

LESSON 26: The Nature of Sin



REFERENCE

Page 353 [TRAINING: CHRISTIAN MORALITY and SENSE-OF-SIN]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) Blackboard or Newsprint
- (2) Bibles
- (4) LSM: 'About Sin'

AIM

- To help learners deepen their understanding of the concept of 'sin'

OUTCOMES

- KUI The learners understand sin as something which goes against the love of God, contradicting what it means to be fully human.
- KUI The learners recognise that sin has damaging consequences.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson and the two following deal with the concepts of 'sin' and 'Christian morality'. The aim of this lesson is to clarify the first of these concepts by exploring the understanding of sin in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Society, or a cultural group, agrees on what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour - which means, what is moral or immoral. The concept of sin implies that the acceptability or unacceptability is judged according to the guidelines for human action given by God. God has left us free to choose between what is good (promoting life), or bad (damaging life). For believers in a personal God - for instance, Jews, Christians, and Muslims - the will of God is the final reference for what is moral or immoral.

LESSON OUTLINE

I Introduction

Organise the class into small groups. Present the following list of statements to the whole class for a short opening discussion:

- Sin is making a wrong choice.
- Sin is disobeying God.
- Sin damages life.
- Sin damages relationships.
- Sin is doing something immoral.
- Sin is something which hurts another being.
- Sin is an old-fashioned idea.
- Sin is going against one's conscience.

Make comments on the learners' responses, without trying to give a final answer to the question of sin.

2 Sin according to the Bible

Introduce the idea that, as the concept of sin always implies a reference to God, it is not surprising that we can find many quotes on sin in the Bible, both in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. Ask the learners, in groups, to agree on a description of sin by referring to the following passages in the Bible:

- Genesis 3:1-7
- Psalm 51:1-4
- Hosea 8:1-3
- Romans 1:28-32
- Galatians 5:19-21

Ask learners to suggest short sentences to add to the list above in (1) that convey ideas about sin that are not found there: for example, 'sin is unfaithfulness to God', 'sin is breaking a covenant or agreement with God', 'sin is breaking God's Law'.

3 What is Sin?

Invite individual learners to develop their own description of sin using the list of ideas that has been generated in (1) and (2). Invite some sharing of these descriptions, and offer comments where you think it is constructive. Before concluding the lesson, offer your own description which might go like this: *Sin is something we do that goes against our humanity, damaging both ourselves and our relationship with God and others.*

4 Conclusion

Invite the learners to read the passage on the Lesson Materials page 'About Sin' reflectively.

OTHER IDEAS

5 Builders and Destroyers

Display the following sentence: 'We are builders and destroyers'. Ask the learners to reflect on it. In the history of humankind, and in our present time, people's attitudes and decisions have had (a) very good or (b) disastrous consequences for others, as well as for themselves.

In pairs the learners jot down two or three names of persons whose decisions and actions have had major consequences for others. For each of the chosen figures they discuss briefly the actions and their consequences. They respond to the following question: Which of the attitudes and actions of the people mentioned can be regarded as moral (enhancing life) or immoral (damaging life)?

If learners are stuck for figures, you might suggest they discuss persons who have been studied recently in their history classes, or some of the following:

- Adolf Hitler (originator of the holocaust which left 6 million Jews dead)
- Hendrik Verwoerd (architect of apartheid in South Africa)
- Mother Teresa of Calcutta ("angel" of the poorest of the poor)
- Nelson Mandela (builder of a new South Africa.)

MATERIALS

LEARNER

- Burke Michael. 1991. 'About Sin' 178 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p. 147



Lesson Materials



About Sin

It is in terms of consequences that Christians understand immorality as sin.

The consequence of sin is always DAMAGE, damage to the humanness of ourselves and others: sin violates this humanness. The degree of guilt can be affected by many factors, so sin is not always damning but it is always damaging. And even the damning possibility is not an imposed punishment but a way of describing the irreparable damage we are free to do to our nature: we can destroy our capacity for God (namely, heaven) and our ability to choose God, by our numbing sinful choices, so that hell becomes a freely chosen option, not a condemnation from God. Our moral choices usually reflect what we are - but they always affect what we are...

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LESSON 27: Taming the Tongue



REFERENCE

Page 354 [EXPLORING: Respect for HUMAN TRUTH]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (3) LSM: 'Prejudice'
- (3) Bible
- (3) Cardboard for poster

AIM

- To make the learners aware what the 8th Commandment implies and how it challenges us

OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand that there are many different ways of being dishonest or untruthful.
- SKL Learners discern motives for dishonest and honest behaviour.
- DAP Learners strive for honesty and uprightness in their own personal lives.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson should help to explore the implications of the 8th Commandment by looking at what the Commandment warns against, and what, on the other hand, it challenges us to do. The exercise on prejudice will help learners explore different patterns of dishonesty and the motives that underlie these. Learners may also make use of knowledge and skills from previous lessons in this unit, including considering consequences, predicting consequences, decision-making, and Christian (or other faith-based) morality.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

Ask the learners, in pairs, to discuss:

- a. two situations in which young people or adults easily tell lies or show dishonest behaviour.
- b. why they are inclined to lie or be dishonest in such situations.

Invite a few learners to share their stories and findings.

2 Brainstorming

Ask the class for quick responses to each of the following and write their responses up.

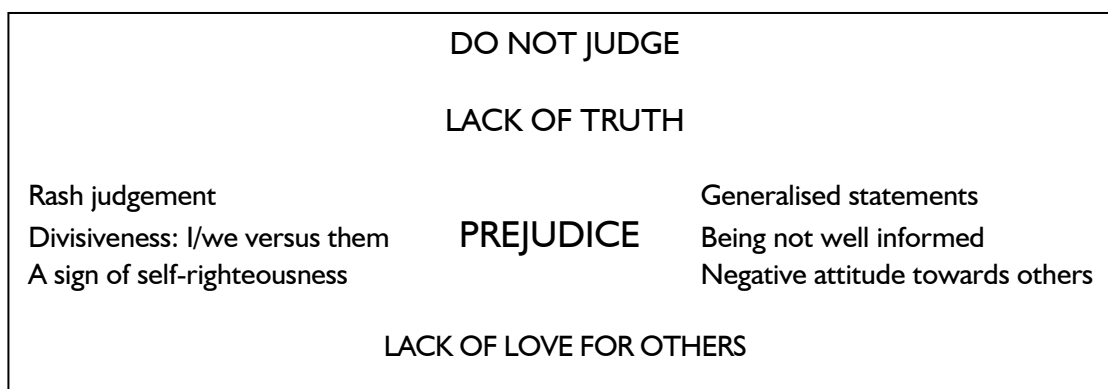
- a. *Suggest different ways of being dishonest.*
[Possible examples include: telling lies (to parents, friends, teachers; boyfriends to girlfriends and vice versa), telling a secret (of a friend or a professional secret), gossiping, slander, backbiting, prejudice, fraud, perjury, cheating (in an examination, presenting copied homework, or in selling stolen goods), hypocrisy (pretending to be who one is not), in words or behaviour), bragging, betrayal, and so on.]
- b. *What are the consequences of dishonesty?*
[Responses might include: lack of trust in others, insecurity, suspicion, destructive relationships (in family, school, social life, and political life), the break-down and ending of relationships]
- c. What does the 8th Commandment challenge us to do?

[Some of the following could be mentioned: to control our tongue, to avoid gossiping, to avoid prejudice, to respect secrets, to avoid cheating (in various forms), to avoid pretending, to be truthful (in our speaking and our behaviour), to stand up for truth and justice, to avoid perjury (giving false witness under oath.)]

3 Prejudice: One Form of Dishonesty

Hand out the Lesson Materials page 'Prejudice'. Learners familiarise themselves with the exercise, and then, in pairs, discuss the statements 1-7. You may need to explain some of the statements, since they come from a context that is foreign to most South African learners. Note in 6 that 'grades' means 'marks' or 'symbols' and 'college' means 'high school'. Invite some of the learners to share their answers.

Ask a learner to look up and read Matthew 7:1-5 to the class. Sum up the discussion on prejudice by developing a mind map or poster, which could look something like this:



OTHER IDEAS

4 The Case of the Gossip

Slander is the uttering of a false charge which damages the reputation of another. Present the following scenario to the learners: Suppose you overhear a classmate slander another classmate. You don't know either of the individuals very well, but you do know that the classmate with the sharp tongue is lying and spreading false rumours. What would you do? What should you do? On the other hand, What if you knew the rumours were, in fact, true? Would that change the situation? Why or why not?

(See Michael Pennock & James Finley. 1984. 'Prejudice' in *Christian Morality and You*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 88).

5 Stereotyping

Learners discuss the questions 1-4 on the Lesson Materials page 'Prejudice'.

6 Personal Experience

Learners identify with one of the stereotypes on the Lesson Materials page, or suggest one of their own. They consider their experience of this, and what they could do to change their own attitudes, or address the actual situation.

MATERIALS

LEARNERS

- Michael Pennock & James Finley. 1984. 'Prejudice' in *Christian Morality and You*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 122.



Lesson Materials



Prejudice

Prejudice is one of the great moral evils today. It can result in stereotyping, that is, oversimplifying our description of people or things. Stereotyping can be favorable, but rarely is; it usually is quite uncomplimentary and even degrading of others.

Can you recognise a stereotype when you see one? Which of the following seem to be stereotypes, the result of prejudiced thinking?

1. Women are incapable of performing as well as men in careers like law, government and medicine.
2. The government should make an effort to look into welfare fraud because sometimes welfare recipients cheat.
3. Homosexuals should not be allowed to teach because they are noted child molesters.
4. Our judicial system seems to work better for people who are white and have a certain income.
5. Women who are raped deserve it because they usually wear provocative clothing.
6. Grades are easier to come by in colleges today than they were 20 years ago.
7. Alcoholics have no respect for life.

Discuss:

1. What harm is done by stereotyping?
2. What would Jesus say about judging others falsely?
3. What are some stereotypes people your age have? What about people of your parents' generation?
4. What can be done about stereotyping?

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LESSON 28: Love Your Neighbour



REFERENCE

Page 354 [EXPLORING: Respect for HUMAN TRUTH]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) Three Flashcards: EASIER? RISKIER? BETTER?
- (3) Bible

AIM

- To help learners explore how respect for human truth is an expression of respect and, ultimately, love for others

OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand that lack of respect for human truth hurts others and that it undermines trust in personal relationships and in society as a whole.
- DAP Learners appreciate the values of honesty and integrity and the role of these values in showing love for others.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson, like the previous one, focuses on respect for truth. However, the 8th Commandment is explored here from the perspective of Jesus' 'second greatest commandment' to love one's neighbour as oneself.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

Ask the learners, in pairs, to:

- a. share an experience when someone told them a lie or deceived them in some way.
- b. relate how they felt about the lie or deception and how they felt towards the person who told them a lie or deceived them.

Let the learners share a few examples with the class. List the feelings that emerge on the board. *(Possible responses include: feeling hurt, betrayed, angry, resentful towards the person who was untruthful towards them.)*

2 Discussion

Put up three flash cards – EASIER? RISKIER? BETTER? and guide a discussion around them along the following lines. Think of examples in (a) personal relationships and (b) in society (the media, politics, business.)

- EASIER? Is it easier to tell lies and be deceitful towards others than to be honest? If so, why?
 RISKIER? What risks are involved in being truthful, and in being dishonest?
 BETTER? Is it better to be truthful or to tell lies?

3 The Second Greatest Commandment

- i. Write the following scriptural reference on the board and ask a learner (or two) to look up the passage and to read it to the class: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.'

[Mark 12:28-31] Ask the learners to discuss how this command includes the 8th Commandment, and all the other commandments that relate to other people. (*Commandments 4 – 10 challenge us to respect and love others, i.e., our neighbours.*)

- ii. Ask a learner to read Matthew 22:34-40 to the class. This passage relates a similar conversation, but in different circumstances. Draw the learners' attention to the final sentence: "On these two commandments hang *the whole Law*, and the Prophets, too."

OTHER IDEAS

4 Role Play

Divide the class into groups of 5 or 6 learners. Ask each group to prepare a skit (a short role play) that models an instance of dishonest behaviour (for example, in school, at home, in social life). Give the learners an opportunity to act out their role plays for the class.

5 The Story of Thomas More

Briefly tell the story of Thomas More (1478 – 1535). The summary which follows is based on the account in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*.

Thomas More lived in London around 1500. He was married and had four children, three daughters and one son. In 1504 he became a member of Parliament. King Henry VIII appreciated Thomas More very much. In the 1520s he often visited him informally in his home and repeatedly asked him for advice. In 1529, Henry VIII chose More as Lord Chancellor. The friendship between the King and the Lord Chancellor, however, became strained when Henry VIII, by an Act of Parliament, demanded of every subject, to acknowledge him as 'Protector and Supreme Head of the Church of England.' Opposing this Act was declared high treason. Those who did not conform were thrown into prison in the Tower of London and later executed. Thomas More was one of them. Together with his friend and adviser John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, More was sent to the Tower on 13 April, 1534. Whilst More was in prison many people, including his favourite daughter Margaret, made great efforts to persuade him to change his mind and, just as the majority did, accept the Act of Supremacy which came into force in 1535. However, Thomas More remained steadfast. He knew that the king's new title as the 'only supreme head of the Church in England' which the Act of Supremacy conferred on him 'was contrary to the king's coronation oath.

During the 15 months which Thomas More spent in prison he lost all his lands; his family shared in his poverty. Also his health deteriorated in the damp prison cell, but his passion for the truth and even his sense of humour never left him. On 4 May 1535, he saw from prison how some Carthusian monks were led to their execution for 'treason'. A month later, on 22 June 1535, John Fisher, More's friend and adviser, was beheaded on Tower Hill. Finally, after a trial on 1 July in Westminster Hall, Thomas More was executed on Tower Hill on 6 July 1535. John Fisher and Thomas More were canonised in 1935.

(David Hugh Farmer. 1987. 'Thomas More', *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Second edition)

Pose the following questions:

- a. Why did Thomas More not swear the oath of Supremacy of King Henry VIII?
- b. Did More despise the king or love the king by acting as he did?

MATERIALS

- No further materials are supplied for this lesson.

