

10 Misconceptions of the Christian Faith

#3 Sin is neither a universal nor a significant problem and there are multiple ways to be forgiven.

The label ‘sinner’ may seem to be a loaded term of ‘Christian-speak’ that Christians apply to everyone but themselves. Or the reverse, perhaps you think that ‘sinner’ is a term applied by Christians only to themselves. You may even understand sin as something that all people have or do, but something that people can move beyond, arriving at a point where they no longer sin. According to Christianity in the New Testament, all three of these are misconceptions concerning this thing called sin.

All people are sinners. Christians do not view themselves as non-sinners while viewing everyone who is not a follower of Jesus as a sinner. The apostle Paul (author of several books in the New Testament), actually wrote this about himself: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost”.¹ All people commit sin and are sinners – Christians and non-Christians, young and old, no matter what belief system they adhere to. No one is perfect. Our experience with others and ourselves affirms this.

This sin is a problem primarily because it creates a barrier between us and God. Sure, sin is also a problem because our sins can hurt other people, damage our relationships, mess up our lives, and make us feel guilt, but all these effects are really only secondary compared to the most severe repercussion of sin – the fact that sin separates us from God. We were made for God, and when separated from him we are unable to do and be what we were made for. This is the primary problem in the universe. We were created to worship and glorify God and to enjoy him forever,² but sin cuts us off from God and makes this glorifying and enjoying of God impossible.

Sin separates us from God because it is an offense against him. Just like when you sin against someone you love and a temporary or permanent rift enters into your relationship, so it is with God when we sin against him. Sin is an offense against God because he – as sinless, perfect, and holy – institutes a moral law in accordance with his nature, which we break when we sin. Perhaps more importantly, sin is also an offense against God because sin is in essence a rejection of God. When we sin we are saying by our actions, “God, even though you are all-wise, all-knowing, and you care for me and have commanded me to act in such a way for your glory and my benefit, I defy you and choose instead to act in my own way.” Thus, by our sins we violate his nature, break his moral law, reject him, and belittle his infinite glory and worth, choosing to enjoy things that are paltry in comparison to him. In one place in the Bible, God describes the situation in this way: “My people have committed two evils [or ‘sins’]: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”³

We need to be forgiven by God. Because God cares for us and he earnestly desires our life-giving relationship with him to be restored, he is eager to forgive us. But God is also just. Our sins against him are infinitely egregious because they are against the only infinitely perfect, sinless, and holy being. God

¹ 1 Timothy 1:15

² See the opening line of the Westminster Confession

³ Jeremiah 2:13

would be utterly unjust if he were to simply ‘forget about’ our sins and ‘sweep them under the carpet,’ so to speak. Our sins deserve the ultimate penalty – namely, physical and spiritual death and eternal separation from God. However, the good news is that God has paid this penalty on our behalf by becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ and by dying the death that we deserve. Peter, another apostle, said it like this: “Christ...suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”⁴ Because God became a human like we are, he could die for us. And because he is God – perfect, sinless, righteous, and infinite in worth – his sacrifice was sufficient to pay the penalty for all the wrongdoing of each person who has ever lived.

Trusting in Jesus’ perfect sacrifice for our sins is the only way to be forgiven by God. Ceasing to sin (if that were possible, which it is not) would not be sufficient because that would not remove our past sins. Doing good works will not remove our sins either, no matter how many good works we do. Someone must pay the legal and legitimate penalty for our sins. We can either rely on Jesus’ past death on the cross as the full payment of the penalty for our sins, and in so doing receive God’s complete forgiveness for our sins, or we can pay for our wrongdoing on our own throughout eternity. “The result of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁵

God wondrously invites you and implores you to turn away from your sins, to be reconciled to him through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and to choose him as the source of your ultimate joy. He is the only being in the universe who will not disappoint, but will satisfy you totally and forever, with ever-increasing joy. He is the One you were made for and he wants you to be free from the weight and consequences of your sin.

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⁴ 1 Peter 3:18

⁵ Romans 6:23