

9. The Problem of Sin

Knowing what sin is and what its consequences are is vital to understanding both God's relationship with humankind and the need for Jesus Christ's mission. Knowing about the law's provision of "atonement" is also critical to understanding these things.

What and Who

Sin is breaking God's law

Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law. 1 JOHN 3:4 GNT

Sin is committed by all people

All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. ROMANS 3:23 CEV

The expression "fallen short of God's glory" (v. 23) most likely means that all people have failed to live up to a standard that matches God's glory. Sin is the reason for this.

Consequences of Sin

Sin means that we face God's anger

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.* EPHESIANS 2:3 GNT

All people have lived sinful lives and face the consequences.

Sin results in physical death

Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned. ROMANS 5:12 GNT

Note that this verse refers to death initially coming as a consequence of the first sin, committed by the first man, Adam.

Sin brings the prospect of eternal death

For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:23 NET

God's holiness and justice mean that unforgiven sin must be punished with everlasting death. It involves everlasting separation from God, in hell.

The Law's Provision for Sin

An animal was offered by a priest to God to make atonement for anyone who sinned

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If any person sins unintentionally, then he must bring a yearling female goat for a purification offering. ²⁸And the priest must make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally ... to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.* NUMBERS 15:27-28 NET

"Atonement" is where God accepts such an offering or sacrifice of a living being as a substitute for the life of a person who has sinned. God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin.

The high priest made atonement for Israel as a whole

[GOD, TO MOSES:] *... he is to make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.* LEVITICUS 16:33B NET

However, Israel did not keep God's law and broke his covenant

Samaria [the capital city of northern Israel] fell because *the Israelites did not obey the LORD their God, but broke the covenant he had made with them and disobeyed all the laws given by Moses, the servant of the LORD. They would not listen and they would not obey.* 2 KINGS 18:12 GNT

Despite the law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.