

# Hamartiology—Doctrine of Sin

## The Definition and Nature of Sin

What is sin? Where does sin come from?

### I. What is sin?

#### A. A definition

- Sin is lack of conformity to the law of God, either in act, disposition, or nature.
- It is both an act and a principle, both guilt and pollution.

#### B. The components

##### 1. God's Law

###### i. What is the law of God?

- God's moral law is an expression of His holiness (His fundamental and governing moral attribute), which in turn creates a demand for perfect conformity to His holiness, i.e. to the "moral requirement" (see Strong, p. 538).

###### ii. What is the nature of God's law?

Law is a necessary component of God's nature

- It is not an arbitrary product of God's will. Law is a necessary expression of God's nature; it is no mere arbitrary decree of right/wrong. Law comes from the revelation of God's nature; therefore, it is something of intrinsic value. It is not rash or unwise in any way.
- All the commands and prohibitions of the Mosaic Law, for example, have their ultimate source in God; that is, the ultimate and most primitive basis for law is God's being and activity.
  - Certain expressions of God's Moral Law in the Mosaic commands appear to be almost arbitrary in nature. E.g., the separation laws.
  - These laws express God's holiness. The prohibitions themselves do not seem to be intrinsically moral, but they display God's holy nature.

### iii. What does law demand?

#### a. Perfect obedience

- The moral law of God's holiness requires positive obedience.
- In other words, the satisfaction of prohibitions cannot be delivered without the positive expression of holiness
- Perfection is required of man in all areas. It is not addressed only to one aspect of man's being.

#### b. Inexcusable ignorance

- God's law exists and operates whether men recognize it or not. Ignorance is no excuse.
- God's law cannot be modified; it cannot be adapted to the ability of man.

### iv. The requirements of God's law

- God's moral law requires **likeness to God** in affections and tendencies of the nature as well as in outward acts.
- God Himself is holy in more than just His acts. So He demands the same from creatures in His image.
- The standard is God's perfect holiness, but no one can meet it. The statement "If I ought, I can" and its corollary, "if I cannot, I am not liable," do not hold good in this realm.

### 2. What is "lack of conformity"?

Sin is more than mere acts, sin is a disposition. It operates in man's nature. Anything anywhere that is unlike God is ungodly.

- All unrighteousness is sin – 1 John 5:17
- Sin is lawlessness – 1 John 3:4
- Whatever is not of faith is sin – Rom 14:23
- Not acting on righteousness – Jam 4:17

## II. Where does sin come from?

# Hamartiology—Doctrine of Sin

## The Problem of Evil

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What is sin's *ultimate* source?

### I. What is sin's ultimate source?

- Sin in the universe originated with Satan (1 Jn 3:8)
- Sin in the human race originated in Adam (Rom 5:12–21)
- Sin in the individual originates in the heart (Mk 7:21–23, Jer 17:9)

### II. Why did God permit sin?

#### A. The inadequacy of finite man

There is no completely adequate answer. Man does not have the capability of fully answering it, for he is both finite & sinful. Furthermore, the Bible is silent on the subject.

#### B. The possible options (taken from A. A. Hodge)

##### 1) Either God could not prevent sin

##### 2) Or, God did not choose to prevent sin, because:

- It is desirable in itself.
- Or it is the necessary means to the greatest good.
- Or it may be overruled for ultimate good.
- Or its permission would involve less evil than its prevention.

#### C. A satisfactory answer???

- Conclusion: "It is obvious (a) that God has permitted sin, and (b) hence it was right for Him to do so. But why it was right must ever remain a mystery demanding submission and defying solution" (Hodge, p. 319).
- Because of the Creator-creature distinction and the ultimate incomprehensibility of God, the solution to this and similar problems will probably never be known fully, even in eternity, much less in life. Only an infinite God can fathom these things, and man will forever remain finite, precluding a full comprehension.

#### A. Born in sin – Ps 51:5

#### B. The heart – Jer 17:9 (cf. Hos 10:2, Heb 4:12), Matt 15:19

#### C. Sin is more than just actions – Ex 20:17, Lev 19:17, Matt 5:27-29

- John 8:34, Rom 6:12

#### D. Sin may be involuntarily committed

Not all sin is voluntarily, consciously committed. Deliberate intention to sin is not essential to constitute any given act or feeling of sin (Ps 19:12, cf. Lk 12:48).

### III. What is the basic nature of all sin?

Sin is basically selfishness

#### A. "Sin is the choice of self as the supreme end"; sin is the opposite of supreme love to God (Strong, p. 567).

- Sin is the choice that I am more important than God. Essentially, we declare that "*I am the God of my life.*" It is narcissistic idolatry.

#### B. Selfishness is at the root of all other forms of sin.

- Sensuality, pride, vanity, etc. (and all biblical terms for sin), have self as their ultimate reference point. *Autonomous man* is at the root of all forms of sin, a breakdown of the Creator-creature distinction. Selfishness itself cannot be predicated on or resolved into simpler elements.

#### C. Biblical examples

- Is 14:13-14 "I will..."
- Matt 22:36-37 The "Great Commandment" opposes self-love.
- Luke 12:13-21 The Rich Fool chose self instead of God.
- 2 Cor 5:15 Christ died so men would "not live for themselves."

#### **D. The preferred answer**

The best answer we may achieve is that God, in His infinite wisdom, determined that He would receive the most glory by allowing sin to enter into the world and then to save men from it. In so doing mankind would become aware of the depths of God's love, mercy, and goodness in a way man never would have had it not been for the existence of sin. As a result, men may lavish praise on God because of His kindness in saving His elect from their great (and grave) depravity (cf. Eph 1:6, 10, 12, 14, 2:7; Phil 2:10-11).

### **III. Is God "wrong" for permitting sin?**

#### **A. Is God sovereign?**

God is the creator of all entities and the absolutely sovereign Governor of all moral agents and of all their actions (Eph 1:11); nevertheless, God is in no sense either the author or the cause of sin (Jam 1:13, 1 Jn 1:5).

#### **B. Did God create sin?**

- So how can we explain the presence of sin if God decrees all things and yet the Bible indicates he is not responsible for sin?
- God ordained that all things would come to pass according to the nature of secondary causation, either necessarily, freely, or contingently, with no violence being done to the will of the creature. Whatever sinfulness ensues proceeds only from men and angels and not from God (Warfield).

#### **C. What is secondary causation?**

1. An illustration...

Let's review Adam's sin in the garden as an illustration (Reymond, p. 374):

- Was Adam aware of God's prohibition and warning respecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the moment he ate its fruit? YES.
- Did Adam have the capacity and power to do God's preceptive will respecting the fruit? YES.

- Did Adam, for reasons sufficient to him, come to the place cognitively where he wanted to eat the fruit? YES
- Was Adam forced to eat the fruit against his will? NO.

#### **2. The conclusion**

Therefore, because Adam acted knowingly, willingly, spontaneously, for reasons sufficient for him (with no violence being done to his will) he was a free agent in his transgression. But if someone should ask: Was Adam totally free from God's eternal decree? The answer is no. Could Adam have done differently? From the viewpoint of the divine decree, the answer is no. Yet each man is responsible for his actions (Rom 14:12).

### **IV. How can we sum it up?**

- God has decreed and is in control of all things but does not sin in doing so. Because God is sovereign, whatever He decrees and whatever He does in accordance with his eternal decree are proper and right just because He is the absolute Sovereign.
- God is good and opposed to evil. But sin exists, and God decreed for it to be so. Yet he is not responsible for sin. Men (and angels) sin as free moral agents who desire it. God has never forced someone to sin, nor does he tempt anyone. Men sin because they want to and, indeed, they have to because of their enslavement to sin via their depraved nature.

**People sin; God did not! The 'blame' for evil in this world must fall on us, not God.**

# Hamartiology—Doctrine of Sin

## The Imputation of Adam's Sin

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How is sin imputed and transmitted?

### I. How is sin imputed?

#### A. Imputation—a definition

- The word imputation means “to charge to one’s account,” and relates to the problem of how sin is transmitted and charged to every person.
- The basic Scripture is Romans 5:12, which teaches that sin entered the world through Adam. The interpretation of that verse determines one’s view of imputation.

#### B. Imputation—various theories

1. **Pelagian:** God created every soul directly; every soul, therefore, is innocent and unstained. Each person has his own “Fall.” Acts of sin are imputed to each person individually.
2. **Arminian (semi-Pelagian):** Man was not considered guilty because of Adam’s sin. When people voluntarily and purposefully choose to sin, even though they had power to live righteously—then, and only then, would God impute sin to them and count them guilty.
  - Romans 5:12 is not understood as all humanity suffering the effect of Adam’s sin and death; rather, because of an individual’s “agreement” with Adam’s act, sin is imputed to the individual.
3. **Realistic (seminal):** The statement “all sinned” in Rom 5:12 suggests all humanity participated in Adam’s sin.
  - All humanity was “seminally present” in Adam when he sinned and therefore all humanity participated in the sin.
  - The sin of Adam and the resultant death is charged to all humanity because all humanity *is* guilty.
  - All men “co-sinned” with Adam; people “really” sinned in Adam (thus the term “realistic” theory).

4. **Federal:** Adam is the “federal head” or “representative” of the entire human race.
  - As a result of Adam’s sin, since he was the representative of the human race, his sin plunged the entire human race into suffering and death.
  - Through the one sin of Adam, sin and death are imputed to all humanity because all humanity was *represented* in Adam.
  - Charles Hodge defines the view: “in virtue of the union, federal and natural, between Adam and his posterity, his sin, although not their act, is so imputed to them that it is the judicial ground of the penalty threatened against him coming also upon them.”?

### II. How should I understand imputation?

#### A. Considerations regarding the *Seminal Theory*

##### 1. Lack of evidence

- There is no biblical evidence that Adam was the race; nothing shows that there existed in Adam the human nature as an entity that was specifically and numerically one. This concept is more philosophical assumption than biblical fact.

##### 2. Lack of reality

- Adam was not you and me; he was Adam, with the gene pool of the whole human race in his genetic code.

##### 3. Lack of understanding

- The seminal headship/realistic theory is oriented to sinful man’s concept of “justice” concerning what constitutes fair and equitable grounds for condemnation and death.
- Realism is trying to offset “alien guilt.” It is designed to show that ultimately the guilt of Adam’s sin is not really ours. We are guilty for our own sin only.

##### 4. Lack of explanation

- The seminal headship theory cannot adequately explain how Christ escaped original sin. He was in Adam’s loins too. If He wasn’t, we cut Him off from a genuine connection with the human race. He is part of that

numerically one human nature that actually sinned in Adam.

- The parallelism between Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12-21 argues against seminal headship. Note especially v. 14.

## B. Considerations regarding the *Representative Theory*

### 1. There are two groups represented in Rom 5:12–21:

- vv. 12, 18 “Just as through one...all men...even so through the One... all men.”
- vv. 15, 17, 19 “by the transgression of the one...even so through the obedience of the One...”
- v.14 Adam “is a type of Him who was to come.”  
Christ’s headship was unquestionably that of vicarious representation. The reign of sin, condemnation, and death brought in Adam’s headship is contrasted by the righteousness, justification, and life brought in Christ’s headship. Both headships must operate the same or the parallelism is lost.
- v. 19 -- This means that through “others, not personally and voluntarily engaged, [we] come to have property, indeed propriety, in the personal, voluntary performance of another” (Murray, p. 88).  
I.e., another’s action can be forensically reckoned as really and properly ours.

### 2. There is one conclusion to be drawn from Rom 5:12–21

- The only viable alternative to representative headship is that each person must be his own representative or stand his own probation. Aside from having no biblical support, theologically there could be no hope of restoration or salvation because there is no way for “individual” sinners to save themselves.
- If each person is his own representative in probation and sin, which is what seminal headship boils down to, then he must also be his own representative in salvation. This is, of course, absolutely and totally impossible.

# Hamartiology—Doctrine of Sin

## The Extent of Sin’s Corruption—Total Depravity

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What is the extent to which man is sinful?

### I. Imputation—Representative Headship

- We recognize the concept of representative headship is found in Rom 5:12-21. There are two groups represented: “Just as through one...all men...even so through the One...all men.”

#### A. Adam represented all mankind in his sin ~ guilt imputed

- Because of Adam’s first sin all mankind was plunged into suffering and death. It is the judicial grounds whereby all men are charged guilty and liable for the penalty of sin.
- Adam was not the race when he sinned (in the sense of the Realistic/Seminal Theory), but God contemplated the race in solidarity with Adam when he sinned, and thus they sinned in him (n.b. Rom 5:14).

#### B. Christ represented all born again men in his obedience ~ righteousness imputed

- The original sin of Adam and Eve produced universal guilt for all other humans. This might seem unfair until we observe that God has countered that by extending the righteousness of Jesus to all who are regenerated by Him.
- “The justified person is constituted righteous by the obedience of Christ because of the solidarity established between Christ and the justified person [established via the believer’s union with Christ]” (Murray, p. 70).

### II. The relation of imputation to depravity

#### A. The contrast

- Though the *guilt* of sin was imputed to all mankind via Adam’s position as representative of the human race, this did not constitute men as *corrupt* (depraved)...

#### B. The connection

- Depravity (which is corruption, not guilt) results from the *hereditary solidarity* between Adam and all men.

#### 1. Guilt through immediate imputation

- We must understand the distinction that Adamic *guilt* is transmitted by direct imputation at conception because of Adam’s 1st sin and his position as *representative* of the race.

## 2. Corruption through seminal procreation

*Corruption* is transmitted by the *seminal* (or traducian) process. The corruption of sin comes from the parents, whereby men inherit a sin nature.

### III. Depravity—common views

- Humanist (and Pelagian)** – Man is basically good; the evil in man only gravitates to the edges and that is what is seen on the outside.
- Semi-Pelagian** – Man is basically evil but his very core is good and can perform acts of good based on this core “goodness.”
- Arminian** – Man is sinful; however, prevenient grace<sup>1</sup> enables man to make righteous choices.
- Reformed** – Man is sinful to his very core and it permeates his whole being; he is unable to choose anything right or perform acts which are pleasing to God.
  - “Man in his raw, natural state as he comes from the womb is morally and spiritually corrupt in disposition and character” (Reymond, p. 450).

### IV. Depravity—biblical characterization

- All are sinners**
  - Rom 3:9, Rom 5:12
- All are sinners by nature**
  - Rom 8:21, Gal 4:3, Ps 51:5, Eph 2:1-5, Matt 15:19, John 8:34

### C. The extent to which all are sinners

- Is 64:6, Jer 17:9, Rom 3:10-18, Rom 7:14-20, Col 1:21
- A person never exists other than as sinful. He does not become sinful. When he actually begins to be, he begins to be as a sinner.

### V. Depravity—its extent

#### A. Spiritual deadness

Man is sinful—this fact is without dispute (Ps 130:3). A point that is of dispute, however, is the extent of man’s sinfulness. That this is a point of contention is peculiar, for the Scriptures appear clear on the matter. The Bible repeatedly directs us to the actuality that man’s sinfulness is total. We need only read Romans 3:10–18 to understand that every man is morally bankrupt, and he does not seek God in any way (cf. Rom 3:23, Jer 17:9, 1 John 5:19). Yet some would argue that while every person is sinful, man may have some ability to do good. The meaning of Ephesians 2:1–5 is manifest: mankind is in dire straits; he is dead in sin and able only to pursue his own evil cravings. Man has no life or ability. Just as one would not ask a dead man to get up and walk, for he has no ability to do so, so also the natural man. Due to his spiritual deadness he is unable to do anything of spiritual good.

#### B. Total depravity

This condition is described as “total depravity,” which does not mean that every man does things that are always morally corrupt or even that men are as bad as they could be. Rather, it means that the corruption of humanity is total. The sinner is dead in every aspect of his being—he is corrupt not just spiritually but also physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and in every other way; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt (Jer 17:9). Thus, unsaved man is unwilling and unable to choose God or to do anything that is good and pleasing to God.

#### C. Complete bondage

When Adam sinned, all mankind was plunged into sin, and therefore “death by sin” (Rom 5:12). Though man may be a free moral agent, his will is free only to the extent that his nature is free, and man’s nature is in bondage to sin. Therefore, man cannot choose good over evil in spiritual matters. It is vital that one accurately grasp this concept, for it will color his thoughts

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<sup>1</sup>To the Arminian prevenient grace essentially nullifies the effects of depravity and restores man to the position of being capable of making right choices. Thus, the view becomes semi-pelagian in its net effect.

on almost every other area pertaining to salvation and certainly his conception of efficacious grace.

#### **VI. Depravity—a summation**

Humanity was created in the image of God, without sin, and in perfect fellowship and harmony with God. That image has been marred by sin. Adam rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. This rebellion contaminated man so that the inner nature was disposed to sin and became incapable of not doing wrong. This depraved nature is now passed down to all mankind.