

The Scriptural Definition of Righteousness

Since where we begin frequently determines whether we come to a correct understanding or not, we will begin where an equivalence is drawn between words we do know and understand, and words we wish to understand.

While a passage containing an equivalence exists for the word "righteousness," it is not conclusive in providing a full understanding of the meaning. Rather, it only provides one element involved in the definition of righteousness. Since this situation exists, there are several passages of Scripture we must examine to obtain the actual definition of righteousness. From the totality of the passages which define the term, we should then be able to determine, based upon that definition, which thoughts and behaviors are righteous and which are not.

Though there are many places where we could begin in Scripture, we will begin where the equivalence exists between the words "righteousness" and "equity." That passage is found in Psalms where we are given the coming reign of Christ for our consideration:

Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity. (*Psalms 98:9*)

Lest we get taken away by the use of the three different words of "earth," "world," and "people" for what the LORD God will judge, we must remember that the LORD is not going to judge the grass, trees and animals, but man only. What the verse is declaring to us is that there is no land, no region or place where He will not judge on this earth, but the entirety of it will be under His jurisdiction. If we understand this, we should be able to perceive that, as He judges the entirety of

the world with righteousness, every person will be judged with equity.

By stating Psalm 98:9 this way, the LORD drew an equivalence between the words "righteousness" and "equity," making them equal in meaning, at least in the area of judgment. But as mentioned earlier, the verse in Psalms is not the only reference in which righteousness is defined. In the following passage from Hebrews, the LORD delineates two things He deems in opposition one to the other:

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. **Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity;** therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (*Hebrews 1:8-9*)

Note here that the LORD God expresses strong feelings for righteousness (Thou hast loved righteousness) and equally strong feelings against iniquity (hated iniquity). By juxtaposing the two and expressing feelings which are in direct opposition (positive for righteousness and negative for iniquity), He is in as much defining righteousness and iniquity as opposites.

However, we must go further and examine what was preserved through the work and ministry of the prophet Ezekiel. During Ezekiel's ministry the LORD God plainly showed Judah what was wrong with what they were doing and why He judged them the way He did. In so doing, Ezekiel records for everyone who cares to observe and consider, an explanation of what righteousness and its opposite, which is iniquity, consist of:

Yet ye say, **The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.** Again, when the

wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. (Ezekiel 18:25-30)

And again in Ezekiel 33:

Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I

will judge you every one after his ways. (Ezekiel 33:12-20)

It is abundantly clear throughout Scripture that the LORD God states He is righteous. Those statements will not be repeated here, as evidence for this is without question. However, the LORD merely making the assertion does not prove it to man, who He is asking to trust in Him for salvation and the totality of the individual's life. So it is that through the prophet Ezekiel, the LORD begins to provide the evidence, and the means to evaluate that evidence. In the above passage from Ezekiel 33, we find the operative phrase as to why the LORD God states that He is righteous:

“are not my ways equal?”

He follows this question with a blunt assessment of why Israel is not righteous by contrasting the above question with another question that draws an immediate distinction:

“are not your ways unequal?”

In so doing He sets forth the reason Israel was to be judged and destroyed if it failed to repent. But in this He also defines for us the central tenet of the quality of righteousness. However, for us to correctly understand righteousness, we must understand other concepts, beginning with what is meant by a person's “way.” We must also understand what iniquity is and how it differs from both transgression and sin.

The “way”

In the above passages from Ezekiel, it is clear that the problem lies in the “way” of an individual, and whether that “way” is equal or unequal. To the end of understanding the significance of the “way,” and why the LORD God compared and contrasted “are not my ways equal?” with “are not your ways unequal,” we must examine the following definitions for the word “way.” It is needful that we pay particular attention to senses 3, 4a, 5a, 7 and 9, as we find them applicable to both

the LORD God and man. The LORD's use of the word in the plural, and the specific definitions which relate to aspects of both His being and ours bear directly upon our understanding:

Way – noun \?wa-\
((“Way.” Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/way>.)

1a: a thoroughfare for travel or transportation from place to place

b: an opening for passage <this door is the only way out of the room>

2: the course traveled from one place to another: ROUTE <asked the way to the museum>

3a: a course (as a series of actions or sequence of events) leading in a direction or toward an objective <led the way to eventual open heart operations – Current Biography>

b(1): a course of action <took the easy way out> (2) : opportunity, capability, or fact of doing as one pleases <always manages to get her own way>

c: a possible decision, action, or outcome: POSSIBILITY <they were rude – no two ways about it>

4a: manner or method of doing or happening; <admired her way of thinking> also : method of accomplishing : MEANS <that's the way to do it>

b: FEATURE, RESPECT <in no way resembles her mother>

c: a usually specified degree of participation in an activity or enterprise <active in real estate in a small way>

5a: characteristic, regular, or habitual manner or mode of being, behaving, or happening <knows nothing of the ways of women>

b: ability to get along well or perform well

6: the length of a course : DISTANCE <has come a long way in her studies> <still have a way to go>

7: movement or progress along a course <worked her way up the corporate ladder>

8a: DIRECTION <is coming this way>

b: PARTICIPANT – usually used in combination <three-way

discussion>

9: state of affairs: CONDITION, STATE *<that's the way things are>*

10a plural but sometimes sing in constr: an inclined structure upon which a ship is built or supported in launching

b plural : the guiding surfaces on the bed of a machine along which a table or carriage moves

11: CATEGORY, KIND –usually used in the phrase in the way of <doesn't require much in the way of expensive equipment –Forbes>

12: motion or speed of a ship or boat through the water

Understanding that one's "ways" encompass more than the mere outward actions is essential here. The "ways" the LORD refers to here are the ground and bottom of the heart, the subsequent thoughts and intents which spring from that ground, and the outworking of those thoughts and intents. It also includes the process of thinking as well. Although everyone may see or perceive the same information, how any particular individual perceives that information is dependent upon what they know about the world around them. Additionally, how that information is processed and the conclusions drawn from that, lead to intents, thoughts and actions. This whole process is inclusive of the "way" of the individual.

Hence the "way" includes the process of reasoning. This process is roughly defined as the taking of information, applying significance (or weight) to that information, then determining, in accordance with how that information is perceived to "fit" in the existence of the individual, what thoughts or actions should follow. If any part of this process is unequal to the reality which actually exists (weighting, fitting and successive actions), then the outcome of those logical operations and how they are applied, which are used to arrive at a conclusion, is also unequal. Logic dictates that if any part of the process of arriving at an outcome is unequal, then the end result of that process will be unequal

as well.

It is imperative to remember that we, that is all of us individually, suffer from the limitation of having to reason or figure things out. This is due to the simple fact that we do not know all things which could be known. In fact, we actually know very little of what could be known. Hence, we have to gather information and “think” about that information. Thus, in the gathering of information and subsequent processing of that information, there exists ample opportunity to be unequal to the reality which actually exists, particularly in the realm of the spiritual. In contrast, this situation does not exist with the LORD God. We would do well to remember that the LORD God is omniscient, which is “all-knowing” and thus does not “think” as man thinks. The LORD God does not have to “figure things out” as we do. Rather, He already knows and understands all the ramifications of that knowledge. Moreover, He knows that He knows all things. This knowledge precludes thinking as we understand it.

A comparison of ways

We note in the passages in Ezekiel that the disagreement is over the issue of “ways,” and whose “ways” are “equal” and whose “ways” are “not equal” or unequal. In this disagreement the LORD states that His ways are equal, and thus righteous, and that Israel’s ways are “not equal” and that “iniquity” would be their ruin. For our understanding, the operative statements that concern us are the following:

Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

In the above passage the LORD compares the “way” of the LORD with the “way” of Israel. Finding fault with them, the LORD

declares that He will judge the “ways” of Israel. Here He also explicitly warns that a failure to turn from those “ways” will allow iniquity to be their ruin. By making this comparison, the LORD draws an antithesis or oppositional equivalence between His ways which are “equal” and Israel’s which are “not equal,” which He then refers to as “iniquity.” Thus the contrast is between how the LORD God is, and subsequently does what He does, and Israel, which exists because of the LORD’s promise to Abraham, and how it chooses to be – despite that blessing, and despite repeated warnings to not persist in this “way.”

The relationship of these elements becomes clearer when we extract certain phrases and examine them. There is an appositional, contrasting relationship of the LORD’s ways and Israel’s ways. The declaration of judgment of Israel’s way, and finally summing up Israel’s situation with a call to repentance, else iniquity would be the ruin of them, plainly demonstrate that iniquity is the property, or attribute of being unequal in one’s ways:

- “are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal
- “I will judge you, . . . , every one according to his ways”
- “turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”

Though the definitions of the words “righteous,” and “righteousness” never mentioned being equal, or equal in one’s ways, the source or root, which is the etymology of the word “iniquity,” is expressly concerned with equality. In examining how iniquity is defined, we see that it is referred to as having a lack of righteousness, or it is wickedness, injustice. It is also called a “wicked act; sin.” Those definitions would seem to take us right back to the problems existent with the way righteousness is defined. However, when we observe the etymology of the word, it supports exactly what the Scripture describes in Ezekiel, and is in direct

opposition to how the Scripture describes righteousness. Note that the Latin etymology of the word is expressly a conjunction of two Latin words “in” (meaning “not”) and “aequus” (meaning “equal”).

Iniquity iniquity [ɪˈniːkwɪti] n pl -ties (“Iniquity.” CollinsDictionary.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/iniquity>)
)

1. lack of justice or righteousness; wickedness; injustice
 2. a wicked act; sin
[from Latin *ini-quita-s*, from *ini-quus* unfair, from *in-1* + *aequus* even, level; see equal]
- iniquitous* adj
iniquitously adv
iniquitousness n

in·iq·ui·ty (-nkw-t) n. pl. *in·iq·ui·ties* (“Iniquity.” ahdictionary.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=iniquity&submit.x=69&submit.y=29>))

1. Gross immorality or injustice; wickedness.
2. A grossly immoral act; a sin.
[Middle English *iniquite*, from Old French, from Latin *iniquis*, from *inquus*, unjust, harmful : *in-*, not; see *in-1* + *aequus*, equal.]

iniquus (“iniquus.” wikionary.org. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/iniquus>))

Latin

Etymology: *in-* (“not”) +? *aequus* (“equal, even, fair”)

Pronunciation: (Classical) IPA(key): /iːniːkʰ(w)us/

Adjective: *ini-quus* m (feminine *ini-qua*, neuter *ini-quum*); first/second declension

1. unjust, unfair
2. uneven
3. unfavourable, disadvantageous
4. unkind, hostile
5. unsuitable

The difference between “iniquity,” “transgression,” and “sin”
If we understand the foregoing explanation about iniquity, we arrive at the place where many raise question over the issue of iniquity and transgression, and the relationship between the two. It is clear and unmistakable in Ezekiel 33, that both iniquity and transgression are included in the LORD’s warning to Israel:

“turn yourselves from all **your transgressions; so iniquity** shall not be your ruin.”

Which raises the question:

Isn't it the transgression which is unequal, and not iniquity?

Or, framed differently:

Isn't it that iniquity and transgression have meanings so closely related that you are splitting hairs and engaging in argument simply for the sake of doing so?

In fact, that was a view expressed concerning the distinction made between the words “iniquity,” “transgression,” and “sin” when conversing with a gentleman via email:

*“While you have made a difference between sin, transgression, and iniquity, I attempted to keep it more simple; **and while we could “split hairs” over their interrelated meanings,** that was never my purpose.” ((Personal communication via email over the issue of the origin of sin. **Emphasis mine.**))*

However common the man's view is held in religious circles, it is not supported by Scripture or by reason. Unless you believe the LORD likes being redundant, or that the penmen or translators of the Scripture liked and added redundancy, then it stands to reason that there is some genuine distinction and difference between "iniquity," "transgression," and "sin," and the words really cannot be used interchangeably.

In the following passage from Exodus, where the LORD God proclaims Himself before Moses, it is clear from the structure of the LORD's statement that a difference exists between "iniquity," "transgression," and "sin:"

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*. (*Exodus 34:6-7*)

It is not reasonable to say that it is "splitting hairs over interrelated meanings" when the LORD God Himself, in declaring what he will and won't forgive, draws a distinction between "iniquity," "transgression," and "sin." Quite obviously, there is a significant enough difference between the three that the LORD God, who is not known for wasting words, delineates between them. It is up to us then, utilizing the information given us in His word, to be willing to see what the difference is.

To that end, let us examine briefly what the LORD told Jeremiah in chapter 33:

And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, **whereby** they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, **whereby** they have sinned, and **whereby** they have transgressed against me. (*Jeremiah 33:8*)

We see that the above verse consists of two major clauses, separated by a semi-colon. In the first clause, ending with a comma is the first phrase, which states “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity,” which is then continued through the employment of the word “whereby” at the beginning of the second phrase. The second major clause begins similarly to the first with “and I will pardon all their iniquities,” and is also continued through the use of the word “whereby” in both phrases which follow. To understand what is done here, it is essential to understand the word “whereby:”

where·by (hwâr-b, wâr-) conj. (“Whereby.” ahdictionary.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=whereby&submit.x=49&submit.y=24>)

In accordance with which; by or through which.

whereby (w???ba?) pron (“Whereby.” CollinsDictionary.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/whereby?>)

1. by or because of which: *the means whereby he took his life.*

adv

2. *how? by what means?: whereby does he recognize me?.*

where•by (^(h)w??r?ba?, w??r-) conj.

1. *by what or by which; under the terms of which.*

adv.

2. Obs. by what? how? [1150–1200]

In the preceding definition, there are two possible senses which fit contextually. However, the correct usage, given the example above, would be the pronoun usage of the word. The given meaning of that usage is “by or because of which” yielding the following rewritten verse:

And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, because of which they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, because of which they have sinned, and because of which they have transgressed against me.

Thus, in using the word “whereby,” which means “*by or because of which*,” ((Though we could use “by which” in the place of “whereby,” it is clearer, though the meaning is the same, to use “because of which.” Hence, “because of which” is used here.)) the LORD God is imparting to us the understanding that transgression and sin come about as a result of iniquity. Since we know that iniquity, transgression and sin are three entirely different words, and we know that sin is already defined as “missing the mark.” However, transgression is defined as “*The exceeding of due bounds or limits*,” as we can see in the following definition: ((We define “transgression” this way because it is the “whereby” in how we “miss the mark.” It is logically out of order to say we “missed the mark” then went “out of the bound.” Rather, we go “out of the bound,” and because we did so, we “missed the mark.”))

trans·gres·sion (“Transgression.” [thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/transgression). Accessed December 24, 2014. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/transgression>. Quoting the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.))

(*tra(ns-gre(sh??n, tra(nz-)* n.

1. A violation of a law, principle, or duty.
2. The exceeding of due bounds or limits.
3. A relative rise in sea level resulting in deposition of marine strata over terrestrial strata.

Which can also be stated as “going beyond or crossing the bounds or limits,” leaving us with the clear conclusion that the inequality the LORD speaks of in Ezekiel 18 and 33 is not

transgression or sin. Rather, it is iniquity that is defined in both passages as 'inequality,' or being "not equal" in one's ways.

Unlike the idea the gentleman holds that any differences in iniquity, transgression, and sin are minor and the meanings of the three words are interrelated, the Scripture defines them as part of a "cause and effect" relationship. What is demonstrated in the verse from Jeremiah 33 is that "iniquity," which is the property or attribute of being unequal in one's ways, is the cause ("because of which") of transgression and sin. Relationally, iniquity causes transgression. Since transgression is crossing the bound, it is inherent in that action of crossing the boundary, that one has missed the mark (which is sin). Though we are tempted to say that sin and transgression are synonymous, we must remember that the law is not particularly a target, and neither is it particularly a set of boundaries. Rather, the law consists of parameters (conditions) which define its extent and applicability. It is important to keep this distinction as the LORD God is careful throughout His word to maintain it.

Thus, if one is unequal in one's ways, it should be of no surprise that one's perception and cogitations would also be unequal to the reality which is. If one misperceives and also errs in the processes of thinking, it should be of no surprise also that crossing the bound is going to happen at some point in time. When that crossing the bound happens, one will have missed the mark simply because perception and cognitive processes were distorted. Hence, though intentions are to perform that which is good, the intended end is not achieved, as the means by which to arrive at that end is misunderstood through misperception, distorted logic, and flawed logic processes. In fact, even the end we think we want to arrive at is frequently not clearly perceived or understood.

Though we might wish that this absolves us of responsibility for our intents, thoughts, decisions and subsequent actions,

it does not for a couple of reasons. Beginning from Adam, who knowingly violated the commandment with regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and extending unto us this day, we are cognizant of the fact that we misperceive, misunderstand and err in our interactions in this world. That knowledge, and our willful failure to address it in any meaningful manner, places the burden of guilt squarely upon each of us individually. Moreover, since man obtained the knowledge of good and evil, which is the understanding of why one thing is righteous and another unrighteous, we are aware of when our thoughts and intents and any resulting words and behaviors are unequal. Though we may not perceive it perfectly, we perceive it well enough to be assured that what we are thinking and/or doing is indeed unrighteous.

In returning to the point at hand, which is the relationship between iniquity, transgression and sin, we would do well to remember that being unequal in our ways is the root cause of all transgressions we commit. It is those transgressions that immediately result in missing the mark, (which is sin) and are counted against us. However, lest we think that if we do not transgress and thus do not sin, that we are somehow guiltless, we are reminded in Scripture that the LORD God cannot have iniquity in His presence:

*Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. **Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:** wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth *the man that is* more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:12-13)*

In disagreement with this, there are those who would have us believe that sin is the problem instead of focusing on the inherent iniquity. The following example from a synopsis of the book "Don't Blame God! A Biblical Answer to the Problem of

Evil, Sin, and Suffering” demonstrates this quite adequately:

“The sub-title of this 210-page book is “A Biblical Answer to the Problem of Evil, Sin, and Suffering.”

It addresses what is probably the number one question most people have about God: If He is a loving God, why is there such rampant human suffering?

This book shows biblically that God is not at all to blame, that the cause of all suffering is sin, and it shows whose sin. ((Emphasis mine. Unfortunately, I don’t see how the book is going to help anyone, as it completely misses the point and assigns the cause of all problems to the wrong source. However, this should be of no surprise as the gentleman that emailed me (a different fellow from the author of the book), who thought there was little difference between iniquity, transgression, and sin, has over 40 years in the ministry, and cannot see the difference between the three.)) It shows why Jesus Christ is the fulcrum of history in this regard, and resolves the seemingly apparent contradiction between the nature of the Old Testament God and that of the New Testament God, which, of course are the same changeless God.” ((“Don’t Blame God! A Biblical Answer to the Problem of Evil, Sin, and Suffering.” [truthortradition.com](http://www.truthortradition.com). Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.truthortradition.com/articles/dont-blame-god-a-biblical-answer-to-the-problem-of-evil-sin-and-suffering>))

And again from a lesson delivered at Common Ground Church:

“First, sin doesn’t discriminate. It has hit everyone. We don’t even have to do anything to be affected by it. Because Adam sinned, and we are all descended from him, we all have received his fallen nature. Adam’s sin impacted everyone. Even if a person had never committed a sinful act, everyone is guilty because our spiritual makeup is flawed.

Because of Adam’s sin, we all have an inborn selfishness that automatically rebels against God and his righteous laws. ((Emphasis mine. Here he is so close, yet so far away. What

he is describing is the property or attribute of iniquity, yet he does not realize it.)) Paul calls our condition "sarx", or being "in the flesh". The New Living Translation translates this word as "sinful nature". Paul isn't referring to flesh and blood. There is nothing evil about muscle, tendons, and bones. We shouldn't misunderstand him to be saying there is something inherently evil about the body." ("Romans, Week 2- Themes: Sin..."Sin is the Problem." cgnaz.org. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://cgnaz.org/september-16-2012-sermon-by-kevin/>))

But the above is not what we are told in Habakkuk, and neither is it what we are told in a number of other passages of Scripture. Nevertheless, there is a passage that some may grasp upon as proof that sin is the core problem. The following passage from Romans, chapter 7 speaks to the problem of sin and its effects:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, **sold under sin**. For that which I do I allow not: **for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I**. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but **sin that dwelleth in me**. (Romans 7:14-17)

Here we should understand that, unlike Jeremiah 33:8, there is no cause and effect relationship defined wherein sin is stated to cause iniquity and vice versa. Were it so, we could say the two were interchangeable. Rather, the cause and effect relationship defined here is of inward propensity to outward action. The inward propensity, which dwells in the flesh, is sin. The "sin" which is spoken of here, in its underlying Greek word, is the following:

hamartia: a sin, failure ("harmartia." biblehub.com. Accessed December 5, 2014.

<http://biblehub.com/greek/266.htm>)

Original Word: ἁμαρτία, ας, ἡ

Definition: prop: missing the mark; hence: (a) guilt, sin, (b) a fault, failure (in an ethical sense), sinful deed.

While this causes the flesh to do that which the apostle hates and has difficulty controlling, it speaks nothing about the deeper problem of iniquity, which is the cause of the inward propensity to miss the mark. This puts us at the issue of why we missed the mark in the first place. There is a root cause for why we have a propensity for missing the mark, and we would do well to focus on it instead.

In returning to that root cause of our problem, the following passages demonstrate that there is a considerable focus on iniquity in Scripture. Moreover, that focus addresses iniquity as a fundamental problem that is in direct opposition to righteousness, and not as another aspect of sin and/or transgression:

*But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. **Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity;** therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (Hebrews 1:8-9)*

For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: **thou hatest all workers of iniquity.** (Psalms 5:4-5)

Interestingly enough, never once in the Scripture does the LORD God say He hates sinners or hates sin. ((Now this is true for the King James Version. Who knows what is in all other versions which purport to be Scripture. It is worth remembering that if Satan can get us focused on the outward sin, we will miss the greater issue of our inward iniquity,

and never address it.)) Now this can be explained two ways. But first, we must understand that all sin, by its nature, is unequal or iniquity. All transgression, by its nature, is also unequal or iniquity. Hence, all sin and transgression fall under the auspices of iniquity, and are iniquity by their very nature. Therefore, to refer to sin and transgression as iniquity is entirely correct, but can be confusing. However, not all iniquity is transgression and/or sin. In understanding this, we might use the example of not being able to work calculus. In other words, we are not equal to, or up to doing calculus. We have iniquity with regard to calculus. Nevertheless, if we never attempt to work a calculus problem, and indeed never encounter one, we have not transgressed and subsequently sinned with regard to calculus. Why? Because we never engaged the the action in which our iniquity would cause us to fall short and sin. Nevertheless, our iniquity remains, it simply has not had opportunity to manifest itself in the symptoms of transgression and sin.

Thus it may be that the LORD God is referring to the “workers of iniquity” as all sinners, but that is an extrapolation of the phrase “all workers of iniquity” to cover “all sinners” which cannot be supported by the balance of Scripture. What we find in Romans 5 is a statement that relates to us the LORD God’s love for all His creation, even the wicked who hate Him:

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. **But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** (*Romans 5:7-8*)

Which is reinforced in Ezekiel 33, verse 11, in which the LORD God states plainly:

Say unto them, **As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live:** turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (*Ezekiel 33:11*)

Therefore, by the direct contradiction of these passages, the concept that the “workers of iniquity” are all sinners cannot stand. Rather, it must mean a certain set or class of sinners which have pushed the point to the extreme in opposition to the LORD. Without going off topic, we can gain some insight into who that might be by examining the following passages of Scripture:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ((It may seem pointless to direct attention to this most obvious point, but it is needful nonetheless: It is inherent in being a hypocrite, that one works iniquity.)) for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men’s* bones, and of all uncleanness. **Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.** (*Matthew 23:25-28*)

And again in John 8:44:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (*John 8:44*)

And yet again from Matthew 12, verses 24-32:

But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against

himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. (*Matthew 12:24-32*)

Lest we think this class of persons, the workers of iniquity, died out with the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, we ought to remember that the referencing of them in Psalm 5 was long before the Pharisees existed. Without doubt, they exist today.

In returning to the point at hand, what this does show us is that iniquity is of particular interest to the LORD God, as it is how His creatures go "off the rails" or 'leave their estate' as it were. That is shown in the fall of Lucifer in Ezekiel 28:

Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. (*Ezekiel 28:15*)

It was not sin that was Lucifer's problem, but iniquity. All Lucifer did was compare himself to the LORD on the throne, and think he was better than the LORD whom he was created to glorify. ((There is yet an entire discussion as to how the first sin occurred that could be brought up here. However, we would likely never reach the point which we wish to reach in this appendix, which addresses the issue of righteousness and

what it is. Rather, the issue of the origin of sin is left to Appendix B: The Origin of Sin, in which the fall of Lucifer is discussed more fully.) Sin is also not the stated reason why the Lord Jesus said that “the love of many shall wax cold.” Rather, it is the much more insidious iniquity:

And **because iniquity shall abound**, the love of many shall wax cold. (*Matthew 24:12*)

Iniquity is insidious, as it is being unequal in our “ways.” Which is to say that it is so much a part of us, and we are so accustomed to it, that we virtually never notice how our iniquitous thinking and behavior are negatively affecting those around us. Whether we like it or not, not a one of us is far from those the LORD God condemns so vigorously in II Peter:

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots *they are* and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, **following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity**: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet. (*II Peter 2:12-16*)

It was iniquity that was Balaam’s problem, and it is the problem of those the LORD is condemning. It was also the problem of one Simon that Peter had to rebuke when he wanted to misappropriate the gift of the Holy Ghost:

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart

is not right in the sight of God. **Repent therefore of this thy wickedness**, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. **For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.** (Acts 8:21-23)

Where Peter speaks of the “bond of iniquity,” he is referring to the fact that Simon is held in iniquity and unable to escape iniquity by his own ability. However, this does not apply to just Simon. Rather, because of the very nature of iniquity and the distortion of everything about a person once they have become unequal in their ways, it is impossible for them to escape that bondage by their own efforts.

Why? Because of misperception, flawed thinking and thought processes. As referenced earlier, if our vision and perception are distorted, and our thinking is also distorted, how can any of us ever expect, of our own distorted and faulty abilities, to escape the cage of being unequal? How can any of us perceive accurately what we must do, if our vision and perception are not functioning correctly to perceive what actually is?

This is why the LORD states in Jeremiah 33 that He, and He alone will cleanse Israel from their iniquity. However, that cleansing is not limited to Israel, as all mankind are shapen in iniquity. Iniquity is the condition in which every person is formed in the womb, and we have no power in and of ourselves to cleanse ourselves from it. Rather, that takes place through the salvation which is in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone.

And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, **whereby they have sinned**, and **whereby they have transgressed** against me. (Jeremiah 33:8)

In comprehending the above passage, there are two separate

issues the LORD God addresses:

1. The iniquity inherent in the individual.
2. The sin which results from that iniquity – which is the cognizant thought, or outward action.

As an aid to our understanding we must comprehend that both iniquity and the resultant sin must be swept away for the individual to be completely clean. Simply taking care of one and ignoring the other will still render one guilty before the LORD. It is imperative that two things occur before we are held guiltless:

1. Have the cause of our going astray removed – which is the iniquity.
2. The transgressions and sins accounted for and payment made for those violations of the Person of the LORD God, clearing the debt the individual owes.

It would appear from a number of passages of Scripture that sin is the problem. However, to believe this is true is no different than believing that the runny nose is the actual problem in a person who has allergies or a cold. Rather, like the runny nose, sin is the symptom and iniquity is the real problem. Iniquity is the root cause of transgression and sin. To claim that sin is the real problem is also like answering as to why you missed a target you were aiming at with the statement “Because I missed the target.” Sin is defined as missing the mark, but there is a reason for missing the mark. That reason is found in Ezekiel, chapters 18 and 33 – and it is the quality of being unequal in our ways.

Lastly, we should understand that we, as the race of man, are driven toward an end that will arrive whether we like it or not. That end is the destruction of all good and order in society and the subsequent rise to preeminence of wickedness and evil – simply because of iniquity:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now

letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. (*II Thessalonians 2:7*)

We must understand: Even as we would work an equation in math, so it is with the passage of time and the outworking of all things with man. Once an inequality is introduced in the equation, it makes the equation unequal and the outcome in error. If we do not realize what we have done, we will arrive at an answer that we think is right, but is completely wrong. Moreover, the longer and more complex the equation, the greater the inequality in the equation becomes. In short, inequality begets more inequality. As time passes, and actions are performed which are unequal to what is, then iniquity grows. If we multiply that by every person on the earth, and none of us actually realize the inequalities we introduce into the working of all things, we can surely see how the mystery of iniquity works – without our really perceiving or understanding it.

The LORD God is equal in all His ways

In contrast to the way man is in his present state, the LORD God sets forth that He is equal in all His ways, and thus righteous. We could, as many have, simply accept the LORD's claim and let it go, leaving unanswered certain questions which the LORD God seems to have given us a way to answer.

If we recall that the LORD God identified equity as the essential part of righteousness along with specifying that a person must have this characteristic or attribute of equity in his "ways," then we can understand that He put before man the means by which man can make an informed determination about the righteousness of God within the limitations of man's existence. Let us recall that the "way" of someone is how they are habitually, which is how they think and act as a matter of course. We need also to remember that being equal as a state of existence is absolute. That is, for one to be "equal," then one must be equal in all their ways (that is, everything that they are as an individual). One cannot be equal in one thing,

and be unequal in another, and be considered righteous or without inequality. For one to have equity, that is, being equal as an attribute of their being, that person must be completely consistent and uniform throughout.

Therefore, righteousness is the property of being equal in **all** one's ways, and iniquity is the property of being unequal in **any** of one's ways. It is of necessity true that if righteousness requires for all ways to be equal, that being (or becoming) unequal in any of one's ways means that one has iniquity. Moreover, like the math equation, being unequal in one part spreads to every other part – and that inequality grows.

In the following passages, the LORD God testifies to man what He is about and what His end for man is. Understanding this is essential for us to come to some definitive conclusion about the character, nature and Person of the LORD God so that we may trust Him and His plan and purpose for man, which He accomplishes in Christ Jesus:

The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The LORD *is* great in Zion; and he *is* high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; *for it is* holy. **The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.** (*Psalms 99:1-4*)

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: **But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:** and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with

the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. (*Isaiah 11:1-4*)

Jesus saith unto him, **I am** the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (*John 14:6*)

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. **To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.** (*John 18:37*)

It is imperative for us to come to the understanding that the Old Testament is there for us to see and evaluate man's thinking and subsequent behavior, and consequences for that thinking and behavior. In practical examples, the Old Testament records events, the thoughts and actions of the individuals that precipitated them, and the LORD God's interaction with His creatures in those events.

One of the things we must be assured of is the LORD God's ability to maintain His own righteousness. This is an issue for us, as we cannot maintain righteousness for any period of time at all. Moreover, we are asked by the LORD to place our full, unreserved trust and confidence in the way He has chosen to justify man before Himself, absolve man of his guilt for sin, and cleanse man of all iniquity. If there exists any shred of doubt on our part about the actions and intentions of the LORD God, then we will not trust in any meaningful way. We must be assured that once purchased by the LORD God through the Lord Jesus Christ and His work, we will not be "let go," abandoned, or denied in the judgment.

It is essential that we understand the LORD God is well able to maintain His righteousness, which is the equality of all His ways in and of Himself.

Without realizing it, most individuals, including Christians,

pass by the LORD God's omniscience (which is the knowing of all things), without so much as a second thought as to what that really means. This is not merely having all knowledge (which we typically think of as mere information) but includes all understanding of that information and all wisdom to properly apply that information. We must understand that having knowledge, which is information of one sort or another, is not enough, but the significance of that information must be known. This is called understanding. Moreover, individually, we must also know how to apply the information to everything that concerns us. This is called wisdom. The Scripture is express that the LORD God's understanding is infinite. We should note that it does not use the word "complete," which could be construed as limiting, but specifically states His understanding is infinite. This relates to us that His understanding extends with no end, which should convey to us the fullness of omniscience.

*Great is our Lord, and of great power: **his understanding is infinite.** (Psalm 147:5)*

We should grasp that understanding is in itself a kind of knowledge. It does not simply pertain to raw information, but addresses the significance of that information. This is to say that He knows what that information means and how it relates to everything else. In sum, it is information about information. Understanding is essential to wisdom. Without understanding there is simply no way to determine the weight or significance of one thing versus another and whether something is to be of concern, can be ignored, or is of lesser significance.

Hence, we are led to wisdom, which is essential for the construct of things. Wisdom in itself is a kind of knowledge. It is the knowledge of how information is to be applied and how it will work out as things interact. Without it, it would have been impossible for the LORD God to create anything that worked. And yet, so wise is the LORD in His creation that even

in a corrupted state, it still is a wonder to behold and works quite well.

To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. (*Psalms 136:5*)

The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. (*Proverbs 3:19*)

Thus, when we say the LORD God is omniscient, in practical terms, that means the LORD God knows all that exists, knows all the significance of everything, and is able to properly weight that information and thus apply it properly and correctly to every situation that exists or could exist, for all eternity.

In sum, the LORD God knows all things, and all possible out-workings of those things and their interaction with all other things, for all time and eternity. Moreover, He knows that He knows all things which are, and knows that He knows all out-workings that are and will be. Additionally, the LORD God knows there is nothing else to know that can be known.

Without this knowledge and understanding, maintaining His righteousness would be impossible as He must know the actual end, and all other possible ends of everything that is or could be. For it to be otherwise, there exists the possibility of an action made by the LORD God ending up unequal in its end. This would yield unrighteousness, which the LORD God declares is impossible with Him.

A love for righteousness

We should understand that omniscience is not enough to maintain righteousness. It is not sufficient to merely have all knowledge so that in all workings accomplished, the end of all is known. Rather, one must also love equity or equality:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the

rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that **I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight,** saith the LORD. (*Jeremiah 9:23-24*)

The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is *in* heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the righteous: **but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.** Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup. **For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness;** his countenance doth behold the upright. (*Psalms 11:4-7*)

We must assuredly understand the following:

Without a love for righteousness, there is no motivator to be righteous, though one may know all things which exist and all actions which could occur, and the outworking of them all.

By the testimony of His word, the LORD God delights in equity in all things and in all His ways. It is His greatest pleasure to see things which are equal, balanced and true. Whether that equity, which is righteousness, is from the things He makes directly or from His creatures, it is a delight to His soul to behold them. Without this love for equity, righteousness and truth, which is in and of Himself, there exists no possibility of maintaining His righteousness.

Hence, this leads us to two questions:

Do we see righteousness in the things the LORD God created, even though they are in their present state corrupted by our iniquity?

Do we perceive righteousness in the interaction of the LORD God with His creatures: the angels, the devils, and man?

Before we answer those questions, we must remember that we, as fallen creatures given to iniquity, are attempting to ascertain and understand the actions of the LORD God as He deals with creatures which (as all recorded history proves) are wicked, uncaring and self-centered. This is of great difficulty, and entirely dependent upon the honesty of each individual heart and the intellectual honesty of the mind. Moreover, much of what we are attempting to understand is spiritual, which cannot be seen and is not easily perceived. This leaves man very little to work with in determining anything about the righteousness of the LORD God.

However, there are some things which we can perceive and understand, which should be obvious to all. Here we turn to the only testable environment we have available – the physical. Because of the system the LORD God has set up, there are some simple “tests” which can be performed by anyone possessing an honest heart and mind. Contrary to the thoughts of some, one does not have to be born again, that is, in Christ, to perceive and understand this. The reason for this is the LORD’s desire that man come to trust Him freely and of his own volition.

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