

Fathom Academy: Christian Theology

WEEK 7: DOCTRINE OF SIN

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Week 7: The Doctrine of Sin

[*Hamartiology*]

The Doctrine of Sin [*Hamartiology*]

Part I: Introduction and Basic Vocabulary

Part II: Images of Sin in the Biblical Witness

Part III: Images of Sin in Christian Theology

Part IV: Conclusions and Implications

Part I: Introduction and Basic Vocabulary

“The consciousness of sin is the *conditio sine qua non* of Christianity.”

Søren Kierkegaard [1813–1855]

Genesis 1–2	Genesis 3
Living in a fruitful garden (2:15)	Cast out of the garden (3:23–24)
Naked and no shame (2:25)	Naked and ashamed (3:7)
Multiplying (1:28)	Pain in childbirth (3:16)
Tending a fruitful garden (2:15)	Working the thorn-infested ground (3:17–19)
Taken out of the ground and given life (2:7)	Dying and returning to the ground (3:19)

Adapted from Jay Sklar, “Pentateuch,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

The Present Human Condition | Threefold Estrangement (Genesis 3)

- **Estrangement from Self (Psychological)**
- **Estrangement from Others (Social)**
- **Estrangement from Creation (Ecological)**
- **Estrangement from God (Theological)**

Basic Vocabulary of Sin:

- **Original Sin vs. Actual Sin**
- **Individual Sin vs. Corporate Sin**
- **Personal Sin vs. Structural / Systemic Sin**
- **Noetic Effects of Sin**

The ‘Thingness’ of Sin

1. A Burden to be Borne

- *nāśā’awōn* = to bear the weight of a sin

2. A Debt to be Repaid

- *nóbâ* = funds owed to a lender

Part II: Images of Sin in the Biblical Witness

Dimensions of Sin in the Pentateuch

- *‘āwōn* (iniquity)
- *peša’* (willful transgression)
- *ht’* (to sin; to miss the mark)

The Takeaway: Sin is not primarily the breaking of a rule, but the breaking of a relationship.

Dimensions of Sin in the Prophets

- **Violation of Covenant**
- **Violation of Exclusive Worship**
- **Sin on a Vertical + Horizontal Axis**

The Takeaway: Illicit cultic practices are always connected to dysfunctional social patterns.

Dimensions of Sin in the Gospels

- *hamartia* (missing the mark)
- *ponēros* (wickedness, evil)
- *opheilē* (debt)
- *adikia* (crookedness, disorder)

The Takeaway: The gospels depict sin with a range of images, from failure to malice to indebtedness to twistedness.

Dimensions of Sin in the Pauline Corpus

- **Sin as Corruption (Romans 1)**
 - **of right worship, and therefore:**
 - **of human community**
 - **of human bodies**
- **Sin as Cosmic Power (Romans 5–8)**

The Takeaway: “Sin is the corruption of humanity; having to do with individual disobedience and corporate behavioral perversions. Sin is also a cosmic power that has will, intention, specific aims, and strategies to achieve those aims.” [Timothy G. Gombis]

Part III: Images of Sin in Christian Theology

“Not satisfied with the invention of evil, the human soul began gradually to regress to worse things. For learning of the diverse forms of pleasure and girded with the forgetfulness of things divine, taking pleasure in the passions of the body and only in things of the moment, it paid regard to opinions about them and *thought that nothing existed other than visible phenomena, and that only transitory and bodily things were good.* So perverted, and forgetting that it was made in the image of the good God, the soul no longer perceived through its own power God the Word, in whose form it had been created, but turning outside itself *it regarded and pictured non-existent things.*”

Athanasius, *Against the Pagans* [Book 8]

Key Augustinian Themes

- **Evil as Privation** (‘Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manicheans’)
- **Sin as Misuse of the Good**
- **Sin as Misdirected Desire**

“... due to original sin, our nature is so curved in upon itself [*incurvatus in se*] at its deepest levels that it not only bends the best gifts of God toward itself in order to enjoy them . . . nay, rather, ‘uses’ God in order to obtain them, but it does not even know that, in this wicked, twisted crooked way, it seeks everything, including God, only for itself.”

Luther, *Lectures on Romans*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849)

- **Despair (Read: Sin) as:**

- **“willing despairingly to be oneself [Defiance]**
- **“not willing to be oneself” [Weakness]**

Part IV: Conclusions and Implications

Concluding Observations

- **Sin is a Reality (‘Thingness’)**
- **Sin is Serious**
- **Totally depraved, but not “totally depraved”**