

Biblical Data on Whether Jesus-Followers Are Sinful

Are Jesus-followers still sinners, or are they not?

- A. **The biblical data suggesting that Jesus-followers (and other God-fearers) are not sinners, but are righteous:**
1. Passages that distinguish the individuals who are “righteous” (and will be rewarded) from the individuals who are “sinners” (and will be condemned):
 - a. *Luke* 6:32–35 (“sinners” versus “sons of the Most High”)
 - A) *Matthew* 13:43
 - B) *Matthew* 25:46
 - b. *1 Peter* 3:12
 - c. *1 Peter* 4:18
 - d. *Acts* 24:15 (there are “righteous” and “wicked”)
 - e. *James* 5:16
 2. Passages that describe particular individuals—directly or indirectly—as being “righteous” individuals:
 - a. *Luke* 1:6 (Zacharias and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist)
 - b. *Luke* 2:25 (Simeon, the old man who was not going to die until he saw the Messiah)
 - c. *Luke* 23:50 (Joseph of Arimathea)
 - d. *Acts* 10:22 (Cornelius, the centurion)
 - e. *2 Peter* 2:7-8 (Lot)
 3. A passage that describes repentance as a movement from being disobedient to being “righteous”:
 - a. *Luke* 1:17
 4. Passages that include an exhortation to “stop sinning”(and therefore to be “righteous” in some sense):
 - a. *John* 5:14 (lame man at pool of Bethesda)
 - b. *John* 8:11 (woman caught in adultery)
 5. A passage that suggests that the one who belongs to Jesus is made “righteous”:
 - a. *Romans* 5:19
 6. Passages that stress how unthinkable it is for one who belongs to Jesus to sin—that is, that maintain that Jesus-followers are “righteous,” and not “sinners.”
 - a. *1 John* 3:4–9
 - b. *1 John* 5:18
 7. A passage stating that the source of sin in a Jesus-follower has been removed. Hence, that Jesus-followers are “righteous,” and not “sinners.”
 - a. *Colossians* 2:11-13

B. The biblical data suggesting that Jesus-followers (and other God-fearers) are sinners who continue to be plagued by sin:

1. Passages that warn Jesus-followers that, if they deny the reality of their own sinfulness, they are denying the truth and calling God a liar.
 - a. *1 John* 1:7–2:2
 - A) *John* 8:7
2. Passages warning Jesus-followers in general terms to avoid sin, clearly suggesting that it is possible for a Jesus-follower to behave sinfully:
 - a. *Romans* 16:19 (be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil)
 - b. *1 Corinthians* 14:20
 - c. *1 Thessalonians* 5:21–22
 - d. *1 Timothy* 5:20
 - e. *Hebrews* 12:1–4
 - f. *1 Peter* 2:16
3. Passages warning Jesus-followers that particular behaviors are sinful and ought to be avoided, clearly suggesting that it is possible that a Jesus-follower might engage in such behavior:
 - a. *Romans* 14:23
 - b. *1 Corinthians* 8:12
 - c. *James* 2:9
 - d. *James* 4:17
 - e. *1 Peter* 3:9–12
4. A passage that exhorts Jesus-followers to one course of action, designated as good, over another course of action, designated as sinful; this clearly implies that the sinful action is a possibility for the Jesus-follower that should be avoided:
 - a. *1 Peter* 2:20
5. A passage that exhorts a Jesus-follower not to yield to those sinful impulses that shaped their lives prior to their coming to belief in Jesus; and, rather, to commit themselves to following the righteous impulses being created in them by the Spirit of God. This passage implies that yielding to sinful impulses remains possible for Jesus-followers.
 - a. *Ephesians* 4:20–24
6. A passage that instructs Jesus-followers to exhort their brothers not to sin, implying that Jesus-followers are capable of falling into sin:
 - a. *Matthew* 18:15–18
7. A passage that suggests that a Jesus-follower will be found to be in need of strength in order not to yield to his sin, implying that he is capable of falling into sin:
 - a. *James* 5:14–18

8. Passages that suggest that a Jesus-follower will sometimes be in need of forgiveness for his sins, implying that he continue to be capable of sin:
 - a. *Luke 11:4*
 - b. *Mark 11:25*
 - c. *Luke 17:3–4*
 - d. *Matthew 18:21-22*
 - e. *2 Corinthians 2:6–11*
9. Passages that suggest that a Jesus-follower will need to forbear the sins of other Jesus-followers against him—clearly implying that Jesus-followers are sinners:
 - a. *1 Peter 4:8*
 - b. *Ephesians 4:2*
 - c. *Colossians 3:13*
 - d. *1 Thessalonians 5:14*
 - e. *2 Timothy 2:24*
10. A passage that makes an important distinction between the sin that condemns a person to destruction and the sin that does not condemn a person to destruction; it instructs Jesus-followers to pray for any brother caught in sin, for if that brother is not committing the sin leading to destruction, God will restore that brother to belief.
 - a. *1 John 5:16–17*

C. Paradoxical conclusion that must be drawn from the biblical data: Jesus-followers (and other God-fearers) are sinful, yet righteous

1. There is some sense in which Jesus-followers are righteous such that they are different from “sinners” who are destined for condemnation.
2. Yet, they are nonetheless sinful and have an ongoing struggle with sin.

D. Understanding this paradoxical conclusion

1. At the most foundational level of their moral nature as human beings (that is, at the level of their very being as human beings) Jesus-followers are evil.
[the believer’s flesh is sinful]
 - a. A clear distinction is made between the influence and effect of what is called the “flesh” and the influence and effect of what is called the “spirit.” While the “spirit” creates an impetus toward righteousness, the “flesh” creates an impetus toward unrighteousness.
 - A) *Matthew 26:41*
 - B) *Mark 14:38*
 - C) *1 Corinthians 3:1*
 - D) *Galatians 5:13–24*
 - b. Paul clearly acknowledges that a dichotomy gets created within the Jesus-believer. On the one hand, the believer has made an impactful choice to follow Jesus and to

pursue righteousness. On the other hand, he remains a sinful human being whose “flesh” (i.e., fundamental humanity) is morally weak and inclined toward unrighteousness.

A) *Romans* 6:19

- c. A common exhortation given to Jesus-followers is to make no provision for (give no room to) the unrighteous desires that arise from the most foundational level of their moral nature as humans (that is, from their “flesh”).

A) *Romans* 13:14

- d. Paul clearly describes the non-believer as limited and confined to living his life in obedience to the desires of his “flesh” (his natural sinful humanity).

A) *Ephesians* 2:3

- 2. Jesus-followers are righteous at the level of their defining personal commitments (that is, at the level of the core commitments [“heart” commitments] of their inner being, they are committed to pursuing righteousness).

[the believer’s HEART {or, SPIRIT, or MIND, or INNER-BEING} is righteous]

- a. Whether one does good or evil is dependent upon the state or condition of one’s inner commitments, that is, the moral state of one’s “heart.”

A) *Luke* 6:45

B) *Matthew* 12:35

C) *Matthew* 15:15–20

- b. Jesus teaches explicitly that it is not a person’s Jewishness (his physical descent from Abraham) that is the basis upon which he will be blessed with the blessing of Abraham. Rather, it is dependent upon his having a distinctive “spirit” (i.e., inner being or “heart”).

A) *John* 6:63

- c. The exhortation to Jesus-followers is that they give heed to the dictates of their sanctified spirit (instructed as it is by the Spirit of God) rather than give heed to the dictates of their own “flesh” (natural sinful humanity).

A) *Galatians* 5:13–24

- 3. *Romans* 7:4–8:14 is the most thorough and explicit teaching with respect to the important distinction between our spirit and our flesh and the impact of both.

- a. My “flesh” is morally sinful and—if allowed to direct me and define me—results in death and condemnation.

- b. My “spirit,” if it has been trained and led by the Spirit of God, is morally righteous and—if allowed to direct me and define me—results in forgiveness and life.

4. ***SOLUTION TO PARADOX***

- a. The Jesus-follower is SINFUL with respect to his *flesh*.

- b. The Jesus-follower is RIGHTEOUS with respect to his Spirit-instructed *spirit*.