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MINISTRIES

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A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll

# Sin and the Fall Research Brief

From Pastor Mark Driscoll

Prepared by a Research Team

## Introduction: Sin and the Fall

Sin is rebellion against God our Maker. Sin is also depicted in the Genesis narrative as the ultimate form of folly. To sin against God, our greatest good, is foolishness. It is insanity. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. writes: “Sin is folly. No matter what images they choose, the Bible writers say this again and again. Sin is missing the target; sin is choosing the wrong target. Sin is wandering from the path or rebelling against someone too strong for us or neglecting a good inheritance. Above all, at its core, sin is offense against God. Why is it not only wrong but also foolish to offend God? God is our final good, our maker and savior, the one in whom alone our restless hearts come to rest.”<sup>1</sup> According to Plantinga, because sin also has horrific horizontal effects on human relationships it can be properly described as self-abuse: “Sin hurts other people and grieves God, but it also corrodes us. Sin is a form of self-abuse.”<sup>2</sup>

Ed Welch describes sin as madness: “There are many ways to describe sin. It is disobedience, missing the mark, hatred, treason, spiritual adultery, self-centeredness. The list can go on. Among these descriptions is that sin is madness or insanity. It is irrational, delusional, and unreasonable. It makes absolutely no sense in light of God’s love toward us.”<sup>3</sup>

## CCEF Articles on the Doctrine of Sin and the Fall of Humanity

In “The Bondage of Sin,”<sup>4</sup> Edward Welch writes that because of the Fall our deepest problem is sin. Welch describes how dead sinners live, both judicially and dynamically, because Christ deals with the past, present, and future of sin. Welch studies three perspectives on sin prominent in Ephesians: cravings, alienation, and the concert of world, flesh, and devil. Sin involves insatiable appetites, addictive false worship. Sin separates people from each other and from God. World and devil work with flesh, cooperating in the production of false worship. Sin is what we were, and so it is still our deepest problem, even though we are called, beloved, children of light.

In “Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free,”<sup>5</sup> Edward Welch describes how in detail one sinful result of the Fall: addictions. He describes how addictions counseling has been dominated by the disease metaphor. But Scripture gives us many ways of making sense of the addictive experience: idolatry, adultery, foolishness, attack by a beast, and disease. An addiction is like a disease in that it affects our entire being, it is painful, it leads to death, and it is

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 123.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Edward T. Welch. “The Madness of Anger,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 24, no. 4 (2006): 26.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Welch, “The Bondage of Sin,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 2, 1999: 24-31.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Welch, “Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 3, 2001: 19-30.

absolutely tragic. Yet there are also ways in which sin is not like a disease. It is something we do rather than catch, we confess it rather than treat it. The Bible addresses addictions by calling us to a holy violence and war against our own desires. The change process is a progressive sanctification. One signpost on the way of change is that things that were once attractive feel more and more like afflictions.

### **John Sailhamer**

John Sailhamer provides a helpful overview and analysis of Genesis 1-3:

“A more studied attempt to treat the problem of evil and temptation cannot be found in all the Scriptures. As a part of his deliberate strategy, the author of the Pentateuch has left the reader virtually alone with the events of the story. He does not reflect or comment on the events that transpired. We, the readers, are left to ourselves and our sense of the story for an answer to the questions it raises. We must seek our own clues to the story’s meaning from the few signs of the author’s own shaping of the story.

The author has chosen to disclose a small but important clue to the story by revealing a detail about the snake: he was more ‘crafty’ than any of the creatures. The word *crafty* is not primarily a negative term in the Bible but suggest wisdom and adroitness (besides its use here it occurs eight times in Proverbs and two times in Job). The description of the serpent as ‘crafty’ is in keeping with the several features of this story which suggest that the author wants to draw a relationship between the Fall and the human quest for wisdom. The disobedience of the man and the woman is depicted no so much as an act of great wickedness or a great transgression as an act of great folly. They had all the ‘good’ they would have needed, but they wanted more—they wanted to be like God. The forbidden tree is the Tree of Knowledge of ‘Good and Evil.’ When they take of the tree and eat, it is because the woman ‘saw that that tree was able to make one wise’ (3:6).

The story of the temptation is told with subtle simplicity. The snake speaks only twice, but that is enough to offset the balance of trust and obedience between 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.

However, a narrative clue already points to the woman’s assuming God’s role of ‘knowing the good’ even before she ate of the fruit—that is, the description of the woman’s thoughts in the last moments before the Fall. The narrative states that the woman ‘saw that the tree was good’ (3:6). Up until now in the narrative, the expression ‘and he saw that it was good’ has been used only of God. Now, instead of God, it is the woman who ‘saw that it was good.’ Precisely at this point the author raises the issue of becoming ‘wise’: ‘And the woman saw that the tree was... also desirable for gaining wisdom’ (3:6). Thus, the temptation is not presented as a general rebellion from God’s authority. Rather, it is portrayed as a quest for wisdom and ‘the good’ apart from God’s provision.

Having thus shown the temptation to be a quest for ‘wisdom’ apart from God, the story comes to an abrupt conclusion in the act of the transgression itself: ‘and she took some and ate it

and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it' (3:6b). How quickly the transgression comes once the decision has been made. The thrust of the story, with all its simplicity, lies in its tragic and ironic depiction of the search for wisdom. That which the snake promised did, in fact, come about: the man and woman became 'like God' as soon as they ate of the fruit. The irony lies in the fact that they were already 'like God' because they had been created in his image (1:26). In the temptation the serpent promised that they would know 'good and evil,' just as God knew 'good and evil.' It is clear in the story that the man and the woman had believed that when they obtained the knowledge of 'good and evil' they would, on their own, enjoy the 'good.' Prior to their eating the fruit, the narrative did not raise the possibility that they would know only the 'evil' and not the 'good.' Yet when they ate of the fruit and their eyes were opened, it was not the 'good' that they saw and enjoyed. Their knowledge of 'good and evil' which was to make them 'like God' resulted in the knowledge that they were no longer even like each other—they were ashamed of their nakedness, and they sewed leaves to hide their differences from each other."<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. A. Carson**

In his newest book entitled *Christ and Culture Revisited* D. A. Carson provides a helpful summary of the doctrine of the fall. Carson describes how the fall is the essence of the de-godding of God:

"God made everything, and he made it good. He made human beings in his image and likeness. Our common parentage (cf. Acts 17:26-28) speaks against slavery, mutual degradation, and repulsive notions of 'half-human, half-ape.' Creation is what grounds all human accountability to God our Maker: we *ought* to delight in him, to serve him, to trust him, to obey him, not only because he is perfectly good, but because he made us for himself and sustains us, and therefore we *owe* him. The glories of that original creation continue to testify to God's existence and power; they continue to evoke awe and wonder, even if their present ordering includes death and disaster.

That God made us embodied beings says something important about our intrinsic nature, and anticipates the culmination of everything at the other end of history: we are made to know and love and enjoy God in the context of embodied existence, and will one day know and love and enjoy God in the context of resurrected embodied existence. Moreover, as God's image bearers we have peculiar responsibilities toward the rest of the created order—responsibilities of governance and care, as we recognize our oneness with the created order and our distinguishing place within it.

We are not only a created race but a fallen race. The fall is not merely the breaking of some arbitrary rule. It is the rebellion of the creature against the Creator; it is the appalling commitment to try to usurp the Creator's place. The astonishingly arrogant and futile cry, 'I will be God!' in reality issues not only in death, but in the destruction of every relationship. Death itself is multifaceted: we die to God, we die physically (as the ghastly repeated refrain of the genealogy of Genesis 5 makes plain: 'and then he died'), we die the second death. 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.

Yet 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

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<sup>6</sup> John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 102-4.

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). Jesus well understood that the first commandment is to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength (Mark 12:28-34; cf. Deuteronomy 6). It follows that the first sin that is always committed when any other sin is committed. The second commandment is to love one's neighbor as oneself. It is only the second, because what makes sin most heinous in the first place is its offensiveness to God: he is always the most offended party. Moreover, the second commandment is grounded in the first. The words that Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18 make this clear: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. *I am the LORD.*' Experience confirms the witness of Scripture: we cannot long sin against God without sinning against God's image-bearers, and if in measure we do love God, we will love those who bear his image (an insight that 1 John repeatedly substantiates).

The consequences of the fall are universal and devastating because they are first and foremost revolt against the Almighty. We must be reconciled to God, for he is the One who now stands against us—not now only our Creator, but our Judge. The drama of the entire story line of the Bible turns on our persistent alienation from God. Scan the entire Old Testament: What is it that characteristically evokes God's wrath? It is, quite simply, idolatry—all that degrades God or diminishes God or de-gods God or replaces God. And since God is the sovereign Judge, human beings must finally be reconciled to him or be lost. The New Testament Scriptures place similar emphasis on the wrath of God, and insist that the only thing that spares us from destruction under this wrath is the death of God's own Son. 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness' (1 Peter 2:24).

The alternatives are absolute: 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them' (John 3:36). The wretched fact is that we were by nature deserving of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). This wrath is described as 'blazing fire,' when Jesus himself 'will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Because of the things that constitute us idolaters, 'God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient' (Ephesians 5:6). Out only hope lies in Christ: he 'redeemed us from the curse for us' (Galatians 3:13). The glory of the good news is that the very God who stands over against us in wrath, and justly so, stands over against us in love, because he is that kind of God: 'Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved' (Ephesians 2:4-5).

As the Bible's story line unfolds, sin's wretched dimensions become clearer and clearer. Sin can be seen not only as idolatry and as the archetypal hubris, but also as the transgression of law that God lays down. It weaves its own web of corruption and its entailments, as God gives his creatures over to their own desires. Sin is social: although it is first and foremost defiance of God, there is no sin that does not touch the lives of others. Even secret sins of the heart and mind adversely affect others, since by subtly changing me, they change my relations with others. Secretly nurtured lust, for instance, soon affects a man's or a woman's relations with the spouse and with other human beings. That is one reason why God's judgment is poured out on people to the third and fourth generations of those who hate God (Exodus 20:5): sin is social. Judgment comes not only in the death of every generation, but in the sweeping condemnation of the flood

(Genesis 7-8), in the repeated cycles of war, pestilence, and famine (e.g., Judges, the exile), and ultimately in hell itself, about which Jesus says so much. Sin is so warping that it corrodes every facet of our being, our wills and affections, our view of others and thus our relationships, our bodies and our minds. Sinners incur guilt, yet they need more than forgiveness and reconciliation to God (though never less), since the results of sin are so pervasive: they also need regeneration and transformation.

Yet the fall does not have the last word. Already in Genesis 3, there are signs of hope. God himself pursues the rebels; God himself promises them offspring that will one day crush the serpent's head; God himself clothes them to hide their nakedness. It comes as enormous relief to discover that this God is not only the jealous God who punishes 'the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation' of those who hate him (for sin, as we have seen, has massive social ramifications), but he is also the God who shows 'love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments' (Exodus 20:6).

Similarly, it comes as an enormous relief to recognize that, however odious and sweeping sin is, whether in personal idolatry or in its outworking in the barbarities of a Pol Pot or an Auschwitz, God intervenes to restrain evil, to display his 'common grace' to and through all, so that glimpses of glory and goodness disclose themselves even in the midst of the wretchedness of rebellion. God still sends his sun and rain upon the just and the unjust; he still guides the surgeon's hand and gives strength to the person who picks up the garbage; the sunset still takes our breath away, while a baby's smile steals our hearts. Acts of kindness and self-sacrifice surface among every race and class of human beings, not because we are simple mixtures of good and evil, but because even in the midst of our deep rebellion God restrains us and displays his glory and goodness."<sup>7</sup>

### **David F. Wells**

In his newest book entitled *The Courage to Be Protestant*, David F. Wells traces the evaporation of the notion of sin in modern evangelicalism. Wells discusses the difference between the word "evil" and the word "sin" in the postmodern world:

"Evil is simply badness. Sin, though, is altogether more serious because it sets up human badness in relation to *God*. It is not just the absence of good, or corruption, brutality, oppression, and nastiness, but it is all these things, and many more besides, as they are understood in relation to God. They are acts of moral defiance of him. They are a rejection of his authority over all of human life. That is the Bible's perspective.

Our perspective in America is different. Only 17 percent of Americans define sin in relation to God, so for the overwhelming majority sin has become a trivial matter, no more serious than having violated some church rule about something quite inconsequential. For most Americans the more serious word by far is 'evil,' though when postmoderns lift it out of a moral world, it has no more than a passing emotional significance. I believe 'sin' has far more gravity than 'evil' because of the standard by which sinfulness is exposed.

Sin, biblically speaking, is not only the absence of good. It also entails our active opposition to God. It is, then the defiance of his authority, the rejection of his truth, the challenge to his sovereignty in which we set ourselves up in life to live the way we want to live. It is the way we wrench ourselves free from obedience to him, cut ourselves off from his grasp, and

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 45-9.

refuse to let him be God. It is therefore all the ways we live life on our own terms, to our own ends, with accountability to no one but ourselves.

This really is the point of the biblical language. Sin is described as missing the target (Rom. 3:9; 7:5), falling short of a standard, or transgressing boundaries (Rom. 2:23; 5:20; Gal. 3:19). However, the target missed, the path abandoned, the authority defied, the law transgressed are in each and every case *God's*. Sin is all about taking issue with God, defying him, refusing to submit to him, and displacing him from the center of existence. We are now disaffected with his rule, resent his claims on our lives, are hostile to his truth in the biblical Word, and are determined to pursue our own values, goals, and pleasures in defiance of what he has said. This 'freedom' from all that God is, and all that he has said, turns out to be an illusion. When we freed ourselves in these ways, beginning with the fall, we fell headlong into dark captivity both to our own selves and, beyond that, to the powers of darkness."<sup>8</sup>

Wells describes throughout his research that the notion of sin in Christian theology must always be seen in light of who God is. If God "goes away" in a culture, then sin will follow closely behind. One of his main critiques of modern evangelicalism is that God is "weightless," that is, unimportant. Without a "weighty" God then the doctrine of sin is not understandable: "It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness."<sup>9</sup>

According to Wells, the fundamental problem facing evangelicals is not methodological but theological. Until God is "weighty" in the church then He will be ignored in the culture: "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common."<sup>10</sup>

Wells also argues that sin is only properly understood in light of God's infinite holiness: "Without the holiness of God, sin has no meaning and grace has no point, for it is God's holiness that gives to the one its definition and to the other its greatness. Without the holiness of God, sin is merely human failure but not failure before God, in relation to God. It is failure without the standard by which we know it to have fallen short. It is failure without the presumption of guilt, failure without retribution, failure without any serious moral meaning. And without the holiness of God, grace is no longer grace because it does not arise from the dark clouds of judgment that obscured the cross and exacted the damnation of the Son in our place. Furthermore, without holiness, grace loses its meaning as grace, a free gift of the God who, despite his holiness and

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<sup>8</sup> David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 101-2.

<sup>9</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 88.

<sup>10</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 30.

because of his holiness, has reconciled sinners to himself in the death of his Son. And without holiness, faith is but a confidence in the benevolence of life, or perhaps merely confidence in ourselves. Sin, grace, and faith are emptied of any but a passing meaning if they are severed from their roots in the holiness of God.”<sup>11</sup>

Wells offers a harsh critique of modernity and describes how worldliness is a result of the fall: “Modernity presents an interlocking system of values that has invaded and settled within the psyche of every person. Modernity is simply unprecedented in its power to remake human appetites, think processes, and values. It is, to put it in biblical terms, the worldliness of Our Time. For worldliness is that system of values and beliefs, behaviors and expectations, in any given culture that have at their center the fallen human being and that relegate to their periphery any thought about God. Worldliness is what makes sin look normal in any age and righteousness seem odd. Modernity is worldliness, and it has concealed its values so adroitly in the abundance, the comfort, and the wizardry of our age that even those who call themselves the people of God seldom recognize them for what they are.”<sup>12</sup>

### **R.C. Sproul**

R.C. Sproul describes sin as “cosmic treason.” According to Sproul, the fall is the classic example of humankind’s absolute rebellion against the King of the universe:

“Is the death penalty for sin unjust? By no means. Remember that God voluntarily created us. He gave us the highest privilege of being His image bearers. He made us but a little lower than the angels. He freely gave us dominion over all the earth. 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. Our crime is far more serious, far more destructive than that of Benedict Arnold. No traitor to any king or nation has even approached the wickedness of our treason before God.

Sin is cosmic treason. Sin is treason against a perfectly pure Sovereign. It is an act of supreme ingratitude toward the One to whom we owe everything, to the One who has given us life itself. Have you ever considered the deeper implications of the slightest sin, of the most minute peccadillo? What are we saying to our Creator when we disobey Him at the slightest point? We are saying no to the righteousness of God. We are saying, ‘God, Your law is not good. My judgment is better than Yours. Your authority does not apply to me. I am above and beyond Your jurisdiction. I have the right to do what I want to do, not what You command me to do.’

The slightest sin is an act of defiance against cosmic authority. It is a revolutionary act, a rebellious act in which we are setting ourselves in opposition to the One to whom we owe everything. It is an insult to His holiness. We become false witnesses to 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

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<sup>11</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 144-45.

<sup>12</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 29.



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.’”<sup>13</sup>

### **Tim Keller**

Tim Keller provides a helpful summary of the fall as fundamentally an act of idolatry. Because of the fall the dust wins: “In the beginning, human beings were made to worship and serve God, and to rule over all created things in God’s name (Gen 1:26-28). Paul understands humanity’s original sin as an act of idolatry: ‘They exchanged the glory of the immortal God... and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator’ (Rom 1:21–25). Instead of living for God, we began to live for ourselves, or our work, or for material goods. We reversed the original intended order. And when we began to worship and serve created things, paradoxically, the created things came to rule over us. Instead of being God’s vice-regents, ruling over creation, now creation masters us. We are now subject to decay and disease and disaster. The final proof of this is death itself. We live for our own glory by toiling in the dust, but eventually we return to the dust—the dust ‘wins’ (Gen 3:17–19). We live to make a name for ourselves but our names are forgotten. Here in the beginning of the Bible we learn that idolatry means slavery and death.”<sup>14</sup>

### **A.W. Tozer**

According to A.W. Tozer, the fall infected the human race with a deep disease: a love of created things replaced a love for the Creator. Tozer writes: “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.”<sup>15</sup>

### **J. C. Ryle**

John Charles Ryle begins his classic work entitled *Holiness* with a chapter on the doctrine of sin. A proper understanding of sin is required for a proper understanding of holiness. The following are helpful quotes about sin and the fall from Ryle’s *Holiness*:

“He who wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is

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<sup>13</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1985), 115-16.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Keller, “Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age,” The Gospel Coalition, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/articleprint.php?a=2>.

<sup>15</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982), 22.

most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption.”<sup>16</sup>

“Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the contemporary church has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.”<sup>17</sup>

“Sin is that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race, of every rank and class and name and nation and people and tongue, a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?”<sup>18</sup>

“Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected.”<sup>19</sup>

“No proof of the fullness of sin, after all, is so overwhelming and unanswerable as the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the whole doctrine of His substitution and atonement. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane and cry at Golgotha, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we will have of sin and the retrospect we will take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Never until the hour when Christ comes the second time will we fully realize the sinfulness of sin.”<sup>20</sup>

“There is a remedy revealed for man’s need, as wide and broad and deep as man’s disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin and study its nature, origin, power, extent and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes: in the everlasting covenant of redemption, to which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are parties; in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect Man in one Person; in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification; in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd and Advocate; in the precious blood He shed which can cleanse from all sin; in the everlasting righteousness that He brought in; in the perpetual intercession that He carries on as our Representative at God’s right hand; in His power to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners, His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest, His readiness to bear with the weakest; in the grace of the Holy Spirit which He plants in the hearts of all His people, renewing, sanctifying and causing old things to pass away and all things to become

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<sup>16</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 1.

<sup>17</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 1.

<sup>18</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 2.

<sup>19</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 4.

<sup>20</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 8.

new—in all this (and oh, what a brief sketch it is!)—in all this, I say, there is a full, perfect and complete medicine for the hideous disease of sin.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Jeremiah Burroughs**

The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote extensively on the doctrine of sin. He vividly describes sin in this excerpt from his book *A Treatise on Earthly-mindedness*: “The evil of idolatry is in this: you depart from God. . . God is slighted and condemned when you choose to make earth your god rather than the infinite First Being of all things. A man might despise his wife, an abominable sin, and choose to go to a queen, the most beautiful woman in the world, forsaking his wife. But to leave a queen or an empress, who is the most beautiful woman upon earth, and to have the heart cleave to a base dunghill-raker, would this not be a great show of contempt to the beautiful queen? Yet it is so when you forsake the blessed, eternal God as your Chief Good, and choose the things of the earth. . . You forsake the Fountain of living waters, the blessed God, and your heart cleaves to the dust. You seek your contentment and happiness in cisterns that can hold no water! Let the heavens be astonished at this horrible wickedness.”<sup>22</sup>

Burroughs also wrote: “Sin is so opposite to God that, if it were possible that the least drop of it could get into God's nature, God would instantly cease to be God.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Jonathan Edwards**

The fall brought humankind into a state of unholiness. For Edwards, the miracle of the gospel is that God, in His grace, transforms fallen sinners and conforms them into the holy image of Jesus Christ. Edwards is astonished at God’s transformation of unholy sinners through their union with Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Edwards writes: “Holiness is the very beauty and loveliness of Jehovah Himself. ‘Tis the excellency of His excellencies, the beauty of His beauties, the perfection of His infinite perfections, and the glory of His attributes. What an honor, then, must it be to a creature who is infinitely below God, and less than He, to be beautified and adorned with this beauty, with that beauty which is the highest beauty of God Himself, even holiness. The highest honor of angels is their holiness. ‘Tis astonishing that God should make even the angels, or any creature, in His own likeness, but how much more admirable is it that God should sanctify sinners— loathsome and abominable creatures— and make them like to Himself.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Charles Ryle, *Holiness* (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan, 2002), 11.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *A Treatise Concerning Earthly-Mindedness: Showing the Great Sin of Thinking as the World Thinks Rather Than Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him*. Ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 2006), 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Evil of Evils: The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin* (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “God’s Excellencies” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723: The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 430.

### **Augustinian's prayer in *Confessions***

“But You, Lord, while he was speaking, turned me back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And You set me there before my own face that I might see how vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous. I saw myself and was horrified, but there was no way to flee from myself. If I tried to turn my gaze from myself, there was Ponticianus telling what he was telling; and again You were setting me face to face with myself, forcing me upon my own sight, that I might see my iniquity and loathe it. I had known it, but I had pretended not to see it, had deliberately looked the other way and let it go from my mind” (*Confessions* VIII, vii, 138-39).

### **Freud as a “theologian of original sin”**

Freud views our innermost self as a “positive Hell.” In *A Short Account of Psychoanalysis* he writes that the “impulses ... subjected to repression are those of selfishness and cruelty, which can be summed up in general as evil, but above all sexual wishful impulses, often of the crudest and most forbidden kind.”

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*; who has the courage to dispute it in the face of all the evidence in his own life and in history?”

Freud refers to Thomas Hobbes' famous "Homo Homini Lupus Est," which is Latin for "man is a wolf to [his fellow] man."

### **Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon***

"Only part of us is sane: only part of us loves pleasure and the longer day of happiness, wants to live to our nineties and die in peace, in a house that we built, that shall shelter those who come after us. The other half of us is nearly mad. It prefers the disagreeable to the agreeable, loves pain and its darker night despair, and wants to die in a catastrophe that will set back life to its beginnings and leave nothing of our house save its blackened foundations."

### **Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 114**

“To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell’s flames. Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one’s sense of how much suffering is caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others. Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood. No one

after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia.”

### **Josef de Maistre**

"Man's destructive hand spares nothing that lives; he kills to feed himself, he kills to clothe himself, he kills to adorn himself, he kills to attack, he kills to defend himself, he kills to instruct himself, he kills to amuse himself, he kills for the sake of killing. Proud and terrible king, he wants everything and nothing resists him... from the lamb he tears its guts and makes his harp resound... from the wolf his most deadly tooth to polish his pretty works of art; from the elephant his tusks to make a toy for his child - his table is covered with corpses... And who [in this general carnage] will exterminate him who exterminates all others? Himself. It is man who is charged with the slaughter of man... So it is accomplished... the great law of the violent destruction of living creatures. The whole earth, perpetually steeped in blood, is nothing but a vast altar upon which all that is living must be sacrificed without end, without measure, without pause, until the consummation of things, until evil is extinct, until the death of death."

### **Description of the effects of the Fall—Walker Percy, opening paragraph of *The Message in the Bottle***

"Why does man feel so sad in the twentieth century? Why does man feel so bad in the very age when, more than in any other age, he has succeeded in satisfying his needs and making the world over for his own use?... Why do people often feel bad in good environments and good in bad environments? Why do people often feel so bad in good environments that they prefer bad environments? Why does man often feel better in a bad environment? Why is man apt to feel bad in a good environment, say suburban Short Hills, New Jersey, on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon? Why is the same man apt to feel good in a very bad environment, say an old hotel on Key Largo during a hurricane?... Why is it that a man riding a good commuter train from Larchmont to New York, whose needs and drives are satisfied, who has a good home, loving wife and family, good job, who enjoys unprecedented 'cultural and recreational facilities,' often feels bad without knowing why?"

### **Movies**

#### **“The Devils’ Advocate” (1997)**

Below is the monologue of the Satan character describing his view of “The Fall.” Kevin repeats the famous quotation—“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven”—from Dante’s *Inferno*.

Milton- Y'know, boy, guilt is like a bag of f\*\*\*ing bricks. All you gotta do is set it down.....Who are you carrying all those bricks for anyway? God? Is that it? God? Well, I'll tell ya, lemme give you a little inside information about God. God likes to watch. He's a prankster. Think about it. He gives man instincts! He gives this extraordinary gift and then—what does he do? I swear—for his own amusement—his own private cosmic gag reel—he sets the rules in opposition. It's the goof of all time! Look. But don't touch! Touch. But don't taste! Taste. Don't

swallow! And while you're jumping from one foot to the next, he's laughing his sick f\*\*\*ing ass off!! He's a tight ass, he's a sadist, he's an absentee landlord!! Worship that? Never!

Kevin- Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, is that it?

Milton- Why not? I'm here on the ground with my nose in it since the whole thing began! I've nurtured every sensation Man has been inspired to have! I cared about what he wanted and I never judged him. Why? Because I never rejected him. In spite of all his imperfections, I'm a fan of man!! I'm a humanist. Maybe the last humanist. Who, in their right mind, Kevin, could possibly deny the 20th century was entirely mine? All of it, Kevin, all of it! Mine! I'm peaking here! It's my time now. It's our time.

### **“Phone Booth” (2003)**

Phone Booth is a morality thriller about a man who is trapped in a telephone booth by a sniper. The narrator begins by mentioning all the phone calls made every day. Enter Stu Shepard, an arrogant, selfish, lying publicist, who contemplates cheating on his wife Kelly. Every day after work he calls Pam, a young actress whom Stu fancies, and only pretends to be making a star out of, from the phone booth between 53rd and 8th. Stu is held hostage in a phone booth by an anonymous caller who seems to know everything about his life. The sniper/caller forces Stu to confess.

This scene below is his amazing confession. He blurts out his whole pantheon of false gods. He names them and repents. He confesses insecurity, phoniness, manipulation, lies, materialism, and adultery...and shame that goes along with them. The cycle of shame has been occurring because he hasn't been able to face his wife, whom he feels is too good for him. So, to deal with his feelings of worthlessness, he has been calling a young actress (Katie Holmes) from a phone booth and taking off his wedding ring during the calls. Full of shame, he turns to mental/emotional adultery, which causes more shame.

So he confesses the shame and all the rest in a jaw-dropping scene. This is a thorough unzipping and baring of the soul. Following Bonhoeffer's lead, this kind of confession and repentance is supposed to be a normal, regular feature of life together. It's not the only element of Life Together, but it's a significant element. As Bonhoeffer says, “The man who is alone with his sin is truly alone.”

The confession:

“I've never done anything for anybody who couldn't do something for me. I string along an eager kid with promises that I'll pay him money. I only keep him around because he looks up to me. Adam, if you're watching, don't be a publicist...you're too good for it.

I lie in person and on the phone. I lie to my friends. I lie to newspapers and magazines who sell my lies to more and more people. I'm just a part of a big cycle of lies...I should be f\*\*\*ing) President.

I wear all this Italian s\*\*t because underneath I still feel like the Bronx. I think I need these clothes and this watch. My \$2000 watch is a fake and so am I.

I neglected the things that I should have valued most. I value this s\*\*t (looking down at his clothes).

I take off my wedding ring to call Pam. Kelly, that's Pam. Don't blame her. I never told her if I was married and if I did, she would have told me to go home.

Kelly, looking at you now I'm ashamed of myself. I mean...I work so hard on this image .... I only proved I should be alone. I've just been something I'm not for so long I'm so I'm afraid you won't like what's underneath.

But here I am...I'm just flesh and blood and weakness and uh... I love you so f\*\*\*ing much. (crying) I take off this ring because it only reminds me of how I've failed you. And uh...I don't want to give you up, I want to make things better...but it may not be my choice anymore. You deserve better.

(sobbing)

## **Other Religions and Cults on the Human Condition, Fall, and Sin**

### **Hinduism**

Hinduism is based on the concept that human and animal spirits reincarnate, or come back to earth to live many times in different forms. They believe that souls move up and down an infinite hierarchy depending on the behaviors they practiced in their life. The caste system survives and charity towards others is unheard of because each individual deserves to be in the social class they were born in. A person is born into the highest class because they behaved well in a past life, and a person is born into poverty and shame because of misbehaviors in a past life.

The human condition is samsara (the flow of reality in which souls are continually dying & being reborn). The present existence is an illusion; people are unaware of their oneness with all reality (Brahman). The goal of life is to gain release (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation and to pass beyond illusion to become one with the divine ultimate reality by following the proper yoga (path or discipline). The goal is to connect individual self (atman) to the ultimate reality (Brahman).

### **Buddhism**

Life is suffering. Suffering is inherent in the very fabric of life. Birth is painful and death is painful; disease and old age are painful. Not having what we desire is painful and having what we do not desire is also painful. The cause of our suffering is the craving of desire for the pleasures of the senses, which seeks satisfaction now. The cause of suffering is thirst, that is, desire or craving: humans suffer because they desire things.

According to Buddhism, life is intrinsically suffering (*dukkha*). A key indicator of the character of life as suffering is the presence of death; suffering is signaled primarily by death. This analysis of human existence is echoed in the Buddha's final words at the age of eighty. After his last meal he declared to his followers, "All conditioned things are of a nature to decay—strive on untiringly." The Buddhist analysis asserts that all things are compounded and that there are no enduring substances that exist autonomously. According to this doctrine of "dependent origination" everything that exists, except the one reality of Nirvana, depends on something else, that is, depends on an antecedent condition. Everything is a constant and changing rearrangement of basic elements of existence. These elements or aggregates of which all things are compounded are difficult to understand but may be rendered as matter, sensation, perceptions, psychic dispositions, and consciousness. All things dissolve, decay, or mutate, because the aggregates of which they are compounded are subject to a continuous process of flux

and recomposition. The Buddha's final words are a reminder that to live is to be involved in an inescapable process of decay and death because everything is simply a rearrangement of constituent elements in a constant state of alteration. Accordingly, the intrinsic quality of life, characterized by such decay and death is correctly understood as suffering

The goal of life is nirvana, which is to eliminate all desire of attachment, particularly by following the Eight-fold Path. Buddhism believes in an-atman (no self) which is the opposite of Hinduism's belief in atman (the true self)

## **Islam**

In Islam, the human condition or theological anthropology is very different from Christianity. The problem is not sin and its consequences but forgetfulness and ignorance. Humans forget that they are creatures of Allah and are to submit to God's will; but, humans are also ignorant of how to properly submit. How a believer lives this life will determine their eternity, hence, during this one life believers must submit to the will of Allah. The Qur'an reveals God's will to humanity and what they must do to remedy the problem in the human condition. In this respect, the epistemological aspect of the Qur'anic revelation becomes "soteriological." In contrast to Christianity, Islam's revelation need not have two natures in one book. In other words, the Qur'an can reveal whether it is considered created or uncreated. Either way, the Qur'an is considered to be from God. If uncreated it is an eternal attribute of God that has been made accessible to humans. If created it is the inimitable miracle of God revealing God's will and having it preserved, recited, inscriptured, and memorized.

For Christianity, the soteriological role of the revelation has epistemological implications. The structure of the revelation in Jesus explicitly connects the divine to the human, a belief that is a necessary precondition for the intelligibility and possibility of knowledge of God. But, because of the salvation offered through Jesus, humans are rightly related to God and the barrier between God and human (sin) is overcome and the difference between God and human (human finitude) is bridged. Hence, the primacy of the soteriological role of the revelation in Jesus has secondary epistemological implications. As mentioned previously, the role of revelation is different in Islam. It is not proper for us to expect the Qur'an to take the same mode or structural form (divine nature and human nature together in one book) if the goal of that revelation is different. For Christianity, the revelation is primarily soteriological but has epistemological implications. For Islam, much of the role of revelation is concerned with knowledge about God and God's will; and, the effects of this revelation counter the human problem of forgetfulness and ignorance.

In summary, sin is disobedience of responsible human beings to the law of Allah. Sin is caused by human weakness and forgetfulness. Allah acts in mercy and allows salvation if one observes the pillars of the faith and submits to Allah.

According to the Qur'an (96:1-3), Allah "created man from a clot of blood" at the same time he created the jinn (evil spirits) from fire. Humans are the greatest of all creatures, created with free will for the purpose of obeying and serving Allah. The Qur'an includes a version of the biblical account of the Fall of Adam (surah 7), but it does not conclude from it the doctrine of original sin as Christianity does. In the Quranic version, Adam and Eve begged Allah's forgiveness (7:23) and he punished them with a mortal life on earth but added, "from earth you will be taken out at last" (7:25). Since Allah forgave the sins of the first pair, Muslims believe, all are born in Al-Fitra, a natural state of submission to Allah (20:122-123). True repentance from



sin returns a person to this original sinless state. According to Muslim theology, humankind's chief failing is pride, rebellion, and forgetfulness.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses**

Sin is willful rebellion against Jehovah. The solution is allegiance to Jehovah plus works (baptism, faithfulness in Kingdom Hall work; those ignorant of Jehovah given a chance to believe during millennium).

### **Mormon**

Sin is disobedience to God's laws. Adam's fall, in God's plan, caused loss of immortality. Each person is responsible for his or her own sin. The solution is exaltation or godhood through obedience to Mormon teachings: repentance, faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, and tithing. Baptism for the dead saves some non-Mormons posthumously

### **Christian Scientism**

The human condition is that we believe the illusion that matter is real. According to them, matter, sin, evil, sickness, and death are not real. The solution is to cast off illusions of reality of matter, sin, evil sickness, and death in favor of the "all-reality" of spirit.

### **Unitarian**

"Sin" is failure to realize and live up to one's divine potential. But through conscious union with Jesus, people can overcome lower human impulses and transform their bodies to make them perpetually healthy, therefore immortal, attaining eternal life (unity with God).

### **Scientology**

The human condition is that engrams (learned behavior or conflicts from one's past, including previous lifetimes and prenatal experiences) prevent individuals from realizing their own divinity. The solution is Dianetic counseling (auditing), which leads a person to become "clear" of engrams, attain full human potential, and become fully aware of personal divinity.

### **Sikhism**

Sin is choosing to live in self-centeredness, which is sensuous desires preferred to ego-abandoning submission to God. The solution is attaining liberation (release) from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth through repeating the name of God and following the path of devotion.

### **Baha'i**

Sin is lack of knowledge. People's failure to develop their spiritual natures bring disobedience to divine commands taught by Baha'u'llah. People attain present and future blessings through faith in God and Baha'u'llah and by performing good works that advance civilization and contribute to world unity and peace.

### **New Age**

Sin is illusion, ignorance, or lack of perception. People are unaware of their true identity as divine, as one with God. They need to be "enlightened," to find ultimate spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. Their primary need is for holism, to be integrated with the whole. People overcome lack of perception by using techniques to change (transform)

consciousness. They can attain enlightenment when they step outside ordinary modes of perception into altered states of consciousness that dispel illusory boundaries of individual existence.