SIN & THE FALL Sunday School

**Introduction-**

More and more people have become fascinated by genealogy in recent years. I haven’t done so, but admittedly I have been batting around the idea of purchasing one of the mail-in DNA kits, in hopes that I might gain greater insight into my family origins. Part of the interest is that we know on some level that we inherit a great deal from our forebears, especially our parents. We can see the family traits in the mirror. Our spouses are often quick to pick up on certain family idiosyncrasies; how many times have I heard it lovingly said, “You're acting like your father”. And she is right. Oddly enough, almost subconsciously, I find myself doing many of the things that my father would do, with similar tendencies and more moments where I can say that I am becoming more and more like my dad as I grow older. May we give God thanks for the commendable traits, that seem to come naturally, and may God give us humility and grace, to put off the things that do not line up with his revealed will- even if they feel like second nature.

I think that part of the appeal of do-it-yourself family trees and modern day mail-in genetic analysis, is that many of us want a glimpse into the past, becoming better acquainted with our roots, in an effort to gain some insight into who we are as individuals. Now I will leave to your judgment to determine the wisdom, the usefulness, and reliability of such endeavors.

However, I will say that today’s lesson cuts through all of it, pushing beyond the many diverse family trees unique to each of us- in order to give to each of us a true, clear, reliable glimpse of who our very first parents were. My first parents. Your first parents. And in doing so, we will gain far greater insight into who we are here and now.

So, today we will take a closer look at our first parents as we take up the Doctrine of Sin and the Fall. I'll begin saying that this is not an easy subject. But it is an absolutely crucial subject.

**The importance of this topic.**

Why is it important that we deal with this doctrine and deal with it biblically? Is it not enough simply to have some general, vague understanding of our condition as sinners? Why present it as a pivotal Christian doctrine? Is it not enough to simply acknowledge the reality of sin in us and around us, check the orthodox boxes, and move on to the more uplifting doctrines?

I'm convinced that if we do not absorb the biblical doctrine of sin and the fall into our theological frameworks, we will eventually end up diminishing, compromising, and maybe even losing the gospel itself. Vague and amorphous impressions of the nature of sin, how it operates in and characterizes humanity, are insufficient.

The reason is this-if we don't fully grasp the problem, we cannot fully grasp the solution. If we don't appreciate the extent and depth of the problem we cannot appreciate the magnitude of the solution. If we underestimate the problem, we may rest content in an inadequate and incomplete and insufficient solution.

But if you see more clearly the nature of sin it will actually serve you well. For the doctrine of Sin and the Fall forms this black backdrop- against which the diamond of the gospel of Jesus Christ comes into bold relief and clear view. And in seeing him for who he is, by the help of the Spirit, will ultimately serve to tighten our grip on Jesus Christ.

**Setting the stage.**

The reality of sin is everywhere in the Bible. In fact, the redemptive story of the Bible simply doesn’t make sense if we do not reckon with sin’s reality.

The Bible states that this truth is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners.* Elsewhere it says that by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Therefore, we need to know what sin is, the implications, what these things mean. This means having a biblical understanding of sin.

And upfront I will say that there are important nuances to this doctrine, there is economy, a structure in how God relates to the reality of sin; how God relates to Adam's sin and consequently how God relates to us. This economy has important implications and important parallels to how God relates to us in Christ.

So to object to or reject the biblical doctrine of sin may lead to a rejection of the biblical gospel, which has profound and even eternal consequences.

**So, let’s pray and ask for God’s help.**

**Sins Fundamental Backdrop**

I mentioned that the gospel takes place against the backdrop of sin. Sin takes place against its own backdrop. In the most fundamental sense, we see the darkness of sin most clearly against the backdrop of the thrice holy God.

God is the one who alone dwells in unapproachable light. James speaks of the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change, harkening back to God’s work of creating light in its various forms.

It is in the light of the holiness of God that we see sin for what it is.

Because of this dynamic, there is an important cause and effect relationship between our appreciation of God’s holiness and our understanding of our own sin.

Consider John’s first epistle.

1 John 1.5-10: This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The text teaches some fundamental truths as we take it in.

**1.**If we are walking with God, we cannot walk in abject darkness, because God is light. His presence will be felt. His light will illumine our way. Our lives will therefore differ radically and practically from those who walk in darkness.

**2.**If God’s light of moral purity and holiness shines into our lives, we cannot help but see the dirt of our sin; and the more fully we walk in the light of God’s holiness, the more dirt we see. So, as we walk in the light, rather than denying the reality of sin in our lives, we will be marked by honest dealings with our remaining sin. Far from denying sin's reality, the experience of Christian maturity is a growing sense of the remaining presence of sin, and its offense to God.

Because of these things, John deploys a precious promise for those who live under God’s sin revealing light-the blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins.

**The Fall’s Backdrop**

Adam and Eve’s first sin and fall takes place against its own backdrop as well. We could do well by reading all of Genesis 1 and 2 to better see this background, but that is a foundation laid a few weeks back. So, I will keep my comments brief.

**Before the Fall- Man’s Prelapsarian Condition**

Man had an absolutely privileged beginning. God created man “upright and perfect”- this is what our confession explicitly teaches. More importantly this is demonstrable from the Scripture.

At the conclusion of the sixth day, after God had completed His work of creation, including the pinnacle of his creation- *mankind*- and the Scriptures tell us this: Genesis 1.31: God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

The inspired preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us in chapter 7 v. 29- “*See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”*

But before we get ahead of ourselves with mankind's sinful schemes, let’s appreciate the fact that there was no fault in Adam before the fall, no sin, no moral deficiency or iniquity- he was upright.

All of his faculties- his mind, will, affections, and body were pristine.

Thomas Boston, one of the Marrow men, a preeminent Scottish theologian and pastor who ministered in the 18th century noted that “There was light in his understanding, sanctity in his will, and rectitude in his affections; there was such an harmony among all his faculties, that his members yielded to his affections, his affections to his will, his will obeyed his reason, and his reason was subject to the Law of God.”

We also see that God made Adam and Eve in his image- Genesis 1.26 "Let us make mankind in our own image".

We see that God took his upright and perfect creation, Adam and Eve, and placed them in an idyllic garden, where he walked among them, the man and the woman enjoying life giving fellowship and communion with God.

We see that God gave Adam and Eve a mandate as well.

We read in Genesis 1:26 that they were to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 1:28 tells us that they were to be “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

They were God's appointed vice-regents, his creature-king and creature queen.

We see in Genesis 2:15, that Adam and Eve are placed in the garden “to work it and keep it.”

This expression is applied to the work the priests and Levites rendered within the temple and tabernacle as described in the book of Numbers- this leads us to believe that man possessed a priestly role in the garden sanctuary as well.

As we take it all in, the man and woman possessed profound dignity and potential, functioning as priests-kings, managing and stewarding and caring for the world, *not autonomously*, but under God’s absolute rule and reign.

All of creation was a testimony to God’s goodness toward his image bearers. God made it patently evident that his intentions toward them were nothing but good. He gave the man the woman, he gave the woman the man, he gave them both a beautiful, verdant garden, a glorious task, and supremely *He gave Himself to them*.

They were made for communion with God in every facet of their existence. Made to know God and glorify God. To borrow from the WSC question 1, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

God did not possess ulterior, evil motives in his dealings. There was no reason to think that God was ruling over them harshly. There was no reason to think that he was withholding any good thing.

**Covenant Realities**

Although the word covenant is not present in the opening chapters of Genesis- I think there is very good reason to believe that a covenant relationship was in place.

Elsewhere, Scriptures demonstrate that a covenant may be in effect, without the word for covenant being present as God initiates the covenant. For instance, God initiates the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 without using the word for covenant. But later Biblical writers explicitly call God’s dealings with David as a covenant.

As it pertains to Adam- we read in Hosea 6:7, “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.” The interpretation is disputed, but a reference to a covenant with Adam seems to be the obvious choice.

Moreover, the framework necessary for the biblical conception of covenant were present at creation. There were *covenant partners*: God and Adam/Eve. God gave *stipulations or requirements*. There are clear *curses or threats for disobedience* and clear *blessings* for obedience, things that are conspicuous features of subsequent covenants.

The covenant seems conditional as well. If Adam and Eve disobeyed, they would die (Gen. 2:17- but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”). But if they obeyed, they would continue to enjoy life with God.

Remember, that there were two trees that feature prominently in the garden. The other tree, the “tree of life” was not off limits. Implicit is a sort of unspoken promise of “life”. The tree of life stands as an ideal, part of God’s good purposes for the man and woman.

As we step back and look at the big picture, it seems to me that seeing a covenant in Genesis 1-2 is entirely reasonable and appropriate. Essential covenantal categories of stipulation, promise and threat are present.

Speculation has arisen as to how long the covenant was meant to endure. Most reformed theologians are convinced that it was intended to end, and it seems reasonable to infer that God would have withdrawn the test, *affirming* Adam and Eve in their covenant loyalty and *confirming* them in their righteous status. The narrative doesn’t address this issue head on, however.

**My main points in all of this technical covenant talk are really two-fold.**

First, as we shall see a little later, the Bible views both Adam and Christ as *covenant heads*, *functioning as representatives* of those who belong to them. There are clear parallels in the Scripture between Adam and Christ. Christ is referred to as the last Adam in 1 Corinthians 15. As we look more closely at Romans 5, we will see the representative, covenantal dynamics more clearly. The bible teaches that sin, death, and condemnation belong to all human beings by virtue of their covenant connection to Adam. The bible teaches that grace, righteousness, and life belong to all those united to Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. *The covenant-representative role of both Adam and Christ are clear in the biblical storyline.*

Secondly, God’s words and dealings toward Adam were both serious and sincere, like a covenant. And God’s serious and sincere words and dealings tell us two very important things about man in his pre-fall condition- man was posse non peccare (able not to sin). And man was posse non mori (able not to die). The man and woman were truly able not to sin and truly able not to die.

Scientists conceive of death and decay as inherent and inevitable in the created order. But that is not how it was in the beginning.

Scientists conceive of self-centered behavior as inherent among humanity, for man is just another animal, surviving and procreating without respect to God or true morality. The only law is the law of the jungle.

But God’s sincere, covenantal dealings with Adam show us otherwise. Man was able not to sin and able not to die.

He enjoys unspeakable dignity and is brimming with potential as God’s unique and living image bearer-fully human but not sinful.

Sin is not part of the definition of a human being. Remember, Jesus was fully human, though he did not sin. We are still human, even when Jesus takes our sins away. And when we stand sinless in glory, we will still be fully human. God’s good creation is not inherently sinful or subject to decay.

As David reflects on man's unique position and potential Psalm 8:5–6 (ESV) he writes: *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet-*

David, a king among kings, expresses astonishment on the honor that God has bestowed on the first man and woman.

**Something is Amiss**

But something irrational, something terrible, something sinister has taken place. Man somehow rejects his mandate and destiny. Man sins and man falls. And their fall into sin plunged the entire human race into the abyss, where we see, not God’s vice-regents, but death and sin reign.

**Origin of Evil**

A word about the origins of sin and evil is now in order. The Fall of Man is not the origin of evil. Rather the fall is the entrance of the human race into sin. Evil already existed in the created order- the cosmos- prior to the Fall of Man. The serpent, the devil, appears in the garden, in all his rebellion against God, before man and woman engage in their own evil rebellion. Therefore, the first sin, as such, appears attributable to Satan.

And since God made everything good (Gen. 1:31), there must have been a fall of Satan and his angels before the fall of man. Scripture says very little about this, however. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 may refer to it as it describes angelic rebellion.

2 Peter 2:4 (ESV): For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

Jude 6 (ESV): And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

1 Timothy 3.6 suggests that the fall of the devil was rooted in pride- Paul speaking of qualifications of an overseer writes- “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” So, characteristic of Satan is the sin of pride, of aspiring to be like God in power and authority.

And this idea meshes well with Jude 6, where we see that the fallen angels were not satisfied with their lot, with the government and power entrusted to them. Therefore, *if pride and the desire to be like God was at the heart of this angelic rebellion*, this would also explain why Satan tempted man on that particular point in the garden.

However, it happened, we know that Satan fell, and that sin originated in the realm of the spirits, and not among humans. Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28 may allude to the fall of Satan, comparing his rebellion the attitudes and sure destruction of ungodly human kings, but the passages are not explicit in that connection. Moreover, it is critical to understand that Satan and the fallen angels did not sin by some external power or temptation, but in and by themselves. *God did not tempt them or coerce them into their rebellion. The devil's sin came out of his own self-twisted arrogance*-

John 8:44 (ESV): You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

These things bring us into the presence of great mystery. We know that somehow everything finds its ultimate origin in God's eternal plan or decree. And though difficult to comprehend, that must also be the case with sin. Sin, after all, is one of the "all things" that God works "according to the counsel of his will," as Paul says in Ephesians 1:11.

This raises other questions that we will discuss later as we address mysteries surrounding the Fall. But I would just encourage to find comfort in God's sovereign decree. Sin and rebellion did not take God by surprise. God ordained it, and if he ordained it, he certainly ordained it for a holy and good purpose.

And in ordaining sin that sin be, God does not commit sin or recommend it. It is part of his decretive will but never part his revealed or preceptive will. He condemns sin, hates it, and will destroy it. God is not and never will be the author of sin.

“Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity,” Job 34:10. He is the holy God, Isa. 6:3, and there is absolutely no unrighteousness in Him, Deut. 32:4; Ps. 92:16. He cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man, Jas. 1:13. He positively hates sin, Deut. 25:16; Ps. 5:4; 11:5; Zech. 8:17; Luke 16:15, and made provision in Christ for man’s deliverance from sin. In the light of all this it would be blasphemous to speak of God as the author of sin."- Berkof

We cannot press much farther than this so as to resolve the mystery of the origin of evil. If we present speculation as truth, such missteps will inevitably lead us into egregious error if we follow them through.

Deuteronomy 29.29- “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

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**The Biblical Account of the Fall**

Therefore, we resolve to direct our attention to what we can know, and what has been clearly revealed. We turn our attention to the biblical account of the fall. It may be helpful to flip there in your Bibles. Genesis 3.1-24

The nuts and bolts of the Biblical account, at first glance seem incredible. A tree and its fruit. A talking snake. The man and the woman, unencumbered by sin and shame and clothing. A little later, we have strategically placed fig leaves.

To embrace this even as a historic fact can make many of us uneasy. Perhaps we think it lacks the sophistication or the epic proportions we would expect for an event of such cosmic significance.

But the Bible is clear- this event as described in all its apparent simplicity, is fundamental to everything else that unfolds in Scripture- and truly gives us the most plausible and reasonable explanation as to what has happened to mankind and the world.

**The Historicity of the Fall**

Many attempts have been made and to explain away the historical character of the fall. Many theologians teach that the story of the fall never really happened. In their view sin did not enter the world by a historical event; rather, sin is just a part of human nature. Some even see Genesis 2-3 as a parable intended to show us that sin is basic to our human makeup.

Some regard the whole Genesis 3 narrative as allegory, representing man’s self-corruption in a figurative way. Some liken the account to the prophet Nathan telling King David the fictional story of a rich man, a poor man, and his one little ewe lamb in order to awaken David to the sobering reality of his actual sin.

However, the Scriptures themselves will not let us construe the events in the garden as something merely symbol laden. It is real history involving a real man and real woman and a real command and a real tree and a real Satan, and a real sin.

**On its historicity two things should be said.**

First, the New Testament assumes it and argues from it, making the first Adam as literal as the last Adam, Christ himself, whose genealogy can be traced back to Adam in Luke 3:23ff.

According to Romans 5:18–19 (ESV) and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 both Adam and Christ are described historical figures, as factual as the resurrection itself.

Romans 5:18–19 (ESV) Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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 Corinthians 15:21–22 (ESV): For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

If we do not believe the historicity of the Genesis account- the historicity of Adam, the historicity of his one sin, we leave ourselves open to amorphous ideas about the real man Jesus Christ- and we may begin analogizing the gospel, making Christ and his cross symbolic and not real history. This is a deadly error because understanding Christ and his gospel as real history is essential to saving faith.

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 (ESV): 15 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

And what Paul relays is nothing but pure historic fact. Not analogies.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

To this I may add that if the fall was a historical event, then we, with confidence, can rest assured that it can be undone through historical event of the cross.

**The Temptation and the Disobedience.**

Who is this serpent? In verse 1, the serpent is explicitly God’s handiwork, God's creation. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made”-. We learn elsewhere that the serpent is the embodiment of Satan himself, as Revelation 12 makes clear.

Revelation 12:9 (ESV): And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The fact that the serpent, and by extension, Satan, is a created entity rules out any sort of absolute dualism. Dualism is the belief that there are two principles operating in the universe, a principle of good and a principle of evil; neither having complete mastery over the other. This view sometimes portrays Satan as the personification of evil, or the personal evil genius behind evil, in exactly the same way that God is the genius behind all that is good. The distinctive and erroneous element in this worldview, however, is that neither Satan nor God is absolute; neither is omnipotent. And if God is not omnipotent, as the Bible insists everywhere, then how can believers be sure how the world will turn out? So, Genesis 3 makes it clear from the outset that such a conception of good and evil is unbiblical.

Satan is a creature-in the grip of rebellion no doubt- but nevertheless God's creature, and does not operate outside of the boundaries of God's sovereign decree. See the opening chapter of Job for a biblical depiction of this dynamic.

The serpent is described as *crafty, shrewd, or subtle*. The overtones of the Hebrew word are not inherently negative. In fact, oftentimes the word brings with it positive overtones.

Proverbs 12:23 (ESV): A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.

Proverbs 14:18 (ESV): The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

So, the idea in Genesis 3 is that we have a creature mightily endowed by God, the wisest of God's creation- and simultaneously his tremendous capacities are now somehow bent toward evil.

So, we give the devil his due. He is crafty and wise. We are to be alert and sober in mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. He deploys various schemes.

But though he is wise, there is something irrational about Satan, and something irrational about sin and rebellion. Satan is a being that knows more about God than we do, nevertheless, still seeks to displace God on the throne; an intelligent being, yet from one perspective incredibly irrational.

**The Procedure of the Tempter**

The serpent is a created thing, part of the creation that the man and woman was to rule over. In that sense the temptation comes through subordinate. And because the serpent is a subordinate, you do not get the sense that man and woman any under any duress. The sin of Adam and Eve was a perfectly voluntary act on their part. There was no violence done to the will of man. They were not forced into disobedience.

Though it was undoubtedly the intention of the tempter to cause Adam, the head of the covenant, to sin and fall, yet he addressed himself to Eve. Why?

Perhaps it was because she was not the head of the covenant and therefore would not have the same sense of responsibility.

It is also possible that she had not received the command of God directly but only indirectly, and would consequently be more susceptible to argumentation and doubt.

And she would undoubtedly prove to be the most effective agent in reaching the heart of Adam.

Note that the serpent begins with suggestion rather than argument. It is just the right amount of skepticism. He doesn’t come on too strong or with a clear agenda.

Genesis 3:1 (ESV): Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

The incredulous tone of Genesis 3:1 is both disturbing and flattering. It smuggles in the assumption that God’s word is subject to our judgment, that ultimately, somehow the man and woman have the prerogative to stand in judgment over God.

Satan’s exaggeration, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden”, is another common strategy deployed by the tempter. It portrays God as withholding the good, which runs completely counter to how God has related to the man and woman. But isn't this how we so often conceive of God. That he is not really good, and that he really doesn’t have our best interests in view. And with this exaggeration dangled before Eve, Satan draws her into debate on his terms.

Here we then see Eve adding her own little bit to the divine mandate- Genesis 3:3 (ESV): “*neither shall you touch it*” the woman says. But God did not say that. She over-corrects the statement by the serpent, and at the same time, perhaps intentionally, perhaps unintentionally, portrays God as overly strict.

Is she beginning to bristle under authority at this point? Does this represent her heart shifting on its axis? I don't know what is going on in her heart at this point. The text simply doesn’t say.

We know that she could have just as easily magnified God’s goodness, drawing attention to what they could freely consume and enjoy.

Moreover, in her correction of the serpent, she omits the name of the tree. It is simply “the tree that is in the middle of the garden”. Again, I am not sure if this is intentional or an oversight on her part. But to name the tree outright would have served the purpose of reorienting everyone's attention to what is a stake. It was the tree of the knowledge of good *and evil*.

At any rate, omitting the tree's name makes God’s command seem excessively arbitrary, the idea that God chose a random tree, without a good reason or good purpose behind his prohibition.

There is a lot going on here, and people tease out the precise dynamics a little differently sometimes. In my mind, all of these things together create a synergy and a certain environment, a perspective, where believing the deception is more palatable to the woman.

And the serpent sees the open door here to advance his full deception. And the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Here, I really appreciate the exposition that Greg Nichols advances in his Doctrine of Man lectures. He observes that the devil focuses his attack on three things: the veracity and sufficiency of God’s Word, the integrity of God’s character, and the consistency and unity of the regulations of God’s revealed will.

Therefore, front and center is how we perceive the authority of God's word. We see this emphasis in Christ's temptation as well. Jesus, by quoting Scripture, he showed that he intended to obey God's Word, and not the devil's.

1. Satan attacks the veracity and sufficiency of God’s Word by insisting “You shall not surely die”. He tempts Eve to deny the truthfulness of God's Word, its authority, accuracy and sufficiency. He assures her that it is not relevant.

2.Satan attacks the integrity of God’s character- “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” in doing so Satan paints God as overly restrictive and harsh. He insinuates that God does not have their welfare or best interest at heart. He insinuates that God imposed the prohibition out of selfish motives. God doesn’t want you to be like him, rather he wants to keep you back from something necessary to her well-being. Thus he slanders God.

3.Satan attacks the consistency of the regulations of God’s revealed will.

Here Satan is trying to create an unnecessary tension between imitating God and obeying him. Satan’s temptation amounts to appealing to their duty as image bearers, their duty to be like God and imitate him as His living representatives. He implies that not eating of the tree would be a failure or defection from their responsibility to be like God. It is the idea that taking and eating from the tree, it is the only way they can fully fulfill their mandate as image bearers.

When we step back, we also see that the serpent calls into question the doctrine of God’s judgment - “You will not surely die”. Again, it is the serpent's word against God’s, and Satan is dismissive of the doctrine of judgment. And if we remove the doctrine of judgment from the equation, you open the door to all manner of disobedience- for then there are no consequences for our actions.

Let's touch on what I think is the heart of Satan's vicious deceitfulness. The irony is that what the serpent promised is partly true and at the same time completely false.

It is partly true because the man and woman did come into a deeper level of consciousness concerning good and evil.

And so in Genesis 3:22 “the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil."

But in another sense, it was total deception, because the way God knows good and evil and the way we have come to know good and evil are two very different things.

God knows about good and evil precisely the way he knows about everything- he is omniscient. He knows the beginning from the end and all things in between. He knows what has been, what is, what will be. He knows what could have been in light of all potential circumstances. He has contingent knowledge or middle knowledge. He is utterly omniscient and knows all things.

But Adam and Eve would come to know evil by becoming evil. And that is the difference. God does not know evil by becoming evil. God knows all about good and evil from the outside as it were, without ever being evil. He knows evil like an expert physician knows all the in’s and out’s of a deadly disease, how it wreaks havoc, and how it can be removed, contained, and eradicated. He knows the disease but does not have the disease. But we know sin, because we have become sinful. We come to know good and evil from the inside, by becoming evil, by defying God.

But the text presses us a little farther. The expression to know good and evil is often used in the Old Testament in a way that suggests someone establishes what is good and what is evil (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:9; Isa. 7:15). You know the situation, you form your judgment, so that you can truthfully say that's good and that's evil. It becomes almost a pronouncement.

Viewed this way- God and God alone knows good and evil in an absolute sense. God alone knows what is perfectly good and he knows what is evil. God alone has the capacity and authority and knowledge to declare and pronounce what is good and what is evil. And his judgment is just and his judgment is final.

And for us to come along, independent of God, own our own, over and against God, and make an independent determination so as to pronounce what is good and what is evil is a heinous sin. We are taking unto ourselves prerogatives belonging only to God. We have then put ourselves in the place of God, and therefore, in a wretched and illegitimate way, are seeking to become like God, knowing and pronouncing the good and the evil. And this is the heart of self-idolatry.

Judges 21.25- In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

So we read in Genesis 3:6–7 (ESV): "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

One commentator has said "so simple the act, so hard its undoing. God will taste poverty and death before ‘take and eat’ become verbs of salvation."

The reference, as you know, is to the Lord's supper.

This fatal sequence unfolds rapidly like a chain reaction: Eve “saw,” “took,” “ate,” and “gave” (Gen. 3:6), and the sequence culminates in “he ate.”

The impression is that this sin didn't unfold in isolation from her husband. The impression is that Adam was there, standing idly by. He doesn't protect her, he doesn't warn her, he doesn't defy Satan, he doesn’t lead her away. He keeps quiet and listens to her voice. When she gives him some fruit, he takes and eats as well. He is as complicit as she is.

Adam, then, was also faced with two contradictory words: the word of God and the word of his wife. He chose the latter, and listened to the voice of his wife. And as head of the race, it Adam’s sin, not Eve's, that Scripture says infects us all. Adam was our representative, so that when he sinned, we all sinned (Rom. 5:12). And thus the fall was complete.

**The Results of the Fall**

They now have a personal, deep knowledge of what it is like to commit sin against God and to feel the terrible guilt of it.

For the first time they experience intense shame (3:7), a fear of God's presence (vv. 8-10), and a breakdown in the marriage relationship (vv. 11-13). The man blames his wife for what he has done, and ultimately blames God for giving her to him. So, alongside the breakdown of the husband-wife relationship comes a breakdown of the God-man relationship.

God imposes curses, beginning with the Serpent. A descendant of the woman will crush him (v. 15). This is the first promise concerning Christ. Even after man's disobedience, God was preparing to show his grace and mercy.

Second, the woman is cursed in childbearing and the man in his labor. Remember, childbearing and subduing the earth via labor, were two elements in their divine mandate as man and woman.

Explicit is a curse on the ground itself. Genesis 3:17–18 (ESV): “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.” This ground-curse surfaces again, as Paul explains in Romans chapter 8, that the creation groans, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.

And, of course, there is the curse of death itself (3:19) and man's expulsion from the garden (vv. 21-24). Now that they have eaten from the forbidden tree, God keeps them from eating of the Tree of Life. Now they will live in a realm of death.

When man sinned, he spiritually died then and there. Sin separates man from God, and that means inevitable death, for it is only in communion with the living God that man can truly live. This spiritual death becomes synonymous with the sinful state and condition in which all unregenerate men find themselves after Adam's disobedience. In this state it may be said that man is dead in the trespasses and sins.

Instead of being able to not sin and being able to not die, the man and the woman are non posse non peccare- not able not to sin and not able not to die, and this status is passed on to all their natural offspring. This spiritual death can only be remedied by the spiritual life that Christ imparts.

The death would be physical as well. Having sinned, man was doomed to return to the dust from which he was taken. All men remain subject to physical death, even though we have been joined to Christ.

And if God doesn't intervene, imparting spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead, there will be eternal death.

So we can speak of death in at least 3 senses, even though the Bible sees this as one overarching category.

Certainly, it could be worse. God had the right to destroy his creatures immediately, condemning man to death in every sense of the word right then and there. But God is gracious and patient. He postpones the death penalty, and although there are curses on labor and childbearing, these activities will continue, giving life and continuity to the human race until Christ comes to crush the Serpent's head.

**The Nature of Sin**

Some have trouble believing that God should take this one act of disobedience so seriously, in what might appear to be a minor matter. In response to this objection, it is important we look at the nature of this sin more closely.

We have established that sin is not merely the breaking of arbitrary rules. Sin is an attempt to dethrone God. Our parents, by eating, sought to place themselves at the center of the universe, and by their actions declared that "I will be God" as they contravened God's commandment. So, at the heart of the violation of the commandment is a hideous idolatry. Idolatry is whenever something takes God's place of "ultimate value". Sin is idolatry.

This is how David in Psalm 51 can have the audacity if you will, to say that against you and you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight. There is scarcely anyone who David hasn't harmed on the horizontal level. Bathsheba, Uriah, the well-being of his men compromised. The wellbeing of a nation if his sin makes the rounds and David is found to be unrepentant. But when the character of sin is understood and understood at its most fundamental level, what David says is absolutely right. "Against you and you only have I sinned", for at the heart of his rebellion he has sought to put himself in the place of God, the king seeking to dethrone God.

But in the Bible sin is depicted by many other words, expressions, and descriptions. Sin can be seen as transgression, which presupposes laws that are being transgressed. Sometimes sin is portrayed as a power that overcomes us. Sin can be envisaged as pollution, as missing the mark, as foolishness, as tied to the “flesh”, as unbelief, as slavery, as spiritual adultery, as disobedience. The list is extensive.

Wayne Grudem offers an excellent definition of sin, defining sin this way: Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.

In taking this approach Grudem is in good company. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sin as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God."

And this really fits with what we see in our first parent’s sin- 2 observations are helpful, and here I am drawing on Sam Waldron's insights.

1. It may be said that Adam violated both general obligations of the law written on his heart, and the specific command concerning the tree. So here we see sin as a violation of God's explicit commandment and implicit moral law.

2. If sin is (negatively) transgression of divine law, then it may be described (positively) as autonomy; in other words, desiring to be a law unto oneself. And this is precisely what we see. It is the assumption of or desire for independence from God and his law. It doesn’t have to be a self-conscious rebellion against God. It may be the presumption that in any area of life I may do just as I please without reference to any standard other than my own desires.

So John’s words to us in 1 John should not surprise us- "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."

Do not imagine that defining sin this way is limited or anemic or focused solely on externals.

Consider the Ten Commandments- they prohibit sinful actions but also wrong attitudes: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Ex. 20:17 NIV).

Here God specifies that a desire to steal or to commit adultery is also sin in his sight.

The Sermon on the Mount also prohibits sinful attitudes such as anger (Matt. 5:22) or lust (Matt. 5:28).

Paul condemns attitudes such as jealousy, anger, and selfishness (Gal. 5:20).

The greatest commandment of all requires that our heart be filled with an attitude of love for God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

We know that sin is harmful to our lives, that it brings pain and destructive consequences to us and to others affected by it. But when we define sin as failure to conform to the moral law of God, we emphasize that sin is more than simply painful and destructive on the horizontal level. It is also wrong in the deepest sense of the word. Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in God’s character. It is, in essence, the contradiction of the excellence of God’s moral character.

People sometimes define sin as selfishness, and sin is usually self-seeking. But, as both Grudem and Waldron point out, we should not define sin as selfishness. Some self-interest is good-to desire God's salvation, for instance.

Waldron points out that there is a proper self-love, and the Bible recognizes this. For instance, we are urged to love our neighbors *as ourselves.* Also, our highest and truest self-interest is always consistent with the glory of God. Waldron mentions that definitions of sin as self-love drive a wedge between God's glory and our good and can lead to moral confusion.

Therefore, carefully defining sin as a violation of God's law helps us to avoid troublesome pitfalls.

**Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?**

\Any sin deserves eternal condemnation. In that sense, all sins are equal before God (Gen. 2:17; Deut. 27:26; Ezek. 18:4; 33:8; Rom. 5:16; 6:23; Gal. 3:10; James 2:10-11).

But some sins have more harmful consequences than others in this life, and some even offend God more deeply than others.

Scripture therefore distinguishes greater and lesser sins (Ezek. 8:6, 13, 15; Matt. 5:19; 23:23; John 19:11), unwitting and high-handed sins (Lev. 4:2, 13, 22; 5:17; Num. 15:27-30), weightier and less weighty sins.

Some sins and errors warrant excommunication, as the incestuous man in Corinth (1 Cor. 6); others do not. James (3:1, cf. Luke 12:48) says that teachers will be judged with greater strictness. The sins of teachers are often worse than the sins of others, because teachers can lead others astray by their errors and their poor example. To whom much is given, much is required.

Mysteries of the Fall

The fall is one of many biblical doctrines that are hard for us to understand. One major difficulty is that of understanding how good persons like Adam and Eve developed the evil desires that led them to disobey God. Theologians have called this the psychogenic problem. Some theologians have tried to describe Adam and Eve as not fully good but ethically neutral, or perhaps immature, or basically good with some tendency to evil.

Scripture does not allow us to think this way. It says that Adam was good, with the rest of creation (Gen. 1:31). Sin was not part of Adam's created nature. It came about by a historical event. Here we just need to be willing to admit our limitations, our lack of understanding.

Inherited Sin

We must now think about the relation of Adam's sin to his descendants, that is, the relation of his sin to us. This topic is sometimes called original sin, but this phrase is often misunderstood. People hear the word original sin and immediately focus on Adam and Eve's specific transgression.

Instead of original sin, I prefer the label inherited sin.

The Bible teaches that we inherit Adam's sin, in Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:22.

1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV): For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

In Romans 5.12 Paul explains the effects of Adam’s sin in the following way:

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—” (Rom. 5:12).

Here Paul says that all sinned— and then Paul breaks off the sentence.

If we look at the context it shows that Paul is not talking about actual sins that people commit every day of their lives.

Rather Paul is focused on *the implications of our solidarity with Adam*.

So as you read the passage, we see that people died between the time of Adam and Moses, though there was no written law (vv. 13-14), because they sinned in Adam.

In verse 15 the many died for the trespass of the one man, namely Adam.

In verse 16 they are condemned for the sin of the one man, Adam

In verse 17 death comes through the sin of the one man, Adam.

In 18 we are condemned for the trespass of the one man, Adam.

In 19 we are made sinners through the disobedience of the one man, Adam.

Through the whole passage Paul draws a parallel between our sin through Adam and our righteousness through Christ. He wants us to see the parallels between our solidarity in Adam and union with Christ.

So the point of Romans 5.12 is that sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—in Adam” (Rom. 5:12).

Therefore, we inherit Adam's sin. His sin is imputed to us.

How is this the case?

The best explanation centers on the idea of representation. We talked about this earlier. In respect to covenant representation.

The Romans 5 text, along with 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 and Romans 15:14, suggest that God appointed Adam to represent the human race as a whole, such that his sin is "imputed" to us; that is, God declares that Adam's sin is to be ours as well.

This view doesn't resolve every tension, but it is consistent with what we see in our Bibles.

Perhaps the biggest objection to this view is whether God is fair to hold us guilty for Adam's sin. How can God be justified in punishing us for the sins of our representative? There are a few helpful observations in view of this objection.

First, if God had not held us guilty of Adam's sin, he would certainly condemn us anyway, for we have committed enough sins of our own to deserve his judgment. So, if there were no inherited sin, that wouldn't get us off the hook.

And probably, if we had been in Adam's place, we would have sinned as he did. For there is nothing in us that wasn't also in Adam. He had all the resources we have and more: a good character, a perfect environment, an intimate relation with God. He encountered only one single source of temptation. *So, Adam was, humanly speaking, more likely to succeed in obeying God than we are today*. If anything, we are better off to be judged in Adam than to be judged as individuals.

Furthermore, human life always has a corporate dimension. Inevitably, what one person does has consequences for others. We don't exist as isolated individuals, but we are dependent on one another. This is especially true in families, where the sins of the father easily get passed down to the next generations, so that the children commit the same sins their parents commit. It is also true in nations. If the king takes his people into an unwise war, all citizens must bear the consequences of his wrong decision. This happens in all spheres of authority, like churches, businesses, schools.

So, it is fitting for God to judge the human race as a whole, under its head, its representative.

***And if we object to this in the case of Adam, how do we accept it in the case of Christ?***

***The good news, the gospel, is that God imputes the righteousness of Jesus to us apart from our works. Salvation is through Jesus alone, not because of anything we have done.***

Inherited Corruption

We inherit not only the guilt or blame of Adam's sin but also inherit a corrupt nature. We are born with it. David said that his sin went back to his conception in his mother's womb (Ps. 51:5; cf. 58:3; Eph. 2:3).

We are born sinful in the root of our being, the heart, and it is from that sinful heart that come all our thoughts, words, and deeds (Matt. 7:17-20; Mark 7:14-23; Luke 6:43-45).

Our corruption is so extensive, so complete, that, apart from God's grace, *we can never please him* (Rom. 8:8). You might think that some unbelievers are better than that. People often do things that are good for society and others.

But a truly good work is more than external. It requires the right goals, right standards, and right motives. If we are not seeking the glory of God, or if we are not acting according to God’s standards, or if we are not motivated by godly faith and love toward Christ, then even our best works are sinful.

This is sometimes called the doctrine of *total depravity*. That phrase is a bit misleading, because it suggests that everybody is as bad as he could be. That's not true. As we have seen, some sins are worse than others, and not everybody chooses the worst sins. God, in his kindness, keeps people from doing that.

But it is important to recognize that depravity, sinfulness, extends to all areas of our lives. It includes our best deeds. *It extends to our thinking, our understanding, to our hearts, minds, will, our volitions.* It extends to every thought, word, and deed (Ps. 51:5; Matt. 15:16-20; John 3:6; Rom. 8:5-8). As Paul says, apart from Christ we are "dead" in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-2). We are slaves to sin (John 8:34). It is important to recognize the deep sinfulness of sin.

According to Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That was, of course, before the flood, at a peak of man's wickedness.

But were human beings any better after the flood? Was the family of righteous Noah any better than the evil civilizations they replaced? In Genesis 8:21 God says, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." The flood did not wash sin away. Indeed, it stands as God's witness that sin is so bad that even the most righteous are not exempt from it.

Something much greater must deal with our sin-nothing less than the blood of the Son of God.

**The Universality of Sin**

Sin is very deep, and it is also extensive: all have sinned. *There is none righteous, no, not one* (Rom. 3:10-23; cf. Pss. 14:3; 143:2; 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; 1 John 1:8-10). As we read the first three chapters of Romans, we see first, the depravity of the Gentiles, then the depravity of the Jews, then the universality of sin.

**Total Inability**

Because of sin, we can never come to God out of our own resources. We are helpless to do anything to save ourselves. This condition is sometimes called total inability.

Romans 8:7-8 read, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

That "cannot" is total inability. Apart from grace, we can do nothing good (Jer. 7:9; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-35; John 6:35-37, 44-45, 64-65; 15:5; Rom. 7:18; 8:7-8)- 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3; Eph. 4:18; Titus 1:15).

Some may try to use total inability as an excuse, saying "I won't believe in Jesus, because I cannot." But Scripture does not warrant that excuse. We must remember that total inability is moral in nature, an inability for which we are responsible. It cannot be used as an excuse. Someone who is unregenerate cannot choose the good, in large part because they do not want to choose the good.

**What about Total Inability and the Christian?**

Well, even after we believe in Christ, we will continue to fight a battle with the sin within ourselves. That is not up for debate.

Nevertheless, God's grace transforms us into something new, a new creation, with a new life, by means of a new birth, regeneration, with a new heart.

Regarding believers, Paul says, "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14; see also Ezek. 36:25-27; Rom. 6:1-23; 8:5-17; 1 John 3:9; 5:18).

**Actual Sin**

Every man is guilty in Adam and is consequently born with a depraved and corrupt nature. And this inner corruption is the unholy fountain of all *actual* sins. The term “actual sins” does not merely mean external acts which performed outwardly, but includes all our conscious thoughts and volitions as well. Actual sin may be inward, such as doubt or evil thoughts, lust or desire in the heart; but they may also be exterior, such as deceit, theft, adultery, murder, and so on. We must not forget that God is intensely concerned with actual sin, the sins we commit day by day in addition to inherited sin and corruption. Actual sins are sufficient to land us in hell, for they are offensive to one who is infinitely holy, just, and kind (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23).

**What about sins that the believer commits?**

We should remember three things about these sins, as Grudem suggests.' First, they do not affect our legal standing with God (Rom. 6:23; 8:1; 1 Cor. 15:3). Once God unites us to Christ in a saving way, nothing can separate us from him, not even our sin. We remain children of God (1 John 3:2), despite the fact that we sin (1 John 1:8). In Christ, all our sin is forgiven, past, present, and future.

Second, our sin can nevertheless disrupt our fellowship with God. We grieve his Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30), and we incur his fatherly discipline (Heb. 12:6, 9-10; Rev. 3:19; cf. Isa. 59:1-2; 1 John 3:21). Our fruitfulness can be hindered (John 15:4), we find ourselves embroiled in inner conflict (1 Peter 2:11), and we may even lose something of our sense of assurance.

Third, as we sin and repent, however, those sins become an occasion for growth, as we recognize our own helplessness and are driven to the resources found only in God, and as we embrace Jesus afresh through the gospel.