

“Fall Of Man” The Thorny Issue Of Sin

After the matter of the origin of the world and mankind, the next aspect of any worldview has to do with what is wrong in the world, or whether or not something is wrong with the world. The biblical worldview not only affirms that God has created all things (e.g. Gen. 1:1), but also He created all things “very good” (Gen. 1:31). One of the implications seems to be that when God brought all things into existence, there was no evil (cf. Rom. 5:12a).

Though that was true of the world when first created, the biblical testimony is also that sin did enter into the world (Gen. 2:17; 3:1-8) and not just in a partial way but to the extent that the world was filled with sin (Gen. 6:5) and in fact, sin indwells every person born (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Rom. 3:23). What is more, it has not only impacted mankind, but also the very creation itself has been subjected to futility because of sin and does not operate as it was originally intended (Rom. 8:19-22).

The sad reality of the entrance of sin into the world is sometimes referred to as the fall of man. Such is an indication that mankind is not what we originally were. An understanding of the fall and of sin is crucial to understanding the world, ourselves, and what God’s solution for mankind is.

There are a number of questions which arise from any discussion of sin. Let’s look at those questions and see if we can discover some answers.

- (1) What is sin? Look at the following passages and see if you can find the answer that each passage gives. In each case the emphasis in the text has been added by this author.
- a. 1 John 3:4: “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; ***sin is lawlessness.***”
 - b. Daniel 5:23: “But you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.... And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, ***but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.***
 - c. Rev. 16:9c: They ***did not repent*** and ***give [God] glory.***
 - d. Psalm 9:17: “The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that ***forget God.***”

Rom. 8:19-22: For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 13. Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created? A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

- e. John 16:8-9: “And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning *sin...because they do not believe in me.*”
- f. Isaiah 65:12: “I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but *you did what was evil in my eyes* and *chose what I did not delight in.*”
- g. Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have *gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way,* and the Lord has laid on him the *iniquity* of us all.
- h. Matthew 5:28: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with *lustful intent* has already committed adultery with her *in his heart.*”
- i. Romans 5:19: “For as by the one man's disobedience the many *were made sinners,* so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
- j. Try this comprehensive definition of sin and see if you believe it covers all the bases. Sin is any failure to conform in act, attitude, or nature to the revealed will of God which teaches that we are to act in perfect holiness from a heart of faith to the glory of God.¹

(2) Where did sin come from?

- a. This question arises from the reality we saw above that God created all things good or without evil. Yet, as we read in Genesis 3:1-8 and Romans 5:12-19, sin did enter the world through Adam. Yet, where did it originate? With all such difficult questions about the Bible and the world, we will begin with what we know and attempt to work our way through the more difficult questions.
- b. God is not the author of sin in the sense that He is morally responsible for causing it. Consider the following passages:
 1. James 1:13: “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.
 2. 1 John 1:5b: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”
 3. Isaiah 6:3: “And one [seraph] called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’”
- c. Everything that takes place happens because God has ordained that it would, even those things that are evil or in any way bad. Consider the following passages:
 1. Ephes. 1:11: “[God] works all things according to the counsel of his will.”
 2. Psalm 115:3: “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

Rom. 5:12-19: Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— [13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. [14] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses.... [17] If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. [18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

¹ Taken from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, rev.), 490, and John Piper, *A Baptist Catechism*, revised, #18.

3. Is. 45:7: “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”
- d. God causes all things but He does not cause all things in the same way. We have seen in the verses just listed under c that He causes all things in some way. Now we see that there is a distinction in His actions. Consider:
1. In the midst of lamenting the fall of Jerusalem the prophet Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 3:33: “for [God] does not afflict or grieve the children of men from the heart.” (author’s own translation) This means that God does not cause affliction with the same intensity of purpose that He does that which is readily recognized as good (e.g. new birth).
 2. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, as Paul offers a promise from God regarding limits on the level of temptation, he makes it clear that God does not cause temptation (cf. James 1:13) in the same way He causes one to be born again (1 Peter 1:3). Consider 1 Corinthians 10:13 which teaches that God ordains temptation by allowing it: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not *let* you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (emphasis added)
 3. We can say that the sovereign God causes all things in some way because everything which happens He either directly causes, indirectly causes, or indirectly allows. For those things that are in conformity with His moral will (creation, salvation, love, acts of forgiveness, etc.) we can say that God ordains them by causing them. With those things that are outside His moral will (unbelief, hate, bitterness, murder, etc.) we can say He ordains they will happen for some greater purpose by allowing them to take place through other moral agents who, at the same time, are morally responsible for the actions since the actions they commit are the very things that come from their heart and that they truly want to do. (cf. Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23 for examples)
 4. Such an understanding is consistent with the biblical material which asserts both God’s absolute sovereignty and man’s responsibility.
- e. Though we can say that Satan, as well as Adam and Eve (and every person who has ever lived) are all responsible agents in sin, the biblical evidence will not allow us to conclude that sin was ultimately caused by them in such a way that it was outside of God’s sovereignty. If such were the case, then something or someone would be greater than or at least opposed to God in such a way that He is not in control over all, He is not absolutely sovereign. God determined in eternity past to allow sin to enter the world through Satan and then through Adam and Eve. Had He not done that, it never would have taken place. Yet, He did it in such a way that He was not the direct cause, nor was He morally responsible. Likewise, He did it for righteous, holy purposes—namely to put His grace and love on display to greater degrees (cf. Rom. 9:22-23). Satan, Adam, and Eve all made their decisions for altogether unglorifying, ungodly purposes.

When we speak of God’s sovereign preservation and governance of His creation and creatures we are addressing His providence. “We may define God’s providence as follows: God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.”
-Grudem, Systematic Theology, 315

We will consider more questions about sin in our next reading.