

LESSON 5: Man and sin

I. Introduction

“What is man?” is a question with enormous implications. How we answer it will determine our mission in life, our view of morality, and our relationships with other people and the world around us. Consider and discuss how each of the following definitions would impact one’s goals, morality, and relationships:

- A. Man is the most highly evolved animal on the planet.
- B. Man is a vehicle for an immortal soul. When he dies, karma will dictate which vehicle shall carry the soul in the next life – whether he will be a cockroach or a king.
- C. Man is a sophisticated composition of mass and energy.

II. Anthropology (the Study of Man)

A. The Creation and Composition of Man:

Genesis 2:7 ***Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.***

A few observations are in order:

1. The Lord God Himself was the initiator and agent in the creation of man.
 - Why is it important to remember that God created us? What does this imply about how we should relate to God?
2. God did not create man “ex nihilo” – out of nothing. Rather, He formed him out of already existing materials. Like a potter, God took a lump of clay and skillfully formed man.
 - How do observations 1 and 2 grate against the notion that man evolved from monkeys?

3. Man does not become a living being until the Lord God breathes life into him. This has some important ramifications:

- a. Death occurs when the “breath of life” leaves the body.
- b. Man is body and spirit. If a man lacks either of these, he is no longer a man.¹

B. Man in the Image of God:

Genesis 1:26-27 ***Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.***

According to this passage, man resembles God in some sense. One Old Testament Scholar comments:

Traditional interpretation of the doctrine of the imago Dei (image of God) propose that man is in God’s image in the sense that he shares much of what God is. That is, man, like God, has personality, intelligence, feeling, and will. To be in God’s image is indeed to be godlike though obviously in a highly nuanced and restricted sense. . . The difference between the transcendent God and mere mortals are so vast, however, as to require a better explanation of the imago Dei, one that focuses not so much on ontological equivalence as on functional comparisons. ²

The following verse strengthens this point.

Genesis 1:28 ***And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”***

Being made in the image of God means that man is to rule the earth as Yahweh’s viceroy – a representative of the King. Just like an ambassador must be aware that his conduct is a reflection of his homeland, so we must realize that our conduct reflects our Creator.

- What are some of the skills and abilities that God gave man in order that he might be able to rule on His behalf?

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holdman Publishers, 2006) pp. 174-8.

² Eugene H. Merrill, pp. 169-170.

C. The Fall of Man:

Although Genesis 3 does not reveal the origin of sin, it does tell the story of how sin entered and impacted humanity, hijacking God's rule over His creatures. This historical event sets the stage for the unfolding drama of how God would reclaim His everlasting dominion over the planet.

1. The Test:

Genesis 2:16-17 ***And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."***

In the garden, God tested Adam and Eve. The test was simple: They were free to eat the fruit from any tree in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17), determining whether or not they would believe God and obey Him. Disobedience was highly consequential—it meant death, both physical and spiritual. God's purpose in the test was to give Adam and Eve a knowledge of sin through obedience by *not* eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. By disobeying His command they came to a knowledge of good and evil, but they attained the knowledge in the wrong manner.³

2. The Temptation:

Genesis 3:1-5 ***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'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 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.' " But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."***

The agent of temptation is the serpent, whom we later discover to be Satan (Rev. 12:9). This crafty creature issues a threefold strategy to dupe Eve into disobedience:

- a. **Satan raised doubt concerning God's Word** (Gen. 3:1). The temptation created suspicion about the goodness of God; it raised a question whether

³ Enns, Paul P.: The Moody Handbook of Theology. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 308

God was dealing wisely and fairly with Adam and Eve. Eve succumbed to the temptation in that she exaggerated God's prohibition by her response to Satan (Gen. 3:3). God had said nothing about touching the fruit.

- b. **Satan lied by saying they would not die** (Gen. 3:4). Satan made a categorical denial of God's earlier statement; Satan said, "You will surely not die!"
- c. **Satan told a partial truth** (Gen. 3:5). Satan told them they would be like God, knowing good and evil if they ate the fruit. It was true they would know good and evil, but Satan did not tell them the rest—he did not tell them about the pain, suffering, and death that would occur because of their sin.⁴
 - What are some ways in which Satan continues to impugn God's character in modern thought and culture?

3. The Results of Sin:

Adam and Eve's sin had catastrophic consequences, as God had to punish their disobedience. His righteous dealings are recorded in Genesis 3:14-19:

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

- a. **Judgment on the serpent** (Gen. 3:14). The serpent had earlier been a noble creature; as a result of the judgment it was altered in form and shape. Because the serpent exalted itself, it would now be forced to crawl on its belly and eat the dust of the earth.

⁴ Enns, Paul P.: The Moody Handbook of Theology. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 309

- b. **Judgment on Satan** (Gen. 3:15). This verse must be understood as addressed not to the serpent, but to Satan. There would be enmity between Satan's seed (unbelievers and possibly demons) and the woman's seed (believers, but specifically Christ). "**He shall bruise your head**" indicates Christ would deliver a death blow to Satan at the cross (Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14) and thus win a major victory. "**You shall bruise his heel**" suggests Satan would have a minor victory in the fact that Christ died; nonetheless, that very death would become Satan's ultimate defeat.
- c. **Judgment on the woman** (Gen. 3:16). This judgment had several parts. First, the woman would experience pain in childbirth. The pain (Heb. *yizabon*) in childbirth is similarly used of Adam's toil (Gen. 3:17); both would suffer in their respective roles. Second, a woman's desire would be toward her husband. This is a difficult phrase and may mean (a) sexual desire, as in Song of Solomon 7:10; (b) desire for security under her husband's authority; or (c) desire to rule over her husband (cf. Gen. 4:7). A final aspect of the judgment upon the woman was that her husband would rule over her.
- d. **Judgment on the man** (Gen. 3:17–19). The first part of this judgment was against the ground: no longer would the earth spontaneously produce its fruit, but only through the man's hard toil. The second aspect of man's judgment was death. Adam had been made from the elements of the ground, and the death process would return man to the dust from which his body had been taken.
- e. **Judgment on the human race** (Rom. 5:12). The result of Adam's sin was passed on to the entire human race, who all now became subject to death.
- f. **Judgment on creation** (Gen. 3:17–18). All animal and plant life would be affected by the sin of Adam. Animal life and nature would resist the man. Animals would become wild and ferocious; plant life would produce weeds to hinder productivity. All creation would groan with the effect of the Fall and anxiously long for the day of restoration (Rom. 8:19–21).⁵
 - What do the above judgments indicate about how God viewed Adam and Eve's simple act of rebellion?

III. Hamartiology

Man's fall necessarily leads us to a discussion of hamartiology – the doctrine of sin.

⁵ Enns, Paul P.: The Moody Handbook of Theology. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 309

A. Definition of Sin

Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. Sin is here defined in relation to God and His moral Law. Sin includes not only individual acts such as stealing, lying, or committing murder, but also attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes God requires of us.⁶

This has led many theologians to query whether there is one basic principle of sin, one underlying factor which characterizes all sin in its manifold varieties. Three suggestions have surfaced.

1. **Sensuality:** Sin is the tendency of the lower physical nature to dominate the higher or spiritual nature. Taking literally Paul's injunction against "living according to the flesh," this view sees the physical or material aspects of being human as the basis for sin. While this may help to explain drunkenness and sexual immorality, it does not give an account for the sins of the mind such as coveting, pride, bitterness, etc. In addition, when Paul says "flesh" he does not conceptualize our physical body as the source of sin, but our corrupt human hearts.
2. **Selfishness:** Simply put, this is to choose the interests of self as the supreme authority and governing principle of life. This means we prefer ourselves to God and to others. All sin is comprised of loving ourselves rather than God. Our sin dethrones God, and places ourselves on the throne of our life.

While there is a lot to commend this view, it is helpful to realize that some of our sinful actions cannot be characterized as selfish in a strict sense. Some people may sin against God because they love *someone else* more than they love God. Or people might selflessly give their lives to a cause, for example a false religion or ideology, that opposes God.

3. **Displacement of God:** This is the failure to let God be God. In one theologian's words,

It is placing something else, anything else, in the supreme place which is His. Thus, choosing oneself rather than God is not wrong because the self is chosen, but because something other than God is chosen. Choosing any finite object over God is wrong, no matter how selfless such an act might be.⁷

⁶ Wayne Grudem, p. 490.

⁷ Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, (2nd Edition) p. 598.

B. Inherited Sin

1. Scriptural Teaching:

Romans 5:12 *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*

Romans 5:19 *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

The idea of this passage is that when Adam disobeyed, God thought of us as sinning, too. Though we did not exist, God saw into the future and began to think of us as guilty with Adam. There are two major theories which attempt to explain how Adam's sin was imputed to us.

2. Possible Explanations:

- a. **Federal Headship:** Adam, as a divinely ordained representative person, stood the test for his posterity, with his act being considered their act and his sin their sin – a serious position for Adam to be in, and he knew it. The problem with this view is that it assumes that “Adam knew that he was the representative of the human race.” We receive no such notion from the biblical accounts that this is the case.
- b. **Seminal Headship:** A biological and genealogical union (sometimes called a natural or seminal union) exists between Adam and his posterity so that when Adam sinned all sinned by actual participation – it is as though we were in Adam. Existing in our father's loins is a concept with biblical precedent. For instance in Hebrews 7:9-10 we read:

One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

In my opinion, this explanation is to be preferred.

3. Objection and Answers:

- a. Objection: Isn't the whole idea of inherited sin unfair? We are not Adam, so why does God hold us accountable for his sin?
- b. Response:

- i. The person who protests this is not without sin himself. In the words of Paul in Romans 2:6, God ***“will render to each one according to his works”***.
 - ii. Although it is not conclusive, we should note that if we were in Adam’s place, we would have done the same thing.
 - iii. If we think that it is unfair for us to be represented by Adam, then it would also be unfair for us to be represented by Christ.
4. How does this doctrine of inherited sin help to explain the necessity of Jesus’ virgin birth?

C. Total Depravity

1. Scriptural Teaching:
 - a. Genesis 6:5 ***The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.***
 - b. Jeremiah 17:9 ***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?***
 - c. Romans 3:10-18 ***as it is written, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”***
 - d. Ephesians 2:1 ***And you were dead in your trespasses and sins***
 - e. Other Scriptures: Ps. 51:5; Matt. 13:14; Matt. 7:17–18; John 1:11; 3:3; 6:44; 8:43; 15:4–5; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14; 12:3; 2 Cor. 3:12–18; Eph. 4:18.
2. Definition:

Total depravity should first be defined negatively: it does *not* mean “(1) that depraved people cannot or do not perform actions that are good in either man’s or God’s sight.... (2) that fallen man has no conscience which judges between good and

evil for him.... (3) that people indulge in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.”⁸

The word *depravity* means that because of sin’s corruption “there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God,” while *total* means that depravity “has extended to all aspects of man’s nature, to his entire being.”⁹ Calvin defined man’s depraved estate as follows: “All men are conceived in sin, and born the children of wrath, indisposed to all saving good, propensity to evil, dead in sin, and the slaves of sin; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they neither are willing nor able to return to God, to correct their depraved nature, or to dispose themselves to the correction of it.”¹⁰

D. Degrees of Sin:

1. Introduction:

One question that often arises when we discuss the nature of sin is, “Are there degrees of sin?” Associated with this question are others regarding the nature of sin, the torments of hell, and the dissemination of God’s justice. The answer to this question helps to comprehend a number of issues related to hamartiology, resolve a number of theological disputes, but also offers a chilling warning to the unconverted within the evangelical church. Before we delve into this discussion, there are some preliminary questions we must consider:

- a. How does sin affect our legal standing before God?
- b. Is there a difference between eternal punishment and infinite punishment?
- c. Does a different punishment correspond to a different degree of sin?
- d. What would differentiate the punishment?
- e. How can there be a ‘worse hell’ if God withholds His wrath and offers no common grace to all who are in hell?

We will attempt to answer each one of these critical questions below, and then discuss the practical ramifications of our conclusions.

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, “Depravity, Total,” *ibid.*, p. 312. See also Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1972), pp. 9–13.

⁹ Ryrie, “Depravity, Total,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 312.

¹⁰ McClintock and Strong, “Calvinism,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 2:44.

2. Critical Issues Answered:

a. How does sin affect our legal standing before God?

- i. According to Genesis 2:17, what does one act of disobedience merit? (cf. Romans 5:16)
- ii. According to James 2:10-11, why does breaking one law make someone guilty of all of it?
- iii. What does breaking the law do to our legal standing before God, and what are the consequences (Romans 6:23)?

b. Is there a difference between eternal punishment and infinite punishment?

- i. Consider the following definitions of eternal and infinite, and discuss the differing shades of meaning.

Eternal: 1. Being without beginning or end; existing outside of time; 2. Continuing without interruption; perpetual.

Infinite: 1. Having no boundaries or limits; 2. Immeasurably great or large; boundless (infinite patience; a discovery of infinite importance).

- ii. What punishment is promised to those who transgress the laws of God (Rev. 14:11)?
- iii. How can a punishment be eternal but not infinite?

c. Does a different punishment correspond to a different degree of sin?

Consider Luke 12:47-48, in which Jesus discusses the need for readiness regarding the return of the Son of Man through the parable of the expectant servant. When Peter asks to whom this parable applies, Christ does not respond

directly, but uses a parable whose central point applies to all with the knowledge of the return of the Son of Man.

- i. How does the master deal with each of the servants, and on what basis (47-48a)?
- ii. What general principle does Jesus give to explain the actions of the master (48b)?
- iii. Based on Jesus' logic, does a different punishment correspond to a different degree of sin? Why or why not?

Consider Matthew 11:20-24, which occurs in a section in the Gospel (beginning in 11:2) in which Israel begins to oppose the Messiah and His coming kingdom. They rejected John the Baptist, Jesus' messenger (vs. 11:2-19), and now they have rejected Jesus and His miracles as well.

- i. Which cities did Jesus rebuke and why (vs. 20)?
- ii. What differentiates the Galilean cities from the pagan cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom?
- iii. How does the judgment of the Galilean cities compare with the judgment upon the pagan cities? What does this suggest about the relationship between the punishment and the degree of the sin?

Consider Numbers 15:27-31, from a book that gives an account of the formation of Israel during their desert wanderings. Numbers contains the laws which God intended His nation to follow, both in the desert and later in the Promised Land.

- i. What is the difference between the sins of verses 27-29 and 30-31?
- ii. What different punishments are offered and why?

d. What factors would differentiate the degrees of punishment?

- i. How would the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum have compared themselves with those of Tyre, Sidon, and especially Sodom?
- ii. Why did the Galileans deserve greater punishment than the pagans?
- iii. From this line of reasoning, as well as the other passages (Numbers 15:27-31 and Luke 12:47-48), what constitutes “greater” sin?
- iv. Why would Caiaphas’ sin be greater than Pilate’s (John 19:11)?
- v. Why would the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit be unforgivable (Matt. 12:24, 31)?
- vi. Why will greater wrath come upon Paul’s fellow countrymen in Judea (1 Thess. 2:14-16)?

e. How can there be a ‘worse Hell’ if God does not withhold His wrath and offers no common grace to any who are there?

Admittedly, this is a tough question, to which Millard Erickson gives the following answer:

The principle here seems to be, the greater our knowledge, the greater is our responsibility, and the greater will be our punishment if we fail in our responsibility. It may well be that the different degrees of punishment in hell are not so much a matter of objective circumstances as of subjective awareness of the pain of separation from God. . . . The misery one will experience from having to live with one’s wicked self eternally will be proportionate to one’s degree of awareness of precisely what one was doing when choosing evil.¹¹

¹¹ Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, (2nd Edition) pg. 1248.

3. Conclusion:

The reality of differing degrees of sin and its corresponding punishment presents itself with chilling consequences for those who, like Agrippa, are *almost* persuaded. The Master Expositor, Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon entitled “To Those Almost Persuaded,” pleads,

Once More. To have been almost persuaded, and yet not to be a Christian, will lead to endless regrets; for will not this thought bubble up in the seething soul amidst its torments forever: “I was almost persuaded to repent: why did I go on in my sin? I was almost persuaded to put my trust in Jesus, wherefore did I cling still to my self-righteousness and vain ceremonies? I was almost persuaded to forsake my evil companions, and to become a servant of God, but I am now cast away forever, where no more persuasions can melt my heart.”¹²

E. Errors Concerning the Sinfulness of Man:

- Error #1: There are good, moral, upright people out there who do not know God.
- Error #2: Some people will be able to get to heaven because their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds.
- Error #3: Every person has a God-shaped vacuum inside which causes him to seek God.
- Error #4: People learn how to become sinners by watching their parents.
- Error #5: Babies are born sinless and then become sinners as they grow up.
- Error #6: The mind of man is not corrupted by sin, and that is why we can reason with people and lead them to Christ.
- Error #7: Unbelievers are able to objectively weigh biblical evidence and then choose the truth.
- Error #8: Unbelievers are able to worship God.
- Error #9: Unbelievers are able to minister to others and give glory to God.
- Error #10: There is good inside of every man that just needs to be cultivated and encouraged.¹³

IV. Conclusion

¹² Charles Spurgeon, Spurgeon’s Sermons on Soulwinning, p. 110.

¹³ Jack Hughes http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/teaching/basic_bible_doctrine_2003_2004/5Man&SinT.pdf

What is man? After studying the doctrines of man and sin, we can safely say, “Not much.” No wonder the perplexed psalmist exclaims,

O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?

(Psalm 144:3)

God decides to make much of man because He is gracious and compassionate. He will take a fallen, rebellious, and sin-stained soul and redeem him to fulfill His original intent – that he might rule the universe on His behalf.

Revelation 20:6 ***Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.***