

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

WEEK 4: HAMARTIOLOGY - WHAT'S SIN & WHERE DID IT START?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series, we are going to look at three systematics...man, sin, and angels.
- Our schedule for the next 7 weeks will be:
 - September 18th: Why should we study man?
 - September 25th: What is the Image of God in Man?
 - October 2nd: None...Worship Conference with Todd Murray
 - October 9th: What makes up a man and his soul?
 - **October 16th: What is sin and where did it come from?**
 - **October 23rd: None...Jeff Street here to share about work in Canada.**
 - October 30th: What are the full consequences of sin?
 - November 6th: What are angels, demons and the believer's defense?

INTRODUCTION

Of the Bible's sixty-six books and 1,189 chapters, **only two books and four chapters do not mention sin or sinners. Genesis 1–2 and Revelation 21–22 stand alone as unique chapters that rehearse the creation before sin and the new heaven and new earth, which will never be infected by sin.** The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3:1 to Revelation 20:15, abounds with the themes of human sin and the need for salvation. Sin is a major doctrine.¹

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SIN?

- **The study of sin is called hamartiology.** This designation comes from the Greek word for “sin,” hamartia. Several associated terms and concepts indicate that sin is a multifaceted and complex reality. In the Old Testament Hebrew, **khata** is often translated “**sinning**” or “**sinned**” (Gen. 20:6; Ex. 10:16). The word is also linked with **missing the mark** (Judg. 20:16; Pro 19:2). This term is closely related to the Greek noun hamartia (“sin”) and its verb form hamartanō, meaning “**miss the mark,**” “**err,**” or “**be mistaken.**”
- Also found in Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned [hamartanō] and fall short of the glory of God.”²

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*: (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 452.

² Ibid.

- Various Greek terms for “sin” exist in the NT. The word **adikia** means “**unrighteousness**” or “**injustice**” (Rom. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:12).
- The term **planaō** emphasizes “**wandering**” or “**straying**” (2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 3:17), **anomia**, which means “**lawlessness**,” that is, rejecting God’s law. First John 3:4 simply declares, “Sin is lawlessness.”
- **Apeitheō** carries the sense of being **disobedient** and **willfully obstinate toward God’s will** (Rom. 11:31).
- **Asebeia** can be translated “**ungodliness**,” “**wickedness**,” or “**impiety**” (Jude 18).
- **Agnoia** refers to **ignorance** or the **absence of understanding** (Eph. 4:18).
- **Parabasis** is a **breaking of or deviation from God’s law**. (Romans 2:23).³
- These are just some of the ways that the Bible defines sin. **The reason for so many different definitions is to show us the multidimensional nature of sin. He wants us to know His standards and expectations for us.**
- God wants us to have a full understanding of what sin is and what it looks like.

Is there a core of sin?

- A question that is commonly debated regards a central element or core of sin. **In other words, is there a place in all mankind that is the “hub” for sin? Is there something that all of our sin stems from?**
- Augustine in the 5th century contended that the root of all sin is pride. He believed that the motive behind every sin was that man wanted to live his own life without the presence or influence of God. He believed that man, when left to his own power, made decisions based upon himself only.
- Throughout history, some have thought that it was a lack of peace that was the central element for sin. They would argue that because sin always brings pain and disorder, sin at its core lacks peace.
- Others have thought that it was selfishness and idolatry. When we love ourselves more than we love God, we are going to do what makes our own hearts happy regardless of what God desires. If we have our own wants in focus, we are only going to be doing what brings us comfort, happiness and contentment.
- Regarding idolatry, if we worship something other than God, putting that “thing” in God’s place, it is going to be the driving force behind all that we do. While most people in the Western world are not working with carved images which they worship, anything that drives our decisions is our idol.
- **Sin must be understood from a theocentric or God-centered standpoint.** At its core, sin is a violation of the Creator-creature relationship. Man, only exists because God made him, and man is in every sense obligated to serve his Creator. Sin causes man to assume the role of God and to assert autonomy for himself.
- **The most all-encompassing view of sin’s mainspring, therefore, is the demand for autonomy.**⁴

³ Ibid, 453.

⁴ Ibid. 453.

- **The essence of sin is simply failure to let God be God.** It is placing something else, anything else, in the supreme place which is his. Thus, choosing oneself rather than God is not wrong because self is chosen, but because something other than God is chosen. Choosing any finite object over God is wrong, no matter how selfless such an act might be.⁵
- The point that MacArthur and Erickson are making is not to be missed. When we talk about pride, lack of peace, selfishness and idolatry...**they all have one thing in common...**a desire to be autonomous or independent or self-sufficient and not allow God to be God in our life.
 - I would say that all of the other words which have been attempted to point to the core of sin are merely words which are descriptive of sin.
 - In other words, it is prideful to think that you can do it on your own. You will not have peace apart from God and when you are on your own path with pride, you will not have peace.
 - **James 4:6 “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”**
 - To be autonomous is not only prideful but also putting yourself as your idol. You are going to sin to make sure that you are pleased. This is also the definition of selfishness.
- We can see how this is played out in the beginning chapters of Genesis.
- After receiving the commands from God to eat of any tree but not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Gen 2:16-17**), we read in **Genesis 3:6 “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”**
 - **Notice what happened here:**
 - The woman saw it but did not have God’s command in her mind. She was not walking around thinking about her Creator. As she was not meditating on what she knew to be true, she was in a place where a lie could possible overtake her.
 - She made an independent evaluation of the tree’s fruit, without God. Her evaluation was all about herself...the tree was good for food...not, God commanded us not to eat of the tree.
 - She decided that her evaluation of the situation was better than God’s and she ate it...disobeying what God had commanded her to do. Because she pridefully thought that her thoughts were better than God’s thoughts, she did what she wanted to do...not what God wanted her to do.

⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. 530.

- This is exactly what we do today, we desire to act independently of what God commands because we think that we know the situation better. We then act on our own assessment, independent of what God has said, and make the decision to sin.

Excurses: The High Calling and Purpose of Obedience to God

- Deuteronomy 27:10 “You shall therefore **obey the LORD** your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.”
- Judges 3:4 “They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would **obey the commandments of the LORD**, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.”
- Jeremiah 38:20 “But Jeremiah said, ‘They will not give you over. **Please obey the LORD** in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live.’”
- Jesus said in Matthew 28:20 “...teaching them **to observe [to attend to carefully, to guard, to keep]** all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- Only two things that we can obey: Romans 2:8 “...but to those who are **selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”
- 2 Thessalonians 1:8 “...dealing out retribution to those who do not know God **and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.**”
- 1 Peter 4:17 “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome **for those who do not obey the gospel of God?**”
- God has called (starting with Adam and Eve) all His creation to obey Him. He is *the* creator of all things and therefore has the right to call all things to obey Him.
- When we reject obeying God, we are casting Him aside for our own personal desires and choices. This is the core of all sin, a desire to do it by ourselves. A desire to show that we do not need God and that we can get along just fine without Him.
- Disobedience to God in our day and age is a rejection of the gospel. We know that no one can follow God’s command on their own, but they need to be regenerated. God’s call to obedience today is a call to submit to His way and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A CHANGE IN OUR SOCIETY⁶

- **The universal sinfulness of man is obvious and verifiable.** Sin permeates every aspect of our existence. It impacts us individually and societally. It is deeply rooted within us and is manifested continually.

⁶ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 451.

Throughout history, societies have consistently acknowledged man's natural sinfulness. Since the Enlightenment, however, Western civilization has become increasingly antagonistic to the reality of sin, especially as it is defined biblically.

- **There are four main reasons for this shift from the reality of sin.**
- We live in an age now when people view themselves and others as **naturally good.**
 - Before the philosophical shifts of the 18th century, an understanding of human depravity prevailed.
 - The Protestant Reformation stemmed from Martin Luther's angst over his own sinfulness.
 - Man is viewed as inherently good. Human problems and suffering were linked with ignorance.
 - Many concluded from the advances in education, science, and technology that man was inherently good and that as he was educated, the world would get better.
 - The 20th century clearly obliterated that illusion as man's depravity was put on display, the largest scale of warfare in history—including two devastating world wars, the Holocaust, and the Cold War.
 - The 21st century has also been rife with wars, unstable nations pursuing or possessing nuclear weapons, and increasing Islamic terrorism.
 - The education, science, and technology that brought great medical advances and comforts have at the same time devised weapons of mass destruction.
 - Societies are increasingly opposed to God's standards, even redefining basic aspects of human identity such as gender and marriage. Contrary to the modern and postmodern mindsets, the reality of sin is alive and on full display.
- With the rise of psychology and its mixing with theology, people are, more than ever, challenging the Biblical view of sin being in us to **people being a product of their environment.**
 - We no longer seek to hold people culpable or accountable for their behavior. As an example, we now pay people who do not want to work, seeking to accommodate their depravity.
 - We take no considerations for their choices in life because that would make them responsible.
 - Mankind thinks that if they can change what is going on around people then people are going to change. **But we know that even with only two people on the earth, living in the most idyllic place and time in history, they still chose to sin against God.**
 - There is no hope for mankind if all we desire to do is change his setting.
- We now live in a **morally relativistic society** where good, and evil are left up to the individual.
 - There are no longer absolute terms, but all things must be understood subjectively.
 - Abortion is not called murder but women's health. **We have made morals flexible, no longer fixed.**
 - We make all societies and individuals to have the final say on what is right and wrong, no longer God. This is because we have such a high focus on education and not holiness.

- We think that advancements are always good and prosperous. But in the meantime, there is so much collateral damage and unintended consequences.
- In other words, we fully favor what society or those in charge say is right and wrong, no longer caring about what God has to say.
- In our age, self-esteem and being who you desire is at the top of the list. Because of this, **nobody has the thought that they themselves are evil.**
 - “To speak of humans as sinners is almost like screaming out a profanity or obscenity at a very formal, dignified, genteel meeting, or even in church. It is forbidden. This general attitude is almost a new type of legalism, the major prohibition of which is, ‘You shall not speak anything negative.’”⁷

THE ORIGIN OF SIN AND PERSISTANT EVIL IN THE WORLD

- **Certainly, the origin of sin is a deep and dark mystery,** but God is not the chargeable cause of sin. Because created persons sinned, the capacity for sin had to exist as a possibility within them. Sin occurred because Satan, Adam, and Eve chose to exercise their volition to disobey God rather than to love God. Consequently, as creatures, they cannot escape accountability to their Creator.⁸

Fall of Satan

- The Bible lays the blame for the sin and death in the world on the first man, Adam (**Rom. 5:12**). In **Genesis 3** and its account of man’s fall, a creature tempted God’s image bearers and cast doubt on what God had told them. He enticed them to interpret the world from his perspective, not God’s.
- Though this creature was a literal serpent (**Gen. 3:1**), the force behind the snake was the fallen angel Lucifer, Satan, “adversary.”⁹
- **John 8:44 “...He was a murderer from the beginning...he is a liar and the father of lies.”**
- **Sin originated with Satan and is his constant practice against God.**
- God created Satan as a free moral agent with the capacity for **REAL** choice, but God did not create evil.
- Evil is the absence of good...everything God creates is good...when Satan utilized his free volition to proudly reject God, he initiated the first sin and hence is called “the Father of lies.”
- **What we know about the Fall of Satan:**
- **Satan exists and is a real person...He is a created spirit being**
- **Psalm 33:6 “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.”**

⁷ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed, 582.

⁸ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 457.

⁹ *Ibid*, 456.

- Colossians 1:16 “For **by Him all things were created**, both in the **heavens** and on **earth**, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things have been created by Him** and for Him.”
- Satan was created in the original creation
- Exodus 20:11 “For in **six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them**...”
- Psalm 148:2, 5 “Praise Him, all **His angels**; Praise Him, **all His hosts**!...Let them praise the name of the Lord, **For He commanded and they were created.**”
- For a short time, he was in a state of unconfirmed holiness...Then Satan fell
- His fall came after creation week and before tempting Eve in Genesis 3 (**not sure how much time passed**)
- There is no place in Scripture which describes Satan’s fall with absolute certainty but there are two possible passages that make reference to it:
- Isaiah 14:12-15 “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘**I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.**’ Nevertheless, you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.”
- Ezekiel 28:12-13, 15-17 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, **You had 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 ruby, the topaz and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. **On the day that you were created** they were prepared. **You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you.** By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, **and you sinned**; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. **Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.** I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you.”

Divine Compatibility¹⁰

- Compatibilism is an attempt to reconcile the theological proposition that every event is causally determined, ordained, and/or decreed by God with the free will of man.

¹⁰ <https://www.gotquestions.org/compatibilism.html>

- The foundation of the compatibility concept of *free will* is how “will” is defined. From a theological viewpoint, the definition of the will is viewed considering the revealed, biblical truths of **original sin** and the **spiritual depravity of man**.
- These two truths render the definition of “will” about fallen man as “captive to sin” (Acts 8:23), a “slave of sin” (John 8:34; Romans 6:16-17) and subject only to its “master,” which is sin (Romans 6:14). As such, although the will of man is “free” to do as it wishes, it wishes to act according to its nature, and since the nature of the fallen will is sinful, every intent of the thoughts of the fallen man’s heart is “only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5, cf. Genesis 8:21). He, being naturally rebellious to that which is spiritually good (Romans 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14), “is bent only on rebellion” (Proverbs 17:11). Essentially, man is “free” to do as he wishes, and he does just that, but man simply cannot do that which is contrary to his nature. What man “wills” to do is subject to and determined solely by his nature.
- Here is where compatibilism makes the distinction between man having a free will and being a “free agent.” Man is “free” to choose that which is determined by his nature or by the laws of nature. To illustrate, the laws of nature prohibit man from being able to fly, but this does not mean that man is not free. The agent, man, is only free to do that which his nature or the laws of nature allow him to do.
- Theologically speaking, though the natural man is unable to submit himself to the law of God (Romans 8:7-8) and unable to come to Christ unless the Father draws him to Him (John 6:44), the natural man still acts freely in respect to his nature. He freely and actively suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18) because his nature renders him unable to do otherwise (Job 15:14-16; Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 3:10-11). Two good examples of Jesus’ confirmation of this concept can be found in Matthew 7:16-27 and Matthew 12:34-37.
- The following examples demonstrate how God can be the ultimate cause of all things (even evil) while never being the proximate or efficient cause of it:
 - God’s punishment of Israel by Assyria in Isaiah 10:1-8.... God ordained the evil of the destruction of Israel by Assyria yet Assyria meant it for evil and are thus accountable for the sin
 - God’s inciting David to number the people in 2 Samuel 24:1-17...God ordained the evil of numbering the people (see 1 Chron 21:1) yet David was held accountable for the sin and was punished (2 Sam 24:10, 15)
 - God’s predetermined plan to crucify Christ in Acts 2:22-23 and Acts 4:27-28...God predetermined it, but Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews were the culpable parties