

SIN

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience. It is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor, arising from a disordered attachment to created goods. Sin wounds the human person, distorts human nature, and injures human solidarity. It has been described as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”

At its deepest level, sin is an offense against God. As Scripture prays, “Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.” Sin turns the human heart away from God’s love and sets itself against that love. Like the first sin, it is disobedience—a refusal of trust and a desire to determine good and evil apart from God. It becomes a form of self-love even to the contempt of God. In this sense, sin stands in direct contrast to the obedient love of Christ, which is the source of our salvation.

THE GRAVITY OF SIN: MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

The Church distinguishes between mortal and venial sin, a distinction already present in Scripture and confirmed in the lived tradition of the Church.

Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of the person through a grave violation of God’s law. It turns the person away from God, our ultimate end and fulfillment, by preferring an inferior good in place of God. Venial sin does not destroy charity, but it weakens and wounds it.

For a sin to be mortal, three conditions are required: grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent. Grave matter is identified in relation to the moral law, especially as expressed in the Ten Commandments. Full knowledge means awareness that the act contradicts God’s law. Deliberate consent refers to a free and intentional choice of the will.

At the same time, the Church recognizes that human freedom is often limited. Ignorance, fear, emotional disturbance, psychological factors, or external pressure can diminish responsibility. Hardness of heart and deliberate malice, however, increase the seriousness of sin.

Mortal sin represents a radical misuse of human freedom. It results in the loss of sanctifying grace and the rupture of communion with God. Ordinarily, reconciliation is restored through repentance and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in which God, rich in mercy, restores the sinner to life in grace. Yet judgment of persons always belongs to the justice and mercy of God alone.

Venial sin, while not breaking the covenant with God, weakens charity, disrupts spiritual growth, and can, if left unrepented, dispose the person toward more serious sin. It calls for ongoing conversion and healing, even as it remains within the life of grace.

Sin, in all its forms, is ultimately a refusal of God’s mercy. While God’s mercy is without limit, it can be rejected by a hardened heart that refuses repentance. For this reason, the Church continually calls the faithful to conversion, trust, and openness to the grace that restores and heals.