

## TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

1. Defining Sin
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  - Protestant
  - Orthodox
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3. Original Sin: Am I a Sinner by Birth?
4. Is There Such a Thing as Right and Wrong?
5. Is Sin a Manmade Idea?
6. Are there consequences to Sin?
7. Sin and Repentance

## Sin: A Discussion

Ask anyone. Sin is one of the most varied topics when people are asked to define it. Is sin the transgression of a cultural taboo, violation of one's own conscience, or disobedience to standards of righteousness established by God. And is sin relative? Is there an absolute standard to measure the degree of sin? Or is sin an antiquated topic that belongs to history and has no place in a free-thinking modern society?

If right and wrong are purely individual concepts, based on conscience and personal preference, then what are the ramifications of such a viewpoint? Is it wrong for one person to indulge his sexual desire by raping and murdering another, simply because it makes the offender feel good? Why or why not? On what basis can we call a sociopath's version of morality incorrect if there is no absolute standard?

### Defining Sin

#### Judaic Idea of Sin

Judaism teaches that all humans enter the world free of sin. We come into the world neither carrying the burden of sin committed by our ancestors nor tainted by it. In this way there is no concept of Original Sin in Judaism. Rather, sin, חַטָּא (hata), is the result of our human inclinations, the יָצֵר (yetzer). This word is found in Genesis 6:5 and

*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination (יָצֵר) of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.*

In Judaism, sin could be seen as bad "yetzer" leads someone into doing something that violates one of the 613 commandments of the Torah. Later, Judaism evolved the concept of yetzer ha-tov, the good inclination, and the yetzer ha-ra, the evil inclination. *In the Way of God*, Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto writes of the relationship between this dual inclination and free will;

*"Man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will... Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good urge (Yetzer HaTov) and evil urge (Yetzer HaRa), and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly..."*

This idea that *Man is created for the purpose of being drawn close to God* would be recognized by the Orthodox as "Theosis." This aligns well with the alternate meaning of the word sin (חַטָּא - hata), which is "to miss the mark" similar to the Greek word for sin which is αμαρτια (amartia).

However, Judaism also recognizes that sin (or evil inclination) and the ability to overcome it (good inclination) is an active part of humanity. This is evident in Genesis 4 when God speaks to Cain.

*"And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen?  
Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you? If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is crouching, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it."*

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Also, similar to Christianity, Judaism believes that all sins can be forgiven. However, Jews recognize that every sin has real-life consequences and that while forgiveness for sins is possible it does not mean people do not suffer from the consequences of their actions.

### **Protestant Idea of Sin**

In Protestantism Man is essentially sinful and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Sin is understood as a form of universal moral corruption, (some denominations using the term "total depravity"), which effects all mankind because of the sin of Adam and Eve. This "moral corruption" has its roots in Martin Luther's evolving view regarding the impact of the Fall. Early on Luther spoke of the inclination to evil (*Yetzer HaRa*) resting in the weakened powers of will but deepened this understanding of inclination to evil as a corrupted nature.

This Original, inherited, sinful nature separates him from God and results in his being under God's judgment as no one is righteous or good in God's eyes.

Every person born of human parents inherits a sin nature that makes it impossible for a person to please or serve God. (by his nature Man acts only by *evil urge (Yetzer HaRa)*)

Sin is interpreted in a more legalistic manner, that is any deviation from God's perfect standards of righteousness and includes actions, words, and thoughts.

The consequence of sin is death and eternal separation from God in hell, however the wages of sin are expiated through the Son of God, Jesus' death on the cross.

### **Catholic Idea of Sin - According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord. But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds.

Sin is an offense against God. Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God." In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation and is the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.

Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus, sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.

The Church has always taught that Man's inclination towards evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "death of the soul". Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.

Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: [but] is inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence". Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God.

# Sin: A Discussion

## Orthodox Idea of Sin

According to Fr. Antony Hughes:

*"In simple terms, we can say that the Eastern Church tends towards a therapeutic model which sees sin as illness, while the Western Church tends towards a juridical model seeing sin as moral failure.*

*For the former the Church is the hospital of souls, the arena of salvation where, through the grace of God, the faithful ascend from "glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18) into union with God in a joining together of grace and human volition.*

*According to the Orthodox Holy Fathers sin is not a violation of an impersonal law or code of behavior, but a rejection of the life offered by God. Adam and Eve were overcome with the same temptation that afflicts all humanity: to be autonomous, to go their own way, to realize the fullness of human existence without God.*

*This is the mark, to which the word  $\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$  (amartia) refers. Fallen human life is above all else the failure to realize the God-given potential of human existence, which is, as St. Peter writes, to "become partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4).*

*The choice offered to Adam and Eve remains our choice: to ascend to life or descend into corruption."*

Ancestral or Original Sin, for the Orthodox, refers to an individual act indicating that the Eastern Fathers assigned full responsibility for the sin in the Garden to Adam and Eve alone. The Eastern Church, unlike its Western counterpart, does not have the Augustinian concept of guilt being passed from Adam and Eve to their progeny.

Fr. Romanides states that the Fall did not destroy the image of God in Man and Origen speaks of the image buried as in a well choked with debris.

## Classes of Sin

***In Judaism*** there are three classes of sin: *sins against God, sins against another person, and sins against yourself.*

- Sins against God might include making a promise you don't keep or taking the Lord's name in vain.
- Sins against another person might include saying hurtful things, physically harming someone, lying to them, or stealing from them.
- Sins against yourself may include behaviors such as addiction or even depression. Generally they are things that prevent someone from living fully or being the best person they can be. It can be considered a sin if you fail to seek correction for the problem.

**In Catholicism** sins can be distinguished according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbor, or oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. The Catholic Church makes a particular distinction between **mortal** and **venial** sin.

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**Mortal sin** destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Mortal sin contradicts the love of God, such as blasphemy or perjury, or the love of neighbor, homicide or adultery. Mortal sin deprives the sinner of sanctifying grace however God's mercy and a conversion of heart can heal this within the setting of the sacrament of confession and reconciliation.

For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: Mortal sin is sin whose a) object is grave matter (violation of the Ten Commandments), b) is committed with full knowledge<sup>1</sup> and *complete consent*, and c) committed with deliberate consent. Sin committed through malice, by deliberate choice of evil, is the gravest.

**Venial sin** allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor, such as thoughtless chatter or immoderate laughter and the like. One commits *venial sin* when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.

Venial sin weakens charity and impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good and merits temporal punishment. However venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness.

### In Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy, in their very Eastern way of resisting definitive statements for non-dogmatic principles has resisted the Catholic idea of an established order of magnitude for sin. The closest one might find is the vices that are identified by St John Climax in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Some Orthodox catechisms list the "seven deadly sins," however this is not meant to be understood same way as in the Roman Catholic "mortal" sin described above, but more to the meaning of "unto death."

As was mentioned, since the Eastern Church tends towards a therapeutic model which sees sin as illness the Orthodox would more agree with the Judaic understanding of the three offences or sins; those against God, against one another, and against oneself. This is modeled in the cross with the vertical component representing our relationship with God and the horizontal component being the relationship with ourselves and one another. Orthodox feel it is more beneficial to focus on a list of virtues and attitudes to strive for rather than developing a list of sins to avoid. In this way while an Orthodox person would not only avoid individuals who may lead them to sin, but would also devote themselves to seek out individuals who will lead them to virtue.

## What Does the Bible Say About Sin

**Genesis** In the Old Testament sin is seen as a transgression or disobedience of the Law or Covenant established by God. The first transgression being the sin of disobedience of Adam and Eve. However while sin was not part of the nature of Adam and Eve, (meaning that Eve received the temptation from Satan), the Jewish idea of *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination appears from within Cain.

**Exodus & Deuteronomy** By the time of the Exodus, God, through Moses, had established the Laws or Commandments which became the standard for right behavior (righteous) and evil behavior

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<sup>1</sup> While *unintentional ignorance* can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense, feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish the impact of the sin.

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(sin). That Biblical definition of sin continues through today for Jews. (Exod 24:3, Deut 6:24). The Bible even identifies those that God's judged as "righteous; for example Abraham, Noah, Job, and Daniel.

**New Testament** With the coming of Christ there is a shift from sin being connected to disobedience to the Law (Word) to sin as disobedience unto Christ (the living Word) who brings salvation from sin. This was foretold to Joseph even before the birth of Christ:

*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, **because he will save his people from their sins.*** (Matt 1:21)

**Jesus** does not abolish the Law and speaks of the importance of righteousness.

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them... For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt 5:17-20)

He warns us to beware of those who connect sin directly to the Law without an application of mercy and good judgement:

*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. They tie up heavy, loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.* (Matt 23: 4, 27)

His command to those He heals is "Go and sin no more." Jesus was not speaking of being perfect, but was warning against a return to sinful choices. His words both extended mercy and demanded obedience to God. (John 1:14)

Interestingly the author of 1 John seems to retain this tie with the Old Testament when he says:

*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.* (1 John 3:4)

In the same book, the author also seems to indicate the beginnings of the Catholic idea of delineation of sins.

*There is a sin that leads to death...All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.* (1 John 5:16)

**St Paul** fully develops his concept of sin in his Epistle to the Romans and this Epistle is the source of most of the theology of sin for the Catholic and Protestant churches.

**The Law** bringing about the knowledge of what is sinful.

*What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting.* (Romans 7:7)

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## Original Sin

*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous.*

(Romans 5:19)

## Christ as the expiation or atonement for sin

*God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

(Romans 3:25)

## Is There Such a Thing as Right and Wrong?

This idea has most certainly evolved over time. Throughout the earliest history of Man there has been the concept of right and wrong behavior. This being evident in punishment being issued to those who deviated from a cultural norm. With the appearance of formal religion there is the development of a divine establishment of rules for correct behavior and punishment for incorrect behavior. This paper have presented the evolution of this in the Judaic and Christian faiths.

Enlightenment, Post-Enlightenment, and Post Modernism have returned us to the Pelegian concept that Man is the Author of morality. This tension between Religion and Modernism has become polarized in the concepts of Moral Absolutism and Moral Relativism.

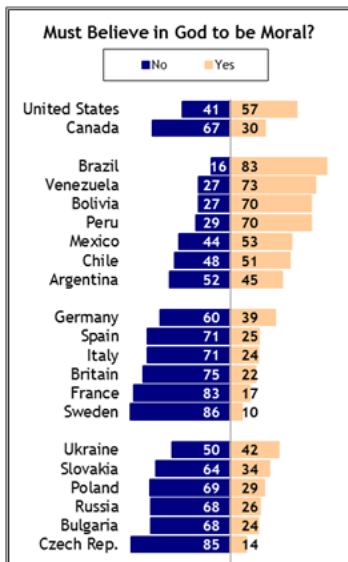


Figure 1

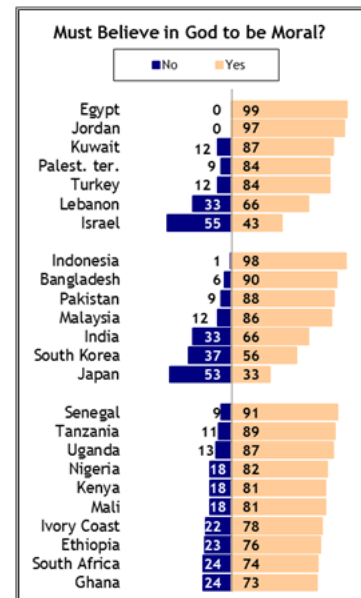


Figure 2

**Absolutism** is making ethical decisions based on objective rules. Some things are always right, and some things are always wrong. There are absolute Truths which are fixed for all time, places, and people.

**Relativism** is making ethical decisions based on subjective rules. Nothing is intrinsically right or wrong and there is no absolute Truth.

Figures 1 and 2 show the results of a 2014 Pew Research study where this impact can be clearly seen.

Another complicating factor is that it is not as simple as Religion vs. Modernism. “Absolute” ideals that are moral to one religion are immoral to members of another. Judaism has a different idea of justice

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than Christianity. Mormons of the 19th century considered polygamy moral, while Christians saw it as a sin.

Moreover, religious ideals of moral and ethical behavior often vary within the same religious group. St John Chrysostom and Martin Luther published many sermons that were anti-Semitic. King Henry VIII started the Anglican Church of England over the issue of divorce and remarriage as morally acceptable. The Episcopalian Church has taken a stand for gay marriage while the Orthodox, Catholic and most Protestant Churches remained opposed. Cremation is considered a sin in the Orthodox Church while fully allowed in the Protestant Church, while the Catholic Church allows it with some restrictions.

Many people today are attracted to *moral relativism* because they believe it represents tolerant thinking. A moral relativist would say that we should not interfere with or judge other people's lives or moral values. Add to this that many times our decisions are guided by impulses, emotions, and our surrounding social environment.

This inconsistent subjectivity coupled with the idea that there are no objective moral truths, or no one "standard" from which to develop an objective answer means that terms such as "right, wrong, and sin" are meaningless since they only have meaning from the perspective of each person.

From a ***moral relativism perspective*** what is the rational universal "standard" by which to claim that slavery, Nazism, or pedophilia are immoral or unethical.

But moral absolutism is not the better choice since absolutism insists that there are absolute fixed truths that cannot be violated. So from a ***moral absolutism perspective*** all form of killing, all lying, and men with long hair is unjustified.

### **Moral Contextualism**

For the Orthodox a middle road has always been the answer. Moral Contextualism states that one should be cautious with regard to moral claims. The traditional Orthodox answer of "It depends" helps us avoid dangerous generalizations about morality and requires that we take into account the circumstances of each particular situation.

Add to this that as Christians we believe that our sense of right and wrong are not a "gut feeling" or a product of our environment but is stamped into our souls by our Creator which allows us to evaluate right and wrong from an established Truth. This idea is expressed nicely in the Catholic Catechism.

*No one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man.*

### **Sin has no meaning apart from God**

Sin, which we have seen, is defined as transgression, moral corruption, or a missing of the mark. For a moral relativist, these definitions are without meaning since the boundary that defines a transgression or the "mark" and the meaning of corruption are internally determined by each individual, society or culture.

Sin only has meaning when it has an external source, who for Christians is God. We see this in Psalm 51.

*Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*



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## Sin and Repentance

The word “forgiveness” or “pardon” appears for the first time in Exodus in the story of the golden calf: “Pardon our iniquity and our sin” (Exod. 34:9).

In Numbers (13:15) we read “Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have tolerated [carried] this people ever since Egypt.” This text is followed by the verse that is central to the Yom Kippur service: “And the Lord said, ‘I pardon, as you have asked.’”

These narratives establish the concept of the God of Israel as a God of mercy and forgiveness. In revealing His nature to Moses, God indicates His forgiving nature much more fully than He did in the Ten Commandments. God emphasizes mercy, “carrying sin” and extending lovingkindness far beyond the extent of punishment.

For Orthodox sin removes us from communion with God and neighbor. St. John Chrysostom states:

"Did you commit sin? Enter the Church and repent for your sin; for here is the physician, not the judge; here one is not investigated, one receives remission of sins"

If sin is considered to be an illness or infirmity, and the church is a "hospital", Christ the “Physician, and the sacraments, the “instruments” of Grace and healing, then this is where sin, this break with God or missing the mark of being centered on God is restored. This is where we are restored to the fullness of our humanity that we had before the Fall.

Recall the words said at every Divine Liturgy,

"Take eat: this is my Body which is broken for you for the remission of sins," and "Drink ye all of this: this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is poured for you and for many, for the remission of sins."