

The Doctrine of Sin

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The Problem of Sin

The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, and the word for knowledge is *ology*. Therefore, hamartiology is the knowledge of the doctrine of sin.ⁱ The scriptures speak continuously of the presence and reality of sin in the world. From Adam's first sin through the final chapters of Revelation, God speaks of man's sin and sinful nature.ⁱⁱ In the Old Testament, we read: *"For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin"* (Ecclesiastes 7:20, NKJV).ⁱⁱⁱ Paul said, *"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE"* (Romans 3:10); *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).^{iv}

One of the more complicated questions is the origins of sin. The evidence of sin is apparent, as even children need not to be taught how to sin but to behave correctly. Therefore, is a sin just an accident of misjudgment or something deeper? We read, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9).^v And Jesus said, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"* (Mark 2:17).

These verses imply that the human heart is sinful, sick, deceitful, and desperately wicked, and all humanity is wicked in God's eyes, not just those who commit undeniable acts of evil, such as murder. And the fact that Christ died for all confirms that all people are sinners in need of God's grace.^{vi} We read, *"For as by one man's disobedience [Adam] many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience [Christ] many will be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19).

While God is the creator of all things, He is not the creator nor instigator of sin, nor did the Bible create the problem of sin in the world. God merely created the conditions that would allow sin to occur due to our free will, and the Bible points out the problem of sin caused by our decision to act in disobedience to God willfully. We read: *"Listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity"* (Job 34:10); *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"* (James 1:13).

God does not sin, and He cannot be tempted, for He is holy, and there is no unrighteousness in Him, nor does He tempt anyone or cause them to sin.^{vii} God hates sin and those who commit evil. As He declared: *"Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate," Says the LORD"* (Zechariah 8:17).^{viii} Thus, one

of the great unanswered questions is why God in His infinite wisdom and power would allow sin to enter the creation? Some even argue that God is evil because He either allowed it to exist or created it in the first place, as nothing can exist unless He willed it. These philosophers and theologians are blasphemous and dangerously close to committing the unpardonable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, calling God's works evil.

God, in His foreknowledge, saw the consequences of sin, first in the heavens and then in the earth. And despite its consequences of suffering and the awful price of death, God chose to allow it for purposes known only to Him. However, for God to hold His created beings accountable for their sin, guilt must be attached to it. It is the free-will act of a responsible and liable being who understands the difference between right and wrong—a free moral agent. Humanity, created in the image of God, possesses the virtue of a free-will choice of good over evil, but man cannot make that choice unless God has permitted wickedness to exist.

But God also foreknew that man, imbued with the knowledge of good and evil, would be inclined towards rebellion. Our predisposition towards sinfulness from Adam's imputed nature and the weakness of our flesh and soul has all but assured that humanity would fall short of God's glory. Therefore, it is only by God's will and desire that He would redeem fallen man through the sacrificial shedding of Christ's blood that we can escape our assured fate of sin and death. Our souls were purchased at an infinite cost. The expression of such love through the exercise of so great a sacrifice to God be all the Glory; the redeemed have much to love and praise God for eternity.'

Humanity was created to learn and attain knowledge, and we are naturally curious beings, growing through experience and revelation. Therefore, we surmise that if Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God and eaten of the tree of knowledge in God's appointed time and by the careful and delicate restraint of a perfect Father, He would have taught His children all the secrets and mysteries of the universe.

Unfortunately, we now live in a world where evil and wickedness abound, and we must first learn that we all have a sinful nature. Rather than blaming God, a humble person can acknowledge that evil exists because of who we are; as Daniel prayed: "*We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments*" (Daniel 9:5). We must recognize that we will not escape the inevitable consequence of our sinfulness, which leads to death. Hence, we also learn of our need for a Savior.

It is interesting to read in scripture that the angels are not redeemed as we are. We read: "*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment*" (2 Peter 2:4). But for the angels who did not sin, God has sent them to us, as we read, "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*" (Hebrews 1:14). They too are learning through the experience of the redemptive mystery of our salvation found in Christ.^{ix}

While God continually demonstrates His hatred of evil, He is also the righteous judge of it. Paul says: *"What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" (Romans 9:22)*. Paul uses Pharaoh as an example that God's power and glory demonstrated in His judgment against the Egyptians and their gods, even more, His miraculous deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage to them. Here too, the angels witnessed God's wisdom, power, glory, and to a degree, God's grace toward Israel.

But now, God's grace is made known to all humanity, as the prophet declared: *"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28)*. And in the latter days, God's mercy will also be poured out on Israel; as we read, *"For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land. The strangers will be joined with them, and they will cling to the house of Jacob" (Isaiah 14:1)*. Our sinfulness and the fallen condition is what has allowed God to demonstrate His divine grace. Not that God desired us to sin to show His mercy, but because of our sinfulness, God's mercy is revealed in His salvation and restoration.

The Origin of Sin

We must understand that sin did not begin here on earth; it started in the spiritual realm. The first sin was committed in the heavens when Satan led a contingent of angels to rebel against God. As Satan was not tempted or deceived by anyone, his sin originated within himself; hence, he is the father of all evil. Jesus said, *"He [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it: (John 8:44)*. Had man fallen without a tempter, he would have originated his own sin and become "a Satan."^x

In reading the Old Testament prophecies, we find correlations between earthly and spiritual principalities. Many of these allegorically point to Satan as the leader of this rebellion, and God's judgments appointed to the angels will also be for the sons of men who follow him. For example, we read, *"Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God:'"*

"You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering... The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones."

"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I

destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you” (Ezekiel 28:12-17).

There is no question that Ezekiel is describing a supernatural being, and careful discernment leads us to the unquestionable conclusion that this being is Satan. Isaiah refers to him as “Lucifer, son of the morning.” We read:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Five times we read that Satan exalted his will against God’s. Hence, the first sin is rebellion and total independence from God. Satan desires to establish his throne above the “stars of God,” a reference to the angelic hosts.^{xi} Satan also wanted to rule over men and all of God’s creation. Hence, he said, “I will also sit on the mount of the congregation.” Mountains in scripture often represent kingdoms.^{xii} And Satan desires God’s glory and to be equal with Him. Thus, we read, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” Yet, we know that God said He would not give His glory to another.

All these statements express Satan’s willful ambition against God, and his fall was because of his intentional, self-determined revolt against Him. In Genesis, we learn how man, created in the image of God, fell away from the very heights of God’s perfection and glory to a lowly place in the dust and depths of the earth because of similar ambitions. Contrary to the world’s view that sinfulness results from social circumstances, we know that man’s sinful nature is the sickness of his heart. Paul said:

“Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32).

These are not learned characteristics; they are inherited, and humanity is not evolving into moral perfection. The New Testament distinguishes between sin and sins; the former refers to the sinful nature, and the latter to the results or expressions of that nature.^{xiii} Sadly, the wickedness in the world today is the same as it was thousands of years ago. If not for God’s grace and the restraint of the Holy Spirit, the whole of humanity would have already destroyed itself.

God created us to receive and reciprocate His love. But for love to be genuine, it must be given and taken freely. Adam and Eve were created in God's image and placed in a perfect garden with every need provided. They did not need the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and they certainly did not need the sin that came from eating it. But for God to prove that man loved Him, He gave us the ability to choose. This test of our free will was necessary to affirm man's righteous character. And our character is the sum of our human choices. Hence, sin was only a possibility, not a necessity, and one simple act of obedience was all God required to demonstrate our devotion to Him.

But Satan had already sinned against God and was determined to destroy all He loves. We read: *"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"* (Genesis 3:1). While God allowed the serpent to deceive the woman, he was not empowered to force her hand. Once again, a true test requires the free will of the one being tested. Satan did cast doubt but pay attention to Eve's response: *"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate"* (Genesis 3:6).

Interestingly, the serpent came to the woman, not the man. Maybe he knew that Adam was given God's command not to eat the fruit, and Satan's approach was to suggest that God was holding something back from them. He also contradicted God's word, saying, *"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:4-5).

Eve contemplated the serpent's words and was enticed by the appearance of the fruit and the knowledge it would provide; hence she ate it. As the Apostle John said, she had succumbed to the temptation: *"For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world"* (John 2:16). The seed of every sin is rooted in lust, but above all, it stems from "the pride of life."

The First Human Sin

Before creation, there was nothing that existed except for God. After creation—*ex nihilo*—we might erroneously assume that something now exists in addition to Him.^{xiv} This addition would effectively change God's absolute unity, as nothing can exist apart from Him. And it is clearly understood that the world's existence is entirely null in comparison to God, yet at the same time, it is wholly united with Him.

Therefore, God is just as alone after the world was created as He was alone before its creation. In other words, relative to the Infinite One, all the worlds are sheer nothingness and nonexistent.^{xv} As the sages declare, "You were [the same] before the world was created, [You are the same

since the world has been created]. Being of absolutely no account relative to God, all the worlds affect no change in Him.^{xvi}

Pride is the elevation or consideration of one's identity over God's unity. God is the Supreme King of kings—and all creation is considered as nothing before Him and utterly nullified before His Will. He brings life to all and continually brings us into being out of nothingness—*ex nihilo*.

The root of all pride is that we regard ourselves as independent beings, separate from God's holiness, which is the oneness and unity of God. And the worship of anything but God, including the worship of self, is idolatry. This was Israel's sin against the first commandment, where God said: *"You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3)*. Pride, and hence, idolatry, was the original sin of Adam when they ate of the forbidden tree, desiring to make themselves wise like God.^{xvii}

Idolatry does not imply an outright denial of God; it is considered idolatry only because we think of ourselves as separate beings similar to God. In doing so, we separate ourselves from God's holiness and refuse to efface ourselves before Him.^{xviii} Adam and Eve could not blame Satan for their motivation or their actions. We are told: *"Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:4)*. Even though Adam and Eve's sin came as a response to deception and temptation, their sin was a choice, and they are therefore accountable to God for all its repercussions.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they immediately became aware of their sin. We read, *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Genesis 3:7)*. God had not yet approached them, and He did not have to tell them of their shameful condition. They knew it and tried to hide from the Lord. Their attempt to cover their nakedness with fig leaves was in vain. Nothing would change what they had done, and their awareness of sin stained their souls.

And when the Lord called out to them, they ran and hid from His presence. Adam and Eve had lost their innocence and were no longer pure. And their first sin immediately led to another, as Adam blamed his wife and God for his disobedience. He ignores God's question, *"Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"* and instead replies, *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:11-12)*.

Adam refused to accept responsibility for his actions, and his sin had not only polluted his whole being but would now infect the entire world. One small act of disobedience driven by lust and pride would now manifest as a "spirit of rebellion" and enter into the heart of every man and woman. God pronounced curses upon the man, woman, and the serpent and cursed the ground. We read:

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,

And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:14-15).

”To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).

”Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

Lastly, the Lord declared He would remove mankind from the Garden of Eden and drive him out into the earth away from the Tree of Life, inferring now humanity’s spiritual death in addition to our physical one. We read:

”Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22-24).

Adam knew the consequences of his actions, as the Lord had directly warned him, saying: *”For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).* Eve, on the other hand, was deceived by the serpent only implying the *possibility* of death, not its certainty in saying: *”But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Genesis 3:3).*

While the punishment of death and God’s judgments are severe, the Lord did not abandon mankind. When He confronted Adam, He called out, saying: *”Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).* This seems like a rhetorical question, as God is “all-knowing.” And He knows the secrets of men’s hearts.^{xix} While humanity continues to flee from the Lord, He constantly searches for those who would open their eyes to find Him. When the Lord called out to the Patriarchs and the prophets, they all responded, “Here I am.” For this reason, the Father has sent the Son. As we read: *”The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).*^{xx}

Amen!

ⁱ Duffield, Guy P. and Van Cleave, Nathaniel M. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology.* Foursquare Media. 1910.

ⁱⁱ 1 Kings 8:46. Psalm 143:2. Proverbs 20:9.

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- iii All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.
- iv Romans 3:11-12. Galatians 3:22. James 3:2. 1 John 1:8.
- v Isaiah 1:5. Luke 6:45.
- vi 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.
- vii Isaiah 6:3. Deuteronomy 25:16, 32:4. Psalm 92:15. Zechariah 8:17. James 1:13.
- viii Deuteronomy 25:16.
- ix 1 Peter 1:12. Ephesians 3:10.
- x Clarence Thiessen, Henry. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Wm. Be Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949. 248-249.
- xi Job 38:7. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Jude 13. Revelation 12:3-4, 22:16.
- xii Isaiah 2:2. Daniel 2:35.
- xiii Romans 3:9, 5:12, 6:12, 14, 7:8-9. John 8:34.
- xiv Matthew 11:27.
- xv Isaiah 40:17.
- xvi Ibid—*Kuntres Acharon, end of Essay 6*.
- xvii Genesis 3:6.
- xviii Ibid—*Likutei Amarim, end of Chapter 22*.
- xix Psalm 139:7-13.
- xx Luke 15:3-7.