The repentant Christian by saying, "I have sinned," shows sorrow for not having committed himself to God's plan of salvation. A Muslim expresses his need for forgiveness in a formula often used in the Qur'ān: "My God, I have wronged myself." So the Queen of Sheba is made to say (27. 44/45): "My Lord, I have wronged myself [by my past idolatry]. With Solomon I surrender myself to God (i.e., profess Islam). . . ." So too it (16. 118/119) explains dietary restrictions imposed on the Jewish people as a punishment for their sins of disobedience: "To the Jews We (God) forbade what We told you of before. We did them no injustice but they were wronging themselves." It also tells how Adam and Eve lament their sinful disobedience (7. 23/22): "O our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us . . . we shall be among the lost." The Qur'ān also distinguishes greater from lesser sins in the following verses (3. 134-135/128-129): "... God loves the doers of good. When such persons commit an abominable deed or when they [merely] wrong themselves, they remember God and ask to be forgiven for their sins (and who but God forgives sins?) and they do not persist in what they did wittingly." The word "merely" inserted here

1. Other verses using the same expression are 2. 54/51; 2. 57/54; 2. 331; 3. 117/113; 4. 64/67; 4. 97/99; 7. 23/22; 7. 160; 7. 177/176; 9. 70/71; 10. 44/45; 11. 101/103; 14. 45/47; 16. 28/30; 16. 33/35; 18. 35/33; 28. 16/15; 29. 40/39; 30. 9/8; 34. 19/18; 35. 32/29; 37. 113; and 65. 1. In the Qur'ānic references where the verse-number in Flügel's edition differs from that in the Egyptian standard edition, that of Flügel is given after the diagonal.
sums up the interpretation of the Muslim commentators Rāzī and Zamakhsharī on this passage and would make "wringing oneself" apply only to lesser sins.

At first sight "wringing oneself" seems a rather mild way of describing the intensity of emotion behind true sorrow for sin. But this way of admitting consciousness of sin is also common in the Old Testament. Proverbs 8. 36 says, "But he who misses me injuries himself" which expresses the basic sense of the Qur’ānic, "I have wronged myself," i.e., "I have sinned." William Oesterley translates the verse as, "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (i.e., himself). Proverbs 6. 32, "He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself," also uses the verb "to destroy" in its moral sense of "to wrong." The words and concepts in these and similar examples from the Hebrew Bible are also found in Talmudic and Midrashic works. Richard Bell and Régis Blachère date almost all Qur’ānic references to sin as "wringing oneself" from Muhammad’s early years at Medina when Jewish influence on the Qur’ān was strongest. Hence "wringing oneself" occurs at a late stage of his spiritual development.

The Arabic verb ẓalama, "he wronged," expresses the various Biblical words of the same meanings as those cited above. Ẓalama has a Syriac cognate, telam, "to wrong," used in the Peshitta Version of the New Testament and probably in the Syro-Arabic jargon in which the Syrian Christian ascetics and the Arab nomads communicated.

3. See Proverbs 13. 13; 15. 32; and Jeremiah 7. 19.
But how has the expression, "I have wronged myself," come to involve moral necessity? Ethics regards the good from the aspect of responsible human conduct. But people can err and so may mistake what only seems to be good for what is really good. Or one may seek a good because it is only useful or only pleasant. One may also seek it because it really befits a human being as such. The moral good, while it may also be pleasant and useful, cannot not be the befitting good. Other kinds of good are optional, but the moral good is necessary. It is a moral necessity, that of the ought; it leaves us able but not allowed to refuse; it guides us in what we see as the proper use of our freedom. It is a necessity that can be refused, but to one's loss, and so it is a freedom. An act held up to one's mind and will for deliberation and choice becomes a practical necessity demanding decision.

Bad use of other abilities — mathematical, artistic, or musical — is stigmatized by failure, not by fault. I had no obligation to use these abilities and so no obligation to succeed in them. But I am a human being, and I have to succeed as one. If I am a failure at it, I am at fault, because the failure was willfully chosen. I then do not become bad only in some certain respect. I become a bad human being. If I despise the moral good, I despise myself. Insofar as I accept or reject the moral good, I rise or fall in my own sense of worth as a person.

Islam and Christianity are sometimes said to hold divergent views on the nature of sin. Muslims do not regard sin as an offence against God, since this might seem to impair His transcendence. In Islamic belief God is above man’s failings. Sin cannot reach Him. Even in Christian thought sin as a personal offense against God cannot imply a strict order of justice between God and man on the same level or in God any openness to change. Both the Book of Job and the Qur’ân make it clear that

among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times (London: Longman Group, 1979) 225. Syriac was the liturgical language of the Arabic-speaking Christians and the two languages were in close contact. See R. Algrain, "Arabie," Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1924) 3: col. 1232.

the divine transcendence defies man’s malice.

Job 35. 6 If you sin, what injury do you do to God? Even if your offences are many, how do you hurt him?

Qur’ān 47. 32/34 Those who disbelieve and who avert (others) from God’s path and who oppose the Apostle (Muhammad) will inflict no injury on God and He will frustrate their deeds.

St. Thomas Aquinas sums up the matter clearly in his comment on Job 35. 6:

... the sinner, by sinning, cannot do God any actual harm; but so far as he himself is concerned, he acts against God in two ways. First, insofar as he despises God in His commandments. Secondly, insofar as he harms himself or another; which injury redounds to God, inasmuch as the person injured is an object of God’s providence and protection.⁹

Man, by sinning, offends against what is required by his own or his neighbor’s being. Rather than call sin the breaking of God’s law one might better speak of it as the refusal to commit oneself to the demands which God’s creation and salvation make upon free and intelligent creatures.

⁹. Sum. Th. 1a-2ae, q. 47, a. 1, ad 1.