves and harms many others
5. John 19:11; James 3:1 - Committed by those with greater responsibility

## II. THERE ARE DISTINCTIONS IN BIBLE WORDS FOR SIN

A. Hebrew "pesha" - "great transgression, rebellion; transgression against individuals, nations, or God; it is recognized by the sinner; it is addressed, punished or forgiven by God" (Strong's H6588)

B. Hebrew "chata" - "to sin, go wrong, incur guilt, forfeit, uncleanness; miss the goal or path of right and duty; to bring into guilt or condemnation or punishment" (Strong's H2398)

- C. Hebrew “avon” - “perversity, depravity, iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity; guilt of condition” (Strong’s H5771)
- D. One may unintentionally “miss the mark” (chata); one may have a weak, depraved nature; and, though these are still sins, it is not as if one had rebelled against God (peshah). In the latter case, one is guilty of “the great transgression - Psalm 19:13

### III. BIBLE PRINCIPLES REGARDING GREATER SINS

- A. This does not mean that some sins are consequential and others are not; nor are there some sins that cause one to be lost, while others are overlooked.
  - 1. No grain of sand is small in the mechanism of a watch.
  - 2. A tiny spark can cause a great fire.
  - 3. Microscopic bacteria can endanger the whole body.
  - 4. A small hole in the hull can sink the entire ship.
- B. What do the scriptures teach?
  - 1. Eve only ate one piece of fruit
  - 2. Lot’s wife only took a single glance backward
  - 3. The Israelite only picked up a few sticks on the Sabbath
  - 4. Achan only took a small wedge of gold and a robe
  - 5. Uzzah only put one hand on the Ark of the Covenant
- C. All sin, whether large or small in Bible description or our own estimation, will keep one out of heaven
  - 1. Heb. 2:1-3; John 8:21; Rev. 21:27
- D. Any un-repented sin is enough to render one a sinner, cause him to be lost, and to void all the good things he did toward an eternal reward - James 2:10
- E. Humankind presumes to classify sins on behalf of God
  - 1. Murder, adultery, and stealing are big sins, great evils
  - 2. Jealousy, random dishonesty, and gossip are little sins, character flaws
  - 3. Luke 15:11-32 - Was the prodigal son worse than the older brother?
  - 4. “There is no little sin, because there is no little God to sin against.” (Matthew Henry)
  - 5. “There is no distinction between big and little when talking about snakes. They are all snakes.” (Indian proverb)

### IV. BESETTING SINS

- A. What are besetting sins? - Heb. 12:1
  - 1. In the life of every individual, there is a besetting sin that persistently stands between him and God.
  - 2. It differs from person to person. What is a besetting sin to one may not trouble another at all.
    - a. With Moses it was anger
    - b. With David it was desire for women
    - c. With Abraham it was fear for his life
  - 3. It is a temptation and sin that one finds it particularly hard for him to resist and often finds himself easily tangled up in it

4. The Hebrew writer insists that these sins in particular must be overcome or we will be unable to progress in our journey to heaven
- B. Defining besetting sins - "Easily beset" - εύπερίστατος - easily ensnaring, obstructing, constricting; that which easily surrounds as a garment that winds around and hinders, clinging closely; easily encircles or entangles, like a loose flowing robe" (ICC)
  1. Euperistatos - "a competitor thwarting a racer in every direction; figuratively, of sins that tangle and hinder" (Strong's)
  2. Runners in the ancient Olympics would lay aside even their inner garments so as not to be impeded.
- C. The Hebrew writer pleads for Christians to lay aside every hindrance to living the Christian life, especially those sins which, like inner garments, cling so close to us. Besetting sins are those which cling close to us and are easily committed by us.
  1. Besetting sins may be those indulged before obeying the Gospel; easily falling back into old, familiar patterns
  2. Besetting sins may be those we are drawn to due to temperament, such as pride, laziness, skepticism, or stubbornness.
  3. Besetting sins may be those we are exposed by our profession.
  4. Besetting sins may be those we are particularly vulnerable due to weakness, genetic or self-imposed: smoking, drinking, drug abuse, stealing, bigotry, gossip, attention, pornography

## **V. BESETTING SINS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE**

- A. Peter had a weakness for impulsive, inconsistent behavior - Matt. 26:33-75
- B. Moses was beset with impatience - Num. 20:7-12
- C. James and John were beset with anger and harshness toward others
  1. Luke 9:51-56
- D. Simon the sorcerer was beset with covetousness - Acts 8:18-21
- E. David wrote a confession Psalm after succumbing to his own besetting sin
  1. Psalm 51:1-3, 7-12

## **VII. BESETTING SINS CAN BE OVERCOME**

- A. We have the power to overcome besetting sins - 1Cor. 10:13; Gal. 5:16
  1. The Corinthians overcame their besetting sins - 1Cor. 6:9-11
  2. The Colossians overcame their besetting sins - Col. 3:5-7
  3. Paul overcame his besetting sins - 1Tim. 1:12-13; 1Cor. 9:27
- B. If we do not overcome them, besetting sins can become intensified, because we cannot stop them without changing our thinking, choices, and behaviors
  1. By returning to former associates in the besetting sins - 1Cor. 15:33
  2. By returning to places that facilitate the besetting sins - 2Peter 2:20
  3. By failing to fill the void left by besetting sins - Luke 11:24-26
- C. How to overcome besetting sins
  1. Make no opportunities for besetting sins
    - a. Rom. 13:14; 2Tim. 2:22; Gen. 39:12

2. Cultivate a mind that is unfavorable for the besetting sin. Keep your mind saturated with spiritual things - Isa. 26:3; Rom. 8:5-6
3. Overcome the besetting sin through Jesus Christ
  - a. John 15:5; Phil. 4:13; Heb. 12:2

#### **VIII. ALL SINS ARE RESOLVED BY THE SAME MEANS**

- A. Just as all sin will bring death... - Rom. 6:23; James 1:14-15; Ez. 18:20
- B. ...So will any sin repented of scripturally and from the heart be blotted out and forgiven, including greater sins - 1John 1:7-10; Mark 3:28-29
- C. Sins are greater or besetting because of the condition of the heart from whence they are committed
- D. Sins are greater or besetting in that they are greater in their temporal consequences and by the number of vulnerable persons impacted by them.
  1. There is a difference in the temporal consequences of Cain murdering Abel and David murdering Uriah the Hittite than in the murder which is committed in the heart by a failure to love one's brother - 1John 3:15
- E. Sins are greater or besetting in that the punishment is often proportionate to the sin and the heart of the sinner - Luke 12:47-48
  1. The punishment in eternity will not be less in duration, only in degree and extent of sorrow over regrets - Matt. 25:46; 2Peter 2:20-21
  2. We are not just punished for our sins; we are punished by them.
- F. God is waiting to forgive us of all sins, even the greater ones - Matt. 18:11-14
- G. "When we stray from His presence, He longs for us to come back. He weeps that we are missing His active love, protection and provision. He throws His arms open, reaches toward us, gathers us up, and welcomes us home." (C. Stanley)