

FOUR WAYS MANKIND OFFENDS GOD

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The overarching narrative of Scripture is not a collection of moral tales; it is the chronicle of a holy God seeking relationship with a rebellious people.

From the moment Adam and Eve hid among the trees of Eden, a rift opened between the Creator and His creation—a rift not caused by God’s capriciousness, but by humanity’s violation of His holy order.

GENESIS 3:8 KJV

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

To speak of what “offends” God is not to suggest that God is petty or emotionally volatile like a pagan deity. Rather, to offend God is to act in a manner antithetical to His nature—His holiness, justice, love, and truth.

These acts are not mere mistakes; they are cosmic treason. They are a rejection of the very reality God established. Without understanding these distinctions, we risk either a cheap grace that minimizes the severity of our condition or a crippling guilt that forgets the sufficiency of the remedy found in Christ.

Let us examine four terms that describe the anatomy of this offense.

1. DISOBEDIENCE

Definition:

Disobedience is the active or passive refusal to comply with a direct command of God. It is a failure of the will to submit to God’s

authority. At its core, disobedience is an issue of lordship. It says, "I will not have this God rule over me."

Distinction: Disobedience is the act of the will against a known command.

It is the broader category that often contains sin and iniquity, but it specifically highlights the relational aspect of rebellion. A child disobeys a parent; a subject disobeys a king. Disobedience breaks the covenant relationship.

ILLUSTRATION: My mother never whipped other kids for misbehaving. She got me because the relationship was with me as well as the instruction.

The gravity of disobedience is revealed in how God equates it with the darkest sins. When King Saul spared the Amalekite king and the best livestock against direct command, the prophet

Samuel confronted him with these words:

1 SAMUEL 15:22-23 KJV

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Here, disobedience is not treated as a minor lapse. It is rebellion, and rebellion is placed in the same category as witchcraft and idolatry—placing one's own will above God's.

The origin of humanity's fallen condition traces back to a single act of disobedience. The apostle Paul contrasts that disaster with the remedy found in Christ:

ROMANS 5:19 KJV

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Adam's act was disobedience; Christ's act was obedience. This shows that disobedience is the legal mechanism by which sin entered the human race.

Furthermore, disobedience becomes a marker of spiritual identity. Those who persist in a lifestyle of defiance are described by their relation to the powers of darkness:

EPHESIANS 2:2 KJV

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Disobedience is the foundational problem. Before David committed adultery and murder, he was disobedient by staying home from war when kings went out to battle. Disobedience is the open door through which deeper corruption enters.

2. SIN

Definition:

The Hebrew word most often used is chata (חָטָא), meaning "to miss the mark." The Greek word hamartia carries the same meaning. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that falls short of God's perfect standard of righteousness. It is not merely a criminal act but a failure to meet the glory of God.

Distinction: If disobedience is the rejection of the command, sin is the missing of the standard. Disobedience implies a conscious defiance; sin can sometimes be committed in ignorance or weakness.

However, all disobedience is sin, but not all sin is necessarily conscious defiance (though much of it is).

The apostle John provides the clearest definition of sin in relation to God's law:

1 JOHN 3:4 KJV

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Sin is not merely a social faux pas or a psychological complex. It is lawlessness—a violation of the legal and moral framework of the universe.

The universal scope of sin leaves no human being exempt. It is the great equalizer:

ROMANS 3:23 KJV

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Sin is not only the murderer and the adulterer, but the selfish thought and the prideful heart. All fall short.

Sin also includes the failure to do what is right. It is not limited to commission; it extends to omission.

The half-brother of the Lord Jesus makes this explicit:

JAMES 4:17 KJV

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Sin focuses on the target. God's standard is perfection. When we aim for holiness and miss, that is sin. The tragedy of sin is that humanity, like archers with broken bows, cannot hit the target of God's standard on their own.

ISAIAH 64:6 KJV

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

3. INIQUITY

Definition:

The Hebrew word avon (אִוֶּן) is deeper than chata. It is often translated as “iniquity,” “guilt,” or “perversity.” It refers to a twistedness or perversion of nature. If sin is the act of missing the mark, iniquity is the bentness of the bow. It speaks to the depraved motivation behind the act and the inherited guilt that often carries generational consequences.

Distinction:

Sin is the act; iniquity is the state or character that produces repeated sin. You can commit a singular act of sin without that being the defining iniquity of your life. Iniquity suggests a deeper corruption—a warp in the soul that makes sinning a natural habit.

When God proclaimed His name to Moses, He distinguished among transgression, sin, and iniquity—yet uniquely attached generational consequences to iniquity:

EXODUS 34:6-7 KJV

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

This generational aspect is unique to avon—it implies a systemic, inherited distortion that perpetuates itself unless divinely interrupted.

King David, after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, understood that his outward acts flowed from a deeper corruption. He did not ask merely for forgiveness of deeds; he cried out against his nature:

PSALM 51:2-5 KJV

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

David understood that his murder and adultery (sins) flowed from a twisted nature (iniquity) he possessed from birth.

The ultimate solution for iniquity is found in the suffering Servant. The prophet Isaiah declared that the Messiah would bear not only wrongful acts but the twisted guilt and corruption of human nature:

ISAIAH 53:5-6 KJV

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Commentary:

Iniquity is the root system that produces the fruit of sin. You can cut the fruit (sin) by behavioral modification, but if you do not pull the root (iniquity), the fruit will grow back. This is why reformation fails without regeneration.

4. ABOMINATION

Definition:

The Hebrew to'evah (תועבה) is the strongest term of revulsion in the Old Testament. It denotes something that is ritually, morally, and intrinsically detestable to God. It is not just a mistake or even a common vice; it is something that God finds repugnant to His very nature. It often involves a perversion of His created order, particularly in worship, sexuality, and justice.

Distinction:

While all abominations are sin, not all sin is an abomination. Abomination carries the connotation of intrinsic repulsiveness. Disobedience is a broken relationship; sin is a missed mark; iniquity is a twisted nature; abomination is that which God says, "I hate this

with a holy hatred." It is the epitome of offense.

The book of Proverbs provides a specific list of things the Lord actively hates—not merely disapproves of, but finds detestable:

PROVERBS 6:16-19 KJV

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Note: these are not errors of judgment. They are character traits and actions that destroy community and reflect the nature of the adversary. Idolatry—the worship of anything other than the living God—is repeatedly called an abomination. God warned Israel not to bring the accouterments of false worship into their homes:

DEUTERONOMY 7:25-26 KJV

The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.

Even religious activity, if performed by a wicked heart or as a cloak for sin, becomes abomination in God's sight:

PROVERBS 15:8 KJV

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Commentary:

Abomination is the category that reveals God's active hatred. In a culture that tells us God is merely disappointed or indifferent to morality, the concept of to'evah corrects the record. God is not a tolerant grandfather; He is a holy Judge who has declared certain things—particularly idolatry, pride, and the perversion of His design

—as intrinsically detestable.

Jesus Is The Ultimate Solution

Understanding these four categories is not meant to paralyze us with fear but to drive us to the sufficiency of the Gospel. We see the progression: Disobedience breaks the relationship. Sin incurs guilt before the law. Iniquity corrupts the nature. Abomination provokes the wrath.

Yet where these abound, grace abounds much more. The solution is not trying harder to obey, sinning less, straightening our iniquity, or avoiding abominations through sheer willpower. The solution is a Person.

The apostle Paul declares the superabundance of grace over sin:

ROMANS 5:20-21 KJV

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Where we were disobedient, Christ was perfectly obedient:

PHILIPPIANS 2:8 KJV

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Where we sinned and missed the mark, He is the propitiation—the satisfying sacrifice:

1 JOHN 2:2 KJV

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Where we had iniquity twisted within us, He became sin (a sin offering) for us:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 KJV

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Where we deserved the judgment of abomination, He became a curse for us:

GALATIANS 3:13 KJV

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

Without this understanding, we will indeed find ourselves on the wrong side of God—not because God is eager to condemn, but because we would be ignoring the gravity of our condition and rejecting the only cure. But with this understanding, we are led to the foot of the cross, where justice and mercy kiss, and the offense is removed.