

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SIN

The Problem of the Universe

Key Questions

- What is wrong with our world?
- How does one's view of God frame his or her view of the problem?

The Christian Prescription

- “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world. According to Christianity, our biggest problem is sin. Yet the concept of “sin” is offensive or ludicrous to many. This is because we don’t understand what Christians mean by the term” (Keller, *The Reason for God*, 159)

Introduction

- In the Bible, sin refers to **rebellion** against God
- Sin is both a **condition**, inherited from Adam (Rom 5:12-21), and an **action**—manifesting in thought, word, and action—against God
- There are over 50 terms in the Bible, describing the nature of sin
- Fundamentally, sin is **lawlessness** (1 Jn 3:4). That is, we have broken God's command and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)
- At a much deeper level, sin is **idolatry** (Col 3:5; 1 Jn 5:21) in that we have replaced the love of God for false gods
- The consequences of sin are pervasive (Rom 3:9-20), involving spiritual, physical, volitional, intellectual, and affective

Sin Enters Eden

- Gen 1:31 declares that God's creation at the end of the sixth day was "very good"
- However, everything good becomes undone sometime between Gen 2:3 and Gen 3, when the serpent enters the garden of Eden
- We know very little about the first sin, except that it manifested itself in an angelic rebellion
- Jude 6 explains that some angels "did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these (the Lord) has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day"
- 1 Tim 3:6 suggests that the fall of the devil was the result of pride (cf. Eze 28:11-19)

Sin Enters Eden

- While sin originated in the world of spirits, it entered into humanity when Eve ate the forbidden fruit, with Adam joining later (Gen 3:6)
- Immediately the two realize their nakedness and experience shame in God's presence for the first time (Gen 3:7)
- As a result, God curses Adam and Eve, the serpent, and the ground with original sin entering the world
- Because of Adam's sin, the entire human race inherited both guilt and corruption (Rom 5:12-21)
- As our federal head, Adam's sin has been imputed to us, and we bear the consequences as those who have participated "in Adam" (1 Cor 15:22) in his rebellion
- Thus, humanity is by nature spiritually dead in transgressions, disobedient, and deserving wrath (Eph 2:1-3)

Sin Spreads

- At the end of Gen 3, God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden
- The death penalty was imposed when God expelled the couple from the garden. Their exile barred them from access to the “the tree of life” (Gen 3:22-24)
- A “proto-evangelium” (early gospel) is introduced in Gen 3:15, promising an offspring-mediator who will crush the head of the serpent:
- “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”
- The struggle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman first rears its ugly head in Cain’s murder of Abel (4:8) and the serpent’s first temptation (Gen 5:22-24)

Sin Spreads

- By the time we get into Gen 6, the wickedness of the human race has become so great “that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5)
- God wiped out the earth with a universal flood and decided to reboot humanity again (Gen 6-9)
- As Noah’s descendants multiplied, so did their wickedness, culminating in plans for a self-aggrandizing Tower of Babel (Gen 11:4)
- “The tower of Babel is a vivid symbol of our sinful desire to exalt ourselves and create our own kingdom independently of God” (Roberts 2002, 43)
- God’s plan of salvation is revealed in Gen 12, when he calls Abraham to be the father of a nation through which all nations would be blessed

Sin Spreads

- Sin spreads among the patriarchs, even as God blesses the good side of the family tree:
- Abraham and Isaac lie about their wives; Sarah laughs at God's promise; Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt; Jacob is a conniving manipulator (and his mother, Rachel, is not much better); Laban is a cheat; Joseph is boastful; his brothers are jealous enslavers; Simeon and Levi slaughter the Shechemites; Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine; Judah sleeps with his daughter-in-law
- What is clear on every page of the Bible is that humans, as God's image-bearers, do not love, revere, worship, or obey the one true God as we ought

Sin in Its Various Dimensions

- From Gen 3 to Rev 21, the story of God's people is a story of our struggle with sin
- The biblical language for sin is multi-faceted. For examples:
- In the Pentateuch sin is **breaking the covenant**, a breach of the legal stipulations given to Moses and to which Israel professed allegiance
- Sin is the breakdown of "**shalom**" and the triumph of evil over good
- In Kings and Chronicles, sin is **forgetting God** and refusing to humble oneself before him
- In the Prophets, sin is **hypocrisy** and **disobedience**
- In general, the OT describes sin as a **failure to love God** with all your heart and to love your neighbour as yourself

Personal Consequences of Sin

- Enslavement (Gen 12:10-20; 20; 26:6-11; Rom 6:17)
- Denial of sin (Gen 3:11-13)
- Self-deception (Jer 17:9; 2 Sam 12:1-15; Matt 7:3)
- Spiritual blindedness (1 Cor 2:14)
- Insensitivity (1 Tim 4:2; Rom 1:21; Matt 12:24)
- Self-centeredness (Phil 2:3-4)
- Restlessness—idolatry, sexual perversion, rampant evil (Rom 1:21-32)

Cosmic Consequences of Sin

- Cosmic—disease, natural disasters, genetic disorder, famine, aging, and death (Rom 8:18-25):
- ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.
- ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Social Consequences of Sin

- We see many social problems around the world today—greed, corruption, ethnocentrism, racism, political oppression, class distinction, economic disparity, violence, and death.

Social Consequences of Sin

- Social or structural evil refers to “the world system” or worldliness
- The term *kosmos* refers to the physical world (Acts 17:24), humanity (Jn 3:16), and value systems (Jn 15:18-19; Jas 4:4)
- Worldliness refers to the social validation of all fallenness within us and in the world (1 Jn 2:15-17)
- The world is controlled by unseen forces
- These refer to “rulers,” “powers” (Eph 6:10-12), “angels,” “principalities” (Rom 8:38-39), “principles of the world,” (Col 2:8), “rulers,” “authorities” (Col 2:15)
- There are “strongholds” or worldly wisdom in this world (2 Cor 10:4-5)
- The idea of “principles of the world” (*stoicheia*) in Col 2:8 are impersonal forces
- There are “rulers” and “authorities” who exercise control in the world (Col 2:20)

Sin is Conquered

- The story of sin in the Bible is not the story of unchecked evil
- Satan cannot operate apart from God's permission (Job 1:12) and divine plan (Gen 3:15)
- Jesus' incarnation was a frontal assault on the devil in that he served as the second Adam (Rom 5:14) by resisting Satan's temptation the first Adam failed (Lu 4:1-13)
- ¹² "Therefore, iust as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." (Rom 5:12)
- ¹⁸ "Consequently, iust as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." (Rom 5:18)

Sin is Conquered

- One way God conquers sin is to throw death and the devil into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10), along with all those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev 20:15)
- Jesus drinks the cup of wrath (Mk 14:36) and he lays down his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45):
- ⁴⁵ “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for (αὐτί or ‘instead of’) many” (Mk 10:45)
- Jesus conquers sin by divine satisfaction through divine self-substitution