

Unit 1: Fruits Of The Spirit

Lesson 1.1 Understanding Sin

Teacher Preparation and Materials Needed:

For the Lesson: Orthodox Study Bible or Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition

Recommended Orthodox Study Bible [HERE](#).

Recommended Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition [HERE](#).

Scripture Reference:

Romans 3:23 (universality of sin), 1 John 3:4 (sin as lawlessness), Isaiah 59:2 (sin as separation), 1 John 1:9 (promise of forgiveness)

Activities: Implement based on available time. Detailed instructions and materials lists are provided in the lesson.

Activity 1: Garden Visualization and Interactive Craft “Before and After” Soul Garden

Purpose: Introduce the garden metaphor for understanding sin and spiritual growth and visual representation of sin’s effects and God’s restoration.

Activity 2: Scripture Discussion

Purpose: Deeper engagement with biblical teaching about sin

Words of the week:

մեղք - meghk - sin

ապաշխարութիւն - a-bash-khar-oo-tyoon - repentance

խոստովանութիւն - khos-do-van-oo-tyoon - confession

Objective:

Students will understand sin as missing God’s target of love, recognize how sin separates them from God and others, and identify specific steps they can take to turn away from sin and back to God through repentance and confession.

Moral Character Focus:

Self-awareness: Recognizing when they miss God’s target

Honesty: Acknowledging sin rather than making excuses

Humility: Understanding their need for God’s forgiveness

Courage: Choosing to confess and turn away from sin

Hope: Trusting in God’s mercy and power to restore

Memory Verse:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

— 1 John 1:9

Lesson

Lesson Opening & Creating Interest:

**Wisdom Prayer, written by St. Nersess the Grace-filled (Shnorhali).*

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տու՛ր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՛ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց եւ ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos yev paneets yen kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

Lesson Body: Understanding Sin

Imagine our soul as a beautiful garden that God planted in us at baptism. In this sacred space, God plants seeds of faith, hope, and love. These are qualities that help us grow closer to Him and become the person He created us to be. However, this garden faces constant threats. Just as weeds can invade a physical garden and choke out healthy plants, spiritual “weeds” called sins can take root in our souls and damage our relationship with God.

The enemy of our souls is always trying to plant what we might call “deadly seeds”—thoughts, desires, and temptations that, if allowed to grow, can destroy the spiritual life God has given us. Sin, then, is like the weeds that spring from these deadly seeds. Left unchecked, they spread quickly and can overtake the entire garden of our soul.

This understanding helps us see why vigilance in our spiritual life is so important. A gardener who ignores weeds will soon find them choking out all the good plants. Similarly, a Christian who ignores sin will find it increasingly difficult to maintain a close relationship with God.

So, what is sin and how do we understand it? The Armenian Orthodox Church has a rich theological tradition that helps us understand the nature and seriousness of sin. This understanding comes from Scripture, the Church Fathers, and centuries of spiritual wisdom.

The Armenian word for sin is մեղք (meghk), but the Greek word is ἁμαρτία (hamartia) which comes from a root meaning “missing the target” or “falling short.” This imagery comes from archery—when an archer aims at a target but the arrow falls short or veers off course. In our spiritual lives, God has given us a clear target: to love Him with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

Every time we choose selfishness over love, pride over humility, or hatred over forgiveness, we miss this divine target. We aim at lesser things—our own comfort, recognition, or desires—and in doing so, we fail to hit the mark that God has set for us.

This understanding helps us see that sin is not arbitrary rule-breaking, but rather a failure to live up to our highest calling as human beings created in God’s image. We were designed for communion with God and sacrificial love for others. When we choose otherwise, we miss the very purpose for which we were created. Sin is a separation from God.

Saint Gregory of Narek, one of the greatest Armenian spiritual writers, describes sin in his Book of Lamentations as a wall that separates the soul from God’s light. This powerful image helps us understand that sin doesn’t just break rules—it breaks relationships.

When we sin, we turn inward and away from God’s love. We become focused on ourselves rather than on the One who created us and sustains us. This separation is perhaps the most tragic consequence of sin, because we were created for fellowship with God. Just as plants wither when cut off from sunlight, our souls begin to shrivel when separated from God, who is the source of all life and goodness.

Words of the Week:

մեղք - meghk - sin

ապաշխարութիւն - a-bash-khar-oo-tyoon - repentance

խոստովանութիւն - khos-do-van-oo-tyoon - confession

Memory Verse:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

— 1 John 1:9

The good news is that this separation is not permanent. God is always calling us back to Himself, always ready to tear down the walls that sin has built between us and Him.

The Church Fathers often compare sin to a disease or illness that affects our spiritual health. This analogy is particularly helpful because it shows us that sin is not just about moral failure, it’s about spiritual sickness that requires healing.

Just as physical diseases can start small but grow serious if left untreated, spiritual diseases can begin with seemingly minor compromises but lead to major spiritual problems. And just as we need doctors to help us with physical ailments, we need the Great Physician, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to heal our spiritual diseases.

This is why confession is so important in the Armenian Orthodox tradition. It’s not just about admitting wrongdoing; it’s about receiving spiritual medicine for the disease of sin. As Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Mark 2:17).

Scripture provides clear teaching about the nature and universality of sin. The Apostle Paul reminds us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This verse uses the same “missing the mark” imagery we find in our theology. Every human being, regardless of how good they try to be, falls short of God’s perfect standard.

The Apostle John defines sin as “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4)—not just breaking specific rules, but living as if we are laws unto ourselves, as if we don’t need to submit to God’s authority in our lives. This helps us understand that sin is fundamentally about rebellion against God’s rightful place as Lord of our lives.

The prophet Isaiah shows us the relational consequence of sin: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2). Sin creates a barrier between us and the One who loves us most, damaging the most important relationship in our lives.

Why Understanding Sin Matters

Understanding sin is crucial for several reasons. First, sin damages our relationship with God. When we choose to go our own way rather than follow God’s path, we distance ourselves from His love, guidance, and blessing.

Second, sin affects our relationships with other people. When we act selfishly, dishonestly, or unkindly, we hurt those around us and damage the trust and love that healthy relationships require.

Third, sin harms us personally. It blinds us to truth, hardens our hearts toward God and others, and makes us think we can live successfully without God’s help. Over time, sin makes us increasingly miserable and empty, even when we appear successful on the outside.

Even seemingly “small” sins matter because they can grow if ignored. Like weeds in a garden, small sins can spread and eventually choke out our spiritual life. A small crack in a dam, if left unrepaired, can eventually lead to catastrophic failure. Similarly, “little” compromises in our spiritual lives can lead to major spiritual disasters if we don’t address them.

While the reality of sin is serious, the Armenian Orthodox Church has always emphasized that God’s mercy is greater than our sin. The Apostle John promises us that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

This means that no sin is too great for God’s forgiveness, and no sinner is beyond the reach of His love. The key is acknowledging our sin, turning away from it, and turning back to God with humble hearts.

Wisdom

from the Church Fathers

The great teachers of the Armenian Orthodox Church have left us profound insights about sin and its effects. Saint John Chrysostom reminds us that *“sin is not just the breaking of a rule, but the breaking of a relationship.”* This helps us see that God’s commandments are not arbitrary restrictions, but guidelines for maintaining healthy relationships with Him and others.

Saint Isaac the Syrian offers hope when he writes, *“It is not the multitude of sins that destroys us, but the lack of repentance.”* This teaches us that no matter how badly we’ve sinned, the real danger lies in refusing to turn back to God. As long as we’re willing to repent, God is willing to forgive and restore us.

Activity 1: Garden Visualization and Interactive Craft “Before and After” Soul Garden

Part One: Garden Visualization

Instructions: Have students close their eyes and imagine their soul as a garden. Ask them to visualize what a healthy spiritual garden would look like, then what happens when weeds (sins) are allowed to grow.

Part Two: “Before and After” Soul Garden

Materials needed: Brown paper, green paper, pre-cut weed shapes, pre-cut flower shapes, small paper hearts, glue sticks, markers

Step 1: Create the “Weedy Garden”

Take the brown construction paper (this represents a soul damaged by sin)

Glue the weed cut outs scattered across the paper

On each weed, write a different sin or temptation (examples: lying, jealousy, selfishness, anger, gossip, etc.)

This shows what happens when we let sin grow in our hearts

Step 2: Create the “Healthy Garden”

Take the green construction paper (this represents a soul restored by God)

Glue the flower cutouts in an organized, beautiful arrangement

On each flower, write a virtue that replaces the corresponding sin from your weedy garden (examples: honesty instead of lying, contentment instead of jealousy, generosity instead of selfishness)

This shows what God wants to grow in our hearts

Step 3: Personal Prayer Request

On the paper heart, write one specific sin or struggle where you personally need God’s forgiveness and help to change

This is private between you and God - you don’t have to share it with others

Glue the heart to your healthy garden as a reminder that God’s love helps us grow

Step 4: Reflection

Compare your two gardens side by side

Discuss: Which garden would you rather live in? How does God help us move from the weedy garden to the healthy one?

Activity 2: Scripture Study Activity

Small Group Instructions: Divide into groups of 3-4 students. Assign each group one passage:

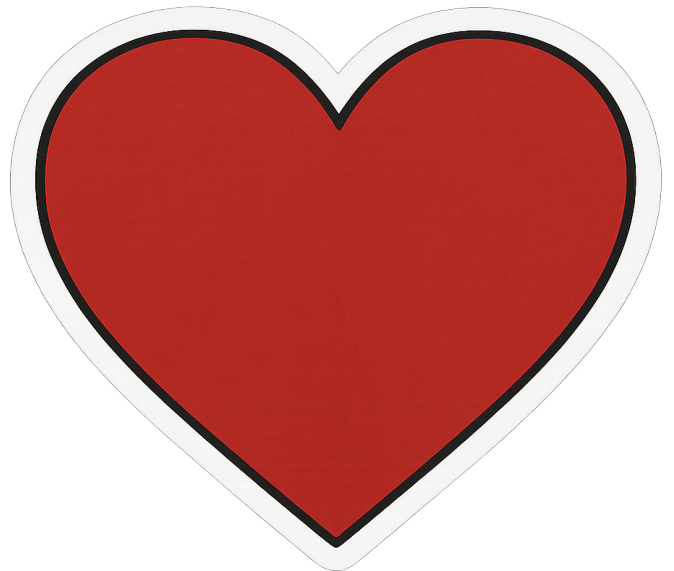
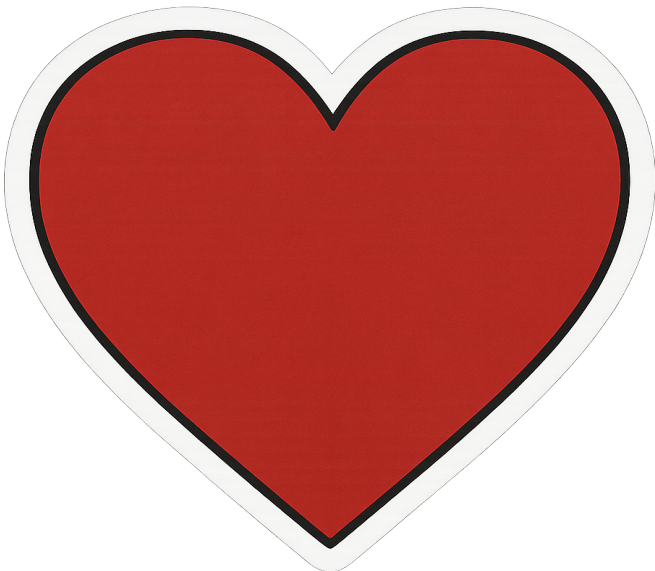
Romans 3:23 (universality of sin)

1 John 3:4 (sin as lawlessness)

Isaiah 59:2 (sin as separation)

1 John 1:9 (promise of forgiveness)

Discussion: Each group reads their passage and discusses: “What does this verse teach us about sin?” Groups share their insights with the class.



Special Prayer to Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, true God, with your peace that surpasses all wisdom and understanding, comfort us your servants, by accepting our supplications. Through your benediction, blot out our transgressions worthy of dreadful punishment. Expiate and hear us, remit and forgive our sins. Make us worthy to thankfully glorify you, together with the Father and the Only-begotten Son, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Խաղաղութեամբ քով Յոգիդ Սուրբ Աստուած ճշմարիտ, որ ի վեր է քան զամենայն միտս եւ զխորհուրդս, մխիթարեա զանձինս ծառայից քոց, ընդունելով զաղաչանս մեր. անցո ի մէջ զցասումն պատուհասի յանցանաց մերոց բարերարութեամբ քով: Ներեա եւ լուր մեզ, քաւեա եւ թող զմեզս մեր, արժանաւորեա գոհութեամբ փառաւորել զքեզ ընդ Յօր եւ ընդ Որդւոյն Միածնի, այժմ եւ միշտ եւ յաւիտեանս յաւիտենից: Ամէն:

Khaghaghootyamp kov Hokeet Soorp Asdvadz jshmareed, vor ee ver eh kan zamenayn meedus yev uzkhorthoortus, mukheetarya zantseenus dzarayeets kots, untoonelov zaghachanus mer. Antso ee mench uzsaoomun badoohasee hantsanats merots parerarootyamp kov. Nerya yv loor mez, kavya yev togh uzmeghus mer, arjhanavorya kohootyamp paravoreyl uzkez unt Hor yev unt Vortvoyn Meeadznee, ayjhm yev meeshd yev haveedyanus haveedeneets. Amen.

Review

Memory Verse Review:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
(1 John 1:9)

Lesson Review:

Questions:

1. How would you explain the concept of sin to someone who has never heard about God?
(Sin is missing the target of God’s love—choosing selfishness over love, which damages our relationships with God, others, and ourselves)
2. Why do you think seemingly small sins can be spiritually dangerous?
(Like weeds or small cracks, they can grow and spread if ignored, eventually causing major spiritual damage)
3. Can you identify a time when you missed God’s “target” in your thoughts, words, or actions?
(Personal reflection—choosing selfishness over love, dishonesty over truth, pride over humility, etc)
4. What helps you recognize when you’ve sinned and need to turn back to God?
(Prayer, reading Scripture, the Holy Spirit’s conviction, advice from mature Christians, the consequences of wrong choices, etc)
5. How does understanding sin as a “disease of the soul” change your perspective on forgiveness and healing?
(It helps us see that we need God’s healing, not just His pardon—and that spiritual health requires ongoing care and attention)

Words of the Week:

մեղք - meghk - sin

ապաշխարութիւն - a-bash-khar-oo-tyoon - repentance

խոստովանութիւն - khos-do-van-oo-tyoon - confession

Life Application

What are we going to do with what we have learned today?

Faith isn't always easy, especially when we face things we can't understand. Sometimes we don't feel God near. But remember—Thomas needed time, and Jesus gave it to him. He didn't demand instant faith. He invited Thomas to draw closer.

This week, ask yourself:

- Do I sometimes doubt or feel distant from God?
- Is there a part of me that needs to be renewed?

Maybe you can offer peace to a friend who's struggling. Maybe you need to forgive someone—or ask for forgiveness. Maybe it's time to read Scripture more regularly, or simply be silent and listen to God. This is the time for renewal.

** Departing Prayer, written by St. Nersess the Grace-filled (Shnorhali).*

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesher-ee, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sa-sanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.