

1. **Introduction:** First, a summary of “From God’s perspective, is there a distinction between little sins and big sins”? The answer is both “no” and “yes” in different senses.
  - We approached this question looking first at the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. What was their sin? They ate a piece of fruit. From a human perspective that seems like a minor infraction, but it caused a major catastrophe for humans. What is the big deal?
  - Understanding the significance of that first sin requires context. Eating fruit for food was something Adam and Eve routinely did without sinning. What was different in this case?
  - Fruit was plentiful in the Garden. Obedience to God was necessary to maintain human life as God designed it. As a test of obedience. God gave the command, “don’t eat the fruit of this tree.” Disastrous consequences would result from disobeying His command.
2. **Genesis 2:15-17:** *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*
  - Adam and Eve’s sin was disobeying God. Eating forbidden fruit was incidental. The sin could have been any disobedience of God. Any deviation from perfect obedience is sin.
  - The dreadful consequences of disobeying God were both immediate and unending. Their disobedience caused them to be spiritually separated from God (spiritual death). Since they were now rebellious sinners, they lost their (as created) holiness and eternal life.
  - Being no longer holy and righteous, they could not continue to live in God’s presence, but were forced to leave the Garden to deal with an environment made hostile by sin.
  - The change they experienced was harsh and drastic with long-term consequences. As sinners, they were dead spiritually, possessed a sin nature, their physical bodies began to deteriorate and would eventually experience mortal death. The changes arising from their disobedience-induced separation from God would be transmitted to all their progeny.
  - The first sin was disobeying God, and so will be the last sin. To disobey God is to sin. Sin results in separation from God our creator who is the source of spiritual and physical life.
  - From the first sin committed by Adam and Eve in Genesis to the last sin that will be committed, any sin, regardless of what people think about its severity, separates sinner from God. Romans 3:23 says, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”
  - That implies every sin committed (whether humanly judged small or great) puts a person in the position of needing God's forgiveness and redemption.
3. **Distinctions:** Although all disobedience to God is sin and the consequence separates the sinner from God, Scripture indicates not all sins are the same in terms of consequences and level of offense to God. Before God all disobedience is sin, but when sin is human to human or human to animal or property, Scripture distinguishes between types sins in terms effects and consequences.

- On trial before Pilate, in John 19:11, Jesus said to Pilate, ***"Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."*** That implies some sins are worse than others.
  - Jesus also spoke of an unforgivable sin that is against God - blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark 3:29 , ***"but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."*** This, again, suggests a distinction in the severity of sins.
  - In other words, there are degrees of obedience and disobedience recognized in both secular and spiritual law. Every disobedience to God is sin and the penalty for sin is death, but God has provided a way to be pardoned.
  - Scripture implies a variation in rewards and punishments for earthly deeds. In Revelation 22:12, Jesus says, ***"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."***
  - God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ forgives all sins. God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Believers are to strive to be holy and righteous, knowing they serve a God who is merciful and just.
4. **Secular law** assigns different punishment for different levels of law-breaking. Disobeying God is sin. The penalty for disobeying God is death. No power but God can change that.
- How far you cross into disobedient territory is important, but to disobey God is rebellion no matter how small the disobedience may seem. Disobedience means you have sinned and cannot of your own power undo your status as sinner.
  - Adam and Eve's infraction of eating a piece of fruit seems minor, but crossing the line from obedience to disobedience was rebellion against God. The consequence of their rebellious sin was a major disaster for Adam and Eve and all their future progeny.
  - Sin is personal disobedience to God. Unless a person who sins is redeemed by believing in the forgiveness and restoration wrought by Jesus' salvation work, God enforces the death penalty for sin (spiritual, physical, and eternal death).
  - Any sin (disobedience to God) whatsoever separates a person from God. Despite that truth, as mentioned before, Scripture indicates that not all sins are equal in terms of their consequences and their level of offense to God.
  - No human person is without sin. All have disobeyed God. All need God's salvation.
  - Returning to our study of Romans 5, Paul writes about the potential benefits of suffering.
5. **Romans 5:3-5**: ***Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.***
- These verses by Paul are reminiscent of James 1:2-4.

6. **James 1:2-4:** *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.*

- We know sufferings (tribulations) are common experiences of all human-kind. Jesus said, **John 16:33:** *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*
- Suffering may be self-inflicted; some suffering is a result of God's corrective actions aimed getting us back on the path of righteousness when we stray; some suffering (as seen in Job) may be the consequence of Cosmic Warfare; but some suffering comes from the world and is aimed at believers simply because they follow Christ.
- This form is the suffering Paul primarily has in mind in 5:3. That becomes clear in 8:35-39 and other places talking about problems Paul experienced as he carried the gospel to the world (1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 1:4-10; 11:23-30; 12:7-10; 2 Tim 3:11-12; 4:13-16).
- Ordinary earthly aches and pain, fears and frustrations, deprivations and disappointments of everyday life are not what Paul is talking about. In the passage, the Greek word translated as "sufferings" primarily means "pressures."
- "Pressures" signify opposition and persecution directed toward believers from a hostile, unbelieving world. Jesus recognized this kind of opposition would occur.

7. **Matthew 5:10-11:** *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

- Ordinary worldly trials can develop endurance, character, and hope if they are dealt with Biblically. Such trials include being forbidden to speak about Christ or to pray or to have a Bible in a classroom, or in general the forcing of people to do things they believe God forbids while refusing to allow them to do things they believe God requires of them.
- Persecution may include bodily harm and murder simply because a person is a Christian.
- God rewards steadfast obedience in the face of trials and tribulations with perseverance, a powerful attribute, both for accomplishing everyday goals and withstanding persecution.
- Perseverance in a godly life develops character, increases desire to be like Christ.
- Because we have been justified, we know from Scripture we will ultimately be glorified.
- Our hope in future glory will not disappoint us, *"because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*
- Unrealized hope can be disappointing, but the hope of the justified that they will be glorified is hope guaranteed by God. It is a sure thing.

- God’s love for believers is the very same love that led the Son of God to become incarnate, so that He could live a perfect human life under the Law as the God-Man Messiah, and in His human nature die to pay the full penalty due for the sins of believers.
  - God’s love in a believer’s heart changes their attitude, changes what is important in their life, changes relationships, and increasingly “tightens” their relationship with God.
  - Though Paul begins this passage with “sufferings,” he ends with “hope.”
8. **Romans 5:6-8:** *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.<sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die –<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- Paul is amazed God’s love for us is so great that He sent the second Person of the Trinity to become incarnate and die for sinners (Jn 3:16, Gal 2:20).
  - When Jesus died to save sinners who would believe, He saved them from the punishment due their sins under the Law and God’s wrath. Unrepentant sinners are enemies of God, disobedient rebels, sentenced to death by the Law, and powerless to save themselves.
  - This is not a description of lovable people of high intrinsic value. Yet, God’s redeeming love for His rebellious human creatures is so great that Jesus Messiah died to save them.
  - Paul points out that from a human perspective, dying to save rebels from their sin was shocking behavior. Even for a righteous person, it is unlikely anyone would choose to die to save that person from death and certainly not for a rebellious, law-breaker.
  - Maybe to save someone who was of great importance to you (like a child), you might choose to die to save their life. But to die for rebellious sinners – not likely!
  - Why would God decide to save sinners who had no power or ability to save themselves from the wrath due them? The answer can only be found in God’s abounding love for His sinful creatures even though there is nothing lovable about sin.
  - When sinners repent and believe, does God love them for that reason? No, while we were still sinners, God so loved us that He sent His Son to die on our behalf (Rm 5:8).
  - Though we perhaps are often perplexed by tragedies and calamities that befall us, we should remember that only God’s love for us keeps us from experiencing the full extent of God’s wrath at sin. We are guilty!
  - Never doubt God’s love. He proved His love by sending His Son to become incarnate, having a human nature added to His divine nature so that He could die to pay the death penalty due our sins.
  - Jesus’ ministry on the cross is past, but He Lives! His accomplishments continue to bring sinners salvation. God sends the Holy Spirit to live within believers, pouring God’s love into our hearts, sustaining those redeemed.
9. **Next:** Begin with Romans 5:9.