

SANCTIFICATION AND THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

INTRODUCTION

- Rather than causing despair, truly understanding how offensive sin is to a holy God alters a believer's desires, transforming holiness from a rigid rulebook into a joyful pursuit of intimacy with Christ
- Understanding our deep moral sickness is the precise medicine that makes Christ beautiful and motivates a life of holiness
- An acute awareness of sin helps believers spot compromised thinking before it manifests as outward rebellion or sinful living
- "This day, My God, I hate sin not because it damns me, but because it has done thee wrong. To have grieved my God is the worst grief to me."¹
- "People think a life of sin is a life of freedom. It's the greatest slavery in the world."²
- Perhaps no one captures the attitude believers must have when it comes to sin than J.C. Ryle in *Thoughts for Young Men*
- "For one thing, try to get a clear view of the evil of sin. Young men, if you did but know what sin is and what sin has done, you would not think it strange that I exhort you as I do. You do not see it in its true colors. Your eyes are naturally blind to its guilt and danger, and hence you cannot understand what makes me so anxious about you. Oh, let not the devil succeed in persuading you that sin is a small matter! Think for a moment *what the Bible says about sin*:
 - how it dwells naturally in the heart of every man and woman alive (Ecc 7:20; Rom 3:23)
 - how it defiles our thoughts, words, and actions, and that continually (Gen 6:5; Mat 15:19)
 - how it renders us all guilty and abominable in the sight of a holy God (Isa 64:6; Hab 1:13)
 - how it leaves us utterly without hope of salvation, if we look to ourselves (Psa 143:2; Rom 3:20)
 - how its fruit in this world is shame, and its wages in the world to come, death (Rom 6:21,23).

Think calmly of all this. I tell you this day, it is not more sad to be dying of consumption, and not to know it, than it is to be a living man, and not know it.

Think *what an awful change sin has worked* on all our natures. Man is no longer what he was when God formed him out of the dust of the ground. He came out of God's hand upright and sinless (Ecc 7:29). In the day of his creation he was, like everything else, "very good" (Gen 1:31). And what is man now?:

- a fallen creature, a ruin, a being that shows the marks of corruption all over
- his heart like Nebuchadnezzar, degraded and earthly, looking down and not up (Dan 4:33)
- his affections like a household in disorder, calling no man master, all extravagance and confusion
- his understanding like a lamp flickering in the socket, impotent to guide him, not knowing good from evil
- his will like a rudderless ship, tossed to and fro by every desire, and constant only in choosing any way rather than God's.

¹ Charles Spurgeon

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Alas, what a wreck is man, compared to what he might have been! Well may we understand such figures being used as blindness, deafness, disease, sleep, death, when the Spirit has to give us a picture of man as he is. And man as he is, remember, was made so by sin.

Think, too, *what it has cost to make atonement for sin*, and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners. God's own Son must come into the world and take upon Him our nature, in order to pay the price of our redemption and deliver us from the curse of a broken law (Gal 3:13). He Who was in the beginning with the Father, and by Whom all things were made (Heb 1:1-3), must suffer for sin the just for the unjust, must die the death of a malefactor, before the way to heaven can be laid open to any soul (1Pe 3:18). See the Lord Jesus Christ despised and rejected of men, scourged, mocked, and insulted (Isa 53); behold Him bleeding on the cross of Calvary; hear Him crying in agony, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mat 27:46); mark how the sun was darkened, and the rocks rent at the sight (Mat 27:45, 51)—and then consider, young men, what must be the evil and guilt of sin.

Think, also, *what sin has done already upon the earth*. Think how it cast Adam and Eve out of Eden, brought the flood upon the old world, caused fire to come down on Sodom and Gomorrah, drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, destroyed the seven wicked nations of Canaan, scattered the twelve tribes of Israel over the face of the globe. Sin alone did all this.

Think, moreover, of all the *misery and sorrow that sin has caused*, and is causing at this very day. Pain, disease, and death; strifes, quarrels, and divisions; envy, jealousy, and malice; deceit, fraud, and cheating; violence, oppression, and robbery; selfishness, unkindness, and ingratitude—all these are the fruits of sin; sin is the parent of them all. Sin it is that has so marred and spoiled the face of God's creation.

Young men, consider these things, and you will not wonder that we preach as we do. Surely, if you did but think of them, you would break with sin forever. Will you play with poison? Will you sport with hell? Will you take fire in your hand? Will you harbor your deadliest enemy in your bosom? Will you go on living as if it mattered nothing whether your own sins were forgiven or not—whether sin had dominion over you, or you over sin? Oh, awake to a sense of sin's sinfulness and danger! Remember the words of Solomon: "Fools," none but fools, "make a mock at sin" (Pro 14:9).

Hear, then, the request that I make of you this day: pray that God would teach you the real evil of sin. As you would have your soul saved, arise and pray."³

THE CONTEMPORARY AVERSION TO SIN

- Getting a right view of sin requires that believers look at how God views it rather than how culture defines it
- It is crucial to understand what God says about sin because there are many false understandings of it:
 - "Sin is a queer thing. It isn't the breaking of divine commandments. It is the breaking of one's own integrity."⁴
 - "Sin cannot be conceived in a natural state, but only in a civil state, where it is decreed by common consent what is good or bad."⁵
 - "Sin is psychological self-abuse...Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem...By nature we are fearful, not bad...Label it a 'negative self-image,' but do not say that the central core of the human soul is wickedness. If this were so, then truly, the human being is totally depraved."⁶

³ J.C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, 37-40.

⁴ D.H. Lawrence

⁵ Benedict Spinoza

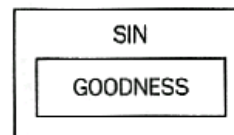
⁶ Robert Schuller, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 84-87.

- Scripture reveals that sin is not just a mistake or a minor flaw...it is a profound offense against a holy God
- However, our society is allergic to a right understanding of sin...our society minimizes sin by referring to it as mistakes, dysfunctions, preferences
- “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. 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.”⁷
- 4 reasons contribute to the downplaying of sin in our modern culture:⁸

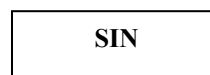
Modernity Tends to View Human Beings as Naturally Good

- With the coming of the modern era, the traditional view of man’s sinfulness began to wane, and man was viewed as inherently good...human problems and suffering were linked with ignorance
- In the false euphoria of the Enlightenment, 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 world’s philosophy is that man’s problems are outside of him...and the solution to those problems are inside of him
- However, the Bible clearly states that man’s problems are inside of him...and the solution to those problems are outside of him

Humanistic View of Man



Biblical View of Man



Deterministic Views of Humanity Have Challenged Definitions of Sin

- People are viewed primarily as products of their environment, social upbringing, or psychological drives
- Society has gone so far in accommodating its own depravity that it is reluctant to hold anyone morally culpable for almost any behavior
- This accommodation is consistent with the view that man is basically a machine that does what he is preprogramed to do
- Thus, mankind does what he does because of the external factors that have made him who and what he is

Postmodernism has Shifted our Society Toward Moral Relativism

- Today, right and wrong, good and evil, are not defined in absolute terms but are viewed subjectively
- Individuals and societies, not God, are seen as having the authority to determine what is wrong
- A strong majority of people now believe that truth and morals are flexible and subjective, not fixed

⁷ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 451.

⁸ Adapted from MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 451-452.

- Thus, each person does what is right in his own eyes with little to no concern about whether there is an objective moral standard that makes such actions wrong

Sin is an Unpleasant Subject

- In our age of self-esteem and subjectivity, people do not like to think of themselves as 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.’”⁹
- Few today want to deal seriously with this topic as it is uncomfortable to a society accustomed to hearing about its self-worth

THE NATURE OF SIN

Biblical Support

- The word translated “sin” throughout the OT, with very rare exceptions, is derived from the word *chatha*, which originally signifies to miss the mark...it emphasizes the fact that all wrong-doing is a failure or a coming short of that aim which God intended all his children to reach
- This is the most general and inclusive OT term for sin...thus, every departure from God’s law is a coming short of the purpose for which man was made, and a missing of the goal which ought to be reached
- However, in Psalm 51, David uses three distinct words to confess his moral failure

Psalm 51:1-3 ~ Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

- “transgression” (vv. 1, 3) = *pesha* = “revolt, a willing breaking of a boundary”...it refers to intentional premeditated sin...i.e. someone who knows exactly what God’s law commands but chooses to cross the line anyway
- “iniquity” (v. 2) = *avon* = “twisted, crooked, distorted”...it refers to the internal moral corruption or perversion of character...i.e. how sin warps a person’s heart and twists their conscience so that they are “bent out of shape”
- “sin” (vv. 2, 3) = *chatha* = “to miss the mark, target”...it refers to failing to live up to God’s holy standard or wandering off the path of righteousness
- The words for “sin” in the NT involve a number of different Greek words to describe the nature of sin:

Romans 1:18 ~ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

1 John 3:4 ~ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 5:17 ~ All unrighteousness is sin.

- *Hamartia* - a general word used to describe sinful acts...it emphasizes the concept of missing the mark or aim...it was used in classical Greek of “throwing a spear and missing the target”...in the singular it denotes the state of sinfulness and refers to falling short of God’s moral standard
- *Paraptoma* - denotes a false step in contrast to a true one (cf. Rom 4:25; Gal 6:1; Eph 2:1)

⁹ Millard Erickson

- *Parabasis* - means stepping aside, a deviation from a true faith (cf. Rom 2:23; 4:15; Gal 3:19)
- *Anomia* - means lawlessness or iniquity (cf. 2 Cor 6:14; 2 Thess 2:3); active rebellion against God's sovereign authority
- *Adikia* – what is unrighteous; a twisting of what is good, true, and beautiful

Working Definition

- Our understanding of sin must be related to the character of God...his holiness cannot be defined by comparison with anything that we know in this life...this is where our definition of sin must begin
- Anything that does not correspond to the nature of God is sin
- Sin draws its essential character of sinfulness from the fact that it is unlike God
- Sin is anything that rebels against God in thought, word, or deed
- It is missing the mark of God's standard...it is a deification of self and a dethronement of God
- Sin is not just breaking rules...it is a desire to replace God with self
- Sin amounts to cosmic treason...due to choosing the creature over the Creator

Romans 1:25 ~ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

- "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God."¹⁰
- "Sin is not just a minor deviation, an error, a false step. It is gross aberration from God's original purpose for all created rational beings, angelic and human alike."¹¹
- "Sin is worse than hell; for the pains of hell are a burden to the creature only; but sin is a burden to God."¹²
- Such definitions highlight how serious sin really is

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

Not From God

Habakkuk 1:13 ~ Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor

James 1:13 ~ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Job 34:10 ~ Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to do wrong.

- God himself did not sin, nor is he to be blamed for sin...God is not the source of sin!
- But what about those verses that seem to indicate that God causes evil events?

Exodus 4:21; 7:3 ~ I will harden Pharaoh's heart

1 Samuel 16:14 ~ an evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul

2 Samuel 12:15, 18 ~ So Nathan went to his house. Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick...Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died

¹⁰ The Westminster Confession

¹¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer

¹² Thomas Watson

2 Samuel 24:1 ~ The Lord incited David to take a census of the people (cf. 1 Chron 21:1)

1 Kings 22:23 ~ Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you

Job 1:7-8 ~ The Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

Isaiah 45:7 ~ I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do these things

Lamentations 3:38 ~ Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

Amos 3:6 ~ If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?

Acts 2:23 ~ this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death

- Considering the weight of this Scriptural testimony, we must conclude that God actually ordains (not simply permits) evil in such a way that he is not morally responsible for it
- "God does bring about sinful human actions. To deny this, or to charge God with wickedness on account of it, is not open to a Bible-believing Christian. Somehow, we must confess both that God has a role in bringing evil about, and that in doing so he is holy and blameless."¹³
- How is it that God is not the culpable cause of sin, even though he ordains that it occur?
- The answer that Scripture seems to give can be boiled down to two propositions.
 1. Though God is the *ultimate* cause of all things (even evil), he is never the *proximate*, or *efficient*, cause of evil
 2. Scripture regards only the efficient cause of evil as the chargeable or blameworthy party
- Properly understanding God's relationship with sin is called Divine Compatibilism which states that God predetermines wicked events in such a way that he is not directly responsible for the wicked free acts of men...his determination of wicked events is compatible both with human freedom and responsibility
- When people perform free acts (not constrained in their actions), they do that which God wants them to do
 1. God sovereignly predetermines all events – Eph 1:11
 2. God uses all things to fulfill his purposes and even uses evil for his glory and our good – Gen 50:20
 3. God predetermines sin but in such a way that man is the responsible party – Acts 2:23; 4:27-28
 4. In this process, God never does evil nor tempts anyone to do evil – James 1:13
 5. Man chooses freely in that he does what he wants to do and is therefore blameworthy
- 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 (i.e. the chargeable or blameworthy party)
 - God punished Israel by Assyria in Isaiah 10:1-8...yet Assyria thus accountable for its sin
 - God incited David to number the people in 2 Sam 24:1-17...but 1 Chron 21:1 indicates that it was Satan who motivated it...yet David was held accountable for the sin and was punished (2 Sam 24:10, 15)
 - God predetermined the plan to crucify Christ in Acts 2:22-23 and Acts 4:27-28...but Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews were the culpable parties

¹³ John Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 175.

From Satan

- Sin originated with Satan and he is held accountable for being the source of sin

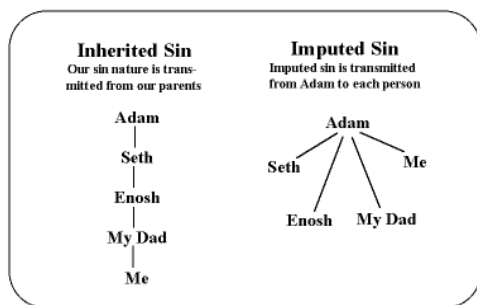
John 8:44 ~ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies

1 John 3:8 ~ The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning...

- God created Satan as a free moral agent with the capacity for choice
- When Satan utilized his free volition to proudly reject God (Is 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-19), he committed the first sin (sometime between Gen 1 and Gen 3...see Job 38:4-7)

From Adam to the Human Race

- How did Adam's sin affect the human race? ➔ In two ways:
 - Inherited Corruption/Inherited Sin – What we are
 - Inherited Guilt/Imputed Sin – What Adam did



- We are counted guilty because of Adam's sin...all mankind sinned in Adam and, therefore, inherit his guilt

1 Corinthians 15:22 ~ For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ, all shall be made alive.

Romans 5:12 ~ Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned

- Notice the phrase "because all sinned"...the past tense indicates that all people sinned when Adam did
- In some way, mankind participated in Adam's sin...this results in two views of the origin of sin

1. Federal/Representative View

- This view holds that Adam was our representative (or federal head) and therefore stood the test for all
- His act was considered their act and because he failed, we are guilty of sin as well
- "Adam's guilt is our guilt. While affirming that a corrupt nature is passed down from Adam, representative headship teaches that all people are condemned because of their direct relationship to Adam. The representative-headship view (often called federal headship) asserts that the action of a representative is determinative for all members united to him. When Adam sinned, he represented all people; therefore, his sin is reckoned to his descendants."¹⁴

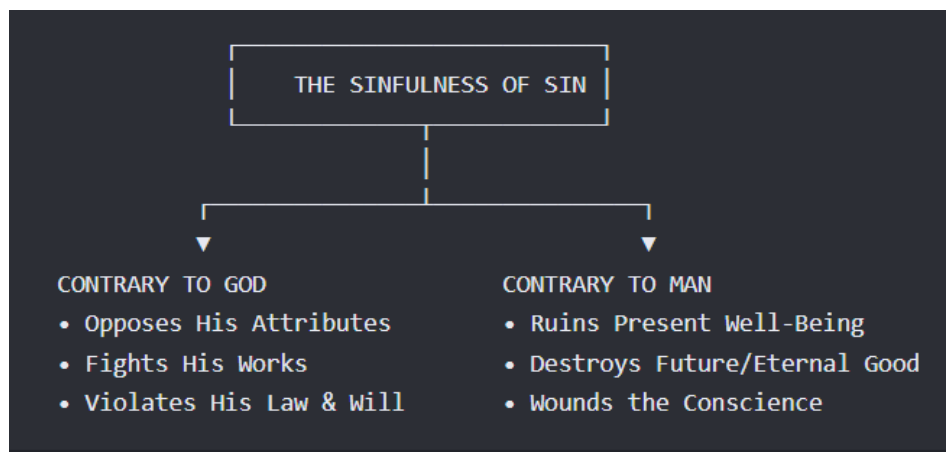
¹⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 464.

2. Augustinian/Seminal View

- This view says that man was not merely represented by Adam but was actually joined with Adam
- All were present in Adam in seminal form since the human race is numerically one in Adam
- A biological and genealogical union between Adam and his descendants exists so that when Adam sinned all sinned by actual participation...thus, Adam's act is their act
- All men are co-sinners with Adam in the fullest sense of the word
- Perhaps the best solution is a combination of the federal and seminal views
- Bottom line: Adam's posterity can never claim to be innocent...they come into existence as sinners by nature and are thus guilty before God...**all die because all sinned AND all die because one sinned**

REGAINING THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

- As believers, we likely don't hate sin enough...true, the penalty of sin has been broken in justification...and the power of sin has been broken in progressive sanctification
- However, sin remains in us...indwelling sin continues to dog us and nip at our heels
- This requires that we go to war with sin...because none of us is above being deceived by sin
- Sin wants to have its way with us...we are prone to falling prey to the sin that resides in our flesh
- We must understand that sin is a cancer to be killed rather than something to be trifled with
- How do we resist sin in our pursuit of holiness? → we must understand the great destruction that sin can inflict...since sin has never benefited anyone ever...it has only brought devastation and ruin
- Pursing holiness requires that believers get a right view of how vile and miserable a thing sin really is
- This is necessary because sin looks pleasant to us...we tolerate it...yet, when unmasked, it is truly seen for what it is...how hateful and wicked and wretched it really is
- We must understand that knowing and obeying Christ is more wonderful than anything sin could ever offer
- We must do the unpleasant work of staring sin in the face so that we would be stirred up to see it in all of its ugliness and vileness
- Ralph Venning published *The Sinfulness of Sin* in 1669, four years after the Great Plague of London...and he called sin "the plague of plagues"
- He did not write the book to leave readers in despair, but to strip away the disguises sin wears...so that we see the true, deadly color of sin
- Realizing the disease of sin is the catalyst that drives a person to seek the cure found only in the forgiving mercy and atoning blood of Jesus Christ
- He noted two primary ways that sin is so heinous



Sin's Contrariety to God¹⁵

- Venning famously wrote that sin is “enmity itself”...and if sin were able, it would “ungod God” by attempting to dethrone him
 1. Sin is contrary to the nature of God
 2. Sin is contrary to all the names and attributes of God. It sets itself in opposition to them all and attacks who God is.
 - a. It deposes the sovereignty of God as much as in it lies.
 - b. It denies God’s all-sufficiency
 - c. It challenges the justice of God
 - d. It disowns his omniscience
 - e. It despises the riches of God’s goodness
 - f. It turns his grace into wantonness

“In short, sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love, as one writer prettily expresses this ugly thing. We may go on and say, it is the upbraiding of his providence (Psalm 50), the scoff of his promise (2 Peter 3.3-4), the reproach of his wisdom (Isaiah 29.16). And as is said of the Man of Sin (i.e. who is made up of sin) it opposes and exalts itself above all that is called God (and above all that God is called), so that it as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing itself as if it were God (2 Thessalonians 2.4).”
 3. Sin is contrary to the works of God – while everything God created was “very good” (Gen 1:31), the work of sin is deformed, monstrous, and produces nothing but disorder, confusion, and ruin
 4. Sin is contrary to the law and will of God, to all the rules and orders of his appointment – sin is an “anti-will” to God in that it has broken every commandment and actively endeavors to make God's holy, just, and good laws void and ineffective
 5. Sin is contrary to the image of God, in which man was made
 6. Sin is contrary to the people and children of God
 7. Sin is contrary to, and set against the glory of God, and all that should and would give glory to him
 8. Sin is contrary and opposite to the being and existence of God
- “Before we pass on, let me beseech you, whoever you are who read this, to pause a little and consider what is said. For what is said of sin is to be considered by the sinner, and is meant of your and my sin. Shall I not plead for God and your soul, and entreat you to be on God’s side, and to depart from the tents of wickedness? Poor soul! Can you find it in your heart to hug and embrace such a monster as this? Will you love that which hates God, and which God hates? God forbid! Will you join yourself to that which is nothing but contrariety to God, and all that is good? Oh, say to this idol, this devil, get hence, what have I to do with you, you (Elymas) sorcerer, you full of all malignity and mischief; you child, yea father of the Devil, you who are the founder of Hell, an enemy to all righteousness, who ceases not to pervert the right ways of the Lord, and to reproach the living God! Away! away! Shall I be seduced by you to grieve the God

¹⁵ Adapted from Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*

of all my joy, to displease the God of all my comfort, to vex the God of all my contentment, to do evil against a good God, by whom I live, move, and have my being? Oh no! Thus consider these things, and do not go on to provoke the Lord, lest a worse thing befall you than any hitherto. Do not contend with God who is stronger than you are, who is able when he will (and he will one day be found both able and willing enough) to turn the wicked into hell, the element of sin and sinners, who shall go into it as into their own place, as Judas did (Acts 1.25). Oh, learn to pity your own soul, for he who sins offends and wrongs God, but also wrongs and destroys his own soul, or, as some read the text, despises his own soul (Proverbs 8.36). Oh, think of it! what! have you no value, no regard for your soul? Will you neglect and despise it, as if it were good for nothing, but to be damned, and go to Hell? Will you be *felo de se*, a self-soul-murderer? Shall your perdition be of yourself? Oh, look to yourself, for sin, notwithstanding all its flattering pretences, is against you, and seeks nothing less than your ruin and damnation.”

Sin's Contrariety to Man¹⁶

- “No sooner is the law transgressed but God and man are joint-sufferers, God in his glory and man in his good. Man's suffering follows at the heel of sin, indeed, as he suffers by sinning, so in sinning; suffering and sinning involve each other.”
 1. Sin is against the good of man in the present life
 - a. Against the good of man's body
 - b. Against the good of man's soul
 - Sin is against man's rest and ease
 - Sin is against man's comfort and joy
 - Sin is against man's health
 - Sin is against the quiet of a man's natural conscience
 - Sin is against the beauty of man
 - Sin is against the loving co-habitation of soul and body
 2. Sin is against the good of man in the life to come
 - a. God damns no man except for sin
 - b. By sin all men are liable to condemnation
 - c. Some men have been, are, and will be damned for sin
 - d. Damnation is the greatest evil of suffering which can befall man
- “Sin will take you further than you intended to go, sin will keep you away longer than you intended to stay, and sin will cost you more than you wanted to pay”
- “I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term than to gain a distaste for it because of a superior satisfaction in God”¹⁷

¹⁶ Adapted from Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*

¹⁷ John Piper