

The Consequences of Sin

by Robert Babecka

Sin is an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law. It is an offense against God. It rises against God in a disobedience contrary to the obedience of Christ. (Catechism 1871)

The Catholic Church teaches there are many consequences of sin. Among these are

- Christ's suffering and death
- Damage to our relationship with God
- Harm to Others

Christ's Suffering and Death

Passage 598 from The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly describes the link between each of our sins and the suffering and death of Our Lord and Savior.

In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured." Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself, the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone:

We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins.

Damage to our relationship with God

All sin harms our relationship with God. The Church distinguishes between two types of sins-mortal and venial.

The root of all sins lies in man's heart. The kinds and gravity of sins are determined principally by their objects. (Catechism 1873)

The repetition of sins-even venial ones-engenders vices, among which are the capital sins. (Catechism 1876)

Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.

(Catechism 1855)

For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and consent." (Catechism 1783)

Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. (Catechism 1472)

One commits venial sin when in a less serious matter he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. (Catechism 1862)

The obvious question at this point is, "Does use of artificial birth control in marriage constitute grave matter?" For the answer, check out what the leaders of the Church have said about birth control throughout the centuries in "Always a Sin."

Harm to Others

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Charity does not insist on its own way. In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all. Every sin harms this communion. (Catechism 953)

Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them:

- by participating directly in them;
- by ordering, advising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing, or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers.

Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a social sin. (Catechism 1868-9)

When we weigh these consequences against the fleeting pleasure of sin we can see why the Church teaches that sin is an act contrary to reason.