

An Introduction to the Biblical Doctrine of Sin

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God is to be praised for his awesome power, infinite mercy, unyielding justice, and immeasurable love. All of these were, and are, made manifest in the glorious gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). For the great apostle Paul, the gospel was absolutely essential and its propagation and defense were of first importance. He wrote, “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1Corinthians 9:16).¹ Upon his arrival in Corinth, Paul “came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1) but simply communicated the gospel of Christ. He reminded them,

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (1Corinthians 15:3-8).

Because Christ’s death paid the world’s sin debt (1 John 2:2) God invites (in fact, commands) all people everywhere to trust in Christ alone for salvation (Acts 17:30). Only by placing one’s faith in the person and work of Christ may one appropriate the benefits of the Lord’s supreme sacrifice (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:5). These include the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), the bestowal of a new spiritual nature (Titus 3:5), and a certain place in the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). The message is not hard to understand. In fact, Paul reminded Timothy that “from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). For Paul, the gospel’s beautiful simplicity was a thing to

¹All Scripture from the *King James Version* of the Holy Bible.

be guarded (2 Corinthians 11:3). God in his merciful providence has ensured that “the main things are the plain things.” Nevertheless, because the gospel belongs, ultimately, to the eternal counsels of God, it contains truths so deep they can only be accessed through sustained, God-guided, prayerful, disciplined study. In short, though the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand, the supernatural wisdom, power, and love it reflects have become the lifelong study of those possessing the most impressive intellectual credentials.

As noted above, the gospel is centered on the redeeming work of Christ, who “died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). According to the Bible, sin is mankind’s great problem and Christ alone is its solution. His very name, *Jesus*, signifies *Savior*² and anticipates his divine mission as announced by the angel: “He shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The biblical doctrine of sin’s reality and universality finds confirmation in mankind’s shared intuition on the subject. Most understand sin to be a transgression of a moral law that imposes itself upon humanity. Man *knows* he is obligated to live in accordance with certain moral standards. Man also appears keenly aware of his own moral failings; he knows that he has not lived up the standards imposed upon him from a source qualitative greater than he. Furthermore, man, aware of his guilt in failing to fulfill his moral obligations, understands that his failings in this area—his sin—can be atoned for. He has a keen sense that something can be done to appease the source of objective morality and to reverse whatever adverse effects his sins might otherwise produce. The plethora of rituals, sacrifices, pilgrimages, prayers and other religious observances that have existed throughout human history bear witness to these

²Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Third Ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), p. 581.

persistent metaphysical intuitions.³ In short, men are in broad agreement that though sin is a serious problem, its disastrous effects can, through the right sort of effort, be avoided. Beyond this broad agreement, however, religious traditions diverge greatly.

In order to have a true understanding of the origin, nature, consequences, and destiny of sin, one must begin by appreciating the fact that all opinions on the subject cannot be true at the same time. It is clearly irrational to say with the secularist that Adam is a nonsensical mythological construct,⁴ whilst affirming with the Augustinian that Adam was an actual historical figure whose sin profoundly influenced the whole course of world history.⁵ In spite of the fact that Western society in recent times has deemed it sinful to say so, at least someone in this debate is wrong.

In striving to adjudicate between the different conceptions of sin, it is beneficial to reflect upon what it is that makes this (or any) inquiry possible. Asking a meaningful question entails two essential presuppositions. First, it entails the presupposition that the universe is intelligible. This necessitates there being some sort of guaranteed regularity or uniformity to natural processes. Secondly, it entails that the rational and cognitive faculties of the questioner himself are so constructed that he is capable of recognizing or deducing the truthful answer to his question should he be confronted with the appropriate data.

³Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), p. 239-240.

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Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), p. 156.

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R C. Sproul, *Original Sin*, lecture (mp3) available at www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=61013947104 [Accessed August 8, 2015].

The Bible teaches that, far from the universe being random, accidental and meaningless, God created it in accordance with a determined plan and for a definite purpose (Isaiah 45:18; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11). He upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3) and by him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). Furthermore, the Bible guarantees not only that natural processes will continue to unfold in a generally uniform way (Genesis 8:22), but that man's rational and cognitive faculties were specifically designed to enable him to recognize, apprehend, appreciate, and communicate truth (Psalm 94:8-10). The Christian's commitment to the Bible as the self-authenticating word of God and final authority provides him with a foundation for supposing that rational inquiry is possible. In short, Christian theism provides the necessary preconditions for intelligibility.

On the secularist view, however, there is no planning Spirit behind the universe.⁶ The cosmos came into existence out of absolutely nothing and for no reason. If this view were true, chance or contingency would be ultimate. It would follow necessarily that literally *anything* may have happened in the past, may be happening now, or may happen in the future. This would leave one without any way to justify *any* belief whatsoever; any line of reasoning and any conclusions drawn would be just as valid as any other. Asking questions in a universe like that would not only be futile, it would be impossible. The fact that secularists *do* ask meaningful questions and expect meaningful answers to them is evidence par excellence that in their "heart of hearts" they do believe in God. In their bid for moral and intellectual autonomy, however, secularists deny and suppress their knowledge of God in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-20).

⁶Franz. M. Wuketits, *Biologie und Kausalitat* (Berlin, Hamburg, 1981), p. 98.

Non-Christian *religious* worldviews fair no better than the secularist's. Whereas on the secularist worldview contingency is ultimate with respect to physical reality, non-Christian religious worldviews see contingency as ultimate with respect to God (or any posited Ultimate Reality).⁷ In other words, Ultimate Reality is unknowable and "wholly other." This unknown Reality may be, with equal probability, personal or impersonal, truthful or deliberately deceptive, consistent or erratic. It makes no difference whether or not this Reality stands in causal relationship to the world, the end result is the same: the ultimacy of chance makes knowledge acquisition impossible. Clearly, rational inquiry can proceed only when a Christian outlook on life is presupposed. One is therefore not only amply justified in turning to the Scriptures in order to understand the origin, nature, and destiny of sin, he is rationally compelled to do so.

The beloved disciple John wrote that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and that "all unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). King David's inspired confession to God is instructive. David prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psalm 51:2-4). Drawing upon these and other related verse passages, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* describes sin as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any laws of God given as a rule to the reasonable creature."⁸ G. W. Bromiley expands on this definition, rightly insisting that,

⁷John Feakes, *Introduction to the World's Religions*, lecture series (mp3) available at www.newlifesanctuarychurch.com/ministries/apologetics/cults-and-religions/ [Accessed August 17, 2015].

⁸The Larger Catechism, as quoted by Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 1961), p. 242.

Sin is to be defined primarily in relation to God. It is disobedience, unbelief, ignorance, the positive assertion of usurped autonomy, and the wicked deviation from, or violation of, God's righteous will and law. The breach of a right relationship with God carries with it the disruption of a right relationship with others and the disintegration of the self. But this is derivative, for it is because of sin against God that there is sin against others and oneself.⁹

God is by definition the greatest conceivable being (Hebrews 6:13). He is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28), omnipotent (Job 42:2; Psalm 135:5-6), omnipresent (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7-10), and omniscient (1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 139:1-4). The moral values and duties he obligates man to live in accordance with are expressions of his own morally perfect character (Psalm 19:7). Paul recognized the law of God to be, like God himself, holy, just, and good. (Romans 7:12). God's *holiness* is key. Holiness speaks not only of separateness from that which is common, but of *completeness*.¹⁰ Norman Geisler has shown that, logically speaking, a perfect being can only create that which is perfect. He writes, "Nothing less than the perfect can come from an absolutely perfect Being, and it befits the perfect Being to make only perfect beings, for the effects bear the image of their Cause."¹¹ This logical conclusion confirms what the Bible insists upon, namely, that in the beginning God created a "very good" world (Genesis 1:31). The apex of God's creative work was the first human couple, Adam and Eve, whom he made in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). That perfect world

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G. W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1988), p. 518.

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Arnie Armstrong and Amy Hancock, *The LORD Has Spoken: Understanding What Moses Wrote concerning Jesus of Nazareth* (Victoria, BC: Self Published, 2007), pp. 118-119 (Available through Millar College of the Bible, Pambrun, SK).

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Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), p. 708.

in which mankind enjoyed loving communion with their creator obviously no longer exists. Something catastrophic has happened to the created order.

The Bible explains that the created order is made up of both material and non-material realities. Some non-material realities, such as numbers, are purely abstract and conceptual in character. As such, they do not (in fact, cannot) stand in causal relationship to anything; they are completely ineffectual. Angelic beings, on the other hand, are concrete, personal entities though they are non-material. That is to say, though they are not extended in space, they are nonetheless personal agents capable of reason and reflection and who are, to a greater or lesser extent, causally active in the world. Originally these creatures enjoyed fellowship with God in heaven but at a certain point in time, probably within days after the creation was complete, there was a rebellion among them (Jude 1:6).

Though few details are given concerning this angelic rebellion, some facts are clear. The angels that rebelled against God have a leader among them, who is variously referred to as Beelzebub, the prince of the devils (Matthew 12:24), the devil and Satan (Revelation 12:9), Abaddon and Apollyon (Revelation 9:11). Though this creature, along with the rest of creation, was created good, he nonetheless freely chose to actualize his created *potential* to do evil. The judgments of God pronounced upon the kings of Babylon (Isaiah 14:12-15) and Tyre (Ezekiel 28:13-19) both contain cryptic references to the satanic power behind their kingdoms. In both cases, Satan's fall from heaven (Luke 10:18) is alluded to. Apparently Satan's fall and the resulting angelic rebellion stemmed from his pride and self-seeking ambition. Paul alluded to this when he stated that a bishop

in the church should “not [be] a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).

God instructed Adam, whom he created first (Genesis 2:7-8, 18-25; 1 Timothy 2:13) that he and his wife were free to eat the fruit from any of the trees in their garden home except one. They were forbidden to eat the fruit of *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. God’s command was clear: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). Though God apparently did not communicate this restriction to Eve directly, she nonetheless knew of it (Genesis 3:2); almost certainly it was Adam that informed her. While there is no universally accepted explanation for the tree’s strange name, two suggestions seem most likely. First, it would reveal whether man’s future state would be good or evil. Secondly, it would reveal whether man would allow God to determine what is good and evil or would chose to determine this for himself.¹²

Satan’s strategy for leading humanity into the bondage of sin was exceedingly subtle (Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3). Taking the fascinating form of a serpent (Revelation 12:9), he approached the woman first and asked, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). The question was obviously intended to cast doubt not only upon what hitherto was regarded as the authoritative word of God, but on her husband’s capability to properly relay the divine message. Most significantly, the Serpent’s question cast doubt upon God’s character and his intentions toward his creatures. The woman’s reply is instructive: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God

¹²Berkhof, p. 222.

hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, *neither shall ye touch it*, lest ye die” (Genesis 3:2-3, emphasis added). When Eve omitted God’s terms of generosity while amplifying his restrictions, she made it clear that she was entertaining the Serpent’s intimation that God’s intentions toward her and her husband were not wholly benevolent. Seizing the moment, the Serpent ensured Eve, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5). When faced with the Serpent’s claims, Eve ought to have continued to regard God’s word as self-authenticating and certainly true (Proverbs 3:5-6). Instead, she chose to regard her own experience as the final court of appeal. For Eve, contingency replaced certainty. She ate the forbidden fruit and Adam followed her lead (Genesis 3:6, 17). In doing so, Adam brought sin into God’s once “very good” world.

Before discussing the devastating effects of Adam’s sin, it is important to understand sin’s cause. Though God is undeniably sovereign (Psalm 135:6), working all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:11), it is wrong to see God as the cause of sin. James explained that “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). God did not cause the angelic rebellion nor did he cause Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. The idea that angelic and human sins were uncaused is obviously equally false. The logically necessary conclusion is that the sins of both Satan and Adam were *self-determined*. That is to say, in both cases the sinning agent was himself the efficient cause of his own actions.¹³

The exact nature and consequences of Adam’s sin have been the subject of intense debate for centuries. For instance, those committed to the evolution story

¹³Geisler, p. 745.

recognize the incompatibility between it and the biblical account of origins. For the evolutionist, there never was an historical Adam whose sin profoundly affected the world. On this evolutionary view, sin is nothing more than the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies that were incidental to an earlier stage in development. The sinfulness of such habits lies solely in their anachronism; they were not originally sinful. In fact, before moral consciousness evolved, they were essential for survival. As moral consciousness gradually replaced animal ignorance, society came to view certain acts as unacceptable. In time humans began to regard these acts as sin. Gradually social sanction became identified with the will of an all-holy God.

The evolutionary explanation for sin is unacceptable for a number of reasons. First, it necessarily denies the biblical account, which, as noted above, must be presupposed in order to make any rational inquiry intelligible. Secondly, even its advocates acknowledge that the whole thesis regarding the moral evolution of man lies “in the sphere of theory and speculation” and “are matters of inference from somewhat scanty facts.”¹⁴ Thirdly, the evolutionary explanation of sin rests on the presumption of Darwinism, which has been shown specious both scientifically^{15, 16} and

¹⁴F. R. Tennant, “The Evolutionary Theory of the Empirical Origin of Sin,” *Readings in Christian Theology, Vol. 2, Man’s Need and God’s Gift*, Millard J. Erickson, Ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976, reprint 1992), p. 110.

¹⁵Gary Parker, *Creation the Facts of Life* (Green Forrest, AK: 2006).

¹⁶Jonathan Sarfati, *The Greatest Hoax on Earth: Refuting Dawkins on Evolution* (Atlanta, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2010).

philosophically.^{17, 18} Fourthly, it is contradictory to insist that human morality rests solely on social convention, while maintaining that some cultures are more moral than others. If, as this theory maintains, society decides right and wrong, moral change may be possible, but not moral *progress*. For genuine moral progress to take place, there must be an objective and prescriptive standard according to which human society is better approximating. On the Christian view, God's own holy, just, and loving character, as expressed in his commands, provides such a standard. The evolutionary view, however, is incoherent in that it must at once deny and yet assume the existence objective moral values and duties. In short, there is no good reason to suspect that the evolutionary explanation for sin is correct and every reason to suspect it is not.

One simply cannot come to a right understanding of sin without consulting the biblical record. However, even amongst those that acknowledge the Bible as the infallible word of God disagreement exists with respect to the scope and consequences of Adam's sin. The British monk Pelagius (354-420) believed that Adam was created in a morally neutral state, and that his sin was nothing more than a bad example to his descendants.¹⁹ According to Pelagius, Adam's sin did not adversely affect the nature of his offspring, much less did it damage the cosmos. Pelagius saw the suggestion that humans born today not only have a fallen nature but bear the guilt of Adam's transgression, as inherently

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Greg L. Bahnsen, *Philosophy and Evolution*, lecture (mp3), Covenant Media Foundation, available at www.cmfnow.com [accessed August 11, 2015].

¹⁸Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: resolving the origins debate* (Green Forrest, AK: Master Books, 2009).

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Gustave F. Wiggers, "The Pelagian View of Original Sin," *Readings in Christian Theology* Vol. 2, pp. 154-155.

incoherent and morally abominable.²⁰ Each human being, according to Pelagius, is born into the world with a freshly created, morally neutral soul. Like Adam, humans have the ability to choose to resist temptation and do what is right. In other words, man by his own effort can fulfill the righteous demands of God's moral law.²¹

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was Pelagius's chief rival. For Augustine, Adam was not created morally neutral, but in a positive state of goodness. In this original "very good" condition (Genesis 1:31) he was able to resist temptation and obey God, but freely chose not to.²² The effects of his disobedience were nothing less than catastrophic. Fellowship with God was instantly severed (spiritual death) and physical death became inevitable. Importantly, the entire human race became totally depraved. Adam's willful disobedience left no part of man's constitution free from the corrupting influence of sin. Spiritually, intellectually, morally, and physically, man is corrupt.²³ On Augustine's view, this corruption manifests itself in man's total inability to resist evil.²⁴

Both philosophically and scripturally there is no question that Augustine's views better approximate to the truth. The pervasiveness of moral evil in the world is strong inductive evidence against Pelagius's views. If original moral neutrality and human capability were true, one would expect to find at least some morally perfect people.

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Ibid.

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Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 429.

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Sproul, *Original Sin*.

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McGrath, pp. 428-429.

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Sproul, *Original Sin*.

Instead, moral corruption seems to have supersaturated the world. As E. C. Bragg has noted,

Our whole structure of business and government is built upon the supposition that man is not to be trusted. There must be something to bind him to his word, and to do right, or he'll do wrong. . . . This is why we have to have locks on our doors, fallen nature, depravity. . . . Here is why we have policemen, guards, jails, courts, judges, soldiers, war equipment. A quarter of a trillion dollars a year for defence. Why? Fallen nature, depravity.²⁵

Some have argued that common intuitions concerning widespread moral evil are wrong and that the doctrine of total depravity is a hasty conclusion. Those that hold this view suggest that it is only because evil deeds are widely reported by the media that people see human nature as morally corrupt.²⁶ After all, the courts, it is said, are not a good place to go in order to make a fair assessment of human morality in the main. This argument, however, assumes that civil goodness is due to the innate magnanimity of man's heart and that divine grace exercises no restraining influence on evil.²⁷ This argument is also based on a misunderstanding of what the doctrine of original sin and total depravity actually entail. These doctrines do not entail that man is as morally wicked as he can be. Berkhof explains:

By ascribing total inability to the natural man we do not mean to say that it is impossible for him to do good in any sense of the word. Reformed theologians generally say that he is still able to perform: (1) natural good; (2) civil good or civil righteousness; and (3) externally religious good. It is admitted that even the unrenewed possess some virtue, revealing itself in the relations of social life, in many acts and sentiments that deserve the approval and gratitude of their fellow-

²⁵E. Bragg, *Hamartiology*, Lecture Series (part nine), mp3 available at www.trinitycollege.edu/academics/ecbragg/hamartiology [Accessed August 15, 2015].

²⁶Steven Pinker, *A History of Violence and Humanity*, lecture given at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (Winnipeg, MB, April 10, 2014).

²⁷Jonathan Edwards, "Some Evidences of Original Sin from Facts and Events," *Readings in Christian Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 133.

men, and even meet with their approval of God to a certain extent. At the same time it is maintained that these same actions and feelings, when considered in relation to God, are radically defective. Their fatal defect is that they are not prompted by love to God, or by any regard for the will of God as requiring them.²⁸

Peter Kreeft agrees, noting that, “Our good deeds are stained with self-interest and our demands for justice are mixed with lust for vengeance. Ironically, it’s the best people who most readily recognize and admit their own shortcomings and sin.”²⁹

The Bible is clear that man was not created in a morally neutral state but in a positive state of goodness (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Adam’s sin profoundly changed that. Man’s very nature became corrupt. Adam’s progeny are not sinners simply because they sin, rather, they sin *because they are sinners*. Paul reminded the believers at Ephesus:

You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; *and were by nature* the children of wrath, even as others (Ephesians 2:1-3, emphasis added).

Adam was at once the genetic, spiritual, and federal head of the human race. As the *genetic* head of the human race, all humans, including his wife (Genesis 2:21-23) derive their physical bodies from him. Part of his punishment was a degeneration of his physical body, which he passed on to all of his posterity. Because of Adam’s sin, every human being is destined to die physically (Romans 5:12). As humanity’s *spiritual* head, every human that has ever existed (with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ), was actually *in* Adam spiritually. When he sinned, all of humanity, including his as yet to be

²⁸Berkhof, p. 247.

²⁹Peter Kreeft as quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), p. 44.

individuated offspring, became spiritually corrupt. This view, which follows from a traducian understanding of human generation, necessarily denies both physicalist and Pelagian anthropologies. Though difficult to understand fully, the Bible is clearly traducian in its approach to human generation. The writer to the Hebrews states:

And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he [Melchisedec] whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. . . . And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him (Hebrews 7:5-6, 9-10).

Just as God reckoned Levi and his descendants as being in Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchisedec, he reckons the entire human race as being in Adam, participating in his sin with him. Thus every man comes into the world not only corrupt and sinful (Psalm 51:5), but actually guilty of sin. Lastly, Adam stood as the *federal* head of the human race. That is, Adam also *represented* his descendants. Just as a Prime Minister declaring war necessarily implicates all of his country's citizens, Adam's choice to disobey God implicated all of his descendants. When Adam became an enemy of God so did the entire human race (Colossians 1:21).

For those who, like Pelagius, see these doctrines as irrational or immoral, it must be pointed out that both objective rationality and morality depend upon God. All rational and moral evaluation involve predication, which entail not only the actual existence of oneness and individuality, but a certain relationship between the two. Understanding and accounting for this relationship has been the challenging task of philosophy for centuries. Christian theism alone solves this "one and the many" problem. On the Christian view, God is the objective identifier of all things as they relate to his plan. He establishes both

oneness and individuality in the created order. Connections between individuals are what he declares them to be. If his declarations are ignored and not presupposed, drawing distinctions and establishing connections between individuals becomes a matter of subjective personal opinion. In this case, any principled objection to the Christian conception of oneness and individuality is impossible. Since God's very nature and character establish the objective standards of right reason and moral perfection, it is impossible to legitimately accuse him of irrationality or moral deficiency. God has declared his creation, Adam, to be the physical, spiritual, and federal head of the human race. He is the "lump of clay" from which all human beings are taken. Paul asks:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:20-24).

Jesus ben Sirach, whose teachings Paul almost certainly was familiar with and probably respected,³⁰ is even clearer. He wrote

"And all men are from the ground, and Adam was created of earth. In much knowledge the Lord hath divided them, and made their ways divers. Some of them hath he blessed, and exalted, and some of them hath he sanctified, and set near himself: but some of them hath he cursed, and brought low, and turned out of their places. As the clay is in the potters hand to fashion it at his pleasure: so man is in the hand of him that made him, to render to them as liketh him best" (Ecclesiasticus 33:10-13).³¹

³⁰James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 607.

³¹"The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus," *The Holy Bible, King James Version: A reprint of the edition of 1611* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005).

Just as a potter has the right to relate derived pieces of clay to their source as he decides, God relates individual human beings to their progenitor as he wills and he does so on his own unquestionable authority. Adam's finite (and fallen) offspring are simply in no position to reply against their maker. Men are what God declares them to be. Period.

Because God is morally perfect, he cannot allow moral evil to go unpunished. He declared through the prophet Isaiah, "I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible" (Isaiah 13:11). Jesus declared that at his second coming in judgement he will consign those that rejected him to eternal conscious torment (Matthew 25:31-46). The Bible, particularly the New Testament, is replete with references to the future state of the damned. They will be judged according to their works (Revelation 20:11-13), cast into everlasting fire (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 14:1-11; 20:15; 21:8), and eternally separated from communion with Christ (2 Thessalonians 7:9). The Bible teaches that not all sins merit the same degree of torment; the amount of truth that a person knew and rejected certainly is a factor (Matthew 23:14; Luke 12:46-48). Accordingly, attempts to deny the doctrine of sin's eternal punishment are not based upon a sound reading of the Bible.³² Rather, they appear to be based upon personal sentiment,³³ which has nothing whatever to do with proper exegesis.

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Phil Fernandes and Christ Date debate the resolution: The punishment of hell will be annihilation: the everlasting loss of life and conscious existence, September 28th, 2013, available at www.instituteofbiblicaldefense.com/2013/10/chris-date-and-phil-fernandes-debate-hell/ [Accessed August 16, 2014].

³³ Rob Bell, *Loves Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2011), pp. 2-3.

Understanding the nature and gravity of sin is essential in order to understand and appreciate the gospel of Christ. Sin, however, must not be merely understood; it must be confessed and repented of (1 John 1:9; Acts 2:38; 3:19). Only then can a person begin to appreciate the Lord's supreme sacrifice and hope to appropriate the benefits of it. Those who choose to ignore the reality of their sin debt would do well to contemplate the question posed by the writer to the Hebrews: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . . ?" (Hebrews 2:2-3).

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