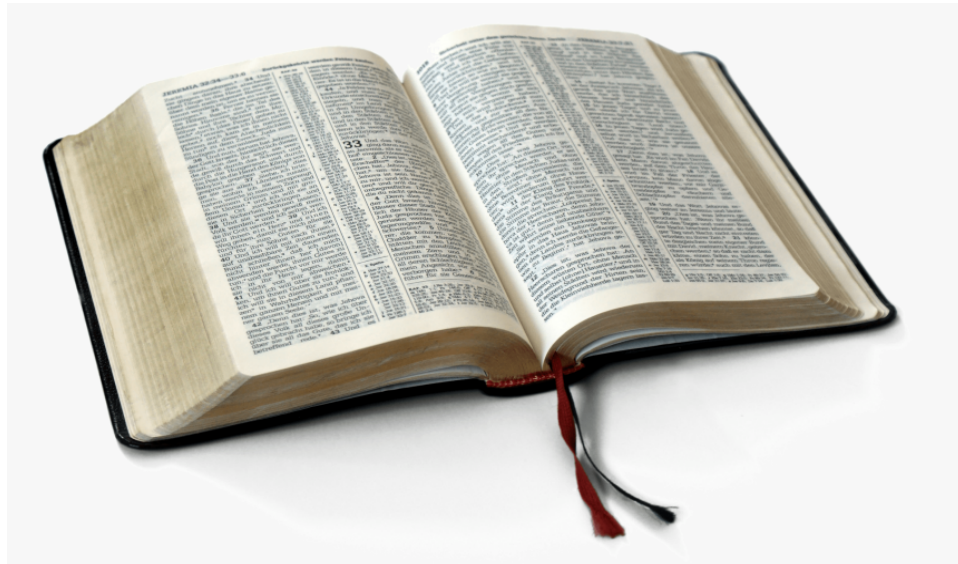


# ***“What Does Scripture Say?”***<sup>1</sup>



**A Study of Systematic Theology  
by Pastor Scott Estell**

**Wednesday Night Adult Bible Study**



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<sup>1</sup> Romans 4:3 (NIV)

## **Primary Resources<sup>2</sup>**

***Systematic Theology* in 3 volumes by Charles Hodge**

***Lectures in Systematic Theology* by Henry Thiessen (1949)**

***Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter Elwell (1984)**

***Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson (1985)**

***Basic Theology* by Charles Ryrie (1986)**

***Integrative Theology* in 3 volumes by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (1987, 1990, 1994)**

***The Moody Handbook of Theology* by Paul Enns (1989)**

***Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* by H. Wayne House (1992)**

**Dr. Rolland McCune’s “Systematic Theology 1” (1995), “Systematic Theology 2” (1993), and “Systematic Theology 3” (1994) class notes**

***Systematic Theology* in 8 volumes by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993)**

***Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem (1994)**

***A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by Robert Reymond (1998)**

***A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* in 3 volumes by Rolland McCune (2009, 2009, 2010)**

**“What Saith the Scripture?”: An Introductory Study of Systematic Theology by Brad Anderson (2011)**

**“Systematic Theology 1” and “Systematic Theology 2” by Brad Anderson and Scott Williquette (2017)**

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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<sup>2</sup>These primary resources will be referenced by author’s last name. Other resources will be referenced by title and full name of author of resource.

# Hamartiology: The Doctrine of Sin

The division of theology called Hamartiology is literally a word about sin (the Greek word, *hamartia*, meaning sin + the Greek word, *logos*, meaning word). In studying this division, we are studying what the Bible says about the subject of sin.

## Part 1: An Explanation of Sin

Before considering such subjects as the origin, extension, and imputation of sin, it is needful to first give an explanation of what sin is.

### Definitions of Sin

One of the simplest definitions of sin is the one found in:

*1 John 3:4*

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Sin is anything that is not in keeping with the moral law of God, and since the moral law of God is a reflection of the character of God, sin is anything that is not in keeping with the character of God. “Sin is sinful because it is unlike God” (Chafer, 2:227).

Accordingly, sin may be defined as the failure to be, think, feel, or act like God in the moral realm.

Following are the definitions of others:

- Sin is “a want [or, lack] of conformity to the character of God” (Chafer, 2:251).
- “Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature” (Grudem, p. 490).
- “Sin is lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state” (A. H. Strong, quoted in McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, 2:45).
- “Sin is any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God ... [in] act ... thought, or ... inner disposition or state. Sin is failure to live up to what God expects of us in act, thought, and being” (Erickson, p. 578).

- “Sin may be defined ultimately as anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator” (James Oliver Buswell, cited in Ryrie, p. 212).

## **Delineation of the Definitions**

Sin is in relation to God. While sin can penultimately be horizontal, or against other human beings (Luke 15:18 and 21), it is ultimately vertical, or against God (Genesis 39:9, 1 Samuel 12:23, 2 Samuel 12:13, Psalm 51:4, Luke 15:18, 21, and especially Romans 3:23). This is further seen in the repentant way in which sinners such as Job (Job 42:5-6), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), and Peter (Luke 5:8) react when perceiving the presence of God.

In this sense, sin can be summarized as selfishness (Isaiah 53:6a; cf. the “I will”s of Isaiah 14:13-14), serving oneself (and whatever else other than God one chooses to serve) and satisfying oneself (and whoever else other than God one chooses to satisfy), rather than satisfying God by serving Him and submitting to His sovereignty. As Erickson (p. 579) writes: “It is preferring one’s own ideas to God’s truth. It is preferring the satisfaction of one’s own will to doing God’s will. It is loving oneself more than God.” Or, as A. H. Strong (quoted in Erickson, p. 579) says, sin is the “choice of self as the supreme end which constitutes the antithesis of supreme love to God.” Salvation is the solution to the selfishness of sin (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Sin is the failure to be like God in terms of essence or being. This is reflected by such words in the above definitions as nature and disposition/inner disposition. Scriptures that point in this direction include:

*Psalm 51:5*

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

*Romans 7:17*

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

When we say that sin is the failure to be like God in terms of essence or being, we mean only in the moral realm, or the failure to be like God in relation to His attributes of goodness (such as His holiness of behavior, love, mercy, grace, wisdom, and justice), those attributes that characterize God to a perfect degree and which man may reflect to an imperfect degree while on earth. We do NOT mean in relation to His attributes of greatness (such as His sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, holiness

of being, infiniteness<sup>3</sup>, incomprehensibility, immutability, eternity, and freedom), those attributes that characterize God alone. It is not sinful to not be like God in relation to these. It is, however, sinful to seek to be like God in relation to these (as seen by the fall of Satan into sin, in Isaiah 14:14).

The fact of being a sinner by essence, being, nature, or disposition results in being a sinner by expression, behavior, and deed. Sinners sin because they are sinners; they are not sinners because they sin. The bad root of the sin nature bears the bad fruit of sin (Matthew 7:17b, Matthew 15:19//Mark 7:21-22, and Luke 6:45).

So, sin is also the failure to be like God in terms of expression or behavior, which includes:

- *Attitudes or notions.* Sin is the failure to think like God.<sup>4</sup> Scriptures that point in this direction include Genesis 6:5, Matthew 15:19//Mark 7:21, 1 Timothy 6:5, 2 Timothy 3:8, and Titus 1:15. Positively, we are to love God with all our mind (Matthew 22:37//Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27) and to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).
- *Affections or emotions.* Sin is the failure to feel like God. Scriptures that point in this direction include those that speak of such “heart” sins as hatred (Leviticus 19:17), covetousness, and sexual lust (Matthew 5:28, Romans 1:24, 26, and 27). Positively, we are to love God with all our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37//Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27).
- *Actions or motions.* Sin is the failure to act like God. Such actions include our works and our words. We are to love God with all our might (Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27).

Sin includes the state of sinners. This is reflected in the above definitions of Strong and Erickson. This means that the legal standing of sinners before God is one of being in sin, the basis upon which sinners are condemned. This state is ultimately the result of the original sin of Adam having been imputed to each and every one of his descendants. More will be said regarding this later in this study of Hamartiology (when dealing with the imputation of sin).

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<sup>3</sup>Sin is not a matter of being finite, but of being fallen.

<sup>4</sup>Such intellectual iniquity includes sinning subconsciously, such as when dreaming (see McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, 2:48-49). See Psalm 19:12’s “hidden faults” and Hebrews 9:7’s “unintentional sins.”

Sin is a matter of omission, as well as commission. This is reflected in the definitions of Erickson and Buswell above. Sin is not just being unlike God, not just thinking what we should not think, feeling what we should not feel, and doing what we should not do, but also not being like God, not thinking what we should think, not feeling what we should feel, and not doing what we should do (James 4:17).

## **Descriptions of Sin**

In order to further understand what sin is, one may give consideration to some<sup>5</sup> of the words used in Scripture to describe it.

### **Bending Out of Shape What is Straight**

Sin is a perversion of what is proper. It is taking what is correct, whatever coincides with God's character and commands, and making it crooked. The Old Testament word (literally translated "twist" in Isaiah 24:1) is translated "iniquity" in Genesis 15:16, Numbers 15:31, 1 Samuel 3:13, Psalm 32:2, 5, Isaiah 43:24, 53:6, Lamentations 4:22, and Hosea 14:2. "Picture a bent key that will no longer fit into the lock. Because it has been twisted out of shape, it cannot be used to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended" (Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, p. 147).

### **Breaching a Boundary**

Sin is crossing a line, crossing from land within the confines of God's character and commands into land that is contrary to both. It is transgressing by trespassing, traveling into territory in which one is not to traverse. The Old Testament word is translated "go beyond" in Numbers 22:18 and "transgress" in Numbers 14:41, Deuteronomy 26:13, Joshua 7:15, Psalm 17:3, Isaiah 24:5, Daniel 9:11, and Hosea 8:1. The New Testament word is translated "break" in Matthew 15:3, Romans 2:23, 25, and 27 and "transgression" in Romans 4:15, Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 2:2, 9:15, James 2:9, and 11. "The word pictures someone disregarding a 'No Trespassing' sign, violating a property line ... In the garden God posted a No Trespassing sign on the tree in the center of the garden. Man disregarded it" (Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, p. 150). See especially Romans 5:14 and 1 Timothy 2:14.

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<sup>5</sup>What follows is not exhaustive, as there are many other words used to describe sin in Scripture. For a more exhaustive treatment, see pages 209f of Ryrie; pages 564f of Erickson; pages 54-56 of volume 2 of McCune's *A Systematic Theology*; pages 200 and 204-205 of volume 2 of Lewis & Demarest; and pages 146-152 of *A Theology of Christian Counseling* by Jay Adams.

## Missing the Mark

This is the most common concept of sin in Scripture. Accordingly, the Greek word from which this concept is derived is *hamartia*, from which the doctrine of sin, or Hamartiology, derives its name. The Old Testament word is used literally in Judges 20:16: “Among all these [the men of Benjamin] were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.” It is translated “amiss” in Leviticus 5:16. To sin is to miss the mark, God’s glory (see Romans 3:23, where “sinned” is the verbal form of the Greek noun, *hamartia*). Ryrie (p. 209) rightly reminds that this involves not only missing the right mark, but also hitting the wrong one: “But missing the mark also involves hitting some other mark; i.e., when one misses the right mark and thus sins, he also hits the wrong mark. The idea is not merely a passive one of missing, but also an active one of hitting.” Erickson (p. 568) likewise writes: “The phrase, ‘missing the mark’ usually suggests to us a mistake rather than a willful, consciously chosen sin. But in the Bible the word ... suggests not merely failure, but a decision to fail. ‘Missing the mark’ is a voluntary and culpable mistake. Ryder Smith puts it very strongly: ‘The hundreds of examples of the words *moral* use require that the wicked man “misses the right mark *because he chooses* to aim at a wrong one” and “misses the right path *because he deliberately follows a wrong one*” – that is, there is no question of an innocent mistake or of the merely negative idea of “failure””(emphasis presumably Smith’s). Anything that is off the mark, off target, that misses the bullseye of God’s glory, is sin. This is why Isaiah 64:6 can speak of relatively righteous deeds as being wrong, because not done for the right motive. Salvation and subsequent sanctification is what gets the sinner back on target.<sup>6</sup>

## A Debt to the Divine

As has been previously mentioned (see the first point above under “Delineation of the Definitions” of sin), sin is against God. Accordingly it can be described as a debt to Him (Matthew 6:12), particularly to His holiness and justice. Because God is perfectly holy, the only way to do justice to Him is to reflect His character by perfectly keeping His commands (Matthew 5:48). Because sin is the failure to do so (Romans 3:23), the only way to rectify (see Romans 2:2’s “rightly” and 2:5’s “righteous judgment”) this infinite wrong is the infinite punishment of eternal death (2 Thessalonians 1:9’s “punishment of eternal destruction”). The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has paid our

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<sup>6</sup>Jay Adams (*A Theology of Christian Counseling*, p. 150; emphasis his) advises: “Counselors not only must help others to identify God’s targets (the *what-to* of the Scriptures), but also must show them how to shoot accurately (the *how-to* of biblical application). They are archery instructors ....”

infinite sin debt through His death (John 19:30's "It is finished")<sup>7</sup>, paying our debt to God's justice, and has also paid our debt to God's holiness by the sinless life He lived for us, providing the perfection we need to be justified, or declared right, in God's sight.

## **Rebellion in Relation to God's Rules**

Several words in Scripture describe sin in terms of disobeying or defying divine demands, not observing or obeying His orders, or rebelling or revolting against His rules.

One such Old Testament word is translated "rebel" in Isaiah 1:2 and Hosea 8:1. A synonymous Old Testament word is translated "rebel" in Numbers 27:14 and Hosea 13:16 and "rebellious" in Ezekiel 2:5-8. A very similar Old Testament word is translated "rebellious" in Psalm 78:8 and "rebel" in Isaiah 1:20, Ezekiel 2:3, and Daniel 9:5.

One such New Testament word has the idea of disobeying God's voice and is translated "disobedience" in Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 10:6, and Hebrews 2:2. Part of the etymology of this word is the Greek verb for hearing. Sin is not listening to God's law so as to live it.

Another such New Testament word is translated "law-breakers" in Matthew 13:41, "lawless" in Acts 2:23, 1 Timothy 1:9, and 2 Peter 2:8, and "lawlessness" in Matthew 7:23, 23:28, 24:12, Titus 2:14, and 1 John 3:4, a word that consists of the Greek word for law with the alpha privative prefixed to it. Sin is not living under the lordship of the Lord's law. To refuse to live under God's law is to be an outlaw.

Yet another such New Testament word, which also has the idea of disbelieve, is translated "disobedient" in Luke 1:17, Romans 11:30, Hebrews 3:18, and 11:31; "does not obey" in John 3:36; "disobedience" in Romans 11:30, 32, Ephesians 2:2, 5:6, and Hebrews 4:6; "disobey" in 1 Peter 2:8; "do not obey" in 1 Peter 3:1 and 4:17; and "did not obey" in 1 Peter 3:20.

Such words are a reminder that sin is an affront to God's absolute authority. The solution to such insubordination is salvation, which includes recognizing and receiving the lordship of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9 and 13; cf. Acts 22:10) and subsequently living under His lordship (Luke 6:46).

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<sup>7</sup>As has been said, Jesus paid a debt He did not owe because we had a debt we could not pay.



## **Impiety in Relation to Deity**

One of the New Testament words used to describe sin is the negated form (negated with an alpha privative) of the Greek word for worship or reverence, meaning that sin is anything irreligious, irreverent, impious, or ungodly. It is translated “ungodliness” in Romans 1:18, 11:26, and Titus 2:12 and “ungodly” in Romans 4:5, 5:6, 1 Timothy 1:9, and 1 Peter 4:18. This is a reminder that sin is anything contrary to God’s character.

## **Stumbling From a Straight Stance or State**

A New Testament word group used to describe sin speaks of it in terms of stumbling and is translated “stumble” in Romans 11:11 and James 3:2 (twice). It is also translated “transgression” in Galatians 6:1, “trespass” in Romans 5:15 (twice), 16, 17, 18, 20, 11:11, and 12, “trespasses” in Matthew 6:14, Romans 5:16, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Ephesians 2:1, and 5, and “sins” in James 5:16. The idea is to stumble (and consequently fall; so, not just stumble, but take a tumble) from a straight or upright state. In this regard, the entrance of sin into the universe through the sin of Satan (see Isaiah 14:12f and Ezekiel 28:11f) is commonly referred to as his “fall” (see also Isaiah 14:12’s “fallen from heaven”), as is the entrance of sin into the human race through the sin of Adam (see Genesis 3:1f). Our fallen nature is such that when we stumble and fall in sin, we cannot get ourselves back up—and need to admit so (“I’m fallen and I can’t get up” and “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up,” the second because of the first). The only One who can get us back on our feet is God, initially through salvation and subsequently through sanctification.

## **The Reverse of Righteousness**

As pointed out previously (see above under “Definitions of Sin”), sin is anything that is contrary to God’s character. Since God is righteous (which is conformity to a standard, with God Himself being the standard), sin is sometimes referred to in Scripture as unrighteousness (so Romans 1:18 and 29), a word consisting of the Greek word for righteousness negated with an alpha privative. As such, a sinner can be called, based on the same Greek word group, a “wrongdoer” (Colossians 3:25) and sin can be called “wrongdoing” (1 John 5:17). Sin is doing wrong and not doing right; it is doing what is contrary to God’s correct character and not doing what is consistent with and conforms to His correct character.

## **Straying From the Straight Way**

In Scripture, a sinner is likened to a sheep in that, just as a sheep has a propensity to (and in practice does) physically stray (Matthew 18:12) from the proper path shown to it by its shepherd (Psalm 23:3b), so the sinner has a propensity to (and in practice does) spiritually stray from the proper path shown to him or her by God (see Psalm 119:176a, Isaiah 53:6a, and 1 Peter 2:25). In this sense, an unsaved sinner can be spoken of as being “lost” (see especially Luke 15:3-7). Sinners go astray (see Psalm 58:3, 119:67, 118a, Ezekiel 44:10, 15, Hebrews 3:10 [a citation of Psalm 95:10], and 2 Peter 2:15). Or, as Robert Robinson wrote, in “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” they are “prone to wander” and in practice do (see Psalm 119:10b, 21, Jeremiah 14:10, and James 5:19-20).

## **Part 2: The Origin of Sin**

Having seen what sin is (Part 1: An Explanation of Sin), we now turn to its source, or its origin, including the source of sin in the universe, the source of sin in the human race collectively, and the source of sin in the human being individually.

### **The Source of Sin in the Universe**

As has been previously seen in this study of Systematic Theology (under Part 6: The Corruption of Angels, in Angelology), sin entered the universe through the fall (see Isaiah 14:12’s “fallen from heaven”) of Satan (and some of the other angels with him, as implied by 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6) into sin (see Isaiah 14:12f and Ezekiel 28:11f, particularly Ezekiel 28:15’s “till unrighteousness was found in you” and Ezekiel 28:16’s “you sinned”; cf. 1 John 3:8’s “the devil has been sinning from the beginning”), sometime between the end of Genesis 1<sup>8</sup> and the start of Genesis 3, when Satan is found tempting Adam and Eve to sin.

### **The Source of Sin in the Human Race**

As has also been previously seen in this study of Systematic Theology (under Part 4: The Corruption of Man, in Anthropology), sin entered the human race through the fall of Adam and Eve into sin due to their temptation by Satan in Genesis 3:1f. So also says:

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<sup>8</sup>Genesis 1:31 says that “God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good,” indicative of the fact that Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12, KJV) was created in an incorrupt condition (see also Ezekiel 28:12’s “signet of perfection” and “perfect in beauty,” as well as Ezekiel 28:15’s “blameless”), a condition of unconfirmed (because yet-to-be-put-to-the-test) creaturely holiness.

*Romans 5:12a*

Therefore, just as sin came into the world<sup>9</sup> through one man ....

*Romans 5:19a*

For as by the one man's disobedience the many<sup>10</sup> were made sinners ....

## **The Source of Sin in the Human Being**

As has been previously stated in this section on Hamartiology, while sin is the failure to be like God in terms of one's expressions or behavior (whether one's attitudes, affections, or actions), more fundamentally and foundationally, sin is the failure to be like God in terms of one's essence or being. In other words, humans are sinners by nature or disposition (see Genesis 8:21's "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth," Psalm 51:5, Matthew 7:11's//Luke 11:13's "you ... who are evil," Romans 7:17's "sin that dwells within me," and 18's "nothing good dwells in me"). Human sin starts within, with an unholy heart (Genesis 6:5, Ecclesiastes 9:3's "the hearts of the children of man are full of evil," and Jeremiah 17:9). "The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart" (Lewis & Demarest, 2:184).

That the human heart is the source of sin in the human being is reflected by:

*Matthew 15:19*

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

*Mark 7:21-23* (cf. Matthew 15:19 and Luke 6:45b)

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within ...

The only solution to this problem is the spiritual heart transplant called regeneration (see Jeremiah 24:7, Ezekiel 11:19, and 36:26; cf. Deuteronomy 30:6 and Zephaniah 3:9).

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<sup>9</sup>Based on the succeeding context (Romans 5:12b and following), the "world" in Romans 5:12a is the world of humanity.

<sup>10</sup>Based on the preceding context, the "many" of Romans 5:19a is to be understood as referring to all (see Romans 5:12's "death spread to all men because all sinned" and Romans 5:18's "one trespass led to condemnation for all men").

### ***Excursus: The Enigma That is the Existence of Evil<sup>11</sup>***

The most difficult difficulty in doing theology when it comes to Hamartiology, and perhaps the most difficult difficulty in all of Systematic Theology, is the problem of sin's existence. Historically, the issue has been called theodicy (from the Greek word for God, *theos* + the Greek word for justice, *dike*). In other words, how can God be just in light of the existence of sin and the evil that results from it, whether the moral evil of sin itself or the natural evil of natural catastrophes, part of the curse upon creation due to the fall of man into sin?

If God is good, and He is (1 Chronicles 16:34a, Psalm 100:5a, 106:1a, 107:1a, 118:1a, 119:68a, and 136:1a), being holy (Job 34:10, Habakkuk 1:13a, Psalm 5:4b, Matthew 5:48b, James 1:13, and 1 John 1:5b; cf. Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8<sup>12</sup>); righteous and just (Genesis 18:25's "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?," Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 92:15, 145:17a, Daniel 4:37, 9:14, and Romans 9:14); loving (2 Corinthians 13:11's "the God of love", 1 John 4:8, and 16); and omniscient, or all-wise (Psalm 18:30a, Romans 16:27's "the only wise God," and Colossians 2:3), and if God is great, and He is, being sovereign (1 Chronicles 29:11b-12a, 2 Chronicles 20:6, and Psalm 103:19; cf. the many times God is called "Most High" in Scripture) and omnipotent (Job 42:2, Jeremiah 32:17, Matthew 19:26//Mark 10:27//Luke 18:27, Mark 14:36, and Luke 1:37; cf. the 56 times God is called "Almighty" in Scripture), then why does sin exist? Being great, could not God have prevented sin's existence? And being good, would he not have wanted to prevent its existence (Psalm 5:4's "You are not a God who delights in wickedness")?

While, being good, God did not produce sin, and, while being great, certainly could have prevented its existence, in His wisdom He decreed to permit its existence.<sup>13</sup> As A. W. Tozer (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 110) has written: "In His sovereign wisdom God has permitted evil to exist in carefully restricted areas of His creation, a kind of fugitive outlaw whose activities are temporary and limited in scope. In doing this God has acted according to His infinite wisdom and goodness. More than that no one knows at present; and more than that no one needs to know."

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<sup>11</sup>For more on this subject, see the Theology Proper portion of this study of Systematic Theology, more specifically under "The Decrees of God" in Part 3: The Plan of God.

<sup>12</sup>In both Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8, God is described as "holy, holy, holy." This "threepeat" concerning God's holiness (sometimes called the "trisagion," from the Greek word for holy, *hagios*) is a Hebraic way of emphasizing the superlative of something, much like our great, greater, greatest; or good, better, best.

<sup>13</sup>Sin is wrong. God permitting sin's existence is not.

When approaching this problem (a problem for us, but not for God), a few factors we must face are: 1) we are finite/limited, while God is infinite/unlimited, so we do not have the perspective that God does and 2) we are fallen/sinful, sin having marred our minds<sup>14</sup>, while God is unfallen/sinless, so we do not have the perfection that God does.

While men have mulled over this mystery for millennia and several suggestions have been given by Christians in answer to the question of why sin exists<sup>15</sup>, the ultimate answer is known only to God.<sup>16</sup> With the apostle Paul, at the end of the day we can only say:

*Romans 11:33-34*

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?” (see also Job 11:7-9, 37:5 b, and Isaiah 55:8-9)

Two concluding points that should be kept in mind when pondering this problem are:

1. God is not the cause of sin (James 1:13; man is: James 1:14), but He does control it. God is not responsible for it, but He does rule over it and overrule it (Genesis 50:20). He is not the source of it, but He is sovereign over it.

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<sup>14</sup>What theologians refer to as the noetic effect of sin, the effect of sin upon our minds (from the Greek word for mind, *nous*).

<sup>15</sup>Chafer (2:231) points in one direction: “... [I]f [God] desires redeemed souls purified by sacrificial blood and purchased at infinite cost, the expression of such love and the exercise of such sacrifice are possible only when sin is present in the world.” Reymond (p. 377) points in a similar direction: “The ultimate end which God decreed he regarded as great enough and glorious enough that it justified to himself both the divine plan itself and the ordained incidental evil arising along the foreordained path to his plan’s great and glorious end.” Likewise, the Westminster Confession of Faith (quoted in Reymond, p. 377) states that God decreed to “permit [the fall], having purposed to order it to His own glory.” In other words, the decree to permit the existence of sin was for the purpose of promoting the perfections of God, both the perfections of His greatness and His goodness, for His glory. See Romans 9:22-23.

<sup>16</sup>McCune (*A Systematic Theology*, 1:324) says: “... [T]he whys and wherefores are simply left untouched by Scripture’s authors. . . . to delve beyond what is written is not only futile, but borders on the heretical (Rom 9:20, ‘Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?’).” A. A. Hodge (quoted in McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, 2:54) calls it a “mystery demanding submission and defying solution.” See Daniel 4:35.

2. God provided the ultimate solution to the problem through the sending of His Son and the sacrifice of His Son for sin. The solution to the problem of evil is the Son.

## **Part 3: The Extension of Sin**

In the previous part (Part 2: The Origin of Sin) of this study of Hamartiology, we briefly considered the source of sin in the human race (the sin of Adam), as well as the source of sin in the human being (the unholy human heart). The first leads to a consideration of the extensiveness of sin, as sin extends to the entirety of the human race, while the second leads to a consideration of the intensiveness of sin, as sin extends to the entirety of the human being. Indeed, there is not one who is good (Romans 3:12b; cf. Matthew 19:17//Mark 10:18//Luke 18:19) and there is nothing good in anyone (Romans 7:18a).

### **The Extension of Sin Throughout the Human Race**

When Adam and Eve sinned, sin entered the human race (Romans 5:12a) and subsequently permeated the entire human race through the procreative process (see Job 15:14, Psalm 51:5, 58:3, and Isaiah 48:8), every human being (with the exception of the God-man, Jesus Christ) being born a sinner by nature. Scriptures that affirm this universality of sin include:

*1 Kings 8:46*

“... for there is no one who does not sin ...”

*Psalm 143:2b*

... for no one living is righteous before You.

*Proverbs 20:9*

Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”?

*Ecclesiastes 7:20*

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

*Isaiah 53:6a*

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way ...

*Isaiah 64:6*

We have all become like one who is unclean ...

*Romans 3:9b*

... For we have already charged [in 1:18-3:8] that all, both Jews [2:1-3:8] and Greeks [1:18-32], are under sin.

*Romans 3:10-12*

As it is written [in Psalm 14:1-3 and 53:1-3]: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

*Romans 3:23*

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

*James 3:2a*

For we all stumble in many ways ...

*1 John 1:8*

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

*1 John 1:10*

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

The universality of human sinfulness is also implied by the universal need of repentance from sin:

*Acts 17:30b (NASB)*

“... God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent.”

The universality of human death (Romans 5:12b), the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23a), also infers the universality of human sinfulness.

## **The Extension of Sin Throughout the Human Being**

Not only has sin permeated the entire human race, resulting in all humans being sinners in being/disposition and consequently in behavior/deed, but it also has permeated the entirety of the human being, making each human being totally depraved in his or her nature.

## The Total Depravity of Man

To say that man is depraved is to say that he is morally perverted or crooked (Ryrie, p. 218), sinful by nature. To say that he is totally depraved is to say that his whole being is bad, that this moral perversion pervades his entire person. "... [A]ll men are corrupt throughout the *totality* of their being with every part, power, and faculty of their nature—mind, intellect, emotions, will, conscience, body—being affected by the Fall" (Reymond, p. 452; emphasis his).

One Scripture that speaks directly to this is:

*Isaiah 1:5b-6a*

... The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it ...

Scriptures that speak indirectly to it include:

*Genesis 6:5*

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.<sup>17</sup>

*Genesis 8:21 (NIV)*

"... [E]very inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood ..."

*Ecclesiastes 9:3*

... [T]he hearts of the children of man are full of evil ...

*Titus 1:15*

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

The nomenclature, total depravity, if not understood correctly, can easily be misconstrued.<sup>18</sup>

By total depravity is not meant that the sinner is always as bad in behavior as he possibly could be, though it does mean that his bent is in the direction of degeneration

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<sup>17</sup>Commenting on Genesis 6:5, T. C. Vriezen (quoted in Lewis & Demarest, 2:197) states: "A more emphatic statement of the wickedness of the human heart is hardly conceivable."

<sup>18</sup>It is for this reason that Reymond (p. 452) prefers to call it "pervasive depravity" and Lewis & Demarest (2:211) "holistic depravity."



(see 2 Timothy 3:13a, as well as the descent into increasingly deeper displays of depravity found in Romans 1:24f).

Nor does total depravity mean that every sinner commits every kind of sin, though it does mean that he is capable of doing so.

Nor does total depravity mean that sinners are incapable of doing good in a restricted, relative sense (what may be considered cultural or civic good; see, for example, Matthew 5:46//Luke 6:32-33, Matthew 7:11//Luke 11:13, Matthew 23:23//Luke 11:42, Acts 28:2, and Romans 2:14), though it does mean that they are incapable of doing good in an absolute sense (what may be considered moral or meritorious, or spiritual or salvific, good), due to such “good” being done for bad reason, such as to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1, 5, and 16). This is why seemingly good deeds can be called sinful (see Proverbs 15:8a and Isaiah 64:6).<sup>19</sup>

### **Deterrents to Depravity**

What is it that deters total depravity, preventing it from totally displaying its destructive depths?

One such deterrent is God’s common grace, the grace that God shows to all men in general, or to all men in common, which includes God the Holy Spirit’s restraint of wrong<sup>20</sup> (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7) through such things as the laws and law enforcement of

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<sup>19</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith (cited in John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 434) reads: “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God ....”

<sup>20</sup>As John Murray (quoted in C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God*, p. 120) has said: “God places restraint upon the workings of human depravity and thus prevents the unholy affections and principles of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them. He prevents depravity from bursting forth in all its vehemence and violence.”

human government<sup>21</sup> (Romans 13:1f), the preserving presence of Christians<sup>22</sup> (Matthew 5:13), and the God-given human conscience working in conjunction with and convicting of violations of the God-given moral law within every man (Romans 2:15). God's common grace is also what allows sinners to do the cultural or civic good discussed in the previous section.

One other such deterrent, and the greatest one, is God's special grace in the sinner's salvation and subsequent sanctification (Titus 2:11-12).

### **Some Differences the Doctrine of Depravity Should Make in Our Deeds**

If belief begets behavior, then what kind of behaviors should a belief in this doctrine of total depravity beget?

1. A healthy distrust of our moral ability. Knowing that, even though we are saved, we are still sinners (sinner-saints), that sin still dwells within (Romans 7:17-18, 20, and 23), that we are capable of committing any kind of sin, we should lean all the more heavily into the divinely-given means of sanctification, such as God's Word, prayer, and the local church, including the accountability that the interpersonal relationships of a local church are designed to provide (Hebrews 10:24-25).
2. Deterrents. Knowing that the temptations of Satan (1 Corinthians 7:5 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5) and of sinners (Proverbs 1:10f) have a source to which they can readily appeal, our depraved nature (James 1:14), we should be praying for protection from temptation (Matthew 6:13//Luke 11:4b) and prudently putting protections in place to prevent temptation from taking place in the first place,<sup>23</sup> preventing the luring and enticing of James 1:14 from taking place.

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<sup>21</sup>Erickson (p. 630) has written: "When society functions normally, man does not appear to be so bad; what we forget is that the law-enforcement authorities are serving as a deterrent. But when an electrical blackout strikes New York City, so that the police are unable to perform their duties normally, crime breaks loose in large proportions." Besides the police, other human authorities that could be added to the list of those whom God uses as deterrents to depravity include parents, pastors, school principals, etc.

<sup>22</sup>This is one of the reasons why the Tribulation will be so devastating—as believers are removed from the earth at the Rapture, so will the Holy Spirit's restraining influence.

<sup>23</sup>As Elisabeth Elliot once said, it does no good praying to not be led into temptation, then leading oneself right into it.

3. **Discipline of our children.** Knowing that their children are, like them, deeply depraved (Proverbs 22:15a; cf. Psalm 51:5 and 58:3), parents need to protect their children from themselves through such things as corporeal discipline (Proverbs 22:15b) and deterrents. When our children, in their depravity, protest such protections by accusing us of not trusting them, we should reply, as did one of my college professors to his children, “I trust you. It’s your sin nature that I don’t trust.”

## **The Total Inability of Man**

A corollary of the total depravity of man and a consequence of it is the total inability of man, that is, the inability of man to in any way counter his corruption and make himself right in God’s sight.

Scriptures that speak directly to this include:

*Jeremiah 13:23* (NIV)

“Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

*Jeremiah 17:9a*

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure ...

*John 6:44a*

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ...”

*John 6:65b*

“... [N]o one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

*Romans 8:7-8*

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

*1 Corinthians 2:14*

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Also consistent with this doctrine of total inability is the sinner’s condition of being spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1, 5a, and Colossians 2:13a).

## **Part 4: The Transmission of Sin**

As has been previously discussed in this study of Hamartiology (see above under “The Source of Sin in the Human Race”), sin entered the human race through the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. The sin of Adam in particular was significant, because it had repercussions for the entire human race, being transmitted to each and every one of his descendants, Jesus Christ excepted.

The sin of Adam, and especially its repercussions for all other human beings, has historically been referred to as “original sin.”<sup>24</sup> It is the sin that is ours as a result of Adam’s fall (Grudem, p. 494). Grudem (p. 495) further explains: “It is ‘original’ in that it comes from Adam, and it is also original in that we have it from the beginning of our existence as persons ....” Erickson (p. 631) defines it as “the dimensions of sin with which we begin life, or the effect which the sin of Adam has upon us as a precondition of our lives.” Louis Berkhof (quoted in Enns, p. 310) defines it as “the sinful state and condition in which men are born.”

By defining original sin in terms of both the sinful state and sinful condition in which all men (again, Jesus Christ excepted) are born, Berkhof is touching on the two transmissions of sin that have taken place in the human race as a result of Adam’s sin: the impartation, or the mediate transmission, of the pollution or corruption of sin (the sinful condition with which we are born) and the imputation, or the immediate transmission, of the penalty or condemnation of sin (the sinful state in which we are born).

### **The Impartation of the Pollution of Sin**

As a result of Adam’s sin, his being became bad; he became sinful in nature (so also did Eve as a result of her sin). Consequently all of their descendants would be (and are) born bad in being (and, consequently, are bad in behavior<sup>25</sup>), born with a sin nature, this pollution of sin being transmitted from Adam (and Eve) mediately through the normal human procreative process.

A Scripture that speaks most directly to this is:

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<sup>24</sup>Both Ryrie (p. 218) and Grudem (p. 494) use the nomenclature, “inherited sin” instead.

<sup>25</sup>While Adam and Eve became sinners by sinning, all of their descendents sin because they are sinners. In other words, in Adam and Eve, the order was sinful behavior, sinful in being. For all others, the order is sinful in being, sinful in behavior.

*Psalm 51:5*

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Other Scriptures that point in this same direction include:

*Genesis 8:21*

“... [T]he intention of man's heart is evil from his youth ...”

*Job 15:14*

“What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?”

*Psalm 58:3*

The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

*Proverbs 22:15a*

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child ....

## **The Imputation of the Penalty of Sin**

The other transmission of sin that took place in the human race as a result of Adam's sin (and his alone) was the immediate imputation of his sin (and, consequently, its penalty, death, both physical and spiritual) upon all of his descendants.<sup>26</sup> Because of Adam's original sin, all men are born in a legal, judicial state or position of sin and consequent condemnation.

The English word, impute comes from the Latin word, *imputare*, which means to reckon or charge to one's account (see Philemon 18). The Scriptures speak of three imputations in particular:

- The imputation of Adam's original sin to each of his descendants, our focus here
- The imputation of the believing sinner's sin to Christ, resulting in Christ becoming sin for the sinner (2 Corinthians 5:21a; cf. 1 Peter 2:24)/becoming a curse for the sinner (Galatians 3:13). As a result, the believer's sin is no longer imputed to him (2 Corinthians 5:19), a most blessed thing (Romans 4:8, citing Psalm 32:2a)!

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<sup>26</sup>The classic treatment of this is John Murray's 1959 tome, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*.

- The imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believing sinner (2 Corinthians 5:21b)

The key text on this teaching of the imputation of Adam's sin to all his descendants is Romans 5:12-21:

**12** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— **13** for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. **14** Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

**15** But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. **16** And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. **17** For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

**18** Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. **19** For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. **20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, **21** so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

According to verse 12, because of the original sin of Adam (the "one man"; cf. verse 14), death, the penalty for sin ("death through sin"; cf. verse 21, as well as Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel 18:4, 20, Romans 6:16, 21, 23a, 7:5, and James 1:15), spread to all his descendants ("death spread to all men"; cf. verse 15's "many"<sup>27</sup> died through the one man's trespass," verse 16's "the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation," verse 17's "because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man," verse 18's "one trespass led to condemnation for all men," and 1 Corinthians 15:22's "in Adam all die") "because all sinned" (cf. verse 19's "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners").

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<sup>27</sup>Based on the overall context of Romans 5:12-21, the "many" of Romans 5:15 and 19 is to be understood as referring to all (see Romans 5:12's "death spread to all men because all sinned" and Romans 5:18's "one trespass led to condemnation for all men").

The tense of the verb translated “sinned” (the aorist tense) in verse 12 is one that indicates a punctiliar, or point-in-time, past action. In other words, a particular point of sin in the past, with the sin being the original sin of Adam. So, it has historically been said, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”

In what sense can the sin of Adam be at the same time the sin of each and every one of his descendants? Some are of the persuasion that such a thing makes no sense and, thus, cannot be so. However, because God in His Word says so, it is so. So, how so? Two answers have historically been given to this question.

One answer is that the relationship between Adam and his descendants was a realistic one, that is, one that was biological, organic, or seminal. In other words, since all of Adam’s descendants were physically in the loins of Adam when Adam sinned, his sin became their sin. In this sense, it could be said that the human race sinned when Adam sinned because Adam, at the time, was the human race. Humanity in its unindividualized, impersonal, and unconscious unity existed in Adam. Proponents of this perspective point to Hebrews 7:1f, which speaks of how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (verses 2, 4, and 6; cf. Genesis 14:20) and of how Levi, great grandson of Abraham, might be said to have in some sense thereby paid tithes to Melchizedek.

The other answer, often called the federal view, is that the relationship between Adam and his descendants was a representative one, God having decided that Adam would be the legal, judicial, or positional representative, or head, of the human race. This perspective appears to be the proper one, for it is the one that fits the contrast that Paul makes in Romans 5:12-21, a contrast between those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ, with both Adam and Christ being the representative heads of two distinct groups, with the action of each head impacting all of those who are under their headship. Those in Adam share in the sin, death, and condemnation of Adam, while those in Christ share in the righteousness, life, and justification of Christ.

Some object to the federal view due to its seemingly arbitrary nature. However, rejoinders include: 1) the realistic view is open to the same objection, as it results in Adam’s descendants being liable for sin they did not individually, personally, and consciously commit; 2) God, who is infinite and unfallen, is the One who decides what is just, not finite and fallen man<sup>28</sup>; 3) the perspective of Scripture is an eastern one, one that is more corporate, collective, or communal (see, for example, Numbers 16:27b-33

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<sup>28</sup>John Piper (in an August 27, 2000 sermon on Romans 5:12-21 entitled, “Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part 5”) states: “This doctrine of original sin pushes the ability of my reason to the limit of its powers and leaves me behind. Most [all?] of us will have to settle for a large dose of mystery here. How are we connected to Adam such that it is just for his sin to be counted as our sin, and just for us to be condemned? Paul does not make that explicit. We do not doubt the justice of God; we doubt our own ability to explain it.”

and Joshua 7:1, 11, and 24-25), rather than a western one, one that is more individualistic; and 4) the representative headship of Christ is the means by which the believer is justified (through what might be called an alien righteousness, the righteousness of Christ); therefore, if one jettisons the alien guilt that results from the representative headship of Adam, he must also jettison the alien righteousness that results from the representative headship of Christ, thereby cutting the very nerve of and his only hope of salvation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>“If you are objecting on the grounds that the principles of representation and imputation are wrong in and of themselves, then you must realise that you have just taken away the ground basis for your salvation. It is only by representation that you are saved, and only by imputation that you are redeemed. If it is right for God to save a man on the basis of another man’s work [Christ’s], it is also all right for God to punish us on the basis of another man’s work [Adam’s]” (R. C. Sproul, *Romans*, p. 106).