

What Is Sin?

An Introduction to Hamartiology

Equipping Hour

What Is Sin?

Consider the words of David in Psalm 51:4 (NASB95)

**Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight....**

The words of D.A. Carson here are helpful:

“At one level, of course, this is blatantly untrue: David has sinned against Bathsheba, her husband, her child, his family, military high command, and the nation as a whole, which he serves a thief magistrate. Yet there is something profound in David’s words. What makes sin *sin*, in the deepest sense, is that it is *against God*. We let ourselves off the hook too easily when we think of sins along horizontal axes only — whether the horizontal sins of socially disapproved behavior or the horizontal sin of genocide. What makes sins really vile, intrinsically heinous — what makes them worthy of punishment by God himself — is that they are first, foremost, and most deeply sins against the living God, who has made us for himself and to whom we must one day give an account.”¹

There is a sinless humanity in first two chapters, and in the last two chapters, of the Bible. Everything else portrays a sin-infected humanity.

Sin sets the stage for everything in the Bible

Salvation cannot possibly be understood until we know what it is we are to be saved from.

God’s activities in the Scriptures cannot be rightly understood apart from a right understanding of sin.

So what is sin? according to George Zemek, sin is “any personal lack of conformity to the moral character or desire of God.”²

Zemek lists the dimensions of sin as follows:

- 1) Sin: a disposition of the heart (i.e., a state).
- 2) Sin: a thought (i.e., an impulse, intent). Mt 5:27-28.
- 3) Sin: an act.
- 4) Sin: an omission. Leviticus 5:17-19; James 4:17.

For us “the sequence of sin begins with the nature and proceeds with the thought then action or omission. With Adam the thought preceded the nature.”³

¹ D. A. Carson, “Sin’s Contemporary Significance”, in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 24.

² Zemek, “Hamartiology”, in *Syllabus*, 40.

³ *Ibid.*, 40. Zemek refers also to Edward J. Young *Genesis 3* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 60-61.

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The Vocabulary of Sin

Old Testament⁴

חָטָא

the most general term for sin.

the verb: "to sin" (1Kings 8:46; Psalm 51:4)

noun forms: sin, sinner, sin-offering

adjective: sinful

"The non-moral connotation of the root (e.g. Judge 20:16) illustrates its basic emphasis, 'to miss the mark,' 'to fail.'"⁵

תָּעָה

"to err", "to go astray"

Psalm 58:3; 95:10; 119:110

this is a deliberate wandering and is therefore culpable.

In a physical sense, this word describes the drunkard wandering about from intoxication.⁶

עָבַר

In a non-moral sense, this word means "to pass over". To cross a boundary, ford a river, or traverse a region.

In a moral context, this means "to step over" or "transgress".

Numbers 14:41; Deuteronomy 17:2; Josh 7:11.

סוּר and שׁוּר

"to turn aside", implying a departure from a correct path.⁷

Deuteronomy 9:12; Judges 2:17; Psalm 14:3.

פָּשַׁע

"to rebel, transgress"

1Kings 12:19; Psalm 32:1.

⁴ This list is generated by Zemek, "Hamartiology", in *Syllabus*. The definitions are summarized from Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

⁵ Zemek, "Hamartiology", in *Syllabus*, 29.

⁶ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1073.

⁷ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 693.

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מַעַל

“to act unfaithfully, treacherously.”

Leviticus 26:40; Josh 7:1

עָקַב

“deceitful, insidious”

The names Jacob and Koby are built on this word.

Jeremiah 17:9.

חָמַס

“to treat violently”.

Job 21:27; Jeremiah 22:3; Ezekiel 22:26

the noun form is found in Genesis 6:11; Jonah 3:8.

רָע

“evil, distress, misery, calamity” - general term for badness.

Genesis 2:17; Deuteronomy 30:15; Proverbs 26:23.

רָשָׁע

“wickedness, wicked”

Numbers 16:26; Deuteronomy 9:27.

“Spiritual criminality is the basic thrust of this word group in ethical contexts.”⁸

אָשָׁם

“to offend, to be guilty”

Numbers 5:6-8; 2 Chronicles 19:10

“The primary meaning of the word ‘asham’ seems to center on guilt, but moves from the act which brings guilt to the condition of guilt to the act of punishment. In any particular passage it is often difficult to determine which thrust the word has.”⁹

אָוֶן

“trouble, sorrow, wickedness”

Psalms 36:4; Proverbs 6:12.

The word “is frequently associated with the concepts of deception and/or fraud, frequently stressing the consequences of idolatry (cf. the word play in reference to Bethel: Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5,8).”¹⁰

עוּל

“to act wrongfully”

Psalms 71:4; Isaiah 26:10.

⁸ Zemek, 32.

⁹ *TWOT Volume 1*, 78.

¹⁰ Zemek, 32.

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עָוָה

“to bend, twist”

In a non-hamartiological sense in Psalm 38:6 (38:7 in Hebrew); “to distort” or “to make crooked” or “to pervert” in Lamentations 3:9; Job 33:27; Proverbs 12:8.

In a hamartiological sense, the word, often translated “iniquity” has in it the idea of perversion. Genesis 15:16; 1 Samuel 20:1.

A look at a few passages portraying profuse piles of the hamartiological vocabulary:

Isaiah 1 (NASB95)

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

2 Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth;

For the Lord speaks,

“Sons I have reared and brought up,

But they have **revolted** (פָּשְׁעוּ) against Me.

3 “An ox knows its owner,

And a donkey its master’s manger,

But Israel does not know,

My people do not understand.”

4 Alas, **sinful** (חַטָּא) nation,

People weighed down with **iniquity** (עָוֹן),

Offspring of **evildoers** (מַרְעִים),

Sons who **act corruptly** (מִשְׁחִיתִים)!

They have **abandoned** (עָזְבוּ) the Lord,

They have **despised** (נִאָּצְעוּ) the Holy One of Israel,

They have **turned away** (נָזְרוּ) from Him.

5 Where will you be stricken again,

As you continue in your **rebellion** (סָרָה)?

The whole head is **sick** (לָחֵלִי)

And the whole heart is **faint** (דָּוִי).

6 From the sole of the foot even to the head

There is **nothing sound in it** (אֵינֶיבֶן מָתֵם),

Only bruises, welts and raw wounds,

Not pressed out or bandaged,

Nor softened with oil.

7 Your land is desolate,

Your cities are burned with fire,

Your fields—strangers are devouring them in your presence;

It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers.

8 The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard,

Like a watchman’s hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

9 Unless the Lord of hosts

Had left us a few survivors,

We would be like Sodom,

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We would be like Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the Lord,
You rulers of Sodom;
Give ear to the instruction of our God,
You people of Gomorrah.

11 “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?”
Says the Lord.
“I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle;
And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

12 “When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?”

13 “Bring your worthless offerings no longer,
Incense is an abomination to Me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.

14 “I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts,
They have become a burden to Me;
I am weary of bearing them.

15 “So when you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Yes, even though you multiply prayers,
I will not listen.

Your hands are covered with blood (יְדֵיכֶם דְּמַיִם מְלֹאִין).

16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil (רָעָה) of your deeds from My sight.
Cease to do evil (הַרְעָה),

17 Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless (תְּמוֹצִי),
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow.

18 “Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the Lord,

“Though your sins (חַטָּאֵיכֶם) are as scarlet,
They will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool.

19 “If you consent and obey,
You will eat the best of the land;

20 “But if you refuse (תִּמְאַנּוּ) and rebel (וּמְרִיתֶם),
You will be devoured by the sword.”

Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

21 How the faithful city has become a harlot (לְזוֹנָה),
She who was full of justice!
Righteousness once lodged in her,
But now murderers (מְרַצְחִים).

22 Your silver has become dross,

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Your drink diluted with water.

23 Your rulers are **rebels** (סוֹרְרִים);

And companions of thieves (וְחַבְרֵי גַּנְבִים);

Everyone loves a **bribe** (שֹׁחַד)

And chases after rewards.

They do not defend the orphan,

Nor does the widow's plea come before them.

24 Therefore the Lord God of hosts,

The Mighty One of Israel, declares,

"Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries

And avenge Myself on My foes.

25 "I will also turn My hand against you,

And will smelt away your dross as with lye

And will remove all your alloy.

26 "Then I will restore your judges as at the first,

And your counselors as at the beginning;

After that you will be called the city of righteousness,

A faithful city.

27 Zion will be redeemed with justice

And her repentant ones with righteousness.

28 But **transgressors** (פֹּשְׁעִים) and **sinners** (חַטָּאִים) will be crushed together,

And those who **forsake** (וַעֲזָבוּ) the Lord will come to an end.

29 Surely you will be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired,

And you will be embarrassed at the gardens which you have chosen.

30 For you will be like an oak whose leaf fades away

Or as a garden that has no water.

31 The strong man will become tinder,

His work also a spark.

Thus they shall both burn together

And there will be none to quench them.

Psalm 32 (NASB95)

A Psalm of David. A Maskil.

1 How blessed is he whose **transgression** (פְּשָׁע) is forgiven,

Whose **sin** (חַטָּאָה) is covered!

2 How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute **iniquity** (עֲוֹן),

And in whose spirit there is no **deceit** (רַמְיָה)!

3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away

Through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

5 I acknowledged **my sin** (חַטָּאתִי) to You,

And **my iniquity** (וַעֲוֹנִי) I did not hide;

I said, "I will confess **my transgressions** (פְּשָׁעֵי) to the Lord";

And You forgave the **guilt** (עֲוֹן) of my **sin** (חַטָּאתִי). Selah.

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6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

7 You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

9 Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, Otherwise they will not come near to you.

10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked (לְיָשָׁרִים), But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

Psalm 51 (NASB95)

For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions (פְּשָׁעַי).

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity (מִעֲוֹנָי) And cleanse me from my sin (וּמִחַטָּאתַי).

3 For I know my transgressions (פְּשָׁעַי), And my sin (וּחַטָּאתַי) is ever before me.

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned (חַטָּאתַי) And done what is evil (וְהָרַע) in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity (בְּעֲוֹן) And in sin (וּבְחַטָּא) my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins (מִחַטָּאתַי) And blot out all my iniquities (עֲוֹנָתַי).

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors (פְּשָׁעִים) Your ways,

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And sinners (ἁμαρτωλοί) will be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness (αιματηρότης), O God, the God of my salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

18 By Your favor do good to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

New Testament¹¹

ἁμαρτία, ἀμαρτάνω

“a departure from the standard”

verb: “to depart from or miss the standard”, either human or divine.

from its early greek meaning, “to miss”, or “to not hit”.

Romans 3:9; 6:1-2,6; 8:3; Matthew 12:31.

πλανάω, πλάνη

“to wander from the path”

noun: a wandering.

Our English word “planet” is derived from this word, as the planets were thought to “wander” across the sky, unlike other “stars” that appear to remain more fixed.

This word is often used of sheep wandering and of false teachers wandering and causing others to wander from the truth.

2Timothy 3:13; 2Thessalonians 2:11; Matthew 18:12f; 1Peter 2:25.

παράβασις, παραβαίνω

verb: “to go aside, transgress”

noun: “transgression”

παρανομία

“lawlessness, evildoing”

2Peter 2:16

¹¹ This list is derived from Zemek, “Hamartiology”, in *Syllabus*. The definitions are summarized from Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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παρανομέω

"to break the law"

Acts 23:3

παράπτωμα

"a violation of moral standards, wrongdoing, sin"

Romans 5:20; Matthew 6:14

"The word emphasizes strongly the deliberate acts (only in Rom. 5:20 is it used of a universal fact) with its fateful consequences: '...it refers directly to the disruption of man's relation to God through his fault.'"¹²

παρακοή, παρακούω

noun: "a refusal to listen and so be obedient, unwillingness to hear, disobedience"

verb: "to refuse to listen to, to disobey"

Matthew 18:17; Luke 5:5; Hebrews 2:2; Romans 5:19

ἀπειθεια, ἀπειθής, ἀπειθέω

"disobedience"

verb: "to disobey"

This word is often used to describe an obstinate refusal to believe the Gospel.

Ephesians 2:2; Romans 11:30; Hebrews 4:6

ἀνομία

"lawlessness". note the alpha privative.

1John 3:4; Titus 2:14.

ἀδικέω

"to act in an unjust manner, to do wrong; to mistreat or injure"

Acts 7:24; 1Corinthians 6:7-8.

ἀσεβής, ἀσεβέω

"violating the norms for a proper relation to God; irreverent, impious, ungodly."

2Peter 2:6; Jude 4.

ἄγνοια

"ignorance"; think a-gnostic.

At times this can refer to an innocent lack of information. At other times, the ignorance is culpable.

Acts 3:17; Romans 1:13; 1Peter 1:14.

ὀφείλημα

an accounting term, "debt, what is owed", used metaphorically of sin.

Matthew 6:12.

κακός

"bad, evil"

Matthew 21:41; 24:48; Romans 1:30.

¹² Zemek, 35, citing *NIDNTT Volume 3*, 586 and *TDNT Volume 6*, 172.

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κακία

“the quality or state of wickedness, baseness, or depravity.”
Romans 1:29; James 1:21.

πονηρία

“the quality or state of a lack of moral values; baseness.”
Matthew 12:35; 15:19; Romans 1:29.

A New Testament passage portraying profuse piles of hamartiological vocabulary:

Romans 1:18–32 (NASB95)

- 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness (ἀσέβειαν)** and **unrighteousness (ἀδικίαν)** of men who suppress the truth in **unrighteousness (ἀδικία)**,
19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.
20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.
21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.
24 Therefore God gave them over in the **lusts (ἐπιθυμίαις)** of their hearts to **impurity (ἀκαθαρσίαν)**, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.
25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,
27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing **indecent acts (ἀσχημοσύνην)** and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their **error (πλάνης)**.
28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a **depraved (ἀδόκιμον)** mind, to do those things which are **not proper (μὴ καθήκοντα)**,
29 being filled with all **unrighteousness (ἀδικία)**, **wickedness (πονηρία)**, **greed (πλεονεξία)**, **evil (κακία)**; full of **envy (φθόνου)**, **murder (φόνου)**, **strife (ἔριδος)**, **deceit (δόλου)**, **malice (κακοηθείας)**; they are **gossips (ψιθυριστὰς)**,
30 **slanders (καταλάλους)**, **haters of God (θεοστυγεῖς)**, **insolent (ὕβριστὰς)**, **arrogant (ὕπερηφάνους)**, **boastful (ἀλαζόνας)**, **inventors of evil (ἔφευρετὰς κακῶν)**, **disobedient to parents (γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς)**,
31 **without understanding (ἄσυνέτους)**, **untrustworthy (ἄσυνθέτους)**, **unloving (ἄστόργους)**, **unmerciful (ἀνελεήμονας)**;
32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

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"One simply cannot make sense of the Bible without a profound and growing sensitivity to the multifaceted and powerful ways the Bible portrays sin."¹³

The phrase "under sin" is important. As Douglas Moo points out, "the human plight is not that people commit sins, or even that they are in the habit of committing sins. The problem is that people are helpless prisoners of sin. . . . Humans [are] addicted to sin. They are imprisoned under it, unable to free themselves by anything they can do. Knowing this, God has sent to us not a teacher or a politician but a liberator — one who has the power to set us free from our sins."¹⁴

False Definitions of Sin

Wrong definitions of sin abound (for the first three, cf. Zemek, *Syllabus*, 38-39):

- sin is an illusion (Christian Science - like Grapenuts).
- sin is finiteness ("to err is human").
- sin is sensuousness (but physicality is not inherently evil, ala neoplatonism).
- sin is anything that robs a human of self-esteem.

"We feel too unworthy. So one layer of negative behavior is laid upon a mother until we emerge as rebellious sinners. But our rebellion is a reaction, not our nature. By nature we are fearful, not bad. Original sin is not a mean streak; it is a contrasting inclination."¹⁵

"Persons . . . suffer from inferiority complexes because they make mistakes, because they are not perfect and don't know all the answers."¹⁶

"What is guilt but an ugly loss of self-esteem?"¹⁷

"Our primal problem . . . is lack of trust, *first* in oneself."¹⁸

¹³ D. A. Carson, "Sin's Contemporary Significance", in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 28.

¹⁴ Douglas J. Moo, "Sin in Paul", in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 112.

¹⁵ Robert H. Schuller, *Self Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 66-67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

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"If there can be one generalized description of the human predicament in the world today, it would be the lack of self-esteem in human beings."¹⁹

"the most serious sin is the one that causes me to say, 'I am unworthy. I may have no claim to divine sonship if you examine me at my worst.' For once a person believes he is an 'unworthy sinner,' it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Jesus Christ."²⁰

"...Any creed, any biblical interpretation, and any systematic theology that assaults and offends the self-esteem of persons is heretically failing to be truly Christian no matter how interlaced, interfaced, or undergirded it might be with Biblical references."²¹

- right and wrong are merely social constructs.
- sin as "brokenness" ("broken" is not a terrible adjective to describe the human condition, but it is not complete. The idea of brokenness at best skirts our culpability, and at worst protects us from culpability).
- sin as mistake.
- others?

"The deep cultural animus against the category of sin means that many preachers much prefer to talk about weaknesses, mistakes, tragedies, failures, inconsistencies, hurts, disappointment, blindness — anything but sin. The result is that biblical portrayal of God is distorted, as is his plan of redemption."²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

²² D. A. Carson, "Sin's Contemporary Significance", in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 35.

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The Origin of Sin

Where did sin and evil come from?

Why did sin enter God's good world?

Theodicy - why does evil exist, given that God is, and He is good?

Framed in the language of the skeptic, the "problem of evil" goes like this:

"If God is all-powerful and all-good, why is there evil in the world?"²³

Some initial thoughts:

We should not think of evil as a substance, some entity in and of itself.

Recall George Zemek's definition of sin: "any personal lack of conformity to the moral character or desire of God."²⁴

God has created moral agents with the capacity for decisions which either conform to God's character and design or rebel against them.²⁵

God has not told us everything that *can* be known, but only what *needs* being known.

Deuteronomy 29:29; Job 38:1-8; 42:1-6.

²³ The Greek philosopher Epicurus, cited in Michael Vlach's syllabus, *Theology III: Man, Sin, and Salvation*, 73.

²⁴ Zemek, "Hamartiology", in *Syllabus*, 40.

²⁵ Jonathan Edwards's *The End for Which God Created the World* is, in my estimation, the best treatment of this subject. The punchline, which is a cheap substitute for your reading its entirety, is this: God is a fountain of goodness which cannot help but pour forth the excellencies of who He is; therefore the creation of a world in which sentient beings can experientially know something of His attributes (purity, beauty, goodness, revulsion against sin, mercy, grace, patience, lovingkindness, superabounding generosity, etc., etc., etc., ad infinitum) is the inevitable result of who God is intrinsically. God has always been who He is, yet His overflowing nature provided for His excellencies to be known and appreciated by beings able to know and appreciate them. All of this results in the increase of His glory, not a change in who He is (intrinsic glory), but an increase of the audience and beneficiaries of His glory (ascribed glory).

What Is Sin?

An Introduction to Hamartiology

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How did sin enter the world?

- 1) Satan. Genesis 3:1-5, 13. cf. Job 1 and Revelation 12:9. [possibly, cf. Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14]²⁶
- 2) Fallen angels. Matthew 25:41.
- 3) Adam and Eve. Genesis 3.
- 4) Human progeny.
The evidence: Genesis 4 (murder, polygamy, revenge, neglect of God), Genesis 5 (“and he died” 8x).
The mechanisms:
 - inherited sin nature (Ephesians 2:3).
 - human choice (John 3:19-21).
 - [many reformed theologians add] imputation (Romans 5:12).²⁷“Sin occurred because Satan, Adam, and Eve chose to exercise their volition to disobey God rather than to love God.”²⁸

What is the importance of virgin birth? God is clearly making a statement about the human condition and the only solution to that problem. The solution to sin will never come from a sinner (John 1:12-14), but only from the One who, infinitely offended *by* our sin, in love became the rescue *from* our sin.

What is God’s relationship to sin? Is God the author of sin? Is God responsible for sin?

Some texts:

Genesis 50:20 (NASB95)

“As for you, you meant (הַשְׁבֵּתֶם qal perfect 2MP) evil against me, but God meant (הַשְׁבֵּה qal perfect 3MS) it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Notice the same verb “meant” is predicated of both subjects — the sinning brothers and the sovereign God; and the same direct object is in view — the brothers’ sin.

²⁶ Much Satanology has been derived from these two passages, thought not without debate. The kings of Tyre and Babylon are clearly addressed by God through the prophets in these texts. I do not believe that Satan is described directly here, and I believe every charge can legitimately be leveled against the two earthly kings addressed. However, God may be addressing the backstage actor (Satan) through the two kings, if Satan is directly involved in the two kings’ evil activities; additionally, these two (possibly) Satan-driven rulers are a preview of what is to come when Antichrist is revealed on the earth.

²⁷ see also subsequent sections: “Adam’s Relationship to the Human Race” and “The Transmission of Sin”.

²⁸ *Biblical Doctrine*, 457.

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Romans 8:28 (NASB95) and (UBS4)

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν.

Biblical truths to affirm:

- 1) God is sovereign [Psalm 115:3]
 - 2) God is the ultimate cause of all things [Genesis 1:1-2; Romans 11:33-36; Jeremiah 14:22; Proverbs 16:4]
 - 3) God accomplishes His sovereign purposes mediately [Genesis 20:5-6 for a “positive” example; 1 Samuel 16:14; 19:9 for a “negative example”]
 - 4) Scripture explicitly affirms God’s superintending role over evil [Acts 2:23; Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20]
- AND -
- 5) God is not the source/author/immediate cause of evil. [James 1:13,17; Psalm 119:68; Genesis 1:31]

Berkhof said it this way: “God’s eternal decree... rendered the entrance of sin in the world certain, but this may not be interpreted so as to make God the cause of sin in the sense of being its responsible author.”²⁹

A cautious conclusion:

It seems reasonable to conclude that God controls evil in such a manner that He gets His sovereign will accomplished without getting His hands dirty.

see Romans 9:22-23 (but discussion later under reprobation and double predestination).

22 εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκευὴ ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα (perfect passive participle ANP) εἰς ἀπώλειαν, **23** καὶ ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκευῇ ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν (aorist active indicative 3S) εἰς δόξαν;

Paul seems intentionally to put space between the way He *superintends* evil actions (the preparation of the reprobate for eternity) and the way He personally ushers His children to glory.

God’s power and goodness are actually put on display in His sovereign control *over* sin and evil to accomplish His good and glorious purposes.

²⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 220.