

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Original Sin or Original Blessing?

### A History of Progressive Christianity – 4: Why Original Blessing Doesn't Have an Answer for Our World's Pain and Suffering

ALISA CHILDERS

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Recently, Michael Gungor of the Liturgists Podcast tweeted, “Heaven is not a place where you are made perfect after you die. Heaven is the realization that you’re already perfect as you are now.” With over 63 thousand followers on twitter, many of whom are current and former evangelical Christians, it’s not a stretch to say this idea has become mainstreamed. But there seems to be a major disconnect between this sentiment and the [evil and suffering](#) we see all around us every day.

For example, at the time I’m writing this article, the news cycle is inundated with images surrounding racism, rioting, looting, arson and brutality. We see humans enacting evil against other humans every time we turn on the news or check our twitter feeds. We can look around us and rightly recognize that there is something wrong with the world—something wrong with *us*.

In the wake of the civil unrest in our nation right now, it’s important to acknowledge an ancient core belief of Christianity—the doctrine of Original Sin. Original Sin teaches that because of Adam’s rebellion against God in the garden of Eden, every human is born

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with sinful desires. As our first parents, [Adam and Eve](#) have passed that sin nature on to us.

## Original blessing?

Generally speaking, progressive Christians deny that we have a sin nature and that our sin separates us from God. In his book, *A New Kind of Christianity*, Progressive leader Brian McLaren argues that whenever we use phrases like “the Fall,” and “Original Sin,” we are borrowing from pagan Greco-Roman philosophies, and not accurately reflecting biblical truth.<sup>1</sup> In their comprehensive



survey of progressive Christianity, progressive authors David Felten and Jeff Procter-Murphy wrote, “Far from being ‘fallen’ creatures trying to return to a mythical Eden, human beings are ‘emerging’ as a species from more primal and baser instincts to become more responsible and mature beings.”<sup>2</sup> Rather than affirming Original Sin, they advocate for what they call “Original Blessing” instead.

Often, progressive Christians teach that our sin isn’t what separates us from God, but it’s our *shame* that makes us *feel* separated from him. This is what Richard Rohr refers to as the “small self.” [He teaches](#) that mature faith is practiced by finding the “True Self,” and learning to “consciously abide in union with the Presence within us.”

According to progressive Christianity, sin doesn’t separate us from God. We just need to understand how loved and good we already are. This idea is antithetical to Scripture and runs contrary to what we experience in our fallen world.

## By what standard?

Since the concept of sin has to do with wrongdoing, this brings us to a much bigger question: [What is good?](#) For a generous helping of daily moral outrage, all one needs to do is to check their social media newsfeed. Everyone around us assumes there is some standard of goodness that is being violated. And there *are* things we should rightly be outraged about. But why is that? We need to ask ourselves by what *standard* can we proclaim one thing evil and another good.

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<sup>1</sup> McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christianity* (p. 43). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Felten, David. *Living the Questions*. HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

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With progressive voices telling Christians to [never give up on their dreams](#), put [themselves first](#), and to [trust their own hearts and consciences](#), it's no wonder many follow those breadcrumbs on a path that will inevitably end in moral relativism. With the Bible cast aside or radically reinterpreted, this leaves nothing but personal feelings and preferences to adjudicate right from wrong.

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To illustrate this point, in 2017, Jen Hatmaker [revealed](#) that she no longer viewed homosexual behavior as a sin. In a subsequent [interview](#), she articulated that one of the main reasons she changed her mind was because of Jesus' analogy of good fruit vs. bad fruit.

This idea was popularized by Matthew Vines in his 2014 book, *God and the Gay Christian*. Vines appeals to Matthew 7:15-20, in which Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruit." He argues that appealing to one's *experience* of a particular teaching should help determine its interpretation. In other words, if the traditional biblical understanding of homosexuality is perceived to be harmful to gay people, it should be reinterpreted.

Because Hatmaker and Vines misunderstand what Jesus [actually meant](#) by "[good fruit](#)," [and "bad fruit"](#), they are actually promoting a type of moral relativism that is based entirely on a person's individual feelings.

## Morality and justice

There is a strong cry in our day for justice—but because many in the progressive Christian movement have walked away from any external (and therefore fixed) moral standard, there is great confusion about what justice looks like. When your view of what is good fruit and bad fruit doesn't match mine, who chooses between us? Can I demand that you conform to my standards of right and wrong? Without a moral law-giver, there can be no objective moral law. It's just my opinion vs. yours. Once a common standard for morality is removed, justice is reduced ultimately to a power struggle—which isn't justice at all.



Nevertheless, most people instinctively realize that things like stealing and lying and murder are wrong for everyone. They also know that bitterness and jealousy and rage

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can be destructive to a person's wellbeing. In other words, most people live as if there's such a thing as sin.

That brings us to the next question: if sin really exists, what should be done about it? Telling people they just need to realize how good and perfect they already are might receive hundreds of "likes" on Twitter, but it will never satisfy the deepest longings of the human soul. Nor will violent displays of anger ever eradicate anger from our world.

To get to the heart of a solution, we need to figure out where sin came from. Was it just an evolutionary misstep? If we view humans as generally good, but just falling a bit short of their potential, we will strive in our own strength to be better and do better. But because we don't agree on what "better" really means, we will never leave the endless hamster wheel of our own confused and often contradictory efforts.

As noted above, the [Bible offers a completely different picture of reality](#). Scripture teaches that sin originally came about when God's created beings set their wills against the will of God. Because God's nature and character is the one true standard for all morality, our failure to meet that standard separates us from Him. The solution to sin would be to restore our unity with him. However, once sin became part of human nature, that restoration was impossible for us to achieve on our own.

In theory, God could have overlooked our sinfulness—but that would make Him unjust. Because justice requires compensation for wrong-doing, a payment for our sin had to be made. The astonishing beauty of the gospel is that God himself, who had no debt to pay, chose to make our payment on our behalf through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

As a result, instead of any "hamster wheel" solution we might devise, those who admit their helplessness and accept God's payment find themselves truly able to overcome the effects of original sin. Because we have received mercy and compassion and forgiveness from God, we are able in turn to extend these gifts to others. Because we understand God's view of morality, we can work to establish the standards of justice and goodness that will actually draw humanity back to what their Creator originally intended.

With its relativistic approach to sin and morality, Progressive Christianity doesn't offer a right diagnosis, medicine, and cure for the disease of sin. It can only leave you enslaved to the sinful chaos that reigns in every human heart. And that is not *good* for anyone.

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## Go Deeper:

- [The History of Progressive Christianity: Progressive Christianity Part 1](#)
  - [How to Spot Progressive Christianity – Cultural Signs: Progressive Christianity Part 2](#)
  - [How to Spot Progressive Christianity – Theological Signs: Progressive Christianity Part 3](#)
  - [How to Reach our Progressive Friends: Progressive Christianity Part 5](#)
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