### Consequences of Sin

The final question to consider in our investigation of sin is its consequences.[[1]](#footnote-1) The book of Proverbs gives us a general idea in stating that the wicked have no future (Prov 2:22; 10:7), they will fall (Prov 6:15; 28:18), and they will be punished (Prov 11:21, 23; 12:2; 10:31). We will divide our study into three parts: the consequences of sin in relation to God, for the individual, and for others.

**1. In Relation to God**

In order to understand how sin affects our relationship to God, we must emphasize several aspects of His character, such as holiness and righteousness. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word holiness means “separation.” God’s holiness means that He is unique and separate from sin. Therefore, sin leads to separation from God. Isaiah 59:2 declares, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” Habakkuk 1:13 adds, “{Your} eyes are too pure to approve evil.”

One can compare God’s attitude toward sin with combining oil with water. The two substances do not mix. The chemical nature of both substances makes this impossible, no matter how we may try. In a similar way, God cannot fellowship with sin. His nature will not allow it. Sin leads to eternal separation from the Lord.

Sin results not in a passive separation from God, but in an active rejection by Him. Yahweh says through Jeremiah, “I will cast you out of My sight” (Jer 7:15). Here, we can draw a parallel with magnets of the same polarity. When we bring them into close approximation, they repel one another. Similarly, when God and sin come together, God rejects it from His presence. The Bible calls this active resistance to sin God’s “wrath.” In Ezekiel 43:8, the Lord speaks of Israel, “They have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger.” Therefore, in the light of God’s holiness, we can understand why sin leads to separation from Him and rejection by Him.

How does God’s righteousness come into play? “Righteousness” means the fulfillment of a certain standard. God Himself is the standard of righteousness. His nature defines what is right. Jesus spoke of the Father in Matthew 5:48, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” When we say that God is righteous, we are saying that He acts in consistency with His nature and the law that He gave us.

In order to uphold His standards, the Lord punishes violators. He will not lower His standards, and in fact cannot do so, since they are a reflection of His nature. Therefore, He punishes every transgression. Exodus 32:34 informs us, “In the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” Therefore, in light of God’s righteousness, we gain further insight into His attitude toward sin. He stands as Judge and punishes transgressors.

Regarding how God punishes, we distinguish two concepts: natural consequences and direct punishment. The first consists of God allowing the natural consequences of a wrong action to come upon the sinner. Paul speaks of this in Romans 1:27 concerning homosexuality – such people receive “in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Direct punishment involves God’s direct intervention. An example would be His judgment on Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5.

When the Lord punishes, He pursues three goals. As a righteous judge, He seeks satisfaction of His justice. In addition, punishment can lead the sinner to repentance. Finally, punishment can serve as a warning so that others do not imitate this behavior.

God is holy and righteous, but also infinite and unchanging. Since He is eternal and unchanging, His punishment for sin is eternal. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says to the condemned, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” In addition, in Mark 9:48 Jesus said that in that place, “Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

In our judicial system, we punish criminals according to the severity of their crime. Correspondingly, if one sins against another person, who is finite, they receive a temporary punishment. Yet, if one sins against an infinite being, that person’s punishment is unending. God considers every sin as being committed against Him. When David sinned with Bathsheba, he declared, “Against You, You only, I have sinned” (Ps 51:4).

A final aspect to consider in God’s relation to sin is His mercy. God once promised Moses to proclaim His name to Him. In biblical thought, the “name” is a description of one’s character. Therefore, when the Lord promised to declare His name to Moses, He was planning to reveal His character.

The passage in question is Exodus 34:6-7, where God proclaimed, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” In His mercy, God desires to forgive sin. In the Garden of Eden, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord spoke to them about His salvation plan, promising that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. He then made garments for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness.

We note here that the Lord first shows mercy to the sinner, and not wrath. This was a characteristic difference between Jesus and the Pharisees. When the latter saw a sinner, they thought of condemnation. When Jesus saw a sinner, He thought of mercy. In Matthew chapter 9, the Pharisees were offended that the Lord ate and drank with tax gatherers and sinners. Yet, Jesus responded, “{It is} not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice’’ (Matt 9:12-13).

We read further in Exodus 34:7, “He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” We see here that God’s mercy has a limit. God is a God of holiness that hates sin. If people reject His love and offer of forgiveness, He will manifest His wrath.

The Bible provides a graphic picture of God’s attitude toward the unrepentant sinner – the image of the cup of wrath (see Isaiah 51:17 and Revelation 14:10). When a cup is filling, we do not see the liquid. When the cup is full, it is ready to be poured out. Similarly, God exercises patience toward the sinner and withholds His wrath. Yet, the time will come for it to be manifest.

**2. In Relation to Self**

Sin causes misery not only for one’s relationship with the Lord, but subjectively for the individual himself/herself. We will highlight three of these woes: slavery to desire, fear, and ignorance. Earlier we stated that our natural human desires are good, but when they lead us beyond God’s standards of proper behavior, they become evil. Sin perverts our nature in such a way that it becomes difficult to control our desires, and they frequently lead us into sin by prompting us to seek satisfaction of our desires outside of God’s will. In other words, sinners are enslaved to their desires.

Fear is a universal human experience. Hebrews 2:15 helps us understand this: through “fear of death” we are “subject to slavery.” The Bible reveals why people fear death: “Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this {comes} judgment” (Heb 9:27). After death, there will be no more opportunity for repentance and faith in Jesus. People subconsciously are aware of this, which is the root of this fear.

Sin also leads to ignorance. We live in the “information age,” where knowledge is growing exponentially in every field. However, in the field of religion we encounter much that could easily be called irrational and nonsensical. Romans 1:21-22 gives us insight here: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

When people reject the Lord, they reject truth as well, which leads to ignorance. Jesus taught us an important principle in John 7:17: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or {whether} I speak from Myself.” In other words, only those who are open to truth will receive truth. Some may consider themselves great scholars or thinkers, but if they reject the truth of God’s Word, they remain in ignorance.

Another key passage is Ephesians 4:17-18: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” Here, we note that people’s ignorance is connected with their hardness of heart. An open heart in necessary to receive God’s truth. Therefore, the Scriptures declare, “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10).

The book of Proverbs speaks much about “fools.” They “despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7), “mock at sin” (Prov 14:9), are “arrogant and careless” (Prov 14:16), and “will quarrel” (Prov 20:3). Moreover, their “way is right in (their) own eyes” (Prov 12:15), they “ruin (their) way” (Prov 19:3), and their “lips bring strife” (Prov 18:6). In the end, they will be punished (Prov 19:29; 26:3; 10:13)

Finally, sin leads to physical death and eternal punishment for those who have not been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. We will look more into this truth in volume 5 of this series.

**3. In Relation to Others**

We will name the initial aspect of sin’s effect on our relationships with others “competition.” We will begin with a reading from Hebrews 10:24: “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” The word “stimulate” translates the Greek term παροξύσμος (*paroxusmos*). The root of this word implies “raise up to a high level.” Therefore, in Hebrews 10:24 the author implies that believers should stimulate each other to high levels of spiritual life in Christ.

On the other hand, competition has a negative side. The Bible calls it “envy,” and its root is unbelief. A good example is when James and John wanted to occupy the place at the right and left hand of Jesus in the Kingdom (Matt 20:20ff). In other words, they wanted to rank ahead of the other disciples. We can also cite Saul’s jealousy of David (1 Sam 18), Joseph’s brothers jealousy of Joseph (Gen 37), and Sarah of Hagar (Gen 21). Envy can reach the point where Solomon would write, “I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is {the result of} rivalry between a man and his neighbor” (Ecc 4:4).

We recall that in the Fall, Adam and Eve lost their trust in God. Instead of trusting the Lord to meet their needs, they sought satisfaction outside of God and fell into sin. God, the ultimate source to supply our needs, was supplanted by a finite source, i.e., what humans could attain for themselves. A finite source can only supply temporary satisfaction. If we rely on a finite source, it may turn out that there is not enough for everyone. Therefore, we compete with one another out of fear of losing out. If you obtain what I was striving for, envy results. In “healthy” competition, as described in the first paragraph above, I want my success to encourage you to succeed as well. In “unhealthy” competition, I want my success at your expense.

Jesus’ dealing with the hungry multitude will prove insightful. He was faced with the challenge of feeding 5000 persons with limited food. How should He decide whom to feed? Would He arrange some competition for it? Yet, Jesus is an unlimited source of supply. He fed all and thereby demonstrated that in God’s kingdom, there is always enough for everyone. My success does not threaten you, and your success does not threaten me. We can all trust God to take care of us.

Related to competition is “manipulation.” People of this age, as a rule, tend to value things more than people. People are often used to get things. We call this manipulation. James, in particular, rebukes those in the church who show partiality to rich members and disdain the poor (Jam 2:1-9).

A dramatic and tragic example is found in 1 Kings chapter 5. From verse 5, we read Jezebel’s question to King Ahab, “’How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?’ So he said to her, ‘Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” As a result, Ahab killed Naboth and took his vineyard. He regarded a piece of land more valuable the Naboth’s life.

However, the values of God’s kingdom differ from the world’s values. Paul writes, “Do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4). In God’s kingdom, people are more important than things. We use things to serve people.

Finally, a third element in sin’s effect on relationships is “enmity.” We have already commented that due to the Fall, our sinful nature harbors hatred toward God and people. In comparison to the previous two points, this feature is the most heinous. In competition, we express only indirect antagonism. It does not usually involve a direct conflict. In manipulation, we are in direct contact, but nonetheless I am pursuing a certain goal – to get something from another. However, in the case of enmity, I am not necessarily seeking a specific goal. I hate simply because it is in my fallen nature to do so. Paul writes about this in Titus 3:3, “…spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” There does not have to be any reason to hate others. It comes out unprovoked.

Often, these hostile attitudes are expressed in arguments and fights. An extreme application is war. It is fascinating how people are fascinated with war. This is due to the natural enmity in the fallen human heart wanting expression in violence. Of course, we applaud those who go to war and make the ultimate sacrifice to defend their country. Yet, there is no honor in loving war. Psalm 68:30 states, “He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.”

When nations are not at war, enmity finds expression in a different way through discrimination. Every nation has certain groups who are looked down upon – usually minorities. We look for reasons to justify our negative attitude in their appearance, dress, customs, skin color, etc. However, when we reside in other counties, the citizens there look on us the same way. It is natural for sinners to seek shortcomings in those who differ from them. This is another method that hate employs to express itself while seeking justification for its actions.

Another example of this phenomenon is the popularity of violent films and television programs. These programs owe their popularity to the fact that persons in their carnal nature relish death and violence. It provides an indirect expression of the hatred that exists in the human heart.

1. Material taken from Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 618ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)