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God voluntarily created us. He gave us the highest privilege of being His image bearers. . . . We are not turtles. We are not fireflies. We are not caterpillars or coyotes. We are people. We are the image bearers of the holy and majestic King of the cosmos. We have not used the gift of life for the purpose God intended. Life on this planet has become the arena in which we daily carry out the work of cosmic treason...No traitor to any king or nation has even approached the wickedness of our treason before God. . . . When we sin as the image bearers of God, we are saying to the whole creation, to all of nature under our dominion, to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field: "This is how God is. This is how your Creator behaves. Look in his mirror; look at us, and you will see the character of the Almighty." We say to the world, "God is covetous; God is ruthless; God is bitter; God is a murderer, a thief, a slanderer, an adulterer. God is all of these things that we are doing."

- R.C. Sproul

Something has gone terribly wrong. And everyone knows it.
Why?
The Fall.

What Is the Fall?

Genesis 3 is one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible because it explains the source of and solution for sin and death.

The scene: the beautiful and perfect garden made by God for man to live in without sin and its many effects. There, God lovingly and graciously speaks as a father to Adam and Eve, giving them complete freedom to enjoy all of creation, except partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden.

The Chaos: the entrance of the Serpent marks the beginning of chaos in creation. The Serpent is Satan according to Revelation 12:9 and 20:2.

The snake speaks only twice, but that is enough to offset the balance of trust and obedience between the man and the woman and their Creator. The centerpiece of the story is the question of the knowledge of the "good"...***In other words, the snake's statements were a direct challenge to the central theme of the narrative of chapters 1 and 2: God will provide the "good" for human beings if they will only trust him and obey him.*** - J. Salihamer

The Play by Play:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.

- Satan began by tempting Eve to mistrust God’s Word by changing its meaning, just as he did when likewise tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:1–11.
- Rather than rebuking Satan, Eve entertained his lies and was subsequently deceived by his crafty arguments.

⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

- Satan was so bold as to accuse God of being a liar and tempt the pride of Adam and Eve by declaring that if they disobeyed God they could in effect become his peer and gods themselves.
- Eve was faced with either trusting her own judgment or God’s protective warning that it was deadly.
- Satan promised that, upon sinning against God, they would become like God. Yet, they were already like God by virtue of the fact he made them in his image and likeness.

⁶ 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. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

- Eve believed Satan over God and chose pride over humility by partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in sin against God. Hers was a sin of commission, whereby she did what God forbade.
- Adam stood by silently, failing to lead his family in godliness. This was Adam’s sin of omission, whereby he failed to do what God created him to do—lovingly lead his family and humbly serve God.
- Adam then joined his wife’s sin of commission, bringing shame, distrust, and separation between Adam and Eve, and between them and God.
- This included hiding from God and one another and covering themselves, as sinners have done in varying ways ever since.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

- God then came looking for the man, holding him responsible for the sinful condition of his family as its head.
- Rather than repenting of his sin, Adam essentially argued with God by blaming Eve for his sin, and blaming God for making Eve.
- Eve, too, failed to repent of her sin and blamed the Serpent for deceiving her.

The Effects:

- A respect for authority was replaced by rebellion.
- A clear conscience was replaced by guilt and shame.
- Blessing was replaced by physical, spiritual, and eternal punishment.
- Viewing God as a friend to walk with was replaced by viewing him as an enemy to hide from.
- Trust was replaced by fear.
- Love was replaced by indifference and even hatred.
- Closeness with God was replaced by separation from God.
- Freedom to obey God was replaced by enslavement to sin.
- Honesty was replaced with lying and deceit.
- Self-sacrifice was replaced by self-centeredness.
- Peace was replaced by restlessness.
- Responsibility was replaced by blaming.
- Authenticity was replaced by hiding.

“Consumed by our own self-focus, we desire to dominate or manipulate others: here is the beginning of fences, of rape, of greed, of malice, of nurtured bitterness, of war. Nonetheless, sin and the fall do not have the world, but rather God does. And he speaks a promise of hope in the coming of Jesus who will respect authority, bring blessing, and be a friend we can walk with, savior we can trust in, love incarnate, and God come down to be close to us and liberate us from sin’s presence and penalty, by calling us to honest repentance to live God-centered lives of peace, responsibility, and authenticity as saved sinners.” - D.A. Carson

What Is Sin?

Sin is so complex and far-reaching that it is difficult to succinctly define.

The Bible presents sin by way of major concepts, principally lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a beast crouching at the door. In sin, people attack or evade or neglect their divine calling. These and other images suggest deviance: even when it is familiar, sin is never normal. Sin is disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all, sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God. - Cornelius Plantinga

Yet the heart of all this evil is idolatry itself. It is the de-godding of God. It is the creature swinging his puny fist in the face of his Maker and saying, in effect, “If you do not see things my way, I’ll make my own gods! I’ll be my own god!” Small wonder that the sin most frequently said to arouse God’s wrath is not murder, say, or pillage, or any other “horizontal” barbarism, but idolatry—that which dethrones God. That is also why, in every sin, it is God who is the most offended party, as David himself well understood: “Against you, only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4). - D.A. Carson

Idolatry is a good way to conceptualize the nature of “sin”. (it gets after the heart motives and desires)

Idolatry is our poor way of thinking that refuses to honor God for who He is. Idolatry is an affront to God...it declares God to be second-rate by denying his power and wisdom and by thinking of His gifts

more important than God Himself. It says that we know better what we need and when we need it. It declares God as insufficient. It is the essence of what Paul is describing in Romans 1 and 2.

Other ways the Bible portrays “sin”.

The Bible uses a constellation of images to explain sin as everything from rebellion to folly, self-abuse, madness, treason, death, hatred, spiritual adultery, missing the mark, wandering from the path, insanity, irrationality, pride, selfishness, blindness, deafness, a hard heart, a stiff neck, delusion, unreasonable, and self-worship.

The New Testament also speaks of sin in many ways, though four words are used most often.

- *hamartia* = wrongdoing, or missing the mark. It is the most general word used for sin and refers to the innumerable ways in which we fall short of what God intends for us and miss his will for our conduct.
- *paraptoma* = to trespass. This word speaks of crossing a line of God’s law, whether intentionally or unintentionally.
- *parabasis* = disobedience and transgression. By using this word, the Bible is referring to evil intent, whereby someone defiantly chooses to disobey God and thus sin, knowing full well what they are doing.
- *asebeias* = ungodliness and godlessness. This word refers to a sinner’s active character of rebellion, whereby they act as if there were no God, and/or as if they were their own God and the highest authority in their life.

What things are considered sin?

Sin includes our thoughts, words, deeds, and motives. Sin includes godlessness, which is ignoring God and living as if there were no God, or as if we were God. Sin is invariably idolatry, which is the replacing of God as preeminent with something or someone else—most often oneself.

Sin includes individuals, communities, networks, and the like as individuals labor together for the cause of sin. Sin includes entire ways of thinking and acting, such as racism and pornography. Sometimes a sin is also a crime, such as murder, and sometimes it is not, such as adultery. Sin can be done deliberately or in ignorance. The practice of a particular sin can occur once, regularly, or even frequently.

Sin includes breaking God’s laws, breaching just human laws, defying godly authority such as parents or pastors, and violating one’s own conscience as well as conviction wrought by God the Holy Spirit. Sin includes perversion, or using good things for evil purposes. Sin includes pollution, or infecting good things with evil. Lastly, sin is the turning of a good thing (e.g., sex, work, money, comfort) into an ultimate thing so that it is worshiped as a god in place of God and becomes a false god.

Or, to say it as Proverbs 20:9 does, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?” The answer is no one but Jesus Christ. - Mark Driscoll

What Are Some Sinful Views of Sin?¹

Outside of the Church

Materialism: believes in no spiritual reality, “sin” is the result of electro-chemical imbalances leading to biological dysfunction. Therefore, the solution to evil and sin is medical and chemical improvement of the human body.

¹ This section is from a forthcoming book on doctrine by Mark Driscoll...he gave me permission to quote / adapt this section from the unpublished manuscript. You’ll want to get the book when it comes out.

Evolutionism: “sin” is essentially anything that hinders the perceived progress of the human race rather than any offense against a personal God.

Psychologism: “sin” is caused by low self-esteem that results in the repression of one’s true feelings. Subsequently, the answer to sinful behavior is not repentance and faith in God for help, but rather love and acceptance of oneself.

Humanism: “sin” is reduced to attitudes or actions that hurt other people. Because humanists also tend to see human beings as essentially good, the answer to evil behavior is better education and social conditioning to help people act out of the goodness of their nature.

Environmentalism: “sin” results from not acting on the truth that the earth is ultimately our mother and living, as if all living things—from plants to animals—were of equal value to oneself. People are encouraged to be one with and live in harmony with the rest of creation as the means by which they can overcome sinful actions.

One-ism (including pantheism and panentheism): “sin” is being out of balance with our immediate environment and living out of harmony with the rest of the earth. So, the answer to evil behavior is for people to meditate and do yoga to connect with the cosmic consciousness and tap into our innate spirituality.

Inside of the Church

Legalism: sin as simply breaking the rules of God. Though sin does include this, they sadly fail to see that sin is fundamentally violating the relationship with God. Thus, they tend to reduce their faith down to rule-keeping rather than a loving relationship with God that underlies, empowers, and enables obedience.

License: since Jesus died for their sins, they need not fight for holiness and repent when they fail. What they fail to realize is that, because Jesus died for their sins, they are supposed to join him by putting their sins to death.

Condemnation: unless they confess every sin they will wind up in hell because all of their sins would not be forgiven. The truth is that, because Jesus died for all of our sins, we can and should repent of all the sins we are aware of while realizing that our imperfection includes an imperfect sensitivity to our sins, causing us to be unaware of all of our transgressions.

Goodness: as long as they are nice and have a “good heart” God will not be displeased by their sin. But God is concerned both with our inner life and our outer life. Moreover, since our life is simply the outworking of our heart, it is nonsensical to consider someone as having a good heart but bad actions.

Foolishness: sin and fun are synonymous and therefore continue in sin in the name of having fun. However, because sin leads to death, it kills everything it touches, particularly joy. Therefore, while a sin may appear to be fun initially, the distance it brings from God, the guilt it causes, and the damage it does to oneself and others are ultimately anything but fun. Sin poses as an attraction before becoming an affliction because it is deceptive and ultimately a lie.

Ignorance: if no one is hurt then their sin does not really matter. But this is untrue on many accounts. Because our sin is against God, it grieves him and distances us from him. Additionally, sin hurts our church, family, friends, and those we are in community with, even if they are unaware of our sin, because our sin affects and changes us negatively. Lastly, our sin also hurts ourselves because we were not made for sin and to live in sin unrepentantly is to damage oneself.

“Sin hurts other people and grieves God, but it also corrodes us. Sin is a form of self-abuse.”

- Calvin Plantinga

Hidden-ness: sin is not a problem unless one is caught and so they persist in secret sin. But sin is never secret because God knows all, the sinner knows, and those who know the sinner often know something is wrong even if they are unaware of the particular sin being committed.

Seriously?: if a sin is popular then it is okay because everyone is doing it. Sometimes a culture even labels a vice as a virtue. However, the Bible speaks often about the world in a negative sense; the Bible is saying that the popular majority and their cultures are prone toward sin and therefore are not to replace God and his Word as the standard for holiness and unholiness.

Perfection: some think that sin and mistakes are synonymous when they are in fact different things. A sin is a moral wrong, and a mistake is a morally neutral imperfection. Painfully, those who do not understand this distinction try to live lives of perfectionism and are devastated at mistakes that do not trouble God and therefore should not trouble them. Even more painfully, parents that fail to recognize this distinction commonly discipline their children for not only sins, but also mistakes. I once saw a family eating dinner at a restaurant and a very young child was drinking out of an open cup. Because her motor skills were not yet well developed, she accidentally spilled a bit of her milk. Rather than simply wiping it up since it was a morally neutral mistake, the parents yelled at the child as if she had sinned, though she had not.

What Has Sin Done to Us?

We are Totally Depraved

Even atheists know humans are not as they should be.

Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. Homo homini lupus [man is a wolf]; who has the courage to dispute it in the face of all the evidence in his own life and in history? -S. Freud

While people are not *utterly depraved* and as evil as they could be, all people are *totally depraved* in that their every motive, word, deed, and thought is affected, stained, and marred by sin.

This includes the mind, will, emotions, heart, conscience, and physical body. The totality of a person is pervasively affected by sin and there is no aspect of their being that is not negatively impacted by sin.

*"Sin . . . pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected."
- J.C. Ryle*

Practically speaking, this means that we cannot fully trust any single aspect of our being (e.g., our mind or our emotions) because each is tainted and marred by sin and therefore not perfect or objective. Subsequently, we need God's Spirit, God's Word, and God's people to help us see truly and live wisely.

Scripture for you to ponder:

Old Testament

Genesis 6:5-6: *"The Lord saw that...every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time."*

Genesis 8:21: *"The Lord...said in his heart...the inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood."*

1 Kings 8:46: Solomon declared that *"there is no one who does not sin against God."*

Psalms 14:1-3: *"The fool says in his heart 'there is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they together have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

{Psalms 51:5; Psalm 58:3; Psalm 130:3; Psalm 143:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 9:3; Isaiah 53:6; 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9}

New Testament

John 5:42: *"I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."*

Romans 1: 29-32:

Ephesians 2:1-3:

1 John 1:8, 10:

We are Totally Inable

Due to the depth of our depravity...we are totally incapable of changing our character.

Matthew 7:18: *"A bad tree cannot bear good fruit."*

John 3:3,5: *"unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."*

John 6:44, 65: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."*

{John 14:17; 15: 4-5}

Romans 8:7-8: *"The sinful mind...does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."*

1 Corinthians 2:14: *"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, because they are spiritually discerned."*

1 Corinthians 12:3: *"no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."*

We are Completely Guilty

Due to our depravity and our inability to please God, we are rightfully deserving of God's just punishment. Our sin is morally wrong, a violation of God's law, undesirable, a contradiction to God's perfection and can expect nothing other than God's just wrath.

Psalms 51:5 - *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*

Isaiah 48:8b - *"...from before birth, you were called a rebel."*

Why is this important?

If we are not corrupt, we have no need for the saving benefits of the cross! If we are not sinners incapable of saving ourselves then we have no need for a Savior! If we are not guilty, then we have no need for God's mercy!

What Are Some Sinful Responses to Sin?²

- There is a propensity to minimize a sin. This is often as simple as comparing one's sin to seemingly greater and more heinous sins so as to get off the hook of rebuke.

There is the delusional belief that my sin is different than anyone else's because I have good reasons that legitimize my sin. Sometimes this goes so far as to say that because God in his grace used sin for something good,

- it was a good thing that the sin occurred. This is a horrendous evil because it uses God's grace that works in spite of our sin to portray our sin as a virtue and not a vice.
- There is the common error of rationalizing one's sin as acceptable for me because of some extenuating circumstances. People who rationalize their sin commonly wear down their listeners

² Again, thanks to Mark Driscoll for this section...particularly good at helping us see ourselves and move to repentance.

by speaking a great deal about their perspective on their motives and the conditions surrounding their sin in an effort to compel others to sympathize with them and thereby excuse them. Ed Welch says, “sin is madness or insanity. It is irrational, delusional, unreasonable. It makes absolutely no sense in light of God’s love toward us.

- There is blame shifting where someone else is blamed for my sin. This was the tactic of our first parents in the garden, where Eve blamed Satan for her sin, and Adam blamed Eve and God for making her.
- There is diversion where we try to avoid our sin by, for example, saying we were just joking, someone misunderstood us, or the person who confronted us in our sin was not as loving as we would have liked and hurt our feelings. Diversionary tactics are subtle and deceptive means by which sinners change the topic from their sin in an effort to not be confronted by their sin or required to repent.
- There is partial confession where we only tell a part of our sin. In pride, rather than simply, clearly, truthfully, and thoroughly telling all that we have done, it is common to only confess a portion of what we have done.
- There is what Paul calls “worldly grief,” where we merely regret the consequences of our sin. We do not repent of our sin and put it to death because we only regret its effects, not the sin itself.
- There is excuse-making, whereby we find a reason to explain our sin so that it is not seen as sinful but understandable. The truth is that, often, there are mitigating factors that contribute to our sin, but to use them as excuses for our sin denies our moral responsibility.
- There is victimization, where I appear helplessly pitiful and unable to have done otherwise by naming someone (e.g., parent, Satan, past abuser) or something (e.g., genes, culture, personality) as responsible for my sin. The aim of victimization is to get sympathy and empathy rather than a rebuke and is an offense to true victims who have suffered actual sin.
- There is mere confession, where I name the sin but do not repent of it and put it to death by God’s grace. Mere confession is incredibly tricky because people who practice it acknowledge their sin, show remorse, and ask for forgiveness. But they do not change and only repeat their sin, thereby revealing that they were not truly repentant and willing to put their sin to death because Jesus died for it.
- There is a growing tendency to speak of sin in secular counseling circles as more of a disease than an evil offense. Indeed, like an addiction or disease, sin affects our entire being; it is painful, tragic, and leads to death. Still, there are many ways in which sin is not like a disease; it is something we do rather than something we catch, and something we confess rather than treat. In the end, speaking of sin as a disease is yet another effort to excuse ourselves and shift the blame for our evil actions away from ourselves.

All of this matters because we are supposed to love sinners. In order to love sinners we must take their sin seriously, as God does. If we do not, we rob sinners, including ourselves, of the dignity God bestows on us as his image-bearers. We were not made for sin and to allow sinners to sinfully respond to their sin and not be confronted by it is unloving toward God and unhelpful for them.

How Does God Respond to Sin?

What would you do if you were God and were treated as he has been by sinners in general, and our first parents in particular?

Would your first instinct be to act in grace toward sinners by pursuing them, speaking to them, teaching them, covering them, and promising them that the second member of the Trinity would come as the “Last Adam” to suffer and die at the hands of sinners for their salvation?

The stunning account of Genesis shows a God that no one would have ever invented because he does what no one could have ever predicted.

In Genesis 3:15 God preached the *protoevangelion* (meaning “first gospel”) to our first parents and promised the coming of Jesus, who would be harmed by Satan but who would ultimately crush him and bring salvation to sinners.

God then cursed the parties involved as consequence for their sin.

God then dealt graciously and kindly with the man and woman even though they had sinned.

God came to them, called to them, promised his Messiah, and lovingly clothed Adam and Eve to protect them. God also lovingly banished the couple from the Garden and the tree of life so that they would not live forever in a state of sin.

Amazingly and ultimately, God not only judged sin in righteousness, but then bore its penalty himself as an act of love; he offers forgiveness and reconciliation by grace even though he is the offended person against whom we have all sinned. In so doing, he remains perfectly perfect and we are more wicked than we ever feared yet more loved than we ever hoped.

The Wrap Up:

1. When we understand our sin biblically, we understand why we are prone to great evil and know why the world is not the way it should be.
2. But by knowing that God made us in his image and likeness, we find the source of our dignity, value, and identity.
3. By knowing of the fall and our state as sinners, we understand the root problems with our life and world.
4. And by understanding the work of Jesus in our place for our sins, we enjoy the depth of God’s love for us, work in us, and eternal future with us as he restores us to the holy state from which we have fallen.