

## Why Christianity Over Other Religions? How Does Atheism View Sin?

### Introduction:

This study by nature is comparative, but we do not intend to be overly critical of other religious beliefs. We do, however, believe in Biblical truth, the Scriptures being inspired by the Holy Spirit: “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

### 1. The Reality of Sin

A. We are introduced to sin in the opening pages of Scripture.

1. Man is ultimate creation of God, the only entity said to be “in our image” (Genesis 1:26-27). While this is a diverse concept, for our purposes we assert that this includes the ideas of rational deliberation, moral discrimination, free choice, self-awareness, conscience and abstract thinking which is capable of conceiving of God’s existence/nature/will.
2. These are in evidence in the first temptation when Satan approaches Eve to entice her into disobedience (Genesis 3:1-7). Eve understood the directive/consequence, she deliberated and then determined to violate God’s law by persuasive counter-arguments. Her conscience, along with Adam’s, convicted them of guilt resulting in their hiding from God.

B. The result of this sin is that man himself, along with his earthly environment, has been altered from its original state. This truth is fundamental to understanding ourselves on a spiritual level and identifying our need for reconciliation with God.

### 2. The Result of Sin

A. The practical results of sinful behavior are on display today: murder, injury, slander, theft, fornication, drug abuse, broken marriages/families, emotional disorders, etc. But underlying all of this human trauma is a spiritual consequence of sin: *separation from God*.

1. This is a spiritual condition, a breach of fellowship between man and God due to God’s holy nature; i.e., He cannot fellowship transgressors of His law (Ephesians 2:1-3).
2. Sinners are further described as ungodly (Romans 5:6), enemies (Romans 5:10), hopeless and without God (Ephesians 2:12), at enmity with God (James 4:4), in the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13), in bondage (Hebrews 2:15), slaves of sin (Romans 6:17) and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Such a one is hopelessly condemned to eternal destruction by God.

B. This is the result of divine justice, for God pronounces one sentence for sin – death: “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). This death is primarily spiritual in that sin separates man from God, who is the source of life. Sin doesn’t immediately result in physical death, but the Bible speaks of someone being “dead while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6) indicating a cessation of fellowship with God.

C. The most compelling question for all mankind: “*Is there any remedy for this condition?*” Is there any way to restore life/fellowship with God? The good news is “Yes!” – but we will come back to this later.

### 3. The Hopelessness of Atheism

- A. As you might surmise, the tenets of atheism deny most all these foregoing statements.
1. Atheism denies that man is a spiritual being specially created by God. Atheism further denies that the cosmos was created by an omnipotent, eternal, uncaused first-cause. Consequently, man is merely a biological “accident,” an anomalous product of purely natural forces evolving into the complex form we are today.
  2. This means that man has no “spirit” or immaterial reality; there is nothing to exist after death. Death is merely the cessation of biological function.
  3. This also means that the concept of “sin” is invalid. This has led to the behaviors of man being labeled either natural (if “harmless”) or a sickness/disease if (“harmful”). “Sin” is an antiquated word that is unheard in public discourse.
- B. How is the concept of guilt viewed? An unnecessary cultural hangover, a vestige of Puritanical morality that should be overridden by self-affirmation and shameless practice. Thus the unnatural is embraced, the sinful justified and the aberrant normalized. We see:
1. Believers being castigated as narrow, bigoted, judgmental and harmful. This has given rise to social/political movements such as undermining parental authority and liberating children from parents’ will; criminals being treated as victims instead of perpetrators; attacks against the judicial/penal system and more leniency and therapy for lawbreakers.
  2. Not only has this given rise to societal chaos, increased criminality and mental instability; it has short-circuited God’s effective solution to the problem of sin.
- C. The neo-atheistic antagonism toward religion is summarized by the following from Thomas Nagel, professor of philosophy at NYU: “In speaking of the fear of religion, I don’t mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility toward certain established religions... in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influence. Nor am I referring to the association of many religious beliefs with superstition and the acceptance of evident empirical falsehoods. I am talking about something much deeper – namely the fear of religion itself... I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and naturally, hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that” (in *Zacharias, Jesus Among Other Gods* 50).

### 4. The True Hope of the Gospel

- A. The bad news:
1. Once sin has been committed, there is no remedy/solution/restitution that can be offered by man alone that would eradicate the guilt he has incurred. Sin creates a spiritual debt that cannot be repaid, for the sentence is death: “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23).
  2. Everything man could offer God to “atone” for his sin is something that already belongs to God. Some ancient religions practiced child sacrifice to false gods, as if giving up the most important and precious item would appease the wrath of deity.

3. But God is the giver of life; my child is not “mine” to give to God. The life of my innocent child has no bearing on my own guilt before God.
- B. The good news: The essence of the gospel is that God offered a payment out of His grace and love that we could not pay ourselves. In a word, “salvation” has been made available to sinful man. Many passages teach this truth; here are three:
1. John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*
  2. 2 Corinthians 5:9-11, 14-21 – This everlasting life is tied to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for all who want salvation. Key words: Love, vicarious sacrifice, renewal, reconciliation, not imputing trespasses, Jesus sinless but paid price of sin – death.
  3. Romans 5:6-10 – Paul combines the ideas of human inability with the love of God to save us from judicial wrath which will come against sin. Terms: justified, reconciled, saved – rejoice!
- C. In essence, by God’s grace Jesus paid a spiritual debt we could not pay. Accepting this gift through obedient faith secures forgiveness, which relieves our conscience of guilt and restores our fellowship, purpose and value of life. It further dispels our anxiety and gives us hope to face death with the confidence that eternal fellowship with God awaits.
- D. In the midst of this love and grace shown by God in paying the price for our sins, listen to a prominent neo-atheist who stated his loathing of such a blessing bestowed by God. This is the late Christopher Hitchens in a debate with David Berlinski: “The concept of vicarious redemption is the most repulsive, I think, and the most central... the idea that by throwing your sins onto somebody else and to escape that – you can have them annealed (annulled?), abolished – that is a disgusting and immoral doctrine. If I care for you enough, I can pay your debt even if you incurred it out of your own stupid irresponsibility. I could if I wished... offer to take your place in prison... or if you were hostage. I could do that if I loved you enough, and there are examples of people willing to put themselves forward as the substitute for someone’s execution... But you cannot relieve people of their responsibility, and it’s immoral to offer to do so. It would be disgusting if it could be done. So, the moral rot of Christianity is exposed in its central doctrine of vicarious forgiveness. It’s an abdication of moral responsibility... We would be so much better off without this cult. We would think so much more clearly about the real moral questions that confront us.” As Paul said, *“We preach Christ crucified... to the Greeks foolishness”* (1 Corinthians 1:23).

### **Conclusion:**

One of the first tenets of obtaining forgiveness is owning or accepting responsibility for our sins. Atheism encourages denial; God demands acknowledgment, repentance and commitment to righteous behavior. There is forgiveness! There is healing! There is hope!