

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Doctrine of Sin

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DEFINITION OF SIN

Sin is a transgression of the law of God. The Greek word *parabasis* means “overstepping, transgression.”¹ God gave the Mosaic law to heighten man’s understanding of His standard and the seriousness of transgressing that standard (Rom. 4:15). Thereafter, when God said, “You shall not bear false witness,” a lie was seen to be what it is: an overstepping or transgression of the law of God (cf. Rom. 2:23; 5:14; Gal. 3:19).

Sin is a failure to conform to the standard of God. The Greek word *hamartia* means “miss the mark,” “every departure from the way of righteousness.”² Hence, it means that all people have missed the mark of God’s standard and continue to fall short of that standard (Rom. 3:23). This involves both sins of commission as well as omission. Failure to do what is right is also sin (Rom. 14:23).

Sin is a principle within man. Sin is not only an act but also a principle that dwells in man.³ Paul refers to the struggle with the sin principle within (Rom. 7:14, 17–25); all people have this sin nature (Gal. 3:22). Hebrews 3:13 refers to it “as the power that deceives men and leads them to destruction.”⁴ Jesus also refers to sin as a “condition or characteristic quality”⁵ (John 9:41; 15:24; 19:11).

Sin is rebellion against God. Another Greek word for sin is *anomia*, which means “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4) and can be described as a “frame of mind.”⁶ It denotes lawless deeds (Titus 2:14) and is a sign of the last days, meaning “without law or restraint” (Matt. 24:12).

Sin is wrongful acts toward God and man. Romans 1:18 refers to “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Ungodliness refers to man’s failure to obey God and keep the

¹ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., revised by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1979), p. 611.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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commandments related to Him (Exod. 20:1–11); unrighteousness is seen in man's failure to live righteously toward his fellow man (Exod. 20:12–17).

ORIGINAL SIN

Definition. Original sin may be defined as “the sinful state and condition in which men are born.”⁷ It is so designated because: (1) “it is derived from the original root of the human race (Adam), (2) it is present in the life of every individual from the time of his birth, and (3) it is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man.”⁸ Simply stated it refers to “the corruption of our whole nature.”⁹

Results. First, man is totally depraved. “Total depravity does not mean that everyone is as thoroughly depraved in his actions as he could possibly be, nor that everyone will indulge in every form of sin, nor that a person cannot appreciate and even do acts of goodness; but it does mean that the corruption of sin extends to all men and to all parts of all men so that there is nothing within the natural man that can give him merit in God's sight.”¹⁰

Second, man has an innate sin nature. “The sin nature is the capacity to do all those things (good or bad) that can in no way commend us to God.”¹¹ Every part of man is affected: intellect (2 Cor. 4:4); conscience (1 Tim. 4:2); will (Rom. 1:28); heart (Eph. 4:18); and the total being (Rom. 1:18–3:20).¹²

IMPUTATION OF SIN

The word *imputation* comes from the Latin word *imputare*, meaning “to reckon,” “to charge to one's account,”¹³ and relates to the problem of how sin is charged to every person. The basic Scripture is Romans 5:12, which teaches that sin entered the world through Adam. The interpretation of that verse determines one's view of imputation. Historically, there have been four major views of how sin is imputed to the human race.

Pelagian view. Pelagius was a British monk born about AD 370 who taught his strange doctrines at Rome in AD 409. Modern Unitarians continue his basic scheme of doctrine.

⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 244.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:227.

¹⁰ Ryrie, *Survey of Bible Doctrine*, p. 111.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R. K. Johnston, “Imputation,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 555.

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Pelagius taught that God created every soul directly (he despised the traducian theory), and that every soul therefore was innocent and unstained. No created soul had any direct relation to the sin of Adam; the only significance of Adam's sin upon humanity was the bad example. Pelagius, therefore, did not view Romans 5:12 as affecting all humanity; it did not. No sin of Adam was imputed to the human race; only those acts of sin that people themselves committed were imputed to them. Moreover, man did not die because he sinned but because of the law of nature. Adam would have died even if he had not sinned. Pelagius and his doctrines were condemned at the Council of Carthage in AD 418.¹⁴

Pelagius's teaching ran contrary to the Scriptures on a number of points. He taught that man did not die because of sin, yet Scripture affirms the opposite (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23). Pelagius taught that man did not have a natural tendency toward sin, but Scripture affirms the opposite (Rom. 3:9–18). If the Pelagian view is followed out logically, then each person born free of the sin of Adam would require an individual "fall," or there would be some perfect people.

Arminian view. Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) was a Dutch theologian. The Arminian view is similar to semi-Pelagianism and is representative in the Methodist church, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, and others. In thought similar to Pelagianism, Arminius taught that man was not considered guilty because of Adam's sin. When people would voluntarily and purposefully choose to sin even though they had power to live righteously—then, and only then, would God impute sin to them and count them guilty. Although man does not possess original righteousness because of Adam's sin, "God bestows upon each individual from the first dawn of consciousness a special influence of the Holy Spirit, which is sufficient to counteract the effect of the inherited depravity and to make obedience possible, provided the human will cooperates, which it still has power to do."¹⁵ Thus Arminius recognized an effect from Adam's sin but not in the sense of total depravity; through divine enablement man could still make righteous choices. Romans 5:12 is not understood as all humanity suffering the effect of Adam's sin and death; but rather because of the individual agreement with Adam's act is sin imputed to the individual.

Federal view. The federal view was originally propounded by Cocceius (1603–1669) and became a standard of belief in Reformed theology. It was taught by men like Charles Hodge; J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.; and Louis Berkhof. This view is called the federal view because Adam is seen as the federal head or representative of the entire human race. God

¹⁴ See the helpful discussion of Pelagius's doctrine as well as a critique of it in A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 597–601. A helpful survey of his life and teachings is also given by B. L. Shelley, "Pelagius, Pelagianism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 833–34.

¹⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 601.

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entered into a covenant of works with Adam whereby He promised to bless Adam and thereby the entire human race with eternal life if Adam obeyed. Disobedience would bring suffering to the entire human race. As a result of Adam's sin, since he was the representative of the human race, his sin plunged the entire human race into suffering and death. Through the one sin of Adam, sin and death are imputed to all humanity because all humanity was represented in Adam. Charles Hodge defines the view: "in virtue of the union, federal and natural, between Adam and his posterity, his sin, although not their act, is so imputed to them that it is the judicial ground of the penalty threatened against him coming also upon them."¹⁶

Augustinian view. This view is named after Augustine (a.d. 354–430) and has been more recently held by Calvin, Luther, Shedd, and Strong. This view teaches that the statement "all sinned" in Romans 5:12 suggests that all humanity was a participant in Adam's sin. Just as Levi (although not yet born) paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham in that Levi was "seminally present" in Abraham (Heb. 7:9–10), in a similar way, all humanity was "seminally present" in Adam when Adam sinned and therefore all humanity participated in the sin. Therefore, the sin of Adam and the resultant death is charged to all humanity because all humanity is guilty. God holds all humanity guilty because all humanity *is* guilty.

VIEWS OF THE IMPUTATION OF SIN				
Views	Romans 5:12	Adam	Humanity	Modern Adherents
Pelagian View	People incur death when they sin after Adam's example.	Sin affected Adam alone.	No one affected by Adam's sin.	Unitarians
Arminian View	All people consent to Adam's sin—then sin is imputed.	Adam sinned and partially affected humanity.	Depravity is not total; people received corrupt nature from Adam but not guilt or culpability.	Methodists Wesleyans Pentecostals Holiness groups
Federal View	Sin is imputed to humanity because of Adam's sin.	Adam alone sinned but human race affected.	Depravity is total; sin and guilt are imputed.	Presbyterians Others holding to Covenant theology.

¹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:192–93.

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Augustinian View	Sin is imputed to humanity because of Adam's sin.	Humanity sinned in Adam.	Depravity is total; sin and guilt are imputed.	Reformers Later Calvinists
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THE CHRISTIAN AND SIN

The conflict. The Christian's conflict with sin, according to 1 John 2:16, arises from three areas. (1) The world. The *world* (Gk. *kosmos*) denotes "that which is hostile to God, i.e., lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved."¹⁷ Believers are warned not to love the world nor the things in the world (1 John 2:15). This statement indicates there is both a material element as well as a philosophy to be shunned. John further indicates that the world lures the Christian to sin through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). This world lies under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19) and manifests itself in foolishness (1 Cor. 3:19), immorality (1 Cor. 5:10), and hostility toward God (James 4:4). The Christian is to reckon that he has been crucified with regard to the world (Gal. 6:14).

(2) The flesh. The *flesh* (Gk. *sarx*) "is the willing instrument of sin, and is subject to sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the *sarx*."¹⁸ The term *flesh* may be used in a material sense; however, it is frequently given a nonmaterial meaning to refer to "the old nature of the flesh ... that capacity which all men have to serve and please self ... the capacity to leave God out of one's life."¹⁹ The flesh as a capacity for sin is described in Paul's Christian experience in Romans 7:17–20. It involves lust and controls the mind (Eph. 2:3); it governs the life of the non-Christian (Rom. 8:5–6). The solution to the dilemma of Romans 7:25 is the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2ff) and a renewed mind (Rom. 12:1) that reckons the flesh crucified (Rom. 6:6).

(3) The devil. The devil is a real, personal being who opposes the Christian and seeks to make him ineffective in his Christian life. He is a formidable enemy of the Christian since he is intent on devouring Christians (1 Pet. 5:8); hence, the Christian is called on to resist the devil (James 4:7). This can be accomplished through putting on the armor for a spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10–17).

¹⁷ Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 446.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 744.

¹⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), pp. 34–35; see also J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed to Be Like Him* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), pp. 85–93, 208–14.

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The provision. God has made ample provision for the Christian to keep him from the path of sin. (1) The Word of God. God has given the Christian a “God-breathed” Bible that is profitable for “training in righteousness” that the believer may be “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). It is this Word that can keep the believer from a life of sin (Ps. 119:9–16); it is this Word that cleanses the believer (Eph. 5:26), sanctifies the believer (John 17:17), and aids in answer to prayer (John 15:7).

(2) The intercession of Christ. Christ is the believer’s advocate or defense attorney when the believer commits sin (1 John 2:1). Because Christ continually lives His intercession is effective (Heb. 7:25). John 17 reveals the nature of Christ’s intercession for Christians: He prays for their security (17:11), concerning their joy (17:13), for their protection from Satan (17:15), for their being set apart in the truth (17:17), and that they might ultimately be with Christ (17:25).

(3) Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s ministry in the believer’s life is crucial regarding a life of separation from sin. The Spirit’s ministry involves indwelling (Rom. 8:9), anointing (1 John 2:20; 4:4), sealing (Eph. 1:13, 4:30), empowering (Acts 1:8), filling (Eph. 5:18), and enabling the believer to live constantly by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).²⁰

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²⁰ Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (pp. 310–314). Moody Press.