

## Lesson 4 (Q&A: Before IV)

### BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: SIN

*We believe that Man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker; but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint but by choice; being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse.*

#### I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF SIN (PG. 15)

The problem of sin is one of the core themes of the Bible. It is pretty hard to read the Bible without coming across the subject of sin. Both denunciation of sin and the announcement of Divine judgment occupies more than half of the prophetic books. The psalms and wisdom writings include many confessions of sin and reflect upon its nature. The history of Israel in the Old Testament is a history that largely underscores the consequences of disobeying God. In the New Testament the treatment of sin is basically the same: sin is presented as a radical problem – the human race is trapped in a state of sin and rebellion against God. Our sin is what separates us from God, but praise God that it does not end there!

Isaiah 59:2 says, **“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”** The primary purpose of Christ’s mission was to deal with this problem of sin. First John 3:5 says, **“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”** Scripture says that Jesus appeared to take away sin, just as John the Baptist had proclaimed when he saw Jesus: **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). That was the reason why he was named “Jesus”: **“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”** (Matt. 1:21). Jesus, himself, stated repeatedly that he had come for sinners and to shed his blood for the remission of sins.

It is important to note that we cannot understand Christ or His purposes without an understanding of our sin. If you don’t know about the problem of sin, then grace will be undesirable, justification meaningless, and the concept of a holy life incomprehensible. A right understanding and knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity.

#### II. THE BIBLICAL VOCABULARY OF SIN (PG. 15)

*(invite class to make three bullet points at this time)*

There are around fifty different words used by the Biblical writers to define, discuss, and describe sin. The variety of Hebrew terms used throughout the Old Testament testify that sin was a dominant concern and that Israel had a powerful sense of the holiness of God.

**The most common word for “sin” in Hebrew (*Hatta’t*)** occurs about 300 times. Its original meaning is that of missing the target, failing, falling short of the goal. (*The arrow doesn’t strike the bull’s-eye*) Man deviates from the path marked out by God. He turns to the left or to the right.

With respect to ceremonial Judaism, this concept of sin was closely connected with notions of spiritual uncleanness. Sin needed to be washed away; atonement for sin was necessary.

**The second most common Hebrew term for sin (*Awon*)**, translated “iniquity” in older translations and ‘wickedness’ or ‘perversion’ in more modern translations, has a root meaning of ‘bending’ or ‘twisting.’ Here, the image is one of distortion. Sin is a distortion of the real thing.

**In the Greek, the most common term used (*hamartia*) signifies offences against laws, people, or God.**

If we continued this discussion and worked our way through all of the Hebrew terms and then into the New Testament Greek, we would see that a wide range of meanings can be imputed to this word 'sin'. Sin is 'ungodliness,' 'trouble,' 'emptiness,' 'falsehood,' 'worthlessness,' 'foolishness,' 'stupidity,' 'sickness,' 'injustice,' 'moral-spiritual evil,' 'error,' 'lack of reverence,' 'trespass,' 'debt,' and 'ruin.' Is it any wonder why we should try to avoid sin?

Thus the biblical vocabulary of sin tells us that sin is a violation of accepted standards, but they don't tell us what those standards are or provide reasons why they should not be violated. That is, of course, until we come to understand the theological context that these words are placed in.

### **III. THE THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF SIN (PG. 15)**

Sin, according to the classical definition, is the lack of conformity to the law of God. The knowledge of sin comes through the law. Romans 3:20 says, **"through the law we become conscious of sin."** The primary function of the revealed law of God is to define sin. Paul says, **"I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'"** (Rom. 7:7).

God had, of course, revealed his law particularly to Israel. But that certainly does not mean that others were ignorant of the problem of sin or, that prior to Moses' ministry, sin was unknowable due to the absence of a written code. Paul takes care of that argument in Romans 2 where he says that even the Gentiles have a sense of God's moral demands that are inherent in all people. The law of God is stamped on the heart and conscience of all of His creatures. Every single person who has ever lived has had an awareness of sin.

You can read biographies of missionaries going into the depths of New Guinea and finding cannibalistic tribes with a definite knowledge of the problem of sin. The tribesman knows that he has done wrong. He believes that his conduct has angered the gods. Of course, his solution of ripping the head off a chicken or covering his body with the fat of the pig he has sacrificed doesn't justify him; his guilt still remains. Everything that does not come from faith is sin, as Romans 14:23 tells us.

So sin is a lack of conformity to the law of God. We must understand though, that the law that God has revealed in Scripture, which defines sin, is not an impersonal and freestanding set of rules. What the law does is it reveals God's personal will and character. Failure to obey His commands entails personal opposition to him.

Sin comes in various forms. It can be an attitude or desire such as lust, greed, or envy. It can be an individual act such as murder, lying, or stealing. There are sins of commission: actively doing what God prohibits. And there are sins of omission: passively failing to do what God commands.

Sin is always the corruption of something good. Its existence is parasitic; it lays hold of and seizes its reality from whatever it corrupts. Thus, adultery is a corruption of the gift of marriage; theft is a corruption of the right enjoyment of material blessings.

Sin promises something that it can never give. It twists the truth, and it enslaves men. But not only that, it also seeks to blind us from the consequences of running after it like the worm on a hook does to a fish.

So, hopefully, this basic understanding of sin will help to provide us with a conceptual framework to start working through some additional theological issues.

## Questions or Comments?

### IV. GOD HATES SIN: BOTH SIN AND SINNER ARE OBJECTS OF HIS WRATH (PG. 15)

It should be clear to us that a holy and righteous God must hate sin. God must hate the violation of his law. If He didn't, he would cease to be good. Hebrews 1:9 says of God, **"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness."**

Most of you have heard the phrase "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." Some of us may have even used it in the past. There is a small element of truth in these words. God has nothing but hate for the sin, and it would also be wrong to conclude that God has nothing but hate for the sinner. A difference must be maintained between God's view of sin and his view of the sinner.

At the same time, however, to say "God hates the sin but loves the sinner" is not quite entirely accurate either. Fourteen times in the first fifty Psalms alone we are told that God hates the sinner, his wrath is on the liar and so forth. For example, Psalms 5 says, **"You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors."** In the Bible, the wrath of God rests both on the sin (Rom 1:18) and on the sinner (John 3:36). God's wrath is not just some abstract, impersonal idea.

When Paul talks about "objects of God's wrath—prepared for destruction" in Romans chapter 9, he's talking about people. According to Ephesians 2:3, those who have not been justified through faith in Christ are "by nature objects of wrath."

What we have just talked about makes a lot of people angry. It's at this point that Christianity gets offensive. But this is the message we see in God's Word. **"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him"** (John 3:36).

The thing we need to understand about God's wrath is that it is perfectly right for him to exercise his holy anger on the sinner. We deserve instantaneous and eternal damnation for our rebellion against an infinitely holy God. John Murray says about God,

*"To be complacent towards that which is the contradiction of [his] own holiness would be a denial of himself...the justice of God demands that sin receive its retribution. The question is not at all: How can God, being what he is, send men to hell? The question is, How can God, being what he is, save them from hell?"*

It is here that we once again see that God is both fully just and fully merciful, and it was God's justice and mercy that was perfectly portrayed by Christ on the cross.

Well, it is true that God hates sin. But this raises a question for us. If God hates sin and is both good and all-powerful, where did sin come from? Thus, we reach the so-called "problem of evil."

### V. THE ORIGIN OF SIN (PG. 16)

Evil, in biblical theology, is totally alien to God: his **'eyes are too pure to look on evil'** (Hab. 1:13); he **'is light; in him there is no darkness at all'** (1 John 1:5); also **'God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone'** (Jas. 1:13). Deuteronomy 32:4 declares that God's **"works are perfect, and all**

**his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”** All these things show that God does not sin and that he does not tempt people to sin.

So how do we explain the existence of sin and evil in the world? Let me suggest that we need to start with two propositions, which show two sides of the same idea:

*Two Biblical Propositions (pg. 16)*

1. *God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.*
2. *Human beings are responsible creatures—that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God’s sovereignty or to make God’s will absolutely contingent. (possible but not certain.) - D.A. Carson (A Call to Spiritual Reformation)*

Scripture portrays God as utterly sovereign, as we have learned in previous weeks. Ephesians 1:11 says, God “**works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.**” In some mysterious way, and without being tainted with evil himself, God ordains all that comes to pass, *including the sinful acts of His creatures*. God did ordain that sin would come into the world, even though he takes no delight in it and even though he ordained that it would come about through the voluntary choices of moral creatures.

It is vital to see that God does not stand behind good and evil in exactly the same way. If God stood behind good and evil in exactly the same way, he would be entirely amoral. Scripture does not let us take this position, however.

The Bible insists God is sovereign, so sovereign that nothing that takes place in the universe can escape the outermost boundary of his control. The Bible also insists that God is the very standard of goodness. Thus, God stands behind good and evil differently. He stands behind good in such a way that the good can ultimately be credited to him, and he stands behind evil in such a way that what is evil is inevitably credited to secondary agents. In the story of Job, Satan has no power over Job without God’s sanction, yet God remains mysteriously distant from the evil itself (Job 1:22). In the story of Joseph, we see at the culmination that God has been working through everything to bring about the best, Genesis 50:20, “**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**”

We must say this is a mystery; while we know that the existence of evil and God’s goodness and sovereignty are compatible truths, Scripture does not reveal to us how they are compatible. It would be presumptuous to claim that we know these secret things of God. As we will see, the very first human sin involved trying to know hidden things and thus be like God.

I say the first human sin, because we must remember that even before the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin was present in the angelic world with the fall of Satan and demons (II Peter 2:4).

## **Questions or Comments?**

### **VI. The Fall: A Case Study (pg. 16)**

With respect to the human race, the first sin was that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). The eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is in three ways typical of sin generally:

- **Their sin struck at the basis for knowledge, for it gave a different answer to the question:**

**“What is true?”** Whereas God had said that Adam and Eve would die if they ate from the tree (Gen. 2:17), the serpent said, “you will not die” (Gen. 3:4). Eve decided to doubt the truthfulness of God’s word and conduct an experiment to see whether God spoke truthfully.

- **Their sin struck at the basis for moral standards, for it gave a different answer to the question “What is right?”** God had said that it was morally right of Adam and Eve not to eat from the fruit of that one tree (Gen. 2:17). But the serpent suggested that it would be right to eat of the fruit, and that in eating it Adam and Eve would become “like God” (Gen. 3:5). Eve trusted her own evaluation of what was right rather than allowing God’s words to define right and wrong.
- **Their sin gave a different answer to the question, “Who am I?”** The correct answer was that Adam and Eve were creatures of God, dependent on him and always to be subordinate to him as their Creator and Lord. But Eve, and then Adam, succumbed to the temptation to “be like God” (Gen. 3:5), thus attempting to put themselves in the place of God.

## **VII. Eight Biblical Statements About Sin (pg. 16)**

Let us now spend time considering eight Biblical statements that we can say about sin.

### **1. Inherited Guilt: We are counted guilty because of Adam’s sin. (pg. 16)**

When Adam sinned, God thought of all who would descend from Adam as sinners. Though we did not yet exist, God, looking into the future and knowing that we would exist, began thinking of us as those who were guilty like Adam.

All members of the human race were represented by Adam in the time of testing in the Garden of Eden. As our representative, Adam sinned, and God counted us guilty as well as Adam. God counted Adam’s guilt as belonging to us, and since God is the ultimate judge of all things in the universe, and since his thoughts are always true, Adam’s guilt does in fact belong to us.

If you think it is unfair for us to be represented by Adam in sin, then you should also think it is unfair for us to be represented by Christ and to have his righteousness imputed to us by God. For the procedure that God used was just the same, and that is exactly Paul’s point in Romans 5:19: **“For just as through the disobedience of the one man (i.e., Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (i.e., Jesus) the many will be made righteous.”** This is often referred to as Federal Theology; Adam and Christ are representative heads. (*Profitable to read Romans 5:12-21*)

### **2. Inherited Corruption: We have a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin. (pg. 16)**

In addition to the legal guilt that God imputes to us because of Adam’s sin, we also inherit a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin. Our sinfulness does not begin from outside us, but within. It is not transmitted from bad training, poor teaching, or awful examples. It is a family disease that is inherited by those descended from Adam.

In **Psalm 51:5**, David is so overwhelmed with the consequences of his own sin that as he looks back on his life he realizes that he was sinful from the beginning. As far back as he can think of himself, he realized that he has had a sinful nature. He says, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** Also Psalm 58:3, **“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.”**

So does having a sinful nature mean that human beings are all as bad as they could be? (*No. The constraints of civil law, the expectations of family and society, the conviction of conscience (Romans 2:14-15) – all workings of God’s common grace – provide restraining influences on man’s sinful tendencies.*) But having a sinful nature does mean...

### **3. In our natures we totally lack spiritual good before God. (pg. 17)**

“Man in his raw, natural state as he comes from the womb is morally and spiritually corrupt in disposition and character. Every part of his being – his mind, his will, his emotions, his affections, his conscience, his body – has been affected by sin (this is what is meant by the doctrine of total depravity). His understanding is darkened, his mind is at enmity with God, his will to act is slave to his darkened understanding and rebellious mind, his heart is corrupt, his emotions are perverted, his affections naturally gravitate to that which is evil and ungodly, his conscience is untrustworthy, and his body is subject to mortality. The Scriptures are replete with such representations of the condition of fallen man, as the following verses will verify”:

**Genesis 6:5-6: “The Lord saw that... every inclination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil all the time.”**

In Romans 7:18 Paul says, **“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”**

Jeremiah 17: 9: **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**

Psalm 14:2-3, **“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”**

Isaiah 64:6-7, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.”**

Ephesians 2:1-3, **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”**

Ephesians 4:17-19, **“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”**

Having a sinful nature also means...

#### 4. In our actions we are totally unable to do spiritual good before God. (pg. 17)

Not only do we lack any spiritual good in ourselves, but we also lack the ability to do anything that will in itself please God. In addition, we also lack the ability to come to God on our own strength.

Because man is totally corrupt, he is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption. This is the doctrine of total inability. He is unable to discern, to love, or to choose the things that are pleasing to God.

Hebrews 11:6 states that **“without faith it is impossible to please God.”** Paul confirms this in his letter to the Roman Christians by saying, **“Those controlled by the sinful nature *cannot* please God.”** (Rom. 8:8)

Jeremiah 13:23 explains that just as it is impossible for a person to change their skin color, it is just as impossible to change their sinful nature. **“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”**

While unbelievers can do good things in society at some level, all of their good deeds and thoughts are not considered to be *spiritually* good before God. Unbelievers cannot even understand the things of God correctly. **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he *cannot* understand them** (I Cor. 2:14).”

Man needs God to remove his spiritual blindness, 2 Corinthians 4:4, **“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

Man also lacks the ability to come to God under his own power. Jesus says, **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him** (John 6:44).”

So if this is how sin has corrupted man, do we have freedom of choice? (*Yes, in the sense that we make willing choices with real effects, but no, in the sense that we are inclined towards sin because in man’s fallen state, we do not have the ability to do what is right and pleasing to God.*)

Just because the commandment says “Thou shalt” does not mean that thou can. The Lord’s commandments are imperative statements and tell us what *ought* to be done rather than indicative statements that tell us what *can* be done. It is through God’s law and commandments that we become aware of our inability to wholly keep them and despair of our efforts and seek Christ’s righteousness rather than our own.

Because every compartment of our lives is tainted with sin, man can exercise volitions easily enough, but he lacks the ability *to be willing* to exercise *holy* volitions because his motives are wholly wrong. For analogy purposes, it is like the bird that has a broken wing. The bird is “free” to fly but it cannot. So it is with fallen man – we are free to come to God, but because we are considered dead and slaves to sin and in our natures are inclined towards evil, we are not able. That is, of course, until the Holy Spirit changes our hearts and regenerates us.

#### 5. All are sinful before God. (pg. 17)

Scripture testifies to the universal sinfulness of mankind. No one is exempt. No one is above this

description. David says, **“They have all gone astray they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no not one (Psalm 14:3, c.f. Rom. 3:9-10). No man living is righteous before you (Ps. 143:2).”** And Solomon says, **“There is no man who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46).”** And Paul says, **“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).”**

#### **6. A single sin makes us legally guilty before God. (pg. 17)**

As we saw earlier, sin is personal opposition to God. It is not the greatness of the law that makes sin worthy of punishment, but the greatness of the Lawgiver. No sins are small when committed against a great and generous God. Notice even the singularity of the word ‘sin’ in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul affirms that **“the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation (Romans 5:16).”**

James declares, **“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” said also, “Do not kill.” If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10-11).**

#### **7. There are different degrees of sin. (pg. 17)**

While any one sin makes us legally guilty before God, some sins are worse than others in that they have more harmful consequences in our lives and in the lives of others. And in terms of our personal relationship to God, they arouse his displeasure more and bring more serious disruption to our fellowship with him.

Scripture speaks of degrees of serious sin. When Jesus stood before Pilate, he said, **“the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin” (John 19:11).** The reference is to Judas, who willfully betrayed Jesus to death. Although Pilate had authority over Jesus because of his governmental office and was wrong to allow an innocent man to be condemned to death, the sin of Judas was far “greater,” probably because of the far greater knowledge and malice connected with it.

In general, some sins have more harmful consequences than others do. Some sins may bring more dishonor to God. Those sins that are done willfully, repeatedly, and knowingly are more displeasing to God than those that are done out of ignorance and are not repeated or are done with a mixture of good and impure motives and are followed by remorse and repentance. For example, in Leviticus 4:22 we see that unintentional sin is still considered sin, but the consequences and degree of God’s displeasure for such sin are less severe than those given for intentional sin.

#### **8. When a Christian sins, their fellowship with God is disrupted and their Christian life is damaged. (pg. 17)**

When we sin, even though God does not cease to love us, he is displeased with us. Just like when a child sins, the parent still loves the child, but at the same time the parent is also displeased with the child. God’s fatherly displeasure often leads to discipline in our Christian lives: **“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Heb. 12:10).**

When we sin as Christians, it is not only our personal relationship with God that is disrupted. Our Christian life and fruitfulness in ministry are also damaged. The New Testament writers frequently speak of the destructive consequences of sin in the lives of believers. In fact, many sections of the epistles are taken up with rebuking and discouraging Christians from sin that they are committing.

Romans 6:16, “**Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?**”

Ephesians 4:30, “**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**”

All of this is to say that sin has consequences. Even though we may not be able to see the evident fruitfulness of our sin, *it is quietly working in our affections and motives to lead us away from God.* The lust of a husband’s heart may not have an immediate outward showing. However, you can be sure that it is making callous his desire for his wife and growing a discontentment for God’s good provisions for him. We must seek to mortify sin, which leads us to our application of this doctrine...

### **Questions or Comments?**

#### VIII. The Mortification of sin (pg. 18)

Knowing that we cannot attempt to fight sin on our own power, what has God given us to help us? *(Ultimately, **Jesus**, gave the mortal blow to the sin of all those who would ever repent and believe. Only a Christian can mortify their sin – There is no death of sin without the death of Christ; The **Holy Spirit** who works to sanctify us and put out the sparse fires of the once-great bonfire. He is the means and power God has given us – all other attempts are futile.)*

How shall we fight against our sin?

**Constantly:** *you are either killing sin, or sin is killing you;*

**Observantly:** *sin is subtle and our seasons of victory must not make us complacent in battling it. When sin goes unchecked, it makes it that much more difficult to fight against it, as it grows stronger. Being surprisingly caught in a sin is the same as being found negligent;*

**Precisely** – *we need to aim at the root of sin and not the fruit (i.e., lust in the heart is not finally remedied by attempts to avoid looking at another woman);*

**Knowingly** – *we must know our sin’s methods, advantages, and opportunities. Every sin works to sear the conscience so that the means of grace will be ignored by the person;*

**Spiritually** – *just as important as sweeping out the acts of the sinful nature is filling the heart with the fruit of the Spirit;*

**Willingly** – *if we fight sin because its fruit grieves us and not because of our love for God, we do not fight it in earnest and do not have the right motive. God often leaves us in our sin, if we do not seek relief with proper motives.)*

What are the benefits of fighting sin?

*(Peace; Comfort and assurance of our adoption into God’s family;*

*Avoids sin’s consequences; Makes it easier to be in worship of God; Please our Lord; Makes us in close proximity to God’s blessings.)*

Ultimately, it is the good news of Jesus Christ – the gospel – where we can know forgiveness for our sin. If you have sat through this class and are not a Christian or are thinking about what Christianity means, I would encourage you to talk with me, or someone else whom you would consider to be a mature Christian example in the church about who Jesus Christ is, which also happens to be the question we will be asking in our next class, Lord willing – Who is Jesus?