

Living the Essentials of the Faith: Everywhere, Everyone, At All Times
RAISE – Revelation, Anthropology, Incarnation, Sanctification, Eternity
Anthropology Part 2 – Why does our brokenness require God's grace?

Key Concept: Humanity broke the relationship between itself and God, but we cannot restore that relationship through any human effort; we rely entirely upon God's grace.

Summary: Sin is not a uniquely Christian concept. Most other religious traditions address sin, or its equivalent, in some version of a karma-like concept with three basic suppositions. First, humans should strive to avoid sin and act righteously. Second, there will be some supernatural evaluation of each individual person. And third, in that evaluation, if one's righteousness outweighs one's sin on the scales of cosmic justice, rewards will follow; if not, punishment will ensue. Thus the solution for sin in many other religious traditions is to outweigh one's sin with one's good behavior.

However, this is not a satisfactory solution to the Christian problem of sin. The Christian tradition understands sin not as a set of actions to be outweighed, but as the condition of separation from God. Even if we overcame our own selfish inclination and were able to stop sinning, it would not undo our history of sin and separation. In the same way, someone who is in debt cannot change their situation by ceasing to draw on lines of credit – the debt itself must still be repaid.

Unfortunately, we have nothing to offer as payment for our debt, since our greatest devotion and worship is no more than what God already deserves – we have nothing to offer that is above and beyond His due. Our best hope is to stop increasing our debt; but we have no way of cancelling it. Like an adulterous spouse who cheats on a faithful wife or husband, all the responsibility for repairing this ruptured relationship lies with us. Yet being loving and faithful in the present and future is merely fulfilling the terms of the marriage relationship. It does not undo the adultery we have already committed.

We are therefore wholly reliant upon God for salvation and restoration. We need God to do more than simply ignore our sin. Such an action might be possible if sin was merely a matter of judging one's effectiveness at adhering to a set of rules. But ignoring a broken relationship does not restore it, any more than a husband ignoring his wife's adultery restores their marriage.

We rely not on God's willingness to ignore our sin, but on His grace. Grace is the term that the church uses to describe God's undeserved favor towards humanity. Grace affirms that only through God's initiation can the problem of sin be solved. In our brokenness, our debt, our adultery, we hope not in ourselves but in our Creator, trusting that His power to save exceeds our power to damn. The story of humanity, and especially the story of the Bible, is the history of God's grace extended again and again despite the promulgation of human sin. Grace culminates in God's solution to sin itself – Jesus Christ – and is finally fully expressed and accomplished through the work of Christ on the cross.