

Theology 101 - Sin  
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Some Definitions:

From the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church: “The **purposeful** disobedience of a creature to the known will of God. Unlike moral evil it is a fundamentally theological conception.”

From the Catechism in the BCP, p 848

Q .	What is sin?
A .	Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.

Q .	How does sin have power over us?
A .	Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted.

What assumptions are contained in these definitions?

- That sin somehow involves our awareness of God’s will
- We are separating ourselves from that will by “thought, word, or deed.”
- That means we lose the freedom God desires for us
- Our relationships become distorted
- Notice these definitions don’t say any thing about our nature as contrasted with original sin, which we will discuss and contrast it with
- While it may involve actions, it is more about our will and the resulting state fo separation and distorted relationships than it is about a list of “bad things we have done!”

Like all theological concepts they are not interpreted or defined in the same way over time.

Biblical Roots:

Hebrew Scripture

- Over fifty words for sin in biblical Hebrew
- Assumption that going against the will of God is a universal moral flaw
- Many stories of disobedience, punishment, and forgiveness
- Origin of sin was not considered important (note different way to interpreting the garden)
- Merely related to creatureliness. We are dust
- Not typically attributed to God
- Sin is lurking to attack Cain
- Really more about the human heart

- Unintentional, cultic sins in Hebrew Scripture are less understandable to our culture compared to disobedience
- Clean and unclean
- Unintentional sin was of equal theological significance
- Scapegoat rituals
- Violation of holiness vs disobedience
- Despite acts of repeated divine grace through mitigations of punishment, reestablishment of election, promise, and covenants human rebellion doesn't go away
- Righteous vs wicked
  - Natural proclivity to sin vs a lawless orientation to life which characterized sinners without conscious
- When great risks to security exist, this language escalates.
- Consequences of sin according to Israelite theologians were grave
  - Ruptured the relationship between the creator and the creature
  - Emotion first shown by God in response is regret and remorse for creating humanity (Gen 6:5-7)
  - Wrath/judgement. Etiological explanation or causal relationship?
- Forgiveness is also a vital doctrine in OT
  - Hope for a restored relationship with God

#### New Testament

- Harmartia in the greek
  - Missing the mark
  - In early greek literature it was any sort of error
- Like the Hebrew Scriptures the sense is that all "Fall short of the glory of God"
- Trespasses or individual wrongdoing may be atoned for
- Some Christians believed those in Christ should be empowered to live without transgression (some parts of Paul and John are interpreted that way)
- How have we interpreted that freedom?
- Theology of the Atonement (another class)
- Connection between sin and sickness
- Hope for or expectation of Christian perfection has never fully disappeared (parousia, puritans)
- Early Christians were concerned by those who had failed to recognize the Messiah as a new category
- Sin as a state of alienation from God
  - This is who Jesus chose to be in relationship with!
  - He was criticized repeatedly by the authorities for it
  - Jesus was offering forgiveness and relationships

#### Early Church

- Now focus on those who "haven't accepted Christ"
- Repentance of sin and forgiveness become more attached to baptism
- Atonement and change is attributed to God's grace
- God is always will and ready to receive us

### Sin as an enslaving power

- Paul’s characterization of sin embodied in Adam
- Did he deduce the plight in light of the solution
- “Joy of being wrong” Allison
- Once he accepts that God intended to save the world by faith in his Son, you have to think the entire world needs saving
- Role of the law

Problem in the 2nd century is when people who’ve been baptized commit serious offenses

- Welcome to Lent!

Early Church theologians had different views

- Athanasius thought there were silliness lives both before and after Christ
- Pelagius argued we have some ability to assist in our own salvation
- Augustine often given credit for the doctrine of original sin came out of his own experience of the gravity of sin in his own life, yet rejected the dualism of evil as a separate competing substance in the world
- 8th and 9th centuries overlaid a feudal system of penitence which was external
- Anselm more personal notion of internalized sin
- Reformers were interested in rejecting the externalized version (indulgences, etc)
- Predestination by Calvin
- Enlightenment attempts to remove sin from the religious setting and place it in moral/ethical terms.

### Human Nature

Q	What are we by nature?
A	We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.
Q	What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
A	It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.
Q	Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?
A	From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.
Q	Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

A .	Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.
Q ,	What help is there for us?
A .	Our help is in God.
Q .	How did God first help us?
A .	God first helped us by revealing himself and his will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially the prophets of Israel.

“Whatever their bodies do affects their souls. It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out...”

— C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

— C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person'd God

BY JOHN DONNE

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

**Praise. (II) George Herbert**

**K**ing of Glorie, King of Peace,  
I will love thee:  
And that love may never cease,  
I will move thee.

Thou hast granted my request,  
Thou hast heard me:  
Thou didst note my working breast,  
Thou hast spar'd me.

Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing thee,  
And the cream of all my heart  
I will bring thee.

Though my sinnes against me cried,  
Thou didst cleare me;  
And alone, when they replied,  
Thou didst heare me.

Sev'n whole dayes, not one in seven,  
I will praise thee.  
In my heart, though not in heaven,  
I can raise thee.

Thou grew'st soft and moist with tears,  
Thou relentedst:  
And when Justice call'd for fears,  
Thou disentedst.

Small it is, in this poore sort  
To enroll thee:  
Ev'n eternitie is to short  
To extoll thee.

Sources include Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church and Anchor Bible Dictionary