

*Bible Study*

# Graded Holiness and Sin

Craig M White  
Version 1.4

"Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has **the greater sin.**" (John 19:11)



## ***Graded Holiness and Graded Sin***

Version 1.4

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The purpose and desire is to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

### Suggested Reading

- *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* by Philip P. Jenson
- *An Introduction to Biblical Law* by William S. Morrow
- *The Signs of Sin. Seriousness of Offense in Biblical Law* by Jonathan P. Burnside
- *What is Inspiration?* by Craig M White

## Introductory Comments

Do sins vary in degree? And if sin does, what about holiness?

While we are about it, what about rewards and punishment? Are they also variant in degrees?

Is lying as bad as murder? What about adultery and envy? Is theft equal to drunkenness? Are all sins equal?

In this Bible study I explore the Biblical principles (utilising examples) for gradings or degrees of holiness and sin.

First of all, let us acknowledge that all sin results in death – even eternal death.

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin [*serious or minor*] is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 6:22-23)

Further, James informs us that if we break just one of God’s requirements, we break them all

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

**For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.**

For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:8-13)

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; **sin is lawlessness.**” (1John 3:4)

“The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. **For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.**” (Rom 14:22-23)

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17)

“And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.” (Deut 7:26. See John 7:49)

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23)

Aside from Christ Himself, it is impossible for any human being to be able to reach, let alone sustain, God's standards; or to come anywhere close to His standards. Hence Christ's sacrifices, His mercy and willingness to forgive transgressions.

What does God want of us? To be holy like Him – at least striving to be so:

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." (Lev 19:2. See Matt 5:48)

Note what Brent Strawn states about this Scripture:

"A text like Lev. 19:2: ""Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" aptly summarizes this perspective. Moreover, the fact that this text is cited in 1 Pet. 1:13-16 would seem to underscore that holiness is a concern, even a command, that runs throughout the text of the Christian Bible--that is, the Old and New Testaments." ("The X-Factor: Revisioning Biblical Holiness", *The Asbury Theological Journal* vol. 54, no. 2, p. 73)

"What is clear, however, is that holiness is central throughout the Holiness Code and is manifested in a number of ways--indeed, in almost as many ways as there are laws --including regulations regarding sacrifice (Lev. 17:1-6), sexuality (Lev. 18:6-23), familial relations (Lev. 20:9), idol worship (Lev. 20:1-5), priesthood (Lev. 21:1-24), offerings (Lev. 22:1 -23), festivals (Leviticus 23), and so forth. Leviticus 19 is a particularly interesting chapter, and probably the most well-known given v. 18ba: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." **The juxtaposition of this verse with a prohibition against mixed breeding shows that this chapter serves as a microcosm for what one finds throughout the Holiness Code.**

What is perhaps most striking about Leviticus 19, besides the rough juxtaposition already mentioned, is the refrain that echoes throughout the chapter: "I am the LORD" (19:3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37)." (p. 77)

"In Israel, these laws would seem to bind the people together, uniting them as one people of God, serving and obeying that God in any and every way. Simultaneously, however, these laws serve to separate them and mark them as different from the outside world. In short, **these laws are an X-Factor differentiating Israel from her neighbors.**" (p. 78)

Holiness is the ultimate goal of the Christian – to strive toward it. While in its absolute completeness it is impossible for any human to achieve, nevertheless one must strive for that with the aid of God's holy spirit. Falling short of the glory of God is covered by the blood of Christ.

## Graded Holiness

More and more scholars are discovering the extent of the grading or degrees of holiness found within Scripture. The basic formula has been known stretching back a very long time, but the extent and depth of it is emerging in scholarship.

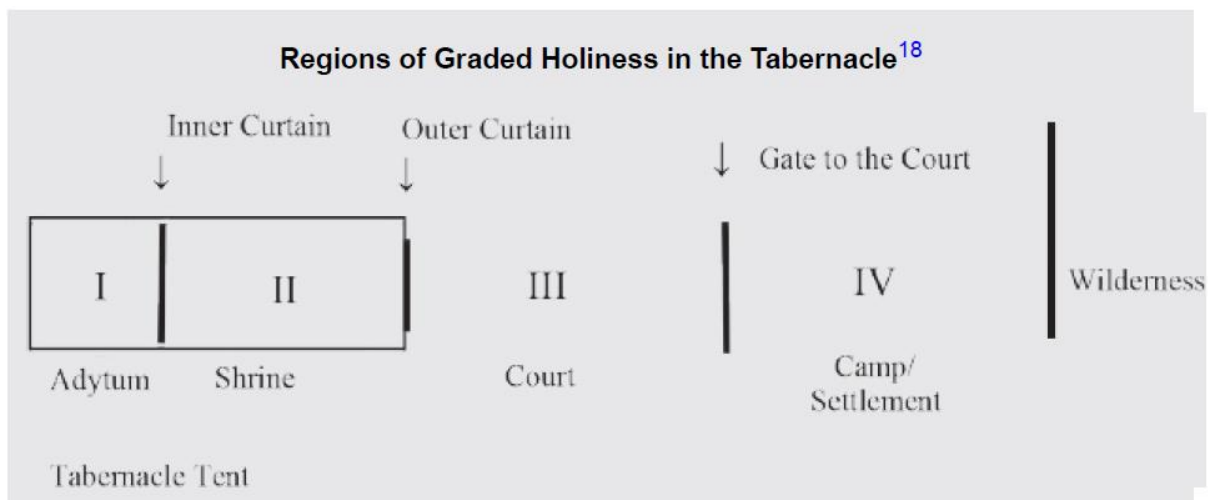
In the temple (and tabernacle) of ancient Israel we find layers of security that guarded it – almost like walls or fences at various points as one nears the presence of God. As one proceeds from outside the camp into the camp; from the outer court into the temple and the holy place, and finally the most holy place that included the ark. There was, in effect, spatial holiness.

Why is this? Because the presence of the Lord was found within the Temple (or Tabernacle) and the closer one was to His area of presence, the closer one is to encounter Him and His holiness. The holy of holies is thus filled with His presence and holier than the holy place.

Beyond that is the courtyard (inner court)<sup>1</sup> which is less holy in degree to the holy place. But it contains various furniture that functions in the holiness process (eg the altar, laver of molten sea, copper platform). In fact, certain of the sacrifices increased one's holiness.

Then there was the High Priest who was in effect supposed to be the holiest of all Israelites and as such he could come within the presence of the Lord – but only once per year and he had to wear the relevant garments which included the turban that had engraved on it “Holy to the Lord” (Ex 28:36). Of course. It was engraved in gold.

A point to note (and it seems strange and out of place in our modern world) was that the High Priest had to be the eldest male of the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. Everything has to be just right to fulfill the symbolisms and what God wanted in order for Israelites to properly worship and serve Him.



Above based on Jenson's, *Graded Holiness*, pp. 89–93.<sup>2</sup>

Morrow explains:

““Graded holiness” is an important value in Priestly thinking, which is reflected in the design of the tabernacle. As one moves through the instructions for building the tabernacle from inside to outside, **there is a progression from what is more valuable**

<sup>1</sup> “the phrase ‘the Temple of the LORD’ was often used to include the courtyard as well. This explains the sudden jump in relative seriousness between the first three abominations and the fourth, as registered by the comparative Q in Ezek. 8.15” (Jonathan P. Burnside, *The Signs of Sin. Seriousness of Offense in Biblical Law*, p. 222)

<sup>2</sup> “The tripartite (or four-part) structure (with spheres of ascending holiness)

On earth after creation there were several spheres of holy space, in ascending degrees of holiness (“set apartness for special use”): (1) the larger area of Eden, (2) the garden planted eastward in Eden, and (3) the “midst of the garden” (Gen 2:8-9). These three spheres are seen again at Sinai: (1) the camp of the Israelites, (2) the place where the seventy elders went on the mountain, and (3) the immediate presence of God where only Moses went at the very top of the mountain.<sup>23</sup> They are repeated in the court, the holy place, and the most holy place in the later sanctuaries (Mosaic tabernacle, Exodus 26–27; Solomon Temple, 1 Kings 6–7; Ezekiel’s temple, Ezekiel 40–43).<sup>24</sup> One may even add a fourth, initial sphere, which in creation was the space beyond Eden. In the Mosaic tabernacle layout this fourth “holy space” constituted the encampment of Israel (the “holy” camp, Deut 23:14), in the Israelite temple it was the “holy city” of Jerusalem (Ps 2:6; Joel 3:17 [Heb. 4:17]).” (Richard Davidson, “Earth’s First Sanctuary: Genesis 1-3 and Parallel Creation Accounts”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 12)

(made of gold and silver) to what is less valuable (made of bronze), from what is most holy (the shrine with the ark of the covenant) to what is less holy (the courtyard of the tabernacle)." (W. S. Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law*, p. 123)<sup>3</sup> [emphasis mine]

We can expand upon this. For instance, the seventh day Sabbath may be considered more holy than the annual holy days (without minimising the holy days in any way):

"The whole festival is to last seven days, the first and seventh being distinguished from the other days. On these days the Israelites are to hold a "holy assembly", ceasing from all normal work, apart from the preparation of food. Abstinence from work indicates that **the initial and final days are holy occasions, but not quite as holy as the Sabbath**" (T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus, Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series*, pp. 226-27)<sup>4</sup>.

This merely demonstrates graded holiness and sin. Something is more important or more serious than another. Of course, holiness is still holiness; and sin is still sin. But they are graded or vary in degree or intensity.

Here are some further examples:

"Teacher, which is the **great commandment** in the Law?"  
And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.  
This is **the great and first commandment.**" (Matt 22:36-38)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the **weightier matters of the law**: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." (Matt 23:23)

No commandment is done away – it seems that Christ is emphasising that which should have greater priority in our lives.

"Therefore whoever relaxes one of **the least of these commandments** and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.  
For I tell you, unless your **righteousness exceeds** that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:19-20)

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<sup>3</sup> "...the word <sup>h</sup>n ('profane') is one of four common Priestly words that reflect the priest's 'graded' conception of the world, the others being <sup>h</sup>q (holy), <sup>h</sup>q (clean) and <sup>h</sup>q (unclean). The relationship between these key terms is indicated by Lev. 10.10, 'you [the priests] must distinguish between the holy (<sup>h</sup>q) and the profane (<sup>h</sup>q), and between the unclean (<sup>h</sup>q) and the clean (<sup>h</sup>q)'. From this and other texts, it is clear that 'holy' and 'profane', 'clean' and 'unclean' are opposed pairs. A strict parallelism between these terms might suggest that the pairs are equivalent in some respect (viz. 'holy = clean' and 'profane = unclean'). However, Jenson argues that this is inconsistent with the strong contrast in the Priestly texts between 'holiness' and 'impurity'." (Jonathan Burnside, *The Signs of Sin. Seriousness of Offense in Biblical Law* p. 126)

<sup>4</sup> "... the terminological distinction between 'Shabbat' and 'Shabbaton' is preserved in the LXX and the annual feast days are not called Sabbaths. The Greek 'Shabbaton' is used as the equivalent of the Hebrew 'Shabbat' and the Greek 'Anapausis' as the equivalent of the Hebrew 'Shabbaton'" (Geert ter Horst, *The Messianic Confusion About the Omer, Part V: The Appeal to the Septuagint*, messianic613.wordpress.com, April 28).

Christ's message is about observing God's commandment and not transgressing any of them. He is saying that they are all important, but some more so than others.

In other words there are grades or degrees of importance and thus holiness as well.<sup>5</sup>

One further one to consider:

"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."  
(1Cor 13:13)

If we were to grade in order of importance, then love is more important than faith or hope. It doesn't mean one doesn't have to practice faith or hope or that they are not important. This is another instance of grading. This is also known as 'relative negation.'

## Graded Sin

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.  
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.  
If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1John 1:8-10)

All have and will sin – falling short of God's glory and perfection.

It is indeed a Biblical principle that some sins are more serious – worse – than others. Therefore, God has imposed degrees of penalties.<sup>6</sup>

One might ask: is lying as bad as homosexuality? Is consuming unclean foods as serious as Sabbath contravention? Is neglecting the land sabbath as evil as committing adultery? What does God's Word reveal to us?

First of all, puny humans are sinful and subject to failures, inherited problems and learnt sins. As such, it is inevitable that some sins will be worse than others as humans undertake thoughts or actions that have great impact upon themselves and others. This means that not only is holiness graded, so is sin.

For instance, if you hate someone it is spiritual or mental murder (1John 3:15). The immediate consequences are bad thoughts and behaviours, slander, cliquishness, jealousy and the spirit of competition. The long-term consequence is eternal death if the sin is not repented of. If the hatred bore physical murder, then under God's law, that person deserved the death penalty.

On the other hand

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<sup>5</sup> Even giving of the spirit is by measure (Dave Harris & Norbert Link, *Does John 3:34 imply that God gives His Holy Spirit in lesser and greater amounts?* <https://www.eternalgod.org/q-a-12856/>)

<sup>6</sup> The Psalmist in chapter one wrote: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." (vv. 1-2). As Alexander Kirkpatrick wrote about this particular Scripture: "The three clauses of the verse with their threefold parallelism (walk, stand, sit: counsel, way, session [sitting with]: wicked, sinners, scornful) emphasize the godly man's entire avoidance of association with evil and evil-doers in every form and degree. They denote successive steps in a career of evil, and form a climax" (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 3). Concerning the scoffer, Professor Kirkpatrick observed that they are "a class of defiant and cynical freethinkers" who exhibit a "spirit of proud self-sufficiency, a contemptuous disregard for God and man (Prov. 21:24)" (p. 2).



"If anyone sees his brother **committing a sin not leading to death**, he shall ask, and God will give him life<sup>7</sup>—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. **There is sin that leads to death**; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death." (IJohn 5:16-17. Compare Is 14:11; 15:1)<sup>8</sup>

Commentaries are divided on what exactly this "sin that leads to death" is. Perhaps it is the terrible sin that Jesus Himself mentions:

"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mark 38-20. See Matt 12:31-32; Luke 12:8-10; Is 59:2)

Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-13; 6:4-6, 10:26-27; IIPet 2:21-22 appear to refer to this sort of horrible sin and its terrifying consequences.

Metaphorically, we see further evidence for degrees of sin and punishment in Luke:

"the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, **will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.**" (Luke 12:46-48)

Jesus expounds this principle in chapter 7 of Luke:

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for **she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.**" And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:47-50)

The grades or degrees of sin, punishment and forgiveness is based on the Old Testament (isn't everything in the New Testament based on the Old?).

"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree" (Deut 21:22)

From this we can see that some sins are worthy of death and some are not.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare with Ps 51:13; Gal 6:1; Dan 12:3; Prov 11:30; Ezek 33:6

<sup>8</sup> "**There are degrees in sin. Guilt has its gradations.** There are sins of ignorance and of deliberation--of weakness and of wickedness: sins which show a lack of goodwill, and others that express intense malignity of will. There are the sins of a Peter, and there are the sins of a Judas." (Joseph Exell, *Biblical Illustrator*, Volume 27, commentary on IJohn) [emphasis mine]

"He said also to me, "You will see still **greater abominations** that they commit." (Ezek 8:13)

Notice: some abominations are greater than others!"

So, here again we see that some sins are worse and more problematic than others. Some so bad that they will lead to eternal death as we have discovered above.

Although all sins lead to eternal death, some sins are evidently more serious than others and the punishments match the seriousness of the sin and are described as sinning against God Himself!

**"Against you, you only, have I sinned** and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." (Ps 51:4. See Gen 20:3, 6; 39:9).

Here adultery is described as being against God Himself – although David sinned against others, the primary offending party was his God.

Some sins are presumptuous, willing, pre-meditated and so bad, that the offender must be dealt with. Unlike sins that are relatively minor and unwitting.

"If one person sins **unintentionally**, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering.

And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them.

**But the person who does anything with a high hand**, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person **shall be cut off** from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him." (Num 15:27-31)

We can thus understand David's cry:

"Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from **presumptuous sins**; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of **great transgression**." (Ps 19:12-13)

Instead of becoming a slave to sin, David calls out to God for help in overcoming them for this sort of sin is "great". Again, indicating that some sins are greater or worse than others.

"The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned **a great sin**. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." (Ex 32:30)

Here we have another instance of a "great" sin.

"Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she **became more corrupt** than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was **worse than that of her sister**." (Ezek 23:11)

"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his

household, he has denied the faith and **is worse than an unbeliever.**" (1Tim 5:8)

With all the evidence provided above, there should be no doubt that there are grades of sin and matching punishment.

## Graded Rewards

We now need to ascertain whether the rewards and blessings provided to Christians are also graded. For example the prophet Daniel wrote:

"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Dan 12:3)

Given the variety of stars and brightness, this Scripture implies rewards that matches one's efforts

Albert Barnes noted that the suggestion is that the righteous will "be honored in proportion to their toils, their sacrifices, and their success" (Albert Barnes, *Notes on Daniel*, p. 450). Luke 19:12-27 attests to this too.

While Matthew recorded the following statement by Christ:

"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will **repay each person according to what he has done.**" (Matt 16:27)

The Apostle Paul affirms this:

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

**For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—**

each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

**If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.**

If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." (1Cor 3:10-15)<sup>9</sup>

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from **one degree of glory to another.** For this comes from the Lord who is the spirit." (11Cor 3:18)

"And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

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<sup>9</sup> "The doubled *prp*[545] *ἐπί* (with *acc*[546])—an idiom characterising later Gr[547], which loves emphasis—implies growth by way of *accession*: "if any one is building-on,—onto the foundation"; contrast *ἐπί* with *dat*[548] in Ephesians 2:20. The material superimposed by the present Cor[549] builders is of two opposite kinds, rich and durable or paltry and perishing: "gold, silver, costly stones—wood, hay, straw,"—thrown together "in lively *ἀσύνδετον*" (Mr[550]). The latter might serve for poor frail huts, but not for the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17)." (William Nicoll (ed), *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_corinthians/3-12.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/3-12.htm))

For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

**There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.**

**There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.**

**So is it with the resurrection of the dead.** What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable." (1Cor 15:37-42)

## **Graded Punishment**

We turn our attention to punishment for sins and crimes. Are these also graded?

It is clear from a plain reading of Scripture that there is proportionate punishment for sins – a sin that is more serious has greater punishment (eg the death sentence for murder, rape, sexual perversions, kidnapping etc). This means that ‘the punishment fits the crime’.

“Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” (Deut 19:21)

Martin Pritikin’s article (“Punishment, prisons, and the bible: Does “Old Testament justice” Justify our retributive culture? *Cardozo Law Review*, 2006, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 715-78) is considerable in its analysis and detail showing that the Biblical justice system is not retribution but that there were degrees of punishment to match the sin or criminal actions.

So, some sins are punishable by death (type of the unpardonable sin and second death). A comprehensive list can be found in the **Appendices**.

Some sins in the Christian era are so bad (eg adultery or mixing one’s religion with paganism) that strong discipline is warranted (1Cor 5:1-6).

We have already seen that the lake of fire is the terrifying fate for the Christian who abandons the true faith and descends into apostasy – by going into false religion or the lures of the world (Heb 10:26-31 etc).

Another high order sin are serious offences that can wound other Christians and recklessly causes them to abandon the faith. Of such hurtful persons Christ warns:

“... but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matt 18:6)

Wolves causing this are in serious danger of the fire. Less culpable and damaging sins will result in a lower level of punishment (Luke 12:47-48).

Here is another:

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be **judged with greater strictness**.” (James 3:1)

This shows that judgment and punishment is graded. James Adamson explains

“The main thought in vv. 1-12 is the greater responsibility of teachers and the extremely dangerous character of the instrument [the tongue] which they have to use? **Greater responsibility brings greater judgment**”. (James Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, p. 141)

## Concluding Remarks

It is clear that the Biblical view is for graded or degrees of holiness, sin, rewards and punishment. Even faith and love are graded – the intensity of each of these are not equal. They differ and are regarded as such.

For example, in James 2 which we have previously encountered, he indicates that if we break one of God’s commandments, effectively all are transgressed.

“James is not suggesting that only when sin has reached its full development does it result in death. The penalty of sin of any kind or extent is spiritual death” (Donald Burdick, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Vol. 12, p. 172).

All sin results in the second death – with the offender becoming nothing for eternity. Utterly and totally extinguished or annihilated whereby one cannot ever be revived but rather forgotten - into infinity. Such a one would become as if they never did exist.

Despite God’s pleading via various means, His tender mercies and immense patience, there are those who just will themselves not to repent. They permit themselves to become Satanic.

Eternal life will not be made available to them (II Thess 1:6-9; Matt 25:41; Rev 20:14-15) because they do not deserve it.

Considering the above, if we understand that we must strive for the highest level of holiness, rewards, commandment keeping etc, we are striving to become perfect (Matt 5:48).

Let us understand that there are grades or degrees even of trust, patience, hope and faith, forgiveness and even inspiration etc. Concerning the latter, would not Christ have been the most inspired man in human history? Others at the top level would be men such as Moses, Noah, Abraham and later the prophets and apostles? Are not Christians inspired, but at a much lower level than the aforementioned?

Even faith is graded:

“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of **little faith**?” (Matt 6:30. See also 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke 12:28)

“The apostles said to the Lord, “**Increase our faith!**”  
And the Lord said, “If you had **faith like a grain of mustard seed**, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.””  
(Luke 17:5-6. See Matt 17:20)

“Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; **help my unbelief!**”” (Mark 9:24)

“When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I **found such faith.**” (Matt 8:10. See Luke 7:9)

“Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, **great is your faith!** Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matt 15:28)

So too is mercy: one could be granted complete forgiveness with no penalty exacted after a crime or misdemeanour is judged; or partial mercy; or no mercy at all.

There are even degrees of revelation to God’s people:

“Every word of inspiration is equally the word of God; but there is a progress in the mode of revelation and **there are degrees in the importance of the words uttered.** With the prophets God spoke in vision, but with Moses “face to face” and “mouth to mouth” (Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:6-8). **The highest revelation** of all is that of God manifest in the flesh. But, however varied the mode, the result is that all Scripture alike is sanctioned as the word of God. Caiaphas is an instance showing that the words were sanctioned as divinely inspired; while the speaker himself did not know the deep significance of his own words (John 11:50), “he spoke not of himself.” So (1 Peter 1:11) the Old Testament prophets “searched what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory, ... unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves but unto us they did minister” (Andrew Fausset, “*Inspiration*”, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*)

Is not even love graded?

In Scripture there are four types of love in the Greek language: eros (romantic), storge (family), philia (brotherly), agape (the divine love of God).<sup>10</sup> Obviously, the love of God is vastly greater than any other degree or sort of love. It is unfathomable for any human to truly comprehend His love. But it is real and it is there.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matt 10:37. See Luke 14:26)

The most negative of all the gradings is that of eternal death. It is the worst grade of the punishments for living in sin or causing others to stumble and fall away.

The truly repentant enjoy the extreme opposite grading of reward – eternal life filled with wonderful joy that is boundlessly beyond our human comprehension.

And THAT is the ultimate lesson of graded holiness.

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<sup>10</sup> God even loves Israel more than other peoples, though all are given opportunities, blessings and grace: Deut 7:7-10, 13-14; 23:5; Mal 1:2-5; Rom 11:1-2, 25-27.

## Appendix. "Punishments", *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

### Punishments

The earliest theory of punishment current among mankind is doubtless the one of simple retaliation, "blood for blood." Viewed historically, the first case of punishment for crime mentioned in Scripture, next to the Fall itself, is that of Cain, the first murderer. That death was regarded as the fitting punishment for murder appears plain from the remark of Lamech. (Genesis 4:24) In the post-diluvian code, if we may so call it, retribution by the hand of man, even in the case of an offending animal, for blood shed, is clearly laid down. (Genesis 9:5,6) Passing onward to Mosaic times, we find the sentence of capital punishment, in the case of murder, plainly laid down in the law. The murderer was to be put to death, even if he should have taken refuge at God's altar or in a refuge city, and the same principle was to be carried out even in the case of an animal. *Offences punished with death.* -- I. The following offences also are mentioned in the law as liable to the punishment of death:

1. Striking, or even reviling, a parent. (Exodus 21:15,17)
2. Blasphemy. (Leviticus 24:14,16,23)
3. Sabbath-breaking. (Exodus 31:14; 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36)
4. Witchcraft, and false pretension to prophecy. (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27; 13:5; 18:20)
5. Adultery. (Leviticus 20:10; 22:22)
6. Unchastity. (Leviticus 21:9; 22:21,23)
7. Rape. (22:25)
8. Incestuous and unnatural connections. (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:11,14,16)
9. Manstealing. (Exodus 21:16; 24:7)
10. Idolatry, actual or virtual, in any shape. (Leviticus 20:2; 13:8,10,15; 17:2-7) see Josh 7:1 ... and Josh 22:20 and Num 25:8
11. False witness in certain cases. (19:16,19) II. But there is a large number of offences, some of them included in this list, which are named in the law as involving the penalty of "cutting off from the people. On the meaning of this expression some controversy has arisen. There are altogether thirty six or thirty seven cases in the Pentateuch in which this formula is used. We may perhaps conclude that the primary meaning of "cutting off" is a sentence of death to be executed in some cases without remission, but in others voidable -- (1) by immediate atonement on the offender's part; (2) by direct interposition of the Almighty i.e., a sentence of death always "regarded," but not always executed. *Kinds of punishments.* -- Punishments are twofold, Capital and Secondary. I. Capital. (A) The following only are prescribed by the law:
  12. *Stoning*, which was the ordinary mode of execution. (Exodus 17:4; Luke 20:6; John 10:31; Acts 14:5) In the case of idolatry, and it may be presumed in other cases also, the witnesses, of whom there were to be at least two, were required to cast the first stone. (13:9; Acts 7:58)
  13. *Hanging* is mentioned as a distinct punishment. (Numbers 25:4; 2 Samuel 21:6,9)
  14. *Burning*, in pre-Mosaic times, was the punishment for unchastity. (Genesis 38:24) Under the law it was ordered in the case of a priest's daughter (Leviticus 21:9)
  15. *Death by the sword or spear* is named in the law, (Exodus 19:13; 32:27; Numbers 25:7) and it occurs frequently in regal and post-Babylonian times. (1 Kings 2:25,34; 19:1; 2 Chronicles 21:4) etc.
  16. *Strangling* is said by the rabbis to have been regarded as the most common but least severe of the capital punishments, and to have been performed by immersing the convict in clay or mud, and then strangling him by a cloth twisted round the neck. (B) Besides these ordinary capital punishments, we read of others, either of foreign introduction or of an irregular kind. Among the former
  17. CRUCIFIXION is treated elsewhere.

18. *Drowning* , though not ordered under the law, was practiced at Rome, and is said by St. Jerome to have been in use among the Jews.
19. *Sawing asunder* or crushing beneath iron instruments. (2 Samuel 12:31) and perhaps (Proverbs 20:26; Hebrews 11:37)
20. *Pounding in a mortar* , or beating to death, is alluded to in (Proverbs 27:22) but not as a legal punishment, and cases are described. 2 Macc. 6:28,30.
21. Precipitation, attempted in the case of our Lord at Nazareth, and carried out in that of captives from the Edomites, and of St. James, who is said to have been cast from "the pinnacle" of the temple. Criminals executed by law were burned outside the city gates, and heaps of stones were flung upon their graves. (Joshua 7:25,26; 2 Samuel 18:17; Jeremiah 22:19) II. Of *secondary punishments* among the Jews, the original Principles were,
22. *Retaliation* , "eye for eye," etc. (Exodus 21:24,25)
23. *Compensation* , Identical (restitution) or analogous payment for loss of time or of power. (Exodus 21:18-36; Leviticus 24:18-21; 19:21) Slander against a wife's honor was to be compensated to her parents by a fine of one hundred shekels, and the traducer himself to be punished with stripes (22:18,19)
24. *Stripes* , whose number was not to exceed forty, (25:3) whence the Jews took care not to exceed thirty-nine. (2 Corinthians 11:24)
25. *Scourging* with thorns is mentioned (Judges 8:16) The *stocks* are mentioned (Jeremiah 20:2) *passing through fire* , (2 Samuel 12:31) *mutilation* , (Judges 1:6) 2 Macc. 7:4, and see (2 Samuel 4:12) *plucking out hair* , (Isaiah 50:6) in later times, imprisonment and confiscation or exile. (Ezra 7:26; Jeremiah 37:15; 38:6; Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:4)



## **Appendix. How many sins called for the death penalty in the Old Testament? by Steve Shirley**

God ordered death for the following sins and people.

1. Murder (Ex 21:12,14)(Lev 24:17,21)(Num 35:16-21,30-31)
2. Kidnapping (Ex 21:16)(Deut 24:7)
3. Child sacrifice (Lev 20:2)
4. Both the man and woman who commit adultery (Lev 20:10)(Deut 22:22-24)
5. Rape (Deut 22:25)
6. Daughter of a priest who became a prostitute (Lev 21:9)
7. An idolater (Ex 22:20)(Deut 17:2-5)(Num 25:1-5)
8. Breaking the Sabbath (Ex 31:14)(Ex 35:2)(Num 15:32-36)
9. A woman having sex before marriage (Deut 22:21-22)
10. Homosexuality (Lev 20:13)
11. A man and his father's wife who have sex (Lev 20:11)
12. A man and daughter-in-law who have sex (Lev 20:12)
13. A man who marries a woman and her mother (all 3 must die) (Lev 20:14)
14. Bestiality (Sex with an animal) (Ex 22:19)(Lev 20:15-16)
15. A false prophet (Deut 13:5)(Deut 18:20)
16. A false witness (Deut 19:16-21)
17. A disobedient son (Deut 21:18-21)
18. A child who strikes his father or mother (Ex 21:15)
19. A child who curses his father or mother (Ex 21:17)(Lev 20:9)
20. Men who are fighting and hit a pregnant woman, causing her lose her baby (Ex 21:22-25) \*\*\*Note: A good verse to use against those who are pro-abortion
21. A man whose ox kills someone after previously goring other people (Ex 21:28-29)
22. A sorceress (Ex 22:18)
23. A medium or spiritist (Lev 20:27)
24. A brother, son, daughter, wife, or friend who entices you to go after other gods (Deut 13:6-11)
25. Everyone in any town that entices people to go after other gods (Deut 13:12-15)
26. A blasphemer (Lev 24:10-16,23)
27. Anyone who failed to abide by a decision of the court (Deut 17:8-12)
28. Any non-Levite who tried to set up or take down the Tabernacle (Num 1:51)

\*\*\* Note: I cannot say with certainty that this list is complete. If you find something missing, please let me know.

Some also believe that when the Bible says people were "cut off," it is speaking of the death penalty. According to Strong's, one meaning of the Hebrew word "karath" is "to exterminate or destroy." A number of verses seem to bear out this possibility (Gen 9:11)(Ex 31:14)(1 Kin 11:16)(Jer 11:19)(Ob 1:9-10). If this is indeed the case, there are a number of other death penalty offences. A few examples are: failing to be circumcised (Gen 17:14 compare with Ex 4:24-26), eating blood (Lev 7:27)(Lev 17:10,14), and failing to observe Passover (Num 9:13).

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## ***Graded Holiness and Graded Sin***

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