

Sin

God made everything 'very good'. When we look at our world we see much that is good. But we also see suffering, death, hate, greed, violence, war, terrorism, injustice, tragedy, sickness etc. Clearly we have a problem. God's Word identifies that problem as sin.

Sin entered the world because one man sinned. And death came because of sin. Everyone sinned, so death came to all people (Romans 5:12).

Sin is more than what we do (actions of sin). Sin is also who we are (state/origin of sin). The Latin phrase: "*Incurvatus in se*" describes sin as being turned/curved inward on oneself.

In the Creation account we learn about the fall into sin and the nature of sin. In the Garden of Eden we can think of the action of disobedience in taking the fruit as the sin.

It is worthwhile comparing the promises of God to the temptation and the human response.

Promise

*The Lord God commanded the man, 'You are **free** to eat from **all** the trees in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will **surely die.**' (Genesis 2:16-17)*

Temptation

*The serpent said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from **all** the trees in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)*

Response

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, **and you must not touch it, or you will die.**'" (Genesis 3:2-3)*

The promises are minimised, the prohibitions are maximised and the consequences are minimised. This demonstrates a distinct lack of trust in God and forms the basis for the temptations we face in our day.

The devil knew what was going on: "*You will not **surely die.** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:4).

Consequences

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:7-8).

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

The issue is not something we grow into but are born with.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5).

It affects everyone.

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:9-12, 23, see also Psalm 14 & 53).

The ultimate consequence is death (eternal separation from God)

For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

One must have a righteousness that exceeds the best of the best.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-20).

To break one part of God’s law is like failing in all of it.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).

It is like sitting an exam and getting 99.9% and being told you fail. It doesn’t seem fair until you see it in terms of the gulf separating us from God – jumping 99.9% across a chasm is a great effort – but it’s not good enough.

We are forever tempted into thinking that sin is something that we can help conquer. Like a drowning person grabbing onto a life buoy. But God’s Word says: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1).* We are spiritually dead. Dead people don’t grab life buoys.

God’s dilemma: We are born outside of a relationship with God and are incapable of rectifying the situation. We cannot enter the presence of God because we need to be holy and blameless to do so. And yet, we still depend on the presence of God in order to have life. Without God we die!

We need to understand the extent of the problem of sin in order to understand the fullness of God’s grace. We cannot use our obedience to the law to resolve the issue. *“All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’” (Galatians 3:10).* We are utterly dependent on what Jesus has done to ensure our place before God.

The Ten Commandments have a place in the life of a Christian but not as a means for justification or for defeating the consequences of sin. As Lutherans we talk about the three-fold function of the Law.

The curb/fence (civil/political)

God curbs evil in our world and maintains peace, order and stability in our communities and prevents chaos and bloodshed. Through this use of the law justice and equality for all are promoted.

The mirror (spiritual)

God uses his law to expose our sin and to show our need for a Saviour. If the Law does not drive us into the arms of Christ then it has failed in its chief purpose.

The rule/signpost (didactic/teaching)

God’s law guides Christians along the path of faith and shows them the good works he would have them do

This understanding of sin helps us to understand the presence of it in our lives and that of others so that we don’t confuse what we do and do not have power to do in relation to it.

This is a key Lutheran distinctive that featured in Luther’s understanding of the “Bondage of the will” and was evidenced by the primary position it was placed in our key confessions.

Augsburg Confession (Article II)

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

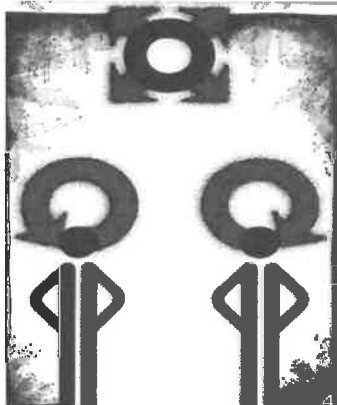
Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article II)

Luther's explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

Analogies

- Setting the bar on a high jump at different levels of difficulty. Set it at the world record holder – (currently Javier Sotomayor from Cuba who jumped 2.45 m in 1993). The set it higher still, well beyond our ability to achieve.
- Have a competition to see who can jump the furthest. At the conclusion ask who the winner is. Then explain that they were actually jumping from one side of a mud/manure pit to the other (a distance further than anyone has jumped). Now who is the winner
- The jar of vegemite on a table with a sign: 'don't touch'. A person comes along, sees the sign and is tempted. He/she touches it and soon realises that it is stuck to their hands. In their endeavours to clean up the mess they end up getting helplessly covered all over.
- The farmer in a paddock full of stones on the surface. Removes them before he sows his field, only to discover bigger ones under the surface. These take more effort only to discover bigger one stills. After a sequence of bigger and bigger stones requiring greater and greater effort the farmer is satisfied that he is finally ready – only to discover an impenetrable bedrock the entire length and breadth of the paddock.
- Nicky Gumbel in the Alpha course about a competition run in England to come up with the shortest answer to the following question: "what is wrong with the world?" The winning answer: "I am".
- Harry Wendt's Crossways image ("*Incurvatus in se*")



What are important considerations related to dealing with these concepts in schools?

What are points of similarity and difference with other denominations?