05

Broken

God Judges

Thirteen points every follower of Jesus should know. A study by Pastor Andy Cisneros.

13 POINTS · 05

Broken: *God Judges*

“God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

Ecclesiastes 7:29

Something has gone terribly wrong. And everyone knows it.

The Bible tells us that God created this world in a perfect state and, upon the creation of man and woman, God declared His entire creation *“very good.”* This intended state of perfect beauty in all things is described in the Old Testament as *shalom*. Even those who do not believe in the Bible long for *shalom* on the earth. Deep down in God’s creation there is a feeling of Eden, an understanding of how things are supposed to be - - but aren’t.

Yet, no matter how much money we spend, how many elections we hold, how many organizations we start, how many complaints we have, how many tears we cry, or how many wars we wage, boredom, annoyances, fears, tragedies, suffering, injustice, evil, sickness, pain, and death continue. 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 - in detail. We read how the human rebellion against God that began with the first sin is foolish and tragic. The scene is the Garden of Eden, a beautiful place made by God for the first people to live in together without sin and its effects. There, God speaks as a father to Adam and Eve, giving them complete freedom to enjoy all of creation, except they were not to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was forbidden.

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

Sailhamer describes the scene: “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.’ The snake implied by his questions that God was keeping this knowledge from the man and the woman (3:5), while the sense of the narratives in the first two chapters

has been that God was keeping this knowledge *for* the man and the woman (e.g., 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:18). 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."

Satan began by tempting Eve to mistrust God's word by changing its meaning, just as he did when tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:1–11. Rather than rebuking Satan, Eve entertained his lies and was deceived by his arguments. Satan was so bold as to accuse God of being a liar and to tempt the pride of Adam and Eve by declaring that, if they disobeyed God, they could effectually become his peer and gods themselves. Eve was faced with the decision to either trust her own judgment or to heed God's warning that doing so would be 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.

Alas, Eve believed Satan rather than God. Choosing pride over humility she partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve's sin is what you call a sin of *commission*. She did what God had forbidden.

While all of this was happening Adam stood by silently. He failed to lead his family in godliness. This is what we call a sin of *omission*. Adam failed to do what God created him to do — lead his family and serve God. Adam then joined in 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 from one another and covering themselves as sinners have done in various ways ever since. God then came looking for the man, holding him responsible for the sinful condition of his family. Rather than admit his sin and repent, 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.

As a result of the fall, the brokenness of sin has continued ever since. 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. Intimacy 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. Theologian D. A. Carson says, "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. Sin and the fall do not have the world, but 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, a savior we can trust in, and the only one who can liberate us from sin's presence and penalty, by calling us to honest repentance and to live God centered lives of peace, responsibility, and authenticity as saved sinners."

What is Sin?

Sin is so complex, and far-reaching that it is difficult to define. Cornelius Plantinga says, “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 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.” D. A. Carson writes, “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).”

The Bible uses a number 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, idolatry, insanity, irrationality, pride, selfishness, blindness, deafness, a hard heart, a stiff neck, delusion, unreasonableness, and self-worship.

Here are eight aspects of sin that the Old Testament teaches us:

1. Sin in the Old Testament is first a relational breach. This is clear in Genesis 2 – 3 where, because of their sin, Adam and Eve are separated from God and one another; they hide from God and are afraid. They fear God, blame one another, and seek to cover their sin and shame while living their life apart from God.

2. Sin in the Old Testament is a social matter because shalom has been vandalized. This is shown by the brokenness of this world expressed in murder, perversion, drunkenness, the continual evil that precipitated the flood, and human attempts at an Eden-like society without any regard for God that spring forth in Genesis 4–11.

3. Sin in the Old Testament is a covenantal rebellion against God and His authority. This is witnessed in Exodus 32 to 34, where, following God’s freeing of His people, they dishonor, disregard, and disobey Him by worshiping idols while God is giving them the Ten Commandments through Moses.

4. Sin in the Old Testament is a legal transgression that results in guilt that necessitates punishment. One clear example is found in Deuteronomy 32, where in song Moses recollects some of the most treasonous behavior of God’s people and the price that had to be paid for justice to be maintained.

5. Sin in the Old Testament results in ritual uncleanness, pollution, and filth, marked by the use of words such as *filth, defiled, unclean*, and *whore*. This defilement happens both to sinners and victims; we defile ourselves by our own sin and are defiled by others when they sin against us.

6. Sin in the Old Testament includes emotional pain such as shame and disgrace. This is first seen in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve sin and then hide in shame and disgrace. Prior to their sin they *"were not ashamed."*

7. Sin in the Old Testament is spoken of in historical terms as an accumulating burden where sin is piled up from one generation to the next. Sin only worsens over time as people invent new ways to do evil more effectively.

8. Sin in the Old Testament is spoken of with the finality of death. Sin is deadly, and ends only in death. This is because when we sin and prefer created things to our creator God, we stop ruling over creation and are ruled by it.

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

1. The most common New Testament word for sin is the Greek word *hamartia*, which means *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. Like an arrow missing the bullseye.

2. The New Testament frequently uses the Greek word *paraptoma,* which means *to trespass.* This word speaks of crossing a line of God's law, whether intentionally or unintentionally, like trespassing on private property.

3. The New Testament also uses the Greek word *parabasis* to speak of sin as *disobedience* and *transgression*. By using this word, the Bible is referring to evil intent, where someone defiantly chooses to disobey God and thus sin, knowing full well what they are doing.

4. The New Testament often uses the Greek word *asebeias* to speak of sin in terms of ungodliness and godlessness. This word refers to sinners' active character of rebellion where they act as if there was no God and/or as if they were their own God and the highest authority in their life.

Sin includes both *omission*, where we *do not do* what we ought, and *commission*, where we *do what we ought <u>not</u> do*. 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 idolatry which is the replacing of God as first with something or someone else—most often ourselves.

Sin includes individuals, communities and networks 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, breaking human laws, defying godly authority such as parents or church, and violating one's own conscience, as well as conviction by the Holy Spirit. Sin includes perversion, using good things for evil purposes. Sin includes pollution, infecting good things with evil. 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.

Proverbs 20:9 says, *"Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?"* The answer is, no one but God through Jesus Christ.

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Some sinners seek to minimize their sin by comparing their sins to others' so that theirs appear minor and somehow less sinful. Are there degrees of sin? On one hand, God sees people in the categories of perfection and imperfection and considers any sin a violation of the entirety of His law (James 2:10). All sin is grievous. One example is Jesus' teaching that people cannot excuse lust because it is not as bad as adultery (Matt. 5:28). This means that sinners must not compare themselves, or their sin, to others. But rather, we must compare ourselves to Jesus and see all of our sin without diminishing any of it (Gal. 6:3 – 4).

On the other hand, sins *do* have degrees of severity. Jesus told Pilate the high priest, *"He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin"* (John 19:21). Some sins have greater consequences than others. This is why the Bible speaks of the sin that leads to death (1 Jn. 5: 16). Some sins are judged more severely that others, for instance, stricter judgment is in store for teachers (James 3:1). greater punishment, greater consequences for intentional sin than unintentional sin, greater punishment for child abusers, greater punishment for a man who does not feed his family than for an infidel, and twice the judgment for self-righteous religious people than for "sinners." This principle makes practical sense, seeing that, for example, it would be a sin for one man to lust after another man's wife but the damage would be far greater if he actually seduced her and committed adultery with her. All parents would prefer that their neighbor simply covet their child rather than actually kidnap her.

Where Did Sin Originate?

Evil and Sin

Christian doctrine professes four essential truths. First, God is fully and continually all-powerful. Second, God is altogether good and there is no evil in Him whatsoever. Third, evil and sin really do exist. Fourth, sinners are fully responsible for their sin.

Various attempts to deal with evil do away with one or more of these truths. In their attempts to explain away evil or reduce the problem they might suggest that perhaps God is not all-powerful, or maybe God is not good, or possibly evil is just an illusion. Maybe sin is not our fault but the fault of our parents' failures,

or maybe we can blame it on our circumstances. In opposition to these errors the Bible faces evil without backpedalling and commands us to do the same. Coming up from Scripture is the greatest evil and sin of all, the murder and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

We do need to make a distinction between moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil is the result of choices of a responsible agent, whether intentional or negligent. Natural evil is suffering that occurs without a moral agent involved (hurricanes, floods, earthquakes). Humans make no (or very few) actions causing natural evils. Defining evil (the essence) and sin (the action) is very important.

Evil is a flaw, a lack or deficiency in something inherently good. Evil is therefore a lack, or that which deprives a being of some good that is proper to that being. As a parasite, evil is even more awful because it destroys that which is beautiful and whole. Examples include blindness, which is not a thing in and of itself but rather a lack of sight; and rot, which is not a thing but rather the corruption of something, like metal or wood. For this reason, Zechariah 10:2 uses the four words *deceit, lies, false*, and *vain* to explain sin in terms of something lacking. Not only is sin a lacking, it is also corruption, according to Romans 5:12–21.

Adam's sin affects us all in three ways:

1. There is inherited sin from the original sin of Adam that causes the rest of humanity to be born into a sinful state or condition. The corrupted sin nature that we inherit from Adam begins in our mother's womb.

2. There is imputed sin whereby Adam's sin and guilt is attributed, or reckoned, to us and our legal standing before and relationship with God is negated. Additionally, by the grace of God, the sinner's guilt and condemnation is imputed to Jesus Christ, who atones for sin on the cross and enables his righteousness to be imputed to the sinner as a Christian.

3. Adam's sin is imparted to us so that we are conceived in a fallen state and, apart from the enabling grace of God, are unable to respond to the gospel or remedy our depravity. To put it another way, we are each sinners by both nature and choice.

As a result of our sinful nature, we are by nature children of wrath. All sinners and destined to death (1Cor.15:21-22). Speaking of our sinful nature, A. W. Tozer says:

"There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets "things" with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns "my" and "mine" look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution."

God does not tempt us to sin, but instead, the temptation arises from within our own sinful hearts. James speaks of the source of sin within us: "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."* (James 1:13 – 15).

Behavioral change is not sufficient to remedy the human condition. What we need is a new heart and a new nature, what the Bible calls *regeneration* or *a new birth.* This must be followed by ongoing sanctification, or growth, into Christlikeness if there is to be any true victory over sin in our lives. There are only two categories of humanity—those who, under Adam, are in sin and damnation by birth and those who, under Jesus, have grace and salvation by a new birth.

Completely Broken

Human depravity is an undeniable reality. Even atheists know humans are not as they should be. Psychological pioneer Sigmund Freud views our innermost self as a "hell." In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes, "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?"

Despite the fact that we are sinners, the Bible repeatedly states that after the fall we do retain the image of God (James 3:9; 1Cor.11:7). In this is a small amount of moral sense because of the conscience that God has given us as His image bearers. Because people are made in God's image with a conscience, the Bible does speak of some non-Christians who, while not holy and living to God's glory, do some "good" things. Examples include Abimelech, Balaam, Rahab, Artaxerxes, and the Good Samaritan.

The existence of "good" non-Christians is evidence of God's common grace. While people are not utterly broken and as evil as they could be, all people are totally wicked 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 not negatively impacted by sin. Alva Huffer, in his book *Systematic Theology* states, "The essence of sin is selfishness. Sin equals self *versus* God and self *apart from* God. . . . Man sins because he is self centered instead of God centered. *Self* within man usurps God's position of authority" (pg. 200). You only have to hear a baby cry to know that this is true.

Describing what can also be called pervasive depravity, J. C. Ryle said, “Sin . . . pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers and the will, are all more or less infected.” 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. We need God’s Spirit, God’s Word, and God’s people to help us see truly and live wisely. Without God’s saving grace we sinners are unable to do anything that makes us pleasing in God’s sight because it is not done in faith as an act of worship out of love for God.

What Fights Against Us?

Not only did Satan tempt Adam in a garden, he also tempted the Last Adam in a desert. In each of the Gospels Satan appears as the tempter of Jesus Christ. From the opening to the closing pages of Scripture Satan is presented as an enemy of God and, subsequently, an enemy of God’s people. Throughout Scripture he is named in a variety of ways, including the Devil, the dragon, the Serpent, enemy, tempter, murderer, Father of Lies, adversary, accuser, destroyer, and the Evil One.

It is not uncommon for people to make either too much or too little of Satan. As C. S. Lewis says, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” We have to recognize that he is in no way equal to God. His knowledge, presence, and power are limited because he is an angelic being created by God for the purpose of glorifying and serving God. He became proud in his heart and desired to be worshiped and exalted like God. So he declared war upon God and one-third of the angels joined his army to oppose God. Judged by God for his sin, the Serpent and his followers were then cast down to the earth. (Do we have some scriptural proof of all this?)

The motivation for all of the Serpent’s work is pride and self-glory instead of humility and God-glory. One of his most powerful allies in opposing God’s people is our own pride. In his war against God, the Serpent not only has demons, but also has people, who are allies in his army either by demonic possession, demonic influence, or simply living according to their sinful nature and flesh. Such people include false prophets who speak for the Serpent, (2 Peter2:1) false apostles who lead ministries for the Serpent (2 Cor.11:13 - 14), false Christians who divide churches, and false teachers who teach false doctrine for the Serpent (2 Peter 2:1).

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare as it is experienced on the personal level, 2 Corinthians 2:11 says, *“In order Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”* Therefore, knowing Satan’s tactics helps us in anticipating his work and living in victory rather than as victims.

SCHEME 1: THE FLESH

The flesh is our internal enemy and a seed of corruption that lingers in us until our glorification at the resurrection at Jesus's coming. The flesh is our fallen internal resistance to obey God and put self-interests above God's interests. The sinful deeds of the flesh come from every part of our person. Paul uses flesh to refer to our inner propensity to sin against God. He says that the flesh is the seat of our sinful passions, the realm of sinners, and the source of our evil desires.

The Bible commands Christians to respond to the flesh in three ways.

1) We are to recognize that we are no longer under the flesh's bondage. Jesus' death for our sin and his resurrection for our salvation give us a new nature and a new power from the Holy Spirit that enables us to say *no* to our flesh and *yes* to God. 2) We are to walk in submission to the Holy Spirit (Gal.5:16) because the Holy Spirit is more powerful than our sinful desires. Only God can get us out of unholy sin and into community with Him. 3) We are to put sin to death. That means we do not excuse sin, tolerate sin, or attempt to manage it. The Holy Spirit convicts us and urges us toward repentance of sin, faith in God, worship of God, and perseverance in holiness so that sin remains dead and joy remains alive.

SCHEME 2: THE WORLD

The world (ie the world system) is our enemy. It has already succumbed to its fleshly desires and now wishes to have you join its community. It tempts us to sin against God. What is meant by the term world in its negative sense? The world is an organized system in opposition and rebellion against God. Fleshly desires working in commonality with others in like-mindedness. In 1 John 2:16, the world is defined as corporate flesh working together in three ways.

In 1 John 2:16 the world is defined as the following:

- Lust of the flesh (wanting physical desires)
- Lust of the eyes (wanting pleasures of the eyes)
- Boastful pride of life (selfish ambition)

Notice how these parallel the temptation the serpent put before Eve (Gen. 3:6).

In response to the world, Scripture instructs Christians to:

- Not love it (1 John 2:15)
- Not let it shape their values (Rom. 12:2)
- Live through Jesus as crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14)

While the world is a source of sinful temptation it does not excuse sinners from their moral responsibility. This is because, while the world can tempt us, we are still the ones who choose to sin.

SCHEME 3: SATAN

As Satan engages in combat against us he uses pride and fear. With pride he tempts us to join him apart from God's grace (Ezek. 28:17; Prov. 3:34; 8:13). Satan seeks to convince us that we are equal to God and can exist happily apart from His grace and manage our lives by our own wisdom and strength (Gen. 3:5; Isa. 13:11). If we yield ourselves to pride we will boastfully think too highly of ourselves and think too little of our God. He is named in a variety of ways, as the following list demonstrates, with many titles each relating to the various aspects of his work.

- Abaddon ("destroyer") (Rev 9:11)
- The god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4)
- Accuser (Rev. 12:10)
- Great Dragon (Rev. 12:9)
- Adversary (1 Pet. 5:8)
- Lawless One (2 Thess. 2:8)
- Apollyon ("destroyer") (Rev. 9:11)
- Liar (John 8:44)
- Beelzebul (Matt. 12:24)
- Morning Star (Isa. 14:12)
- Belial (2 Cor. 6:15)
- Murderer (John 8:44)
- Deceiver (Rev. 12:9)
- Prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2)
- Devil (Luke 4:13)
- Ruler of this world (John 12:31)
- Enemy (Matt. 13:28, 39)
- Satan (Acts 26:18)
- Evil One (Matt. 13:28, 39)
- Serpent (Rev. 12:9)
- Father of lies (John 8:44)
- Tempter (1 Thess. 3:5)

With fear he tempts us to revere him more than God and submit ourselves to his lies, accusations, temptations (Isa. 8:12–13; 35:3–4; Luke 12:4–5; Rom. 8:15). Jesus said, *"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written*

in heaven" (Luke 10:19–20). Whatever his tactics, the Serpent's ultimate goal for believers is a compromised and fruitless life built on lies and sin (1 Tim. 4:1–2; 1 John 3:7–10) and ultimately death (John 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8). This demonic opposition is increased for those who serve God most faithfully. The Bible speaks of Satan's work in what can commonly be understood as the ordinary and extraordinary demonic.

Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his book *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, speaks of the ordinary demonic as Satan coming to us as our tempter and baiting us with various pleasure and temptations, including:

Ordinary Demonic:

- Sexual sin (2 Cor. 7:5)
- Marriage between Christians and non-Christians (2 Cor. 6:15)
- False religion, false teaching, false Jesus (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 1 Tim. 4:1–2; 2 Cor. 11:1–4)
- Bitterness (Eph. 4:17–5:2)
- Foolishness and drunkenness (Eph. 5:8–21)
- Idle gossip and busybodies (1 Tim. 5:11–15)
- Lies (John 8:44)
- Idolatry (1 John 5:18–21)

Extraordinary Demonic:

- Torment (Acts 5:16)
- Physical injury (Matt. 9:32–33; 12:22–23; Acts 8:4–8)
- False miracles (Acts 8:9–23; 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:9–10)
- Accusation (Rev. 12:10)
- Vain regrets and condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- General guilt vs. specific conviction
- Second person ("you" language instead of "I")
- Death, e.g., food, sex, drink, recklessness (Prov. 8:36)
- Murder/Suicide (John 8:44)
- False spirits (1 John 4:1–6)

As God promised Adam and Eve following their sin, the defeat of Satan and his works is possible only through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our place for our sins. Hebrews 2:14–15 says, *"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that*

through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

Foundational to our study of Satan is recognizing that he is in no way equal to God. His knowledge, presence, and power are limited because he is an angelic being (a guardian cherub according to Ezekiel 28:14) Andy, isn't he speaking of the king of Tyre? created by God for the purpose of glorifying and serving God. However, he became proud in his heart and desired to be worshiped and exalted like God. So, he declared war on God and one-third of the angels joined his army to oppose God. Judged by God for his sin, the Serpent was then cast down to the earth (Isa. 14:11–23 king of Babylon?; Ezek. 28:1–19 king of Tyre?). Upon the earth he appeared as a serpent to tempt Adam and Eve by twisting God's word and lying (Gen. 3:1–24). After successfully tempting Adam and Eve to sin, he was judged and cursed by God for his sin and told that Jesus would ultimately come to completely defeat him, though Jesus would suffer physical harm in their conflict (Gen. 3:14–15). The motivation for all of the Serpent's work is pride and self-glory instead of humility and God-glory (Ezek. 28:2 ??; James 4:6–7).

One of his most powerful allies in opposing God's people is our own pride. In his war against God the Serpent not only has the fallen angels, who are now known as demons, but also has people who are allies in his army either by demon possession, demon influence, or simply living according to their sinful nature and flesh (2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 9:1; 12:3–4). Such people include false prophets who speak for the Serpent (2 Pet. 2:1), false apostles who begin ministries for the Serpent (2 Cor. 11:13), false Christians who divide churches (Gal. 2:4), and false teachers who teach bad doctrine for the Serpent (2 Pet. 2:1). Most of them have no idea that they are in league with Satan.

What Are Some Sinful Views of Sin?

Because sin is a humanity-wide problem answers for the definition, source, and cause of sin are taught from just about every conceivable ideology. By examining some of the erroneous views of sin we are able to better understand them and help explain biblical truth to those holding these positions.

- **Materialism:** They 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.
- **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. This view holds that 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.
- **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 their innate spirituality.

There are also many errors that many Christians believe about sin. As a result, their lives, holiness, and happiness suffer. Some see sin as only breaking the rules of God. Sin does include this, but people who restrict sin to just this fail to see that sin is violating the relationship with God. They tend to reduce their faith to rule-keeping rather than to a loving relationship with God that empowers, and enables obedience. Some believe that, since Jesus died for their sins, they need not fight for holiness and repent when they fail. However, because Jesus died for their sins, they are supposed to join him by putting their sins to death. Some think that unless they confess every sin they will wind up in the lake of fire because not all of their sins would have been 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 our transgressions. Some think that 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. Since our life is the outworking of our heart it is odd to consider someone as having a good heart, but bad actions. Some consider sin and fun synonymous and therefore continue in sin in the name of having fun. Because sin leads to death it kills everything it touches, particularly joy. While a sin may appear to be fun initially the distance it causes between the sinner and God, the guilt it causes, and the damage it does to you and others, are ultimately anything but fun. Sin poses as an attraction before becoming an affliction because it is deceptive and ultimately a lie. Some wrongly believe that if no one is hurt then their sin does not really matter. But this is untrue for many reasons. Because our sin is against God it grieves Him and distances us from Him. Sin hurts our church, family, friends, and those we are in community with, even if they are unaware of our sin, because sin affects and changes us negatively. Our sin also hurts us because we were not made for sin, and to live in sin is to damage ourselves. Often times we will have to live with those scars even after coming to Christ. Some believe that sin is not a problem unless one is caught, 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. Some think that if a sin is popular it must okay because "everyone is doing it." The Bible speaks often about the world in a negative sense. The Bible declares that the popular majority, and their cultures, are prone toward sin. They cannot replace God and His Word as the standard for holiness and unholiness. 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. Those who do not understand this distinction painfully try to live lives of perfection and are

devastated by 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 not only for sins, but also for mistakes.

How Does God Relate to Sin?

God is sovereign, powerful, and good. Evil exists and creatures bear moral responsibility for it. In trying to make sense of the undeniable presence of sin, along with the injustice and suffering it causes, many people deny one or more of these essential truths. Many teach that perhaps God is not truly in charge of the world and rendered powerless by sin, that God is somehow limited in his ability to effect change in the world, or that perhaps God is both good and evil. Some try to deny the reality of evil, rendering it an illusion or a matter of perception. Others deny responsibility for their own sinfulness, shifting the blame to other people or a bad environment.

Philosophers have long sought to find a way to reconcile the character of God with the reality of sin. Gottfried Leibniz first coined the term theodicy in 1710 to describe this quest for understanding. Theologian J. I. Packer says that the word theodicy comes from the Greek *theos* (God) and the root *dik* (just) and seeks to "justify the ways of God to man," showing that God is in the right and is glorious and worthy of praise despite contrary appearances. Theodicy asks, "How we can believe that God is both good and sovereign in the face of the world's evil?" There are so many bad people defying God by their bad deeds. They enjoy creating harmful (bad) circumstances, events, experiences and states of mind which thwart, or destroy, any value, actual or potential, in and for humankind. In short, mankind seems to bask in such facts, physical and moral (or immoral), that prompt such feelings. "This ought not to be."

Christian philosophers and theologians have explored several approaches to the problems uncovered by theodicy. Christian philosopher C. Stephen Evans says: "Two of the more important theodicies are the 'soul-making theodicy,' which argues that God allows evil so as to make it possible for humans to develop certain desirable virtues, and the 'free will theodicy,' which argues that God had to allow for the possibility of evil if he wished to give humans (and angelic beings) free will." Theodicies are often distinguished from defenses which argue that it is reasonable to believe that God has reasons for allowing evil, even if we do not know what those reasons are. Specific forms of theodic speculations vary greatly. Some teach a false universalism where everyone will be saved in the end. Others say that we will retain our freedom to sin even in our resurrected state.

A study of the Bible repeatedly declares that God is always, perfectly, and solely sovereign, powerful, and good. It is obvious that God is angry because of sin and evil since creatures, not the Creator, are responsible for it. Sin never destroys His plan, never limits His power to act, and never stops Him from doing good in the worst evil. From the appearance of Satan in the garden onward sin and evil are not dealt with in a systematic fashion, but in such a way as to compel us to have a continued faith in God, trusting in His ultimate providence that one day the presence and power of sin will be no more. To assume that God

cannot (making him not sovereign and/or not powerful) or will not (making him not good) is to judge God before He judges evil, rendering a verdict on God before His plan has come to completion. Since we are in the middle of history, until God is done with all of His work, we must not judge him but rather trust Him until He is finished with sin and history as we know it.

In the meantime, evil is never outside the providential control of God. He is at work to do His good purposes even in the context of evil. We see this in the story of Joseph in the final dozen chapters of Genesis. We read of Joseph's betrayal at the hands of his brothers, his unjust suffering, and his eventual rise to power because "*the Lord was with him*" (Gen. 39:2) whereby many lives were saved. When he confronts his brothers Joseph understood that the providence of God was at work in his life so he said to them, *"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"* (Gen. 50:20).

Many years later, Jesus a descendant of Joseph suffered in a similar way. He too was betrayed by his "brothers," suffered the worst injustice in history, and suffered and died in shame on a cross. At that moment it would have been tempting to imagine that God was not sovereign, that He had lost, was not good and had sinned against Jesus. Or, that He was not powerful enough to stop the injustice. However, three days later Jesus arose from his grave, atoning for the sins of the world, and God was vindicated as fully sovereign, good, and powerful.

God used the freely chosen evil of Judas, Herod, Pilate, Gentiles, and Jews to accomplish His perfect purpose. In the same way he used the Chaldeans, a horribly evil nation, to punish the persistent sin of Judah and Jerusalem (. This does not mean that their evil is His responsibility. They freely desire to kill and destroy. The God of all providence uses evil to judge evil. Even as His hand brings punishment to Israel and death to Jesus, He also brings redemption and resurrection into the context of judgment and death.

A day is coming when we will also rise to resurrection. On that day, our faith will be sight and we will see God fully vindicated as we enter the best possible world after passing through this world that prepares us for it. Until that day, our answer to the question of how God relates to sin is ultimately a humble, and continual reading of Romans 8:28, which promises, *"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* His purpose always wins out.

Wrong Responses to Sin?

Ways in which people respond to sin are numerous. Here are ten particularly sinful responses to sin that, if understood, can be helpful in not responding sinfully, but in repentance. These kinds of insights are helpful because sinners are often also sinful in how they speak about their sin and respond to it. If we love them we need to be aware of their tactics. We also need to continually examine our own responses to sin in an effort to uncover our mistakes.

1. There is a propensity to minimize a sin. This is often as simple as comparing one's sin to seemingly greater sins so as to get off the hook and not feel guilty.

2. There is the belief that *my* sin is special from anyone else's because I have good reasons that legitimize my sin, and God should put an asterisk next to that. Some people continue that thought by saying that God, in His grace, often uses sin for something good. It was a good thing that my sin occurred because others can learn from it. This is evil because it uses God's grace, which works in spite of our sin, to portray our sin as a virtue and not a vice.

3) There is the common error of rationalizing sin as acceptable because of some extenuating circumstances. People who rationalize their sin commonly wear down their listeners 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."

4. There is blame shifting, where someone is blamed for the sin of another. This was the tactic of our first parents in the garden when Eve blamed Satan for her sin, and Adam blamed Eve and blamed God for making her.

5. There is diversion, where we try to avoid admitting our sin by, for example, saying we were just joking, someone misunderstood us, or that the person who confronted us about our sin was not as loving as they should have been and hurt our feelings. Such tactics are subtle and deceptive, a means by which sinners change the subject from their sin in an effort not to be confronted by it or required to repent.

6. There is partial confession where we tell only a part of our sin. Because of pride, rather than simply, clearly and truthfully telling all that we have done, it is common to only confess a portion of it.

7. There is what Paul calls "worldly grief," (2 Cor.7:10) 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.

8. There is victimization, where I appear helplessly pitiful and unable to have done otherwise by naming some one (e.g., parent, Satan, past abuser) or something (e.g., my genes, culture, personality) as responsible for my sin. The aim of victimization is to get sympathy and empathy rather than a rebuke. But, this is an offense to the victims who have suffered because of your sin.

9. 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 do not change and only repeat their sin thereby revealing that they were not truly repentant, nor willing to put their sin to death.

10. There is a growing tendency to speak of sin in secular counseling circles as more of a disease than an evil offense. 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, 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 upon us as His image bearers. We were not made for sin, and to allow sinners to respond to their sin in a sinful manner and not be confronted by it is unloving toward God and unhelpful for them.

How Does God Respond to Sin?

As we study our brokenness it is important that we see things, as much as possible, from the vantage point of God so as to identify with Him rather than sinners. Theologian R. C. Sproul reminds us: "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.'"

How would you respond to someone who sins against you? What if you were God? Would your first instinct be to act in grace toward sinners by pursuing them, speaking to them, teaching them, covering them, and promising them a messiah would come as the Last Adam to suffer and die at the hands of sinners for their salvation (1Cor.15:45). The stunning account of Genesis shows a God that no one would ever have invented, because He does what no one ever could have predicted.

In Genesis 3:15 God spoke the *protoevangelion* (meaning "first gospel") to Adam and Eve and promised the coming of Jesus who would be harmed by Satan but would ultimately crush him and bring salvation to sinners.

God then cursed the parties involved as consequence for their sin. The Serpent was cursed for what he had done and was told he would be defeated one day by the "seed" of the woman, who is Jesus, according to Galatians 3:16. The woman was given increased pain in childbirth, and God notes that she will struggle with the sinful tendency to rule over her husband rather than submit to his leadership as God

intended. The man's work that God gave him before he sinned became pain for him because God cursed the ground. This means that as men seek to work their jobs and pay their bills they will continually be as frustrated with that which is supposed to be under their dominion as God is with the rebellious man who is likewise supposed to be under God's dominion. In this toil, men are continually humbled as they learn how they too are rebellious under God's authority.

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.

We learn that Jesus was born and commissioned to save people from their sins (Matt.1:21). He did this by becoming the one who succeeded where the first Adam failed (1 Cor.15:45). He died in our place for our sins and rose for our salvation. God not only judged sin in righteousness but then allowed His son to die for our sins as an act of love. He offers forgiveness and reconciliation by grace even though he is the offended one against whom we have all sinned.

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

How Should We Respond to Sin?

Like a loving Father, God warned Adam and Eve of the consequences of sin. They, and we, have each chosen sin. Because God is holy He must deal with our sin. Because God is loving He has chosen to do so in a way that we could be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with Him. In so doing God is honoring us by showing us that we are made for more than sin and that He expects more from us.

Here is how the bible tells us to respond to sin:

- Confess our sins. (1 John1:9)
- Return back to God. (Isaiah 55:7)
- Recognize your sin in heart, mind and action. (Psalm 51:17)
- Remember we have an advocate. (1 John 2:1)
- Continue to not just return but also to seek God and His answers. (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- Forsake your sins. (Proverbs 28:13)

Remembering and Repenting:

The proper response to sin is deep, full, true, broken, earnest, devoted, tearful, prayerful, thorough, and continual humble repentance. Repentance is a glorious gift given to the children of God because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We mourn over our wicked sin by seeing it rightly before a holy God. True grief over sin comes from contemplating our Savior, not comparing our character to those around us.

The quickest and most consistent way to grieve over our sin is by seeing Jesus for who he is and the worthy life he calls us to live. God has a standard for the redeemed to live by and we fail . . . often (Philippians 1:27). But, godly grief must give way to repentance which glories in God, the giver of grace, as we live under the gospel of salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10). As we fight to see Jesus we do so in the hope that our hearts will be transformed, and by that, we put sin to death (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we talk about our response to sin I leave you with these words from the book of James. It was written to encourage believers back to faithful living instead of sinful wandering (James 1:21; 4:8–10; 5:19–20). In his letter, James cries out for the believers to see their sin rightly and act accordingly.

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." (James 4:8–9)

Our hearts are often times numb to what we have done to God and His son. Though justified by the blood of Christ, we are still infiltrated with sin (Romans 8:13), and most of the time we appear okay with it. We need help. We need reminders and we need to repent. We need encouragement . . . and an occasional hug. We'll get a little deeper into that in a few months when we discuss *The Church.*

JOURNAL

Notes & Reflections

What stood out to you in this study? Write down questions, verses to look up, and what God is teaching you.