

# Sin and forgiveness in judaism, christianity, and islam

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



## **Introduction**

Religion plays a significant role in millions of peoples lives. There are many different beliefs that are followed around the world. The Abrahamic religions are monotheistic, which means that they believe in only one as opposed to many. The most popular Abrahamic religions are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. While these religions have the same belief in a singular, almighty god, they have their own unique scriptures and traditions that celebrate their faith. Sins and forgiveness are important aspects of religion that are different among the Abrahamic religions. Each religion has a different understanding of what types of actions are considered to be sinful, and they have distinctive rituals that are performed to atone for sins in order to become in closer union with God. This paper examines the conceptions of sins and the different rituals of forgiveness in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in order to gain a better understanding of how religion impacts the lives of their followers, particularly in the countries of the Mediterranean region.

## **Christianity**

The concept and understanding of sin is relatively similar in all branches of Christianity. In Catholicism, sin can be split into two categories; original sin and personal or actual sin. Original sin is believed to be the sin that people are born with as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God as seen in the creation story in the book of Genesis in the Bible. Adam and Eve went against God by consuming the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. This sin is passed down to the rest of the believers. In Catholicism, it is believed that original sin affects individuals by separating them from God and brings

feelings of dissatisfaction and guilt into their lives. The other category of sin is personal or actual sin. This category can be further divided into mortal sins and venial sins. Mortal sins are the more severe division of personal sin. It is believed that mortal sins destroy the charity in the hearts of the followers, which pushes people further away from God. Mortal sins involve grave matters, or going against the rules stated in the Ten Commandments. They require complete knowledge and consent for these actions to be considered mortal sins. The less severe type of personal or actual sin is venial sin. Sins of this category are considered to be less severe because although these actions go against God, they still allow for weakened or damaged charity to exist in their hearts. These sins keep believers from being able to practice moral good, but it doesn't completely sever their covenant with God. It is also believed that the accumulation or deliberate committing of venial sin will lead believers to commit mortal sins. The different types of sins in Catholicism warrant different acts to perform in order to seek forgiveness.

While the concept and understanding of sin is overall similar in different branches of Christianity, each branch has its own rituals that are performed to repent and atone for sins. In Catholicism, the Sacrament of Baptism is executed in order to free individuals from the original sin they were born with. Baptism often takes place in infancy or early childhood but can also happen in adulthood. A priest says a blessing and pours water over the child's head to symbolize the washing away of the original sin. Another way that sins are forgiven is through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Also known as the eucharist, it is believed that people are absolved of their sins

before this sacrament. Since the Eucharist symbolizes the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the people of this belief must say a prayer before partaking in communion so that their bodies are cleansed and sacred when they unite with God. There are also other sacraments of healing that absolve sins for the people of the Catholic church. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a common way for Catholics to repent for their sins. People confess their sins to a priest, who gives them penance to complete for their sins to be forgiven. This ritual includes several prayers that ask for forgiveness, such as the Act of Contrition prayer, and the confession of sins to a priest. Penance can be defined as a “ sacrament that conveys forgiveness, consisting of confessing of one’s sins to a priest” in the Catholic church, and it can range from saying a few prayers for minor sins to confessing to crimes for major sins (textbook). Children receive this sacrament before their First Holy Communion, and they can continue to receive the sacrament from then on as often as desired. Another sacrament of healing is the Sacrament of Anointing. This sacrament is often reserved for the elderly or terminally ill so that they can be cleansed of their sins before they pass away in hopes of joining Christ in heaven. The Sacrament of Anointing partially coincides with the belief of purgatory, which in Catholic theology is the “ place of torment where souls are purged or cleansed of their sinfulness before being admitted into Heaven” (textbook). There are many rituals to forgive the sins in the Catholic faith.

An example of Catholic forgiveness rituals appears in Italy. World Youth Day was hosted in Vatican City in 2016, and Pope Francis held a mass confession

to begin the festivities. He, along with many other priests, conducted confession in St. Peter's square for all of the participants of World Youth Day. Participants and workers were able to begin their activities cleansed of their sins and with their hearts more open to God. Pope Francis has also spoken and written about the importance of Reconciliation in the Catholic faith in hopes that more people will see the value of the sacrament and its power to bring believers in closer union with God. He is often pictured receiving the sacrament himself, which also brings people to go themselves because the pope is considered to be one of the holiest beings in the Catholic faith, but he still willingly goes to confess his sins to be closer to God. The examples in Italy show how the Sacrament of Reconciliation is important in the Catholic faith in a country in the Mediterranean region.

## **Judaism**

The views on sin are very different in Judaism than in Catholicism. It is believed that any type of act that goes against the 613 commandments is considered a sin. The 613 commandments can be prepared to the Ten Commandments in Christianity, but they are more detailed instructions on how believers of Judaism should live their lives in a virtuous manner. The 613 commandments include 248 positive commandments that inform on what actions to perform and 365 negative commandments that inform on what actions to refrain from doing. The commandments include various instructions on how a Jew can live a virtuous life that range from dietary restrictions to charity. Living a life of the commandments requires a vast amount of self-scrutiny and vigilance. In contrast to Christianity, the belief of

original sin does not exist in Judaism. Instead, they believe in yetzer hara, which is the belief that every human has negative tendencies or inclinations. Another term that is used in the Torah is avera which translates to transgressions. Similarly to Christianity, there are different classifications of sins, and punishments that vary based on the classifications.

Pesha is the most severe classification of sin because it is considered intentional sin that is a deliberate act of defiance against God. The next level is avon, which is the middle because it is sin of uncontrollable emotion that is done willingly but not to defy God. The least severe classification is Cheit because it is an unintentional sin. In the Jewish faith, a person must have complete knowledge of the sin in order for the wrongdoing to be considered a sin. There is also a distinction between sins between people and sins between a person and God. In these cases, sins between two people are considered to be more severe than the latter. Belief of sin has its similarities and differences to the Catholic view of sin, but the rituals of forgiveness are significantly different between the two religions.

There are varying punishments for the forgiveness of sins in Judaism. For sins between people, Jews are encouraged to consult the person they sinned against directly in order to solve any conflict. For sins between a person and God, there is a holy day where Jews are able to ask for forgiveness. Yom Kippur, also called Day of Atonement, is considered to be the holiest day of the year in the Jewish faith. It is believed to be the day when God decides the fate of his followers for the following year. Yom Kippur takes place on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei, which is the last day of the Ten days of

Awe that begin on Rosh Hashanah. Because it is the day that God decides the fate of his followers, Jews are encouraged to make amends and ask for forgiveness for the sins they have committed in the past year. Most Jews, excluding the elderly, sick, and women who just gave birth, participate in a 25 hour fast and attend special religious services. Work is forbidden on this day so that as many people as possible are able to participate in religious services. Synagogues get very crowded on this special day. In addition to the Torah, readings from the machzor are used in the services. There are many other traditions that are celebrated on Yom Kippur in addition to the fasts. Other restrictions are placed upon normal activities like bathing, using cosmetics and wearing leather. There is a pre-Yom Kippur feast that helps Jews to prepare for the upcoming feast, and there is a special meal that breaks the fast at the end. People usually wear white, which represents innocence and purity. They also participate in acts of charity where they dedicate their time and also their money in order to seek God's forgiveness. The shofar, which is made out of a ram horn, is blown after the final service to indicate the end of the fast. While Yom Kippur is celebrated by Jews all around the world, the celebrations in Israel are extreme and an important example for the Jewish faith.

Yom Kippur is an extremely important day in Israel. It is a day that creates unity among all of the people within the country. The entire country shuts down, with the most prominent changes in atmosphere in big cities like Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Airports and seaports close, and radio and television broadcasts gradually stop leading up to the holiday. People refrain from

using any type of motorized vehicles, so the streets are free of cars and fill with bikes and people walking instead. More people go to the synagogue on this day than any other day of the year. Thousands of people flock to the Western Wall because it is considered to be the holiest place due to it being the only remains of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. The national participation on Yom Kippur unifies the people of the Jewish faith, and is a prime example of atonement rituals in a country in the Mediterranean region.

## **Islam**

The perception of sin is quite different in the Islamic faith. While Islam is a monotheistic religion like Judaism and Christianity, their views on sin differ dramatically. The Islamic view of sin is described in multiple places in the Quran, Islam's holy book. Major and minor sins are distinguished at 53: 31-32 in the Quran. 53: 31 describes the minor sins as " And to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth - that He may recompense those who do evil with [the penalty of] what they have done and recompense those who do good with the best [reward]" while the next verse describes major sins as Those who avoid the major sins and immoralities, only [committing] slight ones. Indeed, your Lord is vast in forgiveness. He was most knowing of you when He produced you from the earth and when you were fetuses in the wombs of your mothers. So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him" (Quran 15: 31-32). Al-kabirhah is considered to be a major sin, and includes shirk, which is the sin of idolatry and the most severe sin that can be committed in the Islamic



faith. There are other words that are used throughout the Quran to describe sin as well. For example, dhanb and jurum have been described to be either intentional or unintentional sins. Also, ithm and juhan/haraj are used in the Quran when describing sins committed in a legislative manner, such as in marriage or politics. Finally, khati'ah is considered to be a moral lapse or mistake.

Like the other Abrahamic religions, there are many different rituals that Muslims participate in to atone for their sins. It is believed that the removal of sin can be achieved through belief and good works. In similar fashion to Judaism, Muslims are encouraged to ask for forgiveness directly from people they have done wrong against. However, there are different prayers that are used to ask for forgiveness for their sins. Istigfaar is one of the prayers that Muslims say when they are seeking forgiveness from Allah. This prayer is mentioned over 70 times in the Quran. There is no set occasion in which to say this prayer, so people of the Islamic faith say this prayer during their daily prayers or meditation. It is also acceptable to say this prayer to others as a sign of humility. However, it is forbidden for people to confess their sins out loud to other individuals. Another prayer that is said is the Tawbah. Instead of only asking for forgiveness like Istigfaar, Muslims are going through a deeper process and making a more elaborate promise in order to atone for their sins. Tawbah includes repentance, regret, disliking of sin, intention not to commit sin again, intend to stop disobeying Allah and returning to the path of Allah. Like Istigfaar, Tawbah does not include a formal confession to a religious leader as viewed in other religions, such as

Catholicism. Unlike the other Abrahamic religions, these prayers are said at any time, so there isn't an elaborate ritual of the forgiveness of sins that exists in the Islamic faith.

While there is not a distinct ritual of forgiveness in Islam, there are other events that are celebrated by its followers that includes a forgiveness aspect. For example, Ramadan is an important event that is celebrated in the Islamic faith. The main function of Ramadan is to become closer in union with Allah, so prayers asking for forgiveness are often incorporated into the times of worship. Ramadan is an important part of the fasting aspect of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims devote themselves to salat, which are prayers, reciting the Quran, and participating in charitable deeds to try to become more pure. While the forgiveness of sins is not the sole purpose of their worship, Muslims often include Istigfaar and Tawbah in their worship and meditations during Ramadan in hopes that the cleansing of their sins will allow them to be more holy and closer to Allah. Ramadan is an important community event that is celebrated worldwide, but is especially important in Islam dominant countries. For example, the Ramadan festivities are very grand in Istanbul, Turkey. The Blue Mosque, also known as the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, is a popular tourist attraction and a fully functioning mosque. Many tourists and locals visit the Sultan Ahmed Mosque to worship on a regular basis for the five daily prayers, but the population at the mosque significantly increases during Ramadan. There are other rituals that Muslims participate in to celebrate Ramadan, such as suhur and iftar. Suhur is the meal that Muslims partake in before dawn to prepare their bodies for the day

of fasting ahead of them. Iftar is the nightly feast that Muslims enjoy to break the fast. Iftars in Istanbul are widely enjoyed by the Muslim population, and they are often held in the streets. Long rows of tables line the streets, and Muslims are able to congregate and enjoy the meal together. The festivities of Ramadan are an important event in a Islam dominant Mediterranean country.

## **Conclusion**

The perceptions of sin and the rituals of forgiveness are important aspects of each religion that impact the daily lives of their followers. The classifications of sin in each religion can greatly affect how the followers of each religion decide to live their lives. For many religious or spiritual people, following the holy word influences how they make decisions and treat others around them. In addition, living in a country with a dominant religion is extremely unifying and creates a feeling of pride and community. In the events of Yom Kippur in Israel, World Youth Day in Vatican City, and Ramadan in Turkey, people are able to connect with fellow believers on a deeper level, and a stronger sense of community is fostered within the borders of each country. Finally, because of the idea in all of the Abrahamic religions that cleansing of sins will help an individual to live a more moral life and have a positive outcome after death, the perception of sin and the participation in forgiveness rituals are essential for believers so that they are able to achieve their goal of being in union with God.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are the most well known and most followed Abrahamic religions. All of these religions are similar because they are

monotheistic religions, but they differ in their conceptions of sin and the rituals they perform for the forgiveness of their sins. These Abrahamic religions are all prominent in different areas of the Mediterranean region. Their perceptions of sin and forgiveness rituals are important in different countries, and greatly affect how their followers live their lives. They also have an extended impact on the communities and countries as a whole. Overall, in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, their views on sin and rituals of repentance serve as a guide for their followers to live a more moral and virtuous life while also helping them to be in closer union with God.