

WEEK 7 | SIN & ITS CONSEQUENCES

The doctrine of original sin is the one philosophy empirically validated by thirty-five hundred years of human history.

– G. K. Chesterton

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish preacher Thomas Guthrie once put, in the most vivid language, the devastating nature and character of sin:

Who is the hoary sexton that digs man a grave? Who is the painted temptress who steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is the sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? Sin. Who, with icy breath, blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave? Sin. Who, by a more hideous metamorphose than Ovid ever fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters, and their fathers into worse than Herods? The murderers of their own innocence? Sin. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who lights the torch of war and bears it blazing over trembling lands? Who, by divisions in the church, rends Christ's seamless robe? Sin. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who winning smiles on her face, honey flattery on her tongue stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair siren is this who, seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles to deceive, sings to allure, kisses to betray, and flings her arm around our neck to leap with us into perdition? Sin. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne and impels sinners mad as Gadarene swine down a precipice into a lake of fire? Sin.

Sin is the great bane of humanity, a universal blight that permeates every aspect of our existence. Its impacts are seen and felt on individual and societal levels. Its roots dwell deep inside each one of us, and its fruit is manifest in more ways than we would care to count.

WHAT IS SIN?

The Bible is comprised of 66 books and 1189 chapters. Of those, only four chapters do not deal with sin: Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22, chapters dealing with the creation before sin and the

new heaven and new earth once sin is done away with. Everything in between wrestles with the presence and power of sin in this world. Hamartiology—from *hamartia*, the Greek word for sin — is a major doctrine, one we cannot ignore. As we begin our study, we must first ask, what is sin?

I. LEXICAL ANALYSIS

A. Old Testament

1. *Chātā* – Often translated “sinning” or “sinned,” and is linked with the idea of missing the mark
 - a. Genesis 20:6 – Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.
 - b. Exodus 10:16 – Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you.
 - c. Judges 20:16 – Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.
2. *Pāsha* – A strong term for sin, usually translated as “rebellion,” “trespass,” or “betrayal.”
 - a. Isaiah 1:2 – Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.”
3. *Ābar* – When used in a moral sense, usually translated as “to transgress” or “to pass over,” referring to the transgression of a commandment or covenant.
 - a. Numbers 14:41 – But Moses said, “Why now are you transgressing the command of the Lord, when that will not succeed?”
 - b. Judges 2:20 – So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he said, “Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice. . .”

B. New Testament

1. *Hamartia* (n.)/*hamartanō* (vb.) – Often translated simply as “sin” or “sinning,” it has the idea of missing the mark or erring, similar to the Hebrew *chātā*.
 - a. Romans 3:23 – “. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . .”

2. *Adikia* – Means “unrighteousness” or “injustice”
 - a. Romans 1:18 – For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

 - b. 2 Thessalonians 2:12 – . . . in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

3. *Planaō* – This term emphasizes the wandering or straying characteristic of sin.
 - a. 2 Timothy 3:12-13 – Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

 - b. 2 Peter 3:17 – You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

4. *Anomia* – Means “lawlessness,” a rejection of God’s law.
 - a. 1 John 3:4 – Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

5. *Apeitheia* – Means to be disobedient and willfully obstinate to God’s will.

- a. Romans 11:30-31 – For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.
 - b. John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
6. *Asebia* – Translated “ungodliness,” “wickedness,” or “impiety.”
- a. Jude 18 – They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”
7. *Agnoia* – This term refers to the ignorance of lack of understanding often present in sin.
- a. Ephesians 4:18 – They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.
8. *Parabainō* – This term describes a transgression of or deviation from God’s will.
- a. Romans 2:23 – You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

As the lexical variety above shows, sin is complex, multifaceted, and wrong in many ways. As we look over the many definitions given, certain commonalities arise, including the ideas of rebellion, law-breaking, and the inherent “wrongness” of sin. The question we now turn to is, can we identify a core or foundational element of sin?

II. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The list of definitions above is not to be exhaustive; rather, it is meant to show us that sin is more complex than we may at times realize, and it manifests in many different ways. Given this, is it possible to identify a central aspect of all sin? Scholars and theologians have given a variety of

answers to this question. Below is Michael Vlach's summary of this issue along with his conclusion:

Augustine asserted that pride is the heart of sin. Pride is man's attempt to live his life in the power of self. Others have postulated lack of *shalom* or peace since sin bring disruption and pain. Selfishness and idolatry are other options. Selfishness is loving one's self more than God. Idolatry is worship of a creature instead of the Creator. The first commandment warns against idolatry—"I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:1–2). Certainly all of these concepts above are interconnected and closely tied to sin.

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 obligated to serve his Creator. Yet with sin man assumes the role of God and asserts autonomy for himself apart from God. The most accurate view, therefore, is that autonomy is central to sin.

Because God is the Creator of everything, all creatures with volition are obligated to obey God and live according to his will. The falls of Satan and then Adam and Eve are tied to acting autonomously to be like God. Through a human king Satan declared, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Later, the Satan-inspired serpent told Eve, "when you eat of it [tree of knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God . . ." (Gen. 3:5). Eve and then Adam acted on this belief: "So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6).

In the cases of Satan and Adam and Eve they were not content in obeying God. They were created to love God and interpret the world from his perspective. Yet they did not desire to love God through obedience. They concluded they knew what was best instead of God. They stepped out on their own to be like God, acting autonomously. What they did is repeated whenever anyone sins. Instead of saying, "Your will be done," people say, "My will be done." Sin, therefore, is acting autonomously and taking the place of God.

In his detailed treatise on the sinfulness of mankind in Romans 1–3, Paul explained how sinful creatures violated their relationship with the Creator. He says, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom. 1:25). Thus, idolatry occurs when persons exchange the worship of God for the worship of creatures. The peace and wholeness that only comes from worshiping the true God is directed toward creatures and not the Creator. Whether immoral

relationships, drugs, alcohol, gambling, or many other substitutes, sinful humans turn to other things to satisfy. Yet because these matters do not satisfy, people become enslaved to them and spiral downward in their depravity.

In the context of Romans 1, Paul says foolish people with darkened hearts “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23). He singles out homosexuality by both women and men: “For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:26b–27).

In light of these factors we offer a short definition of sin. Sin is any lack of conformity to God’s will in attitude, thought, or action, whether committed actively or passively. The center of all sin is autonomy, which is the replacing of God with self. Also closely associated with sin are pride, selfishness, idolatry, and lack of peace (shalom).¹

The above is a helpful and concise explanation of what lies at the core of sin: the desire for autonomy, for self-rule, a desire innately at odds with position as creatures created by the Creator.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN?

Sin brings along with it a multitude of consequences—some temporal, some eternal. Below is a summary of the consequences of sin that Scripture identifies.

I. CONSEQUENCES FOR PERSONS

Sin never satisfies; it promises much but delivers only shame and death. Adam and Eve found that, rather than becoming “like God” (Gen 3:5), sin only caused guilt and shame (Gen 3:7-10). Rather than enjoying bliss and contentment, their eyes were opened to their nakedness, causing them to hide from the presence of God in fear (Gen 3:10); the innocence and purity of their pre-fall state was replaced by a knowledge of sin and evil. Thus, rather than becoming like God, Adam and Eve were left with guilt, shame, and fear.

Further, Paul reminds us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) and that every person will experience physical death (the first death) as a consequence of sin; the author of Hebrews makes clear that “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9:27). This is

¹ Michael Vlach, “Sin Defined,” in John MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 453-54.

seen clearly in the aftermath of the fall. In Genesis 5 Moses records the generations who came from Adam, writing for each one the same epitaph: “and he died” (Gen 5).

II. CONSEQUENCES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Sin always separates. One of the clearest manifestations of the consequences of sin is its impact on relationships. God told Adam that if he ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil then “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). This death certainly includes physical death—a universal consequence of sin (Rom 6:23)—but more immediately referred to spiritual death: all people are born spiritually dead, meaning they are spiritually separated from God (Eph 2:1, 5). (This spiritual state can manifest itself in attitudes ranging from apathy to hostility towards God and the gospel.) This was seen in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:23-24) and remains true today (Eph 2:12; Paul says we are all born “children of wrath” [Eph 2:3]).

Not only does sin sever the relationship between God and man, but human-to-human relationships are damaged by sin. God told Eve that strife would be a part of her marriage with Adam due to sin (Gen 3:16). In Genesis 4, right after the account of the fall, we see Cain murders his brother Abel (Gen 4:8) and Lamech murders a young man who struck him (Gen 4:23). After man’s sin at the Tower of Babel, God introduced different languages as a barrier to communication and cooperation which further divided people (Gen 11:7-8). Paul speaks of “the dividing wall of hostility” that exists between different people groups outside of Christ (Eph 2:14). All human relationships are negatively impacted by sin.

Finally, man’s relationship to creation has also been negatively impacted by sin. Man was meant to rule over creation as God’s vice-regents (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:4-8, cf. Heb 2:5-8). Instead, because of sin the very creation, now itself cursed (Gen 3:17), works against and frustrates us (Gen 3:17-19a). At death it is the earth that consumes us (Gen 3:19b).

III. CONSEQUENCES FOR CREATION

The consequences of sin extend beyond mankind to the entirety of creation. God told Adam that because of his sin the ground itself was cursed (Gen 3:17; 5:29). The creation that God had declared “very good” (Gen 1:31) was “subjected to futility” and “has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Rom 8:20, 22). Since the fall death’s reign has extended over the created order as well (Gen 3:21). All of creation awaits the time when “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption” at the return of Christ and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1; 2 Pet 3:10-13).

IV. ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES

Scripture speaks of three deaths. The first two—physical death and spiritual death—have been dealt with above. The third (what John calls “the second death” in Rev 20:14), eternal death, refers to the eternal separation from God experienced by the sinner who dies outside of Christ.

Sinners will be finally banished from God's presence and cast into the lake of fire where they will experience a real, physical hell for all eternity (Rev 20:14-15).