

## Doctrines of Sin & Atonement

### I. Definition: Any lack of conformity to the perfect character and will of God as expressed in both God's good creational design and God's revealed law.

- Violation of God's will expressed in God's law/commands
- Violation of relationship with God
  - Idolatry against Creator: Making some created person or thing into our ultimate source of abundant life, satisfaction, comfort, and hope
  - Lack of faith, trust and love for God: A lack of trust in God's ability or intention to do what is best for us
- Violation of human design
  - Self-centeredness
  - Autonomy/independence: An attempt to live as if our lives are not completely dependent upon God, as if God does not exist or does not matter
  - Distorting of good: Sin is not a substance, being, or created entity. Rather, it is a distorting and corruption of things that are good in and of themselves.
  - Misuse of freedom leading to bondage

### II. Origin of human sin: Adam's and Eve's choice to rebel against God (Gen. 3)

- God originally created angels and humanity good in righteousness, holiness, and truth (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). There was no human sin in the world at the origin of humanity. Evil is not a necessary part of the world or of humanity.
- God made angels and humans with intellect and will, and this creates the possibility for sin, but not sin and evil itself. God is not the author of sin or morally responsible for sin (1 John 1:5; James 1:13; Isa. 6:3; Matt. 5:48).
- Evil and sin originates (for mysterious reasons) in the intellect and will of angels and human beings. They chose to believe false ideas about God and chose to act in rebellion against God's design and will.

### III. Cursed effects of sin

- Guilt (Exod. 34:7; Ps. 25:11; Col. 2:14; Rom. 5:16)
  - Objective: The status of being a lawbreaker and liable to a just penalty/condemnation
  - Subjective: Feelings of guilt, accusations of conscience
- Wrath: God's just displeasure and anger (Ps. 21:9; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; Rev. 19:15)
- Alienation (Rom. 5:10; Phil. 3:18; James 4:4; Eph. 4:18)
  - Relational estrangement from God and opposition to God as enemies of God
  - Broken relationships with humanity and the rest of creation (Gen. 3-5)
- Corruption of human nature (Ps. 53; Eph. 2:1-3)
  - The distortion of our nature so that we now have an inclination or disposition to form sinful desires and engage in sinful behavior (Ps. 51:1-5; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20-22)

- Includes darkened minds (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:17-18), the bondage of our will that makes us unable to discern God’s will and to choose obedience to God and his ways apart from radical healing grace from God (John 8:34; Rom. 6:17; 8:5-8), and broken bodies ruled by sin and its effects (Rom. 3:13-17; 6:13).
- Corruption reveals itself in vices and sinful behaviors against God and humanity (Ps. 5; Ps. 10; Rom. 1:18-32; Gal. 5:19-21).
- Misery
  - The wounds and damage we experience from sin’s effects in the world from the breakdown of creation in disease, disorders, and disasters as well as the wounds and hurt we endure from the sins of other human beings and from Satan. The miseries of this life are often create circumstances that become temptations to sin when we encounter situations created by the choices of others.
- Death:
  - Spiritual death: Unresponsiveness to God requiring new birth (Eph. 2:1; John 3:1-8)
  - Physical death (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22)

#### IV. Categories of Sin and the Human Will

- Original sin: The disordered disposition/inclination/propensity to sin, which produces involuntary sinful desires in certain circumstances that activate that disposition
- Actual sin: Particular acts of sin that result from the use of the will to voluntarily indulge sinful desires either mentally (internal acts of lust) or physically (external acts or behaviors)

	Aspect of Sin	Definition
<b>Original sin</b> (involuntary states)	Disposition/propensity/inclination to sin	The state of having an inclination/disposition/propensity toward sinful desires and behaviors. It is not an active state of desire but rather a potential that is only activated when we encounter the right circumstances that lead to the forming of desires.
	Sinful desires	The active state of experiencing sinful desires. It is an involuntary response that arises when our inclination or disposition is activated when we are in the right circumstances that evoke desire.
<b>Actual sin</b> (voluntary acts)	Lust	Choosing to indulge a sinful desire in an internal/mental act.
	Sinful behaviors	Choosing to indulge a sinful desire in an outward/external act or behavior.

## V. Total/Radical Depravity

- Sin affects all dimensions of the human person.
  - The soul and its faculties and powers (what Scripture calls the “heart,” including intellect, will, and emotions)
  - The body in its broken structures and formation by sinful habits
- Sin is both individual and social/corporate/structural.

Human sin is not only individual but also social/corporate and institutional in its effects. Human groups and institutions composed of sinful human beings make decisions, build social customs and institutions, and weave sinful ideas and patterns into the very fabric and functioning of human systems and societies at all levels of human culture.
- Total/radical depravity does NOT mean that human beings are lacking any good and are as bad as we can possibly be. Human beings remain God’s good creation, created in his image, even in the state of sin. And even sinful human beings can make some good choices and display some virtues of character by God’s good design and God’s common grace in the world.

## VI. Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ

- Jesus’ death on the cross accomplishes redemption from sin by providing an atoning sacrifice for sin. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- Jesus’ death provides effective atonement for people because he was the representative and substitute for the rest of humanity in the act of his death (Isa. 53:4-6, 12 → quoted in Mark 10:45; Luke 22:37; 1 Pet. 2:24 → quoting Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:15, 21 [the great exchange]).
- Jesus’ death is the basis for redemption from the many effects of sin because Jesus willingly suffered the full consequences and effects of sin in our place and for our sake.
  - Bearing God’s wrath: propitiation (Rom. 3:25; 5:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
  - Bearing sin’s penalty: substitutionary atoning sacrifice (Rom. 5:6-10; 8:3; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 9:11-10:18)
  - Defeating sin’s power (Rom. 6:1-14)
- God will ultimately triumph over sin completely (Rev. 21-22).
  - Sin’s very presence will be eradicated from the renewed creation to come (Rev. 21:27).
  - Satan condemned and banished (Rev. 20).
  - God’s people will be completely free of sin and confirmed in the freedom and joy of righteousness and holiness forever.

## Going Further

### ***Doctrine of Sin***

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 79-86.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapter 10.

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapter 13.

Mark Jones, *Knowing Sin* (Moody, 2022).

Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1996).

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins* (NavPress, 2017).

Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Brazos, 2020).

Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (Penguin, 2011).

### ***Doctrine of Jesus' Death and Atonement***

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 131-139.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapter 13.

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapter 17.

Marcus Nodder, *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?* (Good Book, 2014).

Jeremy Treat, *The Atonement: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2023).

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 1986).