

## Vocabulary of Sin (NT)

Why study the words for sin in Greek and Hebrew? Fair question. Who wants to listen to imperfections in the world? Or worse yet, evil. We see enough of that on TV or in various videos. But, the Bible is full of stories of people who sinned. Good people sinned. Sin is in the world. The Bible would be remiss if it didn't identify what sin is and the remedy for it. Take David, for instance. He had a man under his command murdered. But grace is waiting for the sinner to acknowledge his sin and return to faith.

The following words for sin are from the Scriptures. The inerrant divinely inspired Word of God gives us insight into how and why human thought is so corrupted. In our study of the Book of Romans, the book of righteousness, sin is contrasted to righteousness. It is the opposite. God is righteous. Man is not. Yet God can impute righteousness to man. We must understand that as a result of what God did to us at the point of salvation which is based upon Jesus' work at the cross we can be free from the power of sin. So we explore the concept of sin through the various words the writers of the New Testament use. And when we get to chapters 6-8 we explore God's grace and the spiritual life of the believer.

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### **Romans Chapter 5**

Dr. John Walvoord, a former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has some cogent (relevant) words on sin.

“Every system of theology can be characterized by its conception of sin. It is, therefore, a matter of great importance that the words used in the Holy Scriptures for sin in its various aspects be carefully studied with a view to establishing distinctions and conclusions which are fundamental to the study of Hamartiology (the study of sin) and which bear an important relation to the doctrine of salvation. Fundamentally, this is the task of the lexicographer, but it is impossible for either the lexicographer or the theologian to work alone, as the work of either is colored by the work of the other.<sup>1</sup>”

This lesson uses Dr. Walvoord’s study of the words for sins in the New Testament found on the bible.org website. There are other authors that have similar expositions of the vocabulary of sin. However, I found that Dr. Walvoord to be the most thorough and easy to read.

Last year there was a lesson on the Old Testament words for sin. This is the second lesson on “sin” in the Bible. Below I provide a list of Hebrew words studied in that lesson.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>

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#### Summary

The words for sin refer to different aspects of sin. As we have seen, often more than one word for sin will be used in a single context.

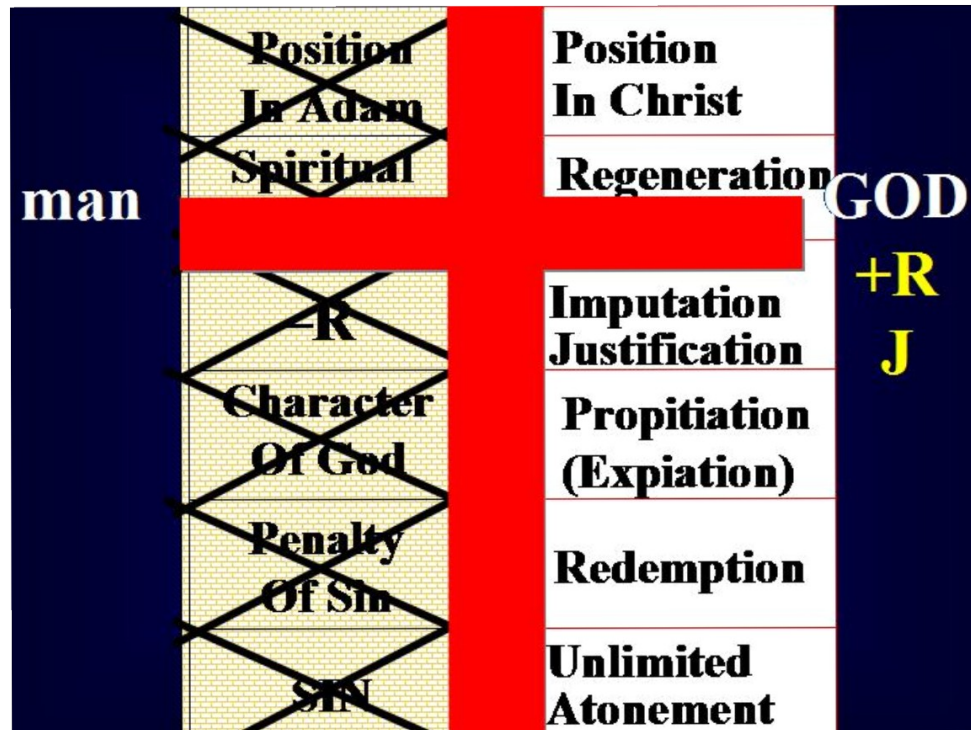
Chata	—	general word for sin
Ra'	—	evil, engaging in anti-God worship of idols/demons
Pasha	—	breaking trust
Awon	—	guilt and punishment for sin
Shagag	—	unintentional/reckless endangerment
Asham	—	guilt
Rasha	—	wicked
Taah	—	go astray

This week, the lesson will cover New Testament words for sin.

Sin is one element of the barrier between man and God. That in itself makes this study important. If sin is one element of the barrier between man and God, then what is sin? The Hebrew words were a good start. But the words in the New Testament are part of the discussions of Adam's fall and Jesus' redemption of the human race. Adam's sin got us into this mess. Faith in Jesus' work on the cross can get us out of the mess.

## Vocabulary of Sin (NT) Romans Chapter 5

Below is the chart I use from Dr. Robby Dean's lessons<sup>2</sup>. Many pastors have a similar chart often based upon one from R. B. Thieme Jr.



With many of the recent lessons in Romans, we are forced to consider what Moses wrote in the book of Genesis. The fall of Adam, as we will see, was a willful disobedience which violated God's righteous standard. God documented his standard verbally face-to-face with Adam.

**Genesis 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;**

**Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.deanbible.org/file-downloads?folder=Visuals%252FIllustrations>

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**You will surely die.** Conservatives are split on how to translate this. There are two words translated literally “dying you shall die.” Others translate this as “surely die” to indicate the emphatic nature of the Hebrew verb construction (infinitive absolute). We know from the context and from Romans chapter 5 that Adam and Eve “died” spiritually instantly (in the day) upon eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there are several kinds of death. If we understand that these deaths are the result of spiritual death, then this idiom emphasizes spiritual death but includes the principle of death and hence the other kinds of death as included.

Now on to our study of the individual words.

There are ten main Greek roots for sin. According to Dr. Walvoord, these plus their nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives results in 33 separate words describing sin. For our study in Romans, especially Romans chapter 5, “hamartia” is the most important word. This will be dealt with first. Then the other nine root words will be addressed. Most of the comments on these words are based upon Dr. Walvoord’s study what can be found on Bible.org on three webpages<sup>3</sup>.

1. “One of the most important words is ἁμαρτία and its kindred forms, in which sin is viewed as missing the mark, “coming short of the glory of God.”<sup>4</sup>” It is a general word for sin pointing to the principle of sin. It is similar to the Hebrew word *chata*.

Hamartia. Many sources define this Greek word as meaning “missing the mark.” It has several forms in the New Testament. Here is a summary of its uses by Dr. Walvoord:

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3 <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>

<https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-2>

<https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-3>

4 <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>

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“A study of the uses of the noun reveal that there are seven important aspects indicated in the meaning and use of the word: (1) the sin which is imputed to man because of Adam’s sin; (2) the sin nature, which is transmitted from generation to generation; (3) the sphere of domination of the sin nature in which the sin nature rules; (4) the act of sin itself; (5) sin in its total, i.e., the collective use of the word; (6) the use of the abstract (ἁμαρτία, sin), for the concrete (ἁμαρτωλός, sinner); (7) the use of the noun (ἁμαρτία) for the adjective (ἁμαρτωλός).<sup>5</sup>”

**Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**

**Romans 5:13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

**Romans 5:14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.**

The passage in Genesis does not specifically identify Adam’s sin as sin. In typical Old Testament fashion, it describes the sin. There is no mistaking the fact that what Adam did was sin. It obviously violated the spoken word of God, violated His righteous requirement and broke fellowship with Him. The New Testament words for sin make this clear.

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5 <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>

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2. παραβαίνω (*parabino*). Dr. Walvoord says this is a “more serious sin and a stronger word than *amartia*. “The central thought of the word παραβαίνω is that of wilful (sic) disobedience.”<sup>6</sup> Whereas *amartia* is a general and more often used word for sin, *parabino* and its associated noun are a conscious willful breaking of a standard or rule or law. This doesn’t help much unless we see this in action in the New Testament. And of course, you expect to see this used in the book of Romans.

**Romans 2:23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?**

**Breaking the Law.** Note the use here clearly indicates that the sin involved transgressing a known standard. This is like it was “premeditated.”

**Romans 4:15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation (*parabino*).**

Clearly the usage here shows how *parabino* is a transgressing of a standard. Only now do I see that Paul is using different words for sin in Romans in order to give us a full appreciation of it’s character. Where possible, I include quotes from Romans for the various words, although not all of them are found in Romans.

**Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin (*amartia*, noun, literally “the sin” i.e. Adam’s sin) entered into the world, and death through sin (*amartia*, noun, again literally “the**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-2>

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**sin”), and so death spread to all men, because all sinned (amartia, the verb)—**

Since we are all “in Adam” we have been imputed his sin right from the start. There are three “sins” in our lives: Adam’s sin, the sin nature and personal sins.

Here is one of three descriptions Paul gives of just Adam’s sin: the sin (amartia).

**Romans 5:13 for until the Law sin (amartia, no article) was in the world, but sin (amartia, no article) is not imputed when there is no law. (Paul is talking about sin that breaks a law.)**

Here is Dr. Walvoord’s explanation of this verse:

“It is true that Paul indicated there was no law in the period from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:13, 14), but the reference is to the law of Moses for Israel, not law in general. In fact, it is clear from the Bible that sin reigned from Adam to Moses as proved by the universality of death. Peter concludes, for instance, that the flood came as a result of sin (2 Pet 2:5; 3:6, 7). The phrase “sin is not imputed where there is no law” is simply a reference to the fact that the law of Moses was not retroactive-did not apply before it was given.<sup>7</sup>”

**Romans 5:14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned (amartia, verb) in the likeness of the offense (parabino) of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.**

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7 <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-3>



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**The offense of Adam.** Adam sinned willfully.

So here is a second word identified with Adam's sin: *parabino*. Whereas the first word, *amartia*, is a general term for sin and is used for Adam's original sin, this word, *parabino*, tells us that Adam sinned willfully. He knew that he was about to sin and decided to do it anyway.

Here is a personal application. Suppose that you are driving on a highway marked as 55 MPH. That is the posted standard, the law. Now you decide to go 65 MPH because you want to get somewhere faster. You decided to break the law. So when the policeman pulls you over for speeding, don't argue with the ticket. You did the crime. Now you pay the fine.

One last example of *parabino*. This references the traitorous act of Judas. He willfully betrayed Jesus. This passage looks back at Judas' betrayal in preparation to choose a replacement.

**Acts 1:23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.**

**Acts 1:24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen**

**Acts 1:25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."**

This was a willful act of Judas. There are several other instances of the verb and noun forms. But we need to peruse other words for sin in this short amount of time allotted for this lesson.

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3. παράπτωμα and παραπίπτω (*paraptoma* and *parapipto*). They are both derived from a root word that means to fall. With the prefix, it is used to mean “a lapse or deviation from truth and uprightness.”<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris gives an insightful comment on this word. It is from a footnote: “Better, “lapse” ( παράπτωμα; see on 4:25). It is not so much the breaking of the law to which the term points as a disruption of the relationship with God. Paul uses this word again in vv. 16, 17, 18, and 20.”<sup>9</sup> (footnote 70 on page 235)

**Romans 5:15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.**

**Transgression.** Here is another description of Adam’s sin, the third. So many words for sin. Paul is emphasizing the immensity and multifaceted nature of Adam’s sin. And also the effectiveness of Jesus Christ’s spiritual death on the cross. Sin, righteousness and life. These are the three items in the barrier between man and God that Paul is emphasizing. He has already, previously emphasized redemption, propitiation and reconciliation. These are topics that a maturing Christian needs to know. Yes, Christ died on the cross for us. But what did that accomplish? What was Jesus Christ dying for? What was the barrier that He had to demolish for us? That is what Paul is telling us. Bible answers. Jesus broke down the barrier so that we now have forgiveness of sin, imputation of righteousness and life. In chapters 6-8 Paul will be able to describe facets of the

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8 <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-2>

9 Morris, L. (2001). The Epistle to the Romans. Leicester, England: Apollos ; Grand Rapids, Mich. Page 365 footnote 70

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spiritual life because of what Christ did at the cross. Grace. All that God can do on the basis of Jesus' work on the cross.

So, this transgression is a lapse or breaking of the fellowship, the relationship between Adam and God. In common parlance, we might say, Adam broke faith with God.

I have not dealt directly with *parapipto* in Hebrews 6:6. Maybe later.

4. παρακούω (*parakouo*). This word derives from a word that means to hear. With the prefix, it takes on the meaning of not heeding what someone said. A father can say to his son, "Do you hear me?" The father knows the son heard the sound of his voice. What he is asking is are you going to heed my words? Are you going to follow my instructions? This word is not found in the book of Romans.

**Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins (amartia), go and show him his fault (literally reprove or rebuke) in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

**Matthew 18:16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.**

**Matthew 18:17 If he refuses to listen (parakouo, meaning in context, he doesn't heed your explanation) to them, tell it to the church (bad translation: context requires this be translated as "assembly" since there was no "Church" during Jesus' first advent); and if he refuses**

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**to listen (again parakouo) even to the church (literally assembly), let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

5. ἀδικέω (*adikeo*). This is a word for righteousness plus the “alpha” which indicates “not.” Not righteous. There are five related words from this root used in the New Testament. Per Dr. Walvoord, “A survey of the five words treated in this section reveals that their meaning is to all practical purposes the same. Sin is viewed as something which is not right, not in harmony with God’s character, and resulting in injustice and wrong to others. It is clearly taught that injustice must be corrected with justice; that wrong must be made right; that sin in its consequences must be met. Lack of righteousness is seen to be not only manifest in deed with injury to those concerned, but it is also viewed as a state or disposition. lack (sic) of righteousness in state and act is revealed to be a part of the problem which Paul meets in Romans. In answer to man’s righteousness, God offers His righteousness, not only justification, but sanctification, not only positional, but experimental and ultimate sanctification.”<sup>10</sup>”

**Romans 3:5 But if our unrighteousness (adikia) demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous (adikos), is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)**

**Romans 3:6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?**

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<sup>10</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-2>

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6. ἄσεβέω (*asebeo*). Dr. Walvoord has an insightful description of the three words based on this verb. “The three words here examined are derived from σέβω, meaning to reverence or to worship, and with the alpha privative come to mean, not to reverence, not to worship. The words in whatever form they are found, noun, verb, or adjective, indicate an active and positive withholding from God of the worship due Him. It is a matter of choice and does not refer to one’s state, disposition, imputed sin, or condemnation.” This sounds like an echo of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment given by God to the Israelites in the desert.

**Exodus 20:1 Then God spoke all these words, saying,**

**Exodus 20:2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**

**Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.**

God is due reverence and worship because of who He is.

**Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (asebia) and unrighteousness (adikia) of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (adikia),**

**Romans 1:19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

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**Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

**Romans 1:21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.**

An extended quote is given to show how this links up with the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment. Although the Ten Commandments were not given to the Church, they are repeated in one form or another to the Christian. Before you ask, no we don't have a requirement to stop work on the "Sabbath." We do have a command to not forsake the gathering of ourselves. In our case, we gather around an internet access.

7. ἀνομία (*anomia*). This word group is derived from the word for "law" plus the "alpha" prefix that makes it negative. "The noun form is never used in the sense of a lack of knowledge of the law, but always refers to a positive transgression of the law."<sup>11</sup>

**Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

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<sup>11</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-3>

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**Matthew 23:28 So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

8. ἄγνοέω (agnoeo). This is a word for knowledge plus the “alpha privative.” That means they have a positive word, prefix it with “a” or *alpha* in the Greek which makes it negative. It is like “un” in English. Something that is safe can become *unsafe*. Right here in Romans, we have God’s righteousness and man’s unrighteousness. The meaning of this word is ignorance. So this kind of sin is done in ignorance. It is still sin, just that it was not intentional sin.

**1 Timothy 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,**

**1 Timothy 1:13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;**

9. ἥττων (*etton*). This word is used three times in the New Testament. Dr. Walvoord says, “A consideration of all the uses of these three words leads one to the conclusion that they refer to a concept of sin in which sin is described as the inferior path, the lesser of the two possibilities. While in most instances the reality of the sin is not questioned, the emphasis is rather upon defeat and inferiority than on sin as a violation of righteousness.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-3>

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**1 Corinthians 11:17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

This verse is leading up to Paul's often quoted verses on the communion.

10. *πονηρία (poneria)*. Dr. Walvoord gives a very brief coverage. "Finally, *πονηρία* pictures sin as utter corruption, depravity, iniquity, which is to be subjected to the righteous judgment of God.<sup>13</sup>"

**John 7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.**

From the three Greek words that Paul uses in Romans chapter 5, we learn about Adam's sin.

- I. His sin missed the mark of what was required of him (*ἁμαρτία*)
- II. It was a willful disobedience (*παραβαίνω*)
- III. This sin was a breaking of fellowship with God (*παράπτωμα*)

Here is Dr. Walvoord's conclusion to his study of sin. It is a very brief summary of the Greek words.

"The rapid sketch afforded the doctrine of sin by a study of the words relating to the doctrine in the New Testament is revealing not only in its detail but also in its more general features. Sin is viewed from every angle. In *ἁμαρτάνω* and its other forms sin is viewed as missing the mark, "coming short of the glory of God." As transgression and a

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<sup>13</sup> <https://bible.org/article/thirty-three-words-sin-new-testament-part-1>



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violation of moral law sin is revealed in the instances where παραβαίνω is used. A lesser word for sin, summed in the concept of the word fall, is found in παράπτωμα. The need for hearing the voice of God, and the danger of failing to listen are embodied in the word παρακούω. The unrighteous and unjust character of sin is revealed in ἀδικέω. Defiance of God and His judgment and open rebellion against God are described by ἁσεβέω. The lawless character of sin is defined in ἀνομία. Sin springing from ignorance as well as the concept of the resulting blindness to spiritual truth is expressed by the word ἄγνοέω. Sin as a defeat and inferior choice is represented by ἡττάω. Finally, sin in its utter corruption, wickedness, and evil character is portrayed in the word πονηρός.”