

CHAPTER 5

NATURE OF SIN

Cf. Hodge 2:ch. 8; Murray 2:ch. 8-9; Shedd 2:ch. 3-5; Calvin *Institutes*, Book 2, ch. 1-5; Berkouwer *Sin* (567 pages!); Edwards “The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended,” *Works* 1:143-233; Murray *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*; Warfield, “Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy,” *Works* 4:289-412, and “Imputation,” *Works* 9:ch. 10, or *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ch. 10; William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* 1:ch. 19-20; Hoekema *Created in God’s Image*, ch. 7-10; David L. Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (1994)

Cf. also commentaries on Romans 5—esp. Calvin, Hodge, Shedd, Barth, Murray, Cranfield

Excellent bibliographical information in *Great Books, Syntopicon* 2:ch. 86

(For origin of sin, see ch. 4, sect. “Adam’s Fall into Sin”)

Biblical terms

The following are the main biblical terms for sin:

Significant OT terms

חַטָּאָה *ḥāṭāh* or חַטָּאת *ḥattā’t*, sin, moral failure

Judg 20:16, sling and not miss

1 Sam 12:23, sin by failing to pray for you

Ps 32:1, whose sin is covered

עָוֹן *‘āwōn*, iniquity, crookedness

Gen 15:16, iniquity of Amorites

Ps 32:2, Lord imputes not iniquity

פְּשָׁעַי *peša'*, transgression, rebellion

1 Kgs 12:19, (political)

Isa 1:2, they have rebelled

Ps 51:13, I will teach transgressors

All three terms used together in Ps 32:1-2, “Blessed is he whose transgressions (*peša'*) are forgiven, whose sins (פְּחַטָּי *ḥāṭā'āh*, related to *ḥāṭāh*) are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin (*'āwōn*) the Lord does not count against him.”

Significant NT terms

ἁμαρτία *hamartia*— (n) sin; ἁμαρτάνω *hamartano*— (v) sin (similar to Heb. *ḥāṭā'*)

Rom 3:23, all have sinned, come short

πονηρός *poneros*, evil, iniquity (similar to Heb. *'āwōn*)

John 3:19, men loved darkness, because their deeds were evil

παραβαίνω *parabaino*, transgress, break a law (similar to Heb. *peša'*)

Matt 5:2-3, transgress the tradition . . . transgress the commandment

Cf. παράβασις *parabasis*, transgression

Other NT words:

ἀδικία *adikia*, unrighteousness

ἀνομία *anomia*, lawlessness

κακός *kakos*, bad, evil

ὀφείλημα *opheilema*, debt

παρακούω *parakouo*, disobey

παράπτωμα *paraptoma*, transgression

Scriptural evidence concerning the nature of sin

Sin a condition or disposition of the heart

Ps 51:5, a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me

Jer 17:9, heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure

Matt 7:17-18, good and evil fruit from corresponding trees

Matt 15:19, sins come from the heart

Rom 7:7-25, Paul's internal struggle with sin in the heart

Sin includes thoughts and affections

—Verses in previous section

Exod 20:17, not covet

Lev 19:17, not hate

Matt 5:27-28, not lust

Cf. degrees of murder in criminal justice

Sin includes outward acts

Matt 18:21, brother sin against me

John 3:19, deeds are evil

Rom 7:19, the evil which I do

Sin includes omission of doing right

1 Sam 12:23, sin by ceasing to pray for you

Jas 4:17, know to do good and do it not—to him it is sin

Sin need not be conscious

Lev 5:14-19, sins unintentionally . . . even though he does not know it, he is guilty

Ps 19:12, secret faults

Ps 139:24, see if there be any wicked way in me

Sin can be directed against oneself or others

Prov 6:32, destroys his own soul

Prov 8:35-36, does violence to his own soul

2 Kgs 14:24, Jeroboam . . . made Israel to sin

Matt 6:12, our debtors

Matt 18:21, my brother sin against me

But all sin is directed primarily against God

Prov 8:35-35 (cf. above), he that sins against me (wisdom)

1 Sam 12:23 (above), sin against the Lord

Gen 20:6, Abimelech withheld from sinning against God

Gen 39:9, Joseph to Potiphar's wife

2 Sam 12:13-14, David's sin; cf. Ps 51:4, "against you, you only, have I sinned"

Luke 15:18, sinned against heaven

1 Cor 8:12, you sin against Christ (cause brother to fall)

Sin reveals pride against God and rebellion against his law

Dan 4:30, Nebuchadnezzar

2 Cor 5:15, not henceforth living for themselves

2 Thess 2:3-4, Antichrist

1 Tim 3:6, Satan

1 John 3:4, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (ἀνομία *anomia*)”

Inadequate philosophical views of sin

—Outline of Hodge 2:130-49

Dualistic view

Held in various forms by Gnostics, Marcionites, Manichaeans

Two forces: spirit and sinful matter

Removes evil from sovereignty of God

Ethical consequences: asceticism, or indulgence

Sin as limitation of being

Spinoza, F. C. Baur, Carlyle, tendencies in Augustine

Since God is the absolute existence, non-existence is evil

Denies goodness of finite things in universe, results in pantheism

Results in ignoring moral laws

Leibnitz's theory of privation

Similar to Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus

Effort of theist to allow coexistence of perfect God with evil in the universe

Since this is the best possible universe, sin must be unavoidable.

Since God the only effective agent, sin is not his work: must be what he has not done; no efficient cause needed.

Makes sin necessary, and God the author of sin

Theory of necessary antagonism

Blasche, Rosenkranz

Universe formed by separation between good and evil; good requires evil

Thus evil cannot be blameworthy

Sin as self-consciousness

Schleiermacher

Complicated view; good summary & evaluation in Hodge 2:138-40

Sin is the God-consciousness being partly replaced by the self-consciousness in spiritually-dual man

Denies a personal God; sin a subjective apprehension, not a moral evil

Sin as sensuousness

Evident in Manichaeism, Romanism

Man a duality, body and spirit; if bodily desires overcome spiritual desire, result is sin

Does not adequately explain body as good, or sin as spiritual

Note Hodge's discussion of biblical terms for *flesh*, *carnal*, *spirit*, *spiritual* (2:143-44)

Sin as selfishness

Aquinas *Summa*, Tholuck, A. H. Strong (567-73), tendencies in Augustine (cf. Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, etc.)

Not self love, but undue preference of one's own happiness over that of the common good

Universal good or happiness replaces God's glory as the chief end of man

Sin made to contribute to happiness

Replaces God's law with subjectivism—problem of Epicurus

Earlier theological approaches to the nature of sin

Cf. Hodge 2:149-80

Early church writers

General, sometimes inconsistent

General agreement on 4 points (quoting Hodge 150):

1. That all men in their present state are sinners.
2. That this universal sinfulness of men had its historical and causal origin in the voluntary apostasy of Adam.
3. That such is the present state of human nature that salvation can be attained in no other way than through Christ, and by the assistance of his Spirit.
4. That even infants as soon as born need regeneration and redemption, and can be saved only through the merit of Christ.

Pelagius and Augustine

(Ca. A.D. 400)

Cf. Hodge 2:152-64

Pelagius: Ability limits obligation. “Sin, therefore, consists only in the deliberate choice of evil. It presupposes knowledge of what is evil, as well as the full power of choosing or rejecting it” (p. 153)

False conclusion of this view, pp. 153-55

Augustine’s reply: two levels—philosophic (temporary impact), and theological (permanent impact)

Philosophically. —evil is negation of being. A helpful definition in his argument against the Manichaeans, who said sin a substance. Yet Augustine stronger than the limitation of being view mentioned above: sin a voluntary, moral evil, deficient in its conformity to God’s standard.

Theologically. —Cf. his *Confessions*, *City of God*, Bks. 12-15 and his writings against Pelagius:

Guilt and pollution evident to his conscience (the pears)

Guilt and pollution includes affections, feelings, emotions; absence of right affections

This guilt and pollution result of voluntary act of the will—true for himself, for all others, for Adam

Hodge’s summary of Augustine’s conclusions (pp. 160-61):

“From these facts of consciousness and experience Augustine drew the inevitable conclusion, (1.) That if men are saved it cannot be by their own merit, but solely through the undeserved love of God. (2.) That the regeneration of the soul must be the exclusive and supernatural work of the Holy Ghost; that the sinner could neither effect the work nor cooperate in its production. In other words, that grace is certainly efficacious or irresistible. (3.) That salvation is of grace or of the sovereign mercy of God, (a.) In that God might justly have left men to perish in their apostasy without any provision for their redemption. (b.) In that men, being destitute of the power of doing anything holy or meritorious, their

justification cannot be by works, but must be a matter of favor. (c.) In that it depends not on the will of the persons saved, but on the good pleasure of God, who are to be made partakers of the redemption of Christ. In other words, election to eternal life must be founded on the sovereign pleasure of God, and not on the foresight of good works. (4.) A fourth inference from the principles of Augustine was the perseverance of the saints. If God of his own good pleasure elects some to eternal life, they cannot fail of salvation. It thus appears that as all the distinguishing doctrines of the Pelagians are the logical consequences of their principle of plenary ability as the ground and limit of obligation, so the distinguishing doctrines of Augustine are the logical consequences of his principle of the entire inability of fallen man to do anything spiritually good.”

In other words, Augustine demonstrates the fact that the famous “five points of Calvinism” stand together and are mutually supportive and dependent.

Roman Catholic teaching

Ambivalent: some Augustinian, some semi-Pelagian (pp. 166-67); cf. Hodge 2:164-80

Decrees of Council of Trent ruled out the strongest positions on both sides (pp. 174-77)

Difficulty of interpreting the RC position (pp. 177, cf. 179)

The modern Catholic church still officially opposes both Pelagianism and full Augustinianism (Calvinism): “The Church’s teaching on the transmission of original sin was articulated more precisely in the fifth century, especially under the impulse of St. Augustine’s reflections against Pelagianism, and in the sixteenth century, in opposition to the Protestant Reformation. Pelagius held that man could, by the power of free will and without the necessary help of God’s grace, lead a morally good life; he thus reduced the influence of Adam’s fault to bad example. The first Protestant reformers, on the contrary, taught that original sin has radically perverted man and destroyed his freedom; they identified the sin inherited by each man with the tendency to evil (concupiscentia), which would be insurmountable. The Church pronounced on the meaning of the data of Revelation on original sin especially at the second Council of Orange (529) and at the Council of Trent (1546).” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [1994], parag. 406)

Protestant doctrine of the nature of the sin

[Outline below from Murray 2:ch. 8, which largely is from Hodge 2:180-92]

1. Sin is a real evil

Not an illusion, a deficiency, a limitation, or a necessary side of good

2. Sin is a specific evil

Sin is of a different nature than are its consequences: disease, calamity, death

3. Sin is a moral evil

A violation of God's moral nature and government

1) It is wrong, contrary to the "ought"

(Cf. much-used term "inappropriate behavior") "It is not something simply unwise, or inexpedient, or hurtful, or painful, or calamitous, or unfortunate"

2) It is violation of law

Law given because it is right; not simply advantageous, expedient, utilitarian

3) It is violation of God's law

God's moral law is the extension of his moral perfection into the creation. Love must be defined by law (1 John 3; Murray 78; cf. Christian Ethics course)

4) God's law is pervasive

Applies to deeds, words, thoughts, intents of heart; cf. WLC 99:1-2

4. Sin involves both pollution and guilt

Pollution—*macula*, "stain, blemish," defilement of soul resulting from sin

Guilt—*culpa*

Liability to punishment—*reatus*

Punishment—*poena*

Reatus potentialis, “potential guilt”

= “Demerit,” *demeritus*

Reatus actualis, “actual (imputed) guilt”

= “The judgment of demerit,” *judicium demeriti*

= “Obligation to penalty,” *obligatio ad poenam*