

Hamartiology: Fall, Original Sin, Guilt, and Corruption

Topics: Fall; original sin; guilt and corruption; total depravity; bondage of the will.

Key Question: What did sin break and what has it done to us?

Big Idea: Sin broke fellowship with God and disordered His good creation, leaving us guilty before Him and corrupted in every part of our being.

Doctrine at a Glance

- Sin is lawlessness and rebellion against God’s law in act, habit, attitude, and mode of existence.
- The Fall brought a twofold ruin: guilt (legal liability/condemnation) and corruption (moral disorder/bondage)
- This doctrine explains why our need for redemption is deeper than moral failure. We need both pardon and renewal.

Core Claims

- The Fall shattered communion with God, fractured human relationships, and brought death and disorder into creation.
- Original sin includes inherited corruption and imputed guilt in Adam.
- Total depravity means sin touches every faculty (mind, will, desires, body). It is total in extent, not degree (not “as bad as possible”).
- This corruption results in bondage or “total inability”: apart from grace, we do not naturally choose God because our desires are bent inward.
- Actual sin flows from this corrupted nature and is expressed in thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions; temptation does not remove moral responsibility.

Biblical Foundation (Key Texts)

- **Gen 3** — The fall and its effects.
- **Ps 51:5** — Sin’s depth and origin language.
- **Rom 3:9–23** — Universal sin and accountability.
- **Rom 5:12–19** — Adam and Christ as covenant heads.
- **Eph 2:1–3** — Spiritual death and enslaving desires.

Key Terms

- Sin – rebellion/lawlessness; violation of God’s holy will
- Original Sin – inherited corruption + imputed guilt in Adam
- Imputation – Adam’s guilt reckoned to his descendants (federal headship)
- Corruption/Total Depravity – every part of us is touched by sin (extent, not maximal degree)
- Bondage of the will/Total inability – inability to do spiritual good apart from regenerating grace
- Temptation – Enticement toward sin; not necessarily sin itself; requires deliverance, whereas sin requires repentance

Confessional Touchpoints

- WCF 6
- Belgic Confession Articles 14–15
- Heidelberg Catechism Q. 7–8

Common Errors / Missteps

- **Pelagianism:** denying original sin and need for grace.
- **Antinomianism:** treats grace as making sin irrelevant (“It doesn’t matter if I sin”)
- **Moralism:** treating sin as “bad habits” rather than bondage and guilt.
- **Therapeutic reductionism:** sin as merely dysfunction.
- **Fatalism:** using depravity to excuse responsibility.