



## What is Sin?

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When we consider atonement and what it involves, we have to keep in mind that it is part of God's ultimate plan with His creation. We recognize that atonement in the Old Testament is a covering for sin. One of our fleshly weaknesses is that we are so confident that we understand the words we are using in our discussions that we don't consider them as carefully as we should. The words "atonement" and "sin" are so simple to us that we don't take the time to carefully examine how God uses them in His Word. This can and does result in an incomplete understanding of God's message and potentially can lead to error.

We see "atonement" as a covering for sin, which it is. We also see "sin" as transgression of God's laws, again which it is. But "sin", as God uses the word in Scripture, often includes more than transgression. The Hebrew word "chattaah" is translated sin in English, and primarily is associated with both the offense and its penalty, or sacrifice, so in English we often define the Hebrew word "chattaah" as transgression. However, sin is often used as a translation for the root of "Chattaah" or "chata", and so Vine's Expository Dictionary says the basic nuance or feeling of this word, "Chattaah", is missing the road or mark. So a question we should be asking ourselves, is what is the road or mark God is speaking of when He uses the word "chattaah" in His word? Our initial response is that "the mark" is obedience to His law and commandments, and we sin when we fail to obey them and thus miss the mark. However when we consider God's plan with His creation we find that obedience to His laws is only part of the mark. The actual mark is on a much higher plane.

God's ultimate plan with His creation, the earth and all it contains, is the glorification of His name so that He may be all in all. Anything, thought, action or condition which does not glorify His name misses the mark and is "chattaah". His name is glorified in the perfection of His creation which is eternal. A condition which is not eternal, that is corruptible and decays, is not perfect and thus does not ultimately glorify His name. Thus God calls mortality, that is a dying nature, "chattaah" because it is a condition which does not glorify His name.(1)

Similarly, in the New Testament the principal term is "hamartia" (and

cognates), which is equivalent to “Chata” above. In classical Greek. it is used for missing a target or taking a wrong road, and is the general New Testament term for sin as concrete wrongdoing.

Christ informs us that the glorification of God’s name is indeed the mark when he tells us what he has done during his ministry on the earth. Christ says *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the word thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4)*. He doesn’t say, “I have obeyed your commandments”. He says, “I have glorified thee. I have hit the mark.” This is what God wants all mankind to do. Glorify His name. That is the mark.

Because our dying nature, called mortality, does not glorify God, it is properly called “chattaah”: this along with the propensities and desires we have to promote self, (i.e., the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.) Christ, having the same nature as we do in every respect, had our same temptation “chattaah”. He destroyed his “chattaah” when he offered himself up on the cross. He glorified God both by his obedience and by his destruction of his “chattaah”.

When we consider the Mosaic Law, we find God established two separate yet related principles in dealing with the need for atonement. When someone, either individually or collectively, transgressed the law then they must offer up a sin offering for atonement. This principle is established in Leviticus 4. They have transgressed God’s law, but they are not unclean and excluded from the camp. This principle teaches that God requires an atoning sacrifice for transgressions.

God also establishes another principle relative to the need for an atoning sacrifice when he deals with uncleanness. This principle is established in Leviticus 12 and 14, and Numbers 6 when He deals with child birth, leprosy, and the Nazarite. In these cases the individual has been declared unclean due to circumstances over which they had no control, and excluded from the camp. In order to be declared clean and reenter the camp they must offer a sin offering as an atoning sacrifice. There had been no transgression, but they had a condition, uncleanness, and God requires an atoning sacrifice for their uncleanness.

So we see that Christ participated in his own sacrifice in that he destroyed the corruptible body in which he had the temptation to “miss the mark”, “chattaah”. His mortal body was deserving of death because it was corruptible. Because he had done no transgression deserving of death, God, in His righteousness, raised him from the dead, gave him an incorruptible body and elevated him to sit at His right hand.

All living organisms are mortal. Man, the beast of the field, plants, bacteria, even viruses, are mortal and die, and thus do not glorify God’s name. But this will change. God has told us that the corruptible nature of the world will be changed when He establishes His kingdom on the earth with Christ as king. Paul, quoting from Isa 25:8, says that *“death is swallowed up in victory” (1Cor 15:54)*, and John says, *“And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be nor more death, neither sorrow or crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:4)*. These words apply to all of God’s creation, that all of creation may glorify Him.

*John Pursell (Rogue Valley, OR)*

## Note

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1. Of course, the Lord Jesus glorified His name before resurrection, as the only son of God.

"You must expect opposition & detraction if you stand for the truth. And the opposition will come from pretended friends of the truth; & under pretense of zeal for the truth, & assumed fear that you will do harm. All sympathizers with the Old Mother & her Daughters, & their innumerable progeny, will cry out against harshness, exclusiveness, & all that sort of thing. Nevermind. Heed them not. You can do no good in trimming your sails to their breeze." (John Thomas to Robert Roberts, March 1865)