

A Systematic Theology of Sin

Sin is fundamentally rebellion against God and a failure to conform to His holy character and law. Scripture uses several words to describe its nature:

- **Missing the Mark:** "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It is failing to live up to God's perfect standard.
- **Transgression (Law-breaking):** "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). It is crossing a known boundary.
- **Iniquity or Perversion:** An inward crookedness or distortion of what is right. "We have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).
- **Unbelief:** At its root, sin is distrusting God's word and character. "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

In essence, sin is placing oneself—one's desires, will, and judgment—above God. It is not merely a list of bad actions but a condition of the heart that produces those actions (Mark 7:20-23).

The Nature of Sin: What is Sin?

Sin is not merely an action but a state, condition, and power that corrupts every human faculty. These passages illustrate sin's multifaceted nature:

1. **Sin as Idolatry** (The Ontological Root): At its core, sin is exchanging the worship of the Creator for the worship of creation (Romans 1:25). This is the foundational rebellion. The sins listed—greed (which is idolatry, Col. 3:5), sexual immorality, witchcraft (Gal. 5:20)—all flow from this primal misplacement of ultimate value. It is making a god out of self, desire, or created things.
2. **Sin as Moral Corruption** (The Manifestation): The lists catalogue the moral outworking of this idolatrous heart:
 - **Sins Against God:** Idolatry, witchcraft, God-haters (Rom. 1:30; Gal. 5:20).
 - **Sins Against Others:** Murder, strife, deceit, malice, slander, gossip, arrogance, insolence, rage, dissensions, factions, adultery, theft, slave-trading (Rom. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10).

- **Sins Against Self:** Sexual impurity, debauchery, drunkenness, orgies, lewdness, envy (Gal. 5:19-21; Mark 7:22). These show the self-destructive nature of sin.
3. **Sin as Enslaving Power** (The Human Condition): The texts present sin not just as choices but as a dominion. People are *characterised* as "the sexually immoral, idolaters, drunkards..." (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Romans 1 describes a downward spiral where God "gives over" rebellious people to their depraved minds and sinful desires (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), illustrating sin's power to enslave and degrade.
 4. **Sin as Defilement** (The Internal Reality): Jesus clarifies that sin originates internally: "For from within, out of the human heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder..." (Mark 7:21). It is a condition that defiles a person.

II. The Origin of Sin: How Did Sin Start?

While your passages focus on human sin, systematic theology traces its origin:

- Pre-Human Origin: Sin began in the angelic realm with Satan's prideful rebellion (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28).
- Human Origin (The Fall): Tempted by Satan, humanity rejected God's rule, seeking autonomous knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3). This resulted in:
 - Alienation from God (spiritual death).
 - Corruption of Human Nature (a heart now bent toward evil, as seen in the passages).
 - The Entry of Death and curse upon creation.
- Universal Propagation: Romans 5:12 teaches that sin and death spread to all humanity because "all sinned" *in Adam* (the doctrine of original sin). The universal scope of the sins listed in your passages (e.g., "all have turned away," Rom. 3:12) confirms this total human depravity.

III. The Consequences of Sin: What Are the Results?

The passages reveal a terrifying array of consequences, both immediate and eternal:

1. The Wrath of God: God's holy and just response to sin is active wrath (Rom. 1:18). It is not passive displeasure but righteous judgment against ungodliness.
2. Relational Catastrophe:

- With God: Separation, being "excluded from the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:9).
 - With Others: Breakdown into strife, discord, malice, and violence (Rom. 1:29-31).
 - With Self: Internal disorder, "depraved minds," and shameful lusts (Rom. 1:26-28).
3. Eternal Judgment: The ultimate consequence is eternal separation from God. Those who practice such things "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). This is the final outworking of God's wrath.

IV. The Remedy for Sin: How Can I Be Free?

The passages, while listing sins, point to the need for a radical solution. Systematic theology presents this as the work of Christ:

1. The Problem Defined: The lists (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21) serve as diagnostic mirrors, showing our helpless state. The law makes us conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:8-10), but cannot save us from it.
2. God's Action in Christ (The Gospel):
 - Substitutionary Atonement: Christ bore the wrath of God for sin on the cross (Rom. 3:25-26). He took the penalty we deserved.
 - Regeneration & Justification: Salvation is not self-reformation. It is a divine act: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). This is a declaration of righteousness (justification) coupled with a change of nature (regeneration).
3. The Human Response: Repentance and Faith.
 - Repentance is turning away from a life characterised by the sins listed, *recognising* them as idolatrous and destructive.
 - Faith is turning to Christ, trusting in His death and resurrection alone for forgiveness and righteousness.
4. The Ongoing Battle (Sanctification): Freedom from sin's *penalty* (justification) begins a battle against its *power*. Colossians 3:5-8 commands: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature..." This is done by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25), not by mere willpower. When believers sin, 1 John 1:9 provides the remedy: confession and cleansing.

Conclusion

Systematically, sin is the universal human condition of idolatrous rebellion, resulting in corruption, condemnation, and death. The diagnostic lists in Scripture show its comprehensive scope. The remedy is found exclusively in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who atones for our sin, imparts His righteousness, and sends His Spirit to break sin's dominion, leading us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-14).