

FOR DISCUSSION

Can you think of any examples which might count as 'sins of omission'?

Look up the following references to see what Jesus is said to have included in 'sins of omission': Matthew 22:23 and Matthew 25:31–45.

SIN, JUDGEMENT, FORGIVENESS, SALVATION, ETERNAL LIFE

SIN

A word used in the New Testament for sin is hamartia – missing the mark.

Sin is disobedience against the will of God, falling short of God's standards and falling away from the perfection of God.

Thoughts, words and actions which result from 'sin' are called 'sins'. People who commit sins are called 'sinners'.

Sometimes sins include actions which have not been done. These are 'sins of omission'. They have not been done but they should have been done.



Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden of Eden. 1887 Window by Lorin in St. Aignan Church, Chartres.

The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 is about the first sin. It presents the idea that, from the very beginning when God first created them and gave them free will, human beings have been rebellious and disobedient. The idea that all people are born in a state of sin with a natural inclination to do wrong is called 'original sin'. This is a Christian idea and although the Old Testament is a Jewish book, Jews do not believe in original sin.

Christians have different ideas about original sin. Some see it as a sort of stain which is passed on and on from parents to children, and some see it as guilt handed down from the time of Adam, whilst others simply accept that original sin is a way of expressing the fact that human nature is weak.

In the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, sin is shown to separate people from God. Baptism of children and adults is seen by Christians as one of the ways of washing away sin and sins in order to start a new life filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (see page 113).

JUDGEMENT

Belief in judgement has always been part of Christian teaching. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament say that God is just; sin is wrong and, therefore, sin should be punished.

Christians believe that this life is a preparation for the next life, life after death. By words like 'the next life' and 'the afterlife', Christians do not mean reincarnation. Christians believe that we have only this one life on earth and in it we are tested; then we are rewarded or punished. Believers will go to Heaven. Heaven is where God is. Sinners will be separated from God. They will be in Hell. Roman Catholics believe there is a state of existence called Purgatory where people who deserve some punishment or are not fully prepared for heaven will go to be cleansed and made ready to meet God.

Many Christians believe that there will be an actual 'Day of Judgement' at the end of time when the world ends.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel there is a prophecy of 'one like a human being' coming in the sky (Daniel 7:13). This is often translated as 'one like a son of man'. Jesus used the title 'Son of Man' and the Gospel writers saw it as a Messianic title. From New Testament times, Christians have awaited this Second Coming of Jesus. The Creeds also refer to the return of Christ and the final Judgement (see above).

Some Christians accept the biblical prophecies about the events at the end of the world as a literal account of what will happen, whilst others see the descriptions as picture language to express faith in the final triumph of God's kingdom over all evil.

In medieval times Christian churches often had lurid paintings of the Last Judgement with the believers in Heaven with God and the damned souls being tortured and tormented in the fires of Hell.

FOR DISCUSSION

Christian preachers often point to the fact that the word 'sin' has the letter 'i' in the middle. They say that this reminds us that putting 'I', one's own self, as the centre of one's life will always lead to unhappiness. Do you agree?

Look at the Ten Commandments (see page 21). Breaking any one of these commandments shows the sort of behaviour which might be called sinful. Do you think everybody breaks these rules?



The Last Judgement by Jean Cousin the Younger.