

# Why an Historical Adam Matters for a Biblical Doctrine of Sin

*John W. Mahony*

## INTRODUCTION

“WHAT HAPPENED HERE?” is the surprised gasp of any parent with young, active children. Things at home can, and often

do, get out of hand quickly. Sadly, the same is true with the world in which we live. “What happened down here?” is a paraphrase of God’s interrogation of Adam after he sinned (Gen 3:9). According to the Scripture, human history may be viewed as an account of the fallout from Adam’s one act of disobedience and its implications for every human being. The human

race’s story is one of rampant hatred and greed, telling us that something has gone terribly wrong, and God’s Word reveals precisely what that wrong is: sin. Consequently, wrongness is one of the defining features of the reality in which we live. Reflecting on the status of our world one writer put it: “It’s not supposed to be this way!”<sup>1</sup> The fact that we

realize this and yet continue to pursue sinful acts is an indictment of us and a clear declaration of our lost condition. Every academic discipline tries to explain the human problem, but the Bible has a clear answer: God created the first humans in his image and these humans, who the Bible calls Adam and Eve, disobeyed a direct command of God; this rebellion is then manifested in every human life.

However, questions still persist. Major disparities exist between the biblical cosmogony (the revelation of the way things were and are from God’s perspective) and the advances of scientific research, especially in light of recent DNA findings and the progress in the genome project. At the center of the debate, at least for evangelicals, is the status of the first humans, Adam and Eve, and their role in the unmaking of creation. Since the period of the Enlightenment and, more specifically, with the introduction of Darwinism, the notion that the human race emerged from a single couple of image-bearing hominids a few millennia ago is categorized as religious fiction.

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JOHN W. MAHONY is Chairman and Professor of the Department of Theological and Historical Studies at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Cordova, TN.

Dr. Mahoney is the author of numerous journal articles and publications and has also served as a pastor in churches in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

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Unfortunately many evangelicals have joined the evolution chorus at different stages and in different ways, raising questions about the biblical account. The typical response among most of these evangelicals is to defend the Genesis account of human origins in broad terms but surrender the scriptural details of the text.<sup>2</sup> Although I am personally a “literalist” in regard to the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 (i.e., the text recounts actual events in human history), I recognize that the findings of science (which are not conclusive in themselves due to the empirical nature of science) are also helpful. Consequently, scientific findings may legitimately serve as catalysts for a healthy debate between God’s two books: the book of nature and Scripture. Since both are God’s revelation, closing either book is not wise. Science properly done can facilitate the worship of the Creator, who is perpetually making himself known to all people through the grandeur and mystery of nature (Ps 19:1). Yet, the danger in embracing fully the conclusions of science or using developmentalism as an interpretive grid for Scripture is a skewed theological perspective.

Specifically, we need to remind ourselves of the assertions of biblical anthropology, especially in the matter of human identity (Who are we?) and fallenness (Why do we act the way we do?). The former concerns the *imago dei* and the actual definition of the term “human.” As important as that issue is, my focus in this article is the latter. The Bible is clear regarding human sinfulness. Yet, pushing Adam and Eve into the realm of myth or fable, or supposing that sin first appeared when a group of highly advanced *homo sapiens* reacted against the moral directives of the newly implanted image, raises some major problems concerning the origin, the universality, even the meaning of human sin. Instead of defending a “literalist” interpretation of the text on textual grounds alone (which has been cogently done by many others),<sup>3</sup> my goal is to survey biblical hamartiology and see how “literal” we need to be in our interpretation of Genesis 3. For example,

how essential is it, given what the Bible says about sin, to maintain that Adam was a historical figure? What do we lose if we deny this point? In order to answer these questions I will proceed in three steps: (1) I will survey the biblical view of human sin; (2) I will discuss the various interpretive options proposed by current evangelicals who are questioning the actual historicity of the Genesis account; (3) I will conclude by arguing that the biblical doctrine of sin requires an original image-bearing couple, rooted and grounded in history.

## **SURVEY OF THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMAN SIN**

The general components of the biblical understanding of sin include: the nature of sin; the universality of sin; and the consequences of sin. These are the “big picture” concepts of sin which allow us to discover the overall biblical teaching on sin. In what follows they will serve as the interpretive grid by which we unpack the doctrine of sin from the entire Scripture.

### **THE NATURE OF SIN**

What is sin? The classic definition of sin comes from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 14: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” The Bible itself gives a simple definition of sin: “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4b), but the Scripture also uses an array of terms and metaphors to describe the hideous nature of sin. The following serves as a summary of the biblical teaching.

*Sin is a failure to glorify the Lord and an active rebellion against His established standards.*

Scripture uses many different terms for sin, an indication of subtle shades of meaning. The parallels between the Hebrew and the Greek terms are striking. For our purposes we will focus on the New Testament words.<sup>4</sup> The range of meaning of the Greek terms can be narrowed to two. The first are those terms which view sin as a failure or a “falling short.” In this sense, sin is a failure to keep

God's law (*anomia*, "lawlessness," 1 John 3:4), a lack of God's righteousness (*adikia*, Rom 1:18), an absence of reverence for God (*asebeia*, Rom 1:18; Jude 15), a refusal to know (*agnoia*, Eph 4:18), and, most notably, a "coming short of the glory of God" (*hamartia*, "missing the mark," Rom 3:23). Thus sin is the quality of any human action that fails to glorify the Lord; there is always a God-orientation to sin.

In addition, another set of terms features a second aspect of sin which focuses on our active resistance or disobedience to God's commands. Words such as *paraptoma* (trespass or deviation from a prescribed path), *parabasis* (to transgress) and *parakoe* (hearing that results in disobedience) emphasize this point. Adam's act in the garden is characterized by each of these terms (5:14, *parabasis*; 5:19, *parakoe*; 5:15-18, *paraptoma*). In each case a broken law is the focus. In this way sin is viewed as a failure to reflect God's perfect standard as well as an active rebellion against his standards. The twofold aspect of sin was referenced by Paul in Ephesians 2:1, in which he described spiritual death as composed of "trespasses (*paraptoma*) and sins (*hamartia*)." This is roughly comparable to the distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission.

*Sin is a state of being and an act of the human will.*

Many attempt to limit "sin" to the actual expressions of moral evil in an individual's life.

The Arminian view is that people are sinners but are only accounted guilty when they act upon that inner principle.<sup>5</sup> However, Scripture affirms that even our sinful condition is itself "sin."

As noted above, any failure to conform to the law's demands is sin and our hearts are viewed as "evil" (Matt 15:19; Heb 3:12, "an evil, unbelieving heart"). In fact, that which describes our very being, namely the heart, is called "deceitful" and "desperately wicked" by Jeremiah (17:9). Paul called his inward state "sin" and claimed that "sin" had "deceived" him and through the application of the law had "produced ... coveting of

every kind" and had "killed" him (Rom 7:9, 11). He even claimed that what he was doing was contradictory because "no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me" (Rom 7:17, 20). The apostle John used the singular and the plural form of *hamartia* to discriminate between one's deeds and one's state of being (1 John 1:8-10). In addition, the Bible refers to dispositions of the heart as sinful: pride (Prov 6:16-17; Jas 4:6), hatred, and lust (Matt 5:21-30). E. G. Robinson, Professor of Theology at Rochester University during the nineteenth century wrote:

Sin is not mere act—something foreign to the being. It is a quality of being. There is no such thing as a sin apart from a sinner, or an act apart from an actor. God punishes sinners, not sins. Sin is a mode of being; as an entity by itself it never existed. God punishes sin as a state not as an act. Man is not responsible for the consequences of his crimes, nor for the acts themselves, except as they are symptomatic of his personal states.<sup>6</sup>

*Sin is a specific type of evil.*

Two classifications of evil are apparent. One is natural evil (natural disasters and disease). They are called evil because of their often devastating effects. Natural evil is not produced by human sinfulness but it is an expression of God's purpose (Isa 45:7, "The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity [rendered "evil" in the KJV]; I am the LORD who does all these" (NASB)). The other form of evil is called moral evil. Sin is moral evil. We use the terms "bad" and "wrong" to distinguish the two forms of evil.<sup>7</sup> Moral evil is an expression of a wicked heart (Mark 7:21-23).

*Sin is only definable in the context of the God of the Bible and his character.*

Isaiah's sinfulness became apparent when he encountered God's holiness (Isa 6). The same is true for Peter in the presence of Christ (Luke 5:8). Sin is not measurable except in light of God's char-

acter and Law. James Orr wrote:

Sin, in other words, is not simply a moral, but is peculiarly, a religious conception. Sin is transgression against God; the substitution of the creature will for the will of the Creator; revolt of the creature will from God. It is this relation to God which gives the wrong act its distinctive character as sin (Ps 51:4). It is, therefore, only in the light of God's character as holy—perfected, in Christ's teaching in the aspect of Fatherly love—and of God's end for man, that the evil quality and full enormity of sinful acts can be clearly seen.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, sin is egregious and beyond human depiction. We can only judge wrongs (pedophilia, substance abuse, senseless violence, wanton acts of sexuality) from our limited context (how wrong they appear to us and how devastating the consequences might be). God's estimation of the wrongness of our sin is made in regard to the splendor of his own holiness. Ralph Venning in his classic work on sin, *The Plague of Plagues*, noted this relationship to God's holiness: "On the contrary, as God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy, so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful (Gen 6:5)."<sup>9</sup>

In addition, another way to measure sin is by thinking through the original condition from which Adam fell in relation to the Lord. Sin is a total contradiction of the way things ought to be, a total contradiction of God and his character.<sup>10</sup> In fact, seen in this light, sin is totally irrational.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is the reason it is called "folly" in the book of Proverbs: "Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight" (15:21). Adam's act in the garden is a total contradiction. He was righteous; the disobedience of the direct command given by the Creator was contrary to his very nature. Yet, he acted upon the lies of the devil, trusting his own sense of purpose instead of the clear dictates of the Creator.

Therein sin is a contradiction, not only of human nature but of the character and will of our Creator.

We can also see the hideous nature of sin in relation to God when we think of the cross of Christ and final judgment. Paul wrote, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21, NASB). Christ is called "sin" not in the sense of becoming a sinner but as a sin offering to provide salvation for sinners. He was "displayed publicly as a propitiation" (Rom 3:25) that he might placate the wrath of God against sinners. Clearly the Lord demonstrated his love for sinners through the Cross (Rom 5:8); but he also manifested his personal disgust in regard to sin. It is only the blood of Christ that removes sin (Heb 9:11-14). In addition to the cross which displays the seriousness of sin, is the final judgment as well. Scripture describes hell as a real place, designed to punish Satan, demons, and all unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15). Hell is everlasting torment (Matt 25:46; Rev 20:10). The most disturbing aspect of the biblical concept for most of us is the revelation about the torment of the lost forever. How awful must sin be given the reality of hell; what is it about sin that caused God to create such a place?

Looking at sin from all of these aspects in relation to God, it is fair to say that sin has an absolute quality about it. It is worse than all of those realities prompted by moral corruption. "Nothing is so evil as sin; nothing is evil but sin." Venning goes on to show that sin is worse than any affliction, worse than death, worse than the Devil himself, and even worse than hell.<sup>12</sup> Interpreted in the context of God and his broken covenant, sin is the consummate moral evil; in fact, it is the only moral evil because all human crimes are ultimately against God. And, it must be noted, that the wickedness of sin is only known through special revelation. Listening to the psychologist or sociologist explain the phenomenon of human corruption can fall short of the mark. Even Karl Menninger in his arresting work, *Whatever Hap-*

pened to Sin?, proposed that perhaps the Freudian understanding of the human psyche was inadequate without the notion of sin and the accompanying guilt.<sup>13</sup> These analyses are helpful in a treatment context. But sin is strictly related to the God of the Bible. Therefore, we are dependent upon his perspective on sin revealed in the pages of Scripture.

*Sin is not an aspect of the created order.*

Sin is a rogue element in God's creation. Augustine understood sin as a *privatio boni*, or the "privation of good." In his work, *The City of God*, he illustrated his meaning with silence and darkness. He wrote: "Silence and darkness may be perceptible to us, and it may be true that silence is perceived through the ears, and darkness through the eyes. Yet silence and darkness are not percepts [species], but the absence [privatio] of any percept."<sup>14</sup> Thus sin is not viewed here as a substance created by God but as an absence of the good which he did create.<sup>15</sup> Further, sin arose through willful choices made by creatures God had made. The only avenue through which it appears in creation is the open door of willful choice.

James Dunn in his study of Paul identifies sin as "a personified power." He concluded:

Sin is the term Paul uses for a compulsion or constraint which humans generally experience within themselves or in their social context, a compulsion towards attitudes and actions not always of their own willing or approving ... [and the Greek term] *hamartia* would denote that power which draws men and women back from the best and keeps causing them to miss the target. In particular, sin is that power which makes human beings forget their creatureliness and dependence on God, that power which prevents humankind from recognizing its true nature, which deceives the *adam* into thinking he is godlike and makes him unable to grasp that he is but *adamah*.<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that the apostle personifies both sin and death. However, qualifications are needed. Shifting the focus of sin from the willful choices of the sinner to an alien power seems to diminish human responsibility as well as create an unwarranted metaphysical dualism. Clearly, sin is a controlling power as is death according to Paul. They exist however not as part of the created order but through persons who are in rebellion against God. And, it is in that state of rebellion that sin and death find their power (1 Cor 15:56).

Evolutionary thought, which is inherently Pelagian, has another perspective.<sup>17</sup> Sin is a part of the moral development of humankind. Accordingly, the first appearance of the *imago dei* was among peoples who had developed a moral conscience. Humans were created in an immature state and were given the opportunity to develop morally, socially, and so on. George Murphy wrote:

The first humans would have inherited tendencies for selfish behaviors that injured their fellows. Sin has to do with our relationship with God, and didn't exist before God revealed his will to our ancestors. But when God told them not to harm others, they would have been tempted to ignore him. Humanity could theoretically have obeyed God, for our behaviors are not hardwired. Sin wasn't 'necessary' but was 'inevitable.' Refusing to obey God, humanity turned from God's intended goal and started on a road to perdition. Science of course supplies further details about early humanity, but we're concerned here with theology rather than history.<sup>18</sup>

The key word here is "inevitable." Thus, sin is an inherent feature of the created order. Scripture gives a very different scenario.

### **THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN**

Scripture is quite clear that sin is pervasive throughout the entire human race as well as within each member of the human race. The Old Testament affirms that "there is no man who does

not sin” (1 Kgs 8:46). Ecclesiastes 7:20 declares, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.” In the New Testament, the witness is even clearer. Paul’s argument in Romans is anchored in the pervasive nature of sin and is summarized in 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (NASB). Death is attributed to human sin according to Romans 5:12ff. In Ephesians 2:3, all are “by nature children of wrath.” All are sinful at birth (Ps 51:5; John 3:6). Further, the need for salvation is universal (Acts 4:12; 17:30) because all stand condemned (John 3:36). The universal need for salvation is also implicit within the Great Commission and the command of Jesus to proclaim the gospel to the whole world (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). Louis Berkhof concluded: “Sin, then, is something original, in which all men participate, and which makes them guilty before God.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the questions raised by sin’s pervasive nature is how it appeared in the race. Paul answered this question in Romans 5:12-21. He claimed that human sinning and death are traced to Adam and his disobedience in Eden (5:12, 14-19). The doctrine that most clearly expresses Paul’s position is called Original Sin. Henri Blocher identified four aspects of the position popularized by Augustine (and often bears his name). Original sin refers first to “universal sinfulness, consisting of attitudes, orientations, propensities, and tendencies which are contrary to God’s law, incompatible with his holiness, and found in all people, in all areas of their lives.” Second, original sin is an aspect of the fallen nature of humans, which they possess from birth. Third, original sin is “inherited,” it doesn’t originate in the actions of individuals. Finally, “it stems from Adam, whose disobedience gave original sin a historical beginning, so that the present sinfulness of all can be traced back through the generations, to the first man and progenitor of the race.”<sup>20</sup>

The continuing effects of original sin are identified as guilt, corruption, and the loss of Adam’s

pre-fall rightness before God. Guilt is universal and arises because of a broken law. The broken law in this case is the original command given to Adam in the garden which he disobeyed. The one to whom account is given is the covenant Lord who issued it. Am I then guilty for what Adam did? Although it seems awkward from a legal standpoint to argue that we are guilty for what someone else did, Paul clearly traced human guilt to Adam’s sin. Our guilt is a matter of imputation. Just as Christ’s righteousness is conferred to our account justifying us before Holy God, so Adam’s sin is ours based upon a legal transaction consummated in the garden by our human representative. Adam’s act left us condemned before God, existing in perpetual antagonism to him. The proof of this, beyond the clear teaching of Scripture, is that we share his fallen nature, which is sinful, is the source of all of our sins, and is therefore sin.

Original sin also explains our corruption as humans. Corruption, also referred to as depravity, is the complete pollution of our natures by sin. It refers to “our moral condition rather than with our status before the law,” which is our guilt.<sup>21</sup> Scripture is clear in its descriptions. Prior to the flood, humankind had degenerated to the point at which “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5) Corruption here is called “wickedness” (*ra*, moral badness) and it filled the earth (“great” or abundant) because it filled humankind: “...every intent of the thoughts of his heart.” The corruption was inclusive (“every”), intentional (“thoughts” or “scheme of his mind” in HCSB), pervasive (“heart”), exclusive (“only evil”), and constant (“continually”). In Jeremiah 17:9, the heart is described as “desperately sick.” Corruption arising from the heart is like an artesian spring, which is perpetually pouring forth corruption.

Jesus had the same perspective, noting that all human wickedness flows from the heart (Matt 15:18-20; Mark 7:20-23). Paul describes the per-

vasive corruption of the race and the perversity that arises from this pollution (Rom 1:18-32). He further describes the human condition in Ephesians 4:17-19 reflected in the way “the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

Corruption, then, is inclusive because of its depth in the heart. James Denney wrote: “There is no part of man’s nature which is unaffected by it. I repeat what I said before, that man’s nature is all of a piece, and that what affects it at all affects it altogether.”<sup>22</sup> Marguerite Shuster clearly illustrated the impact upon the intellect by noting criminals’s use of their minds to devise the perfect crime and the “perverse bent of mind that leads the thief, asked why he robs banks, to respond, ‘That’s where the money is.’”<sup>23</sup> Further, based upon the scriptural declarations, the corruption of sin denotes an absence of a God-directed affection (Rom 3:18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes”). Corruption also includes bondage to sin (John 8:34). It is clear that our corrupted condition worsens over time (2 Tim 3:13). Finally, the corruption of our natures is impossible for us to change (Jer 13:23).

Original sin also includes the loss of original righteousness. Original righteousness refers to Adam’s pre-fall condition.<sup>24</sup> Three aspects of this pre-fall condition are found in Paul. He described the renewal of the believer in Christ as putting on the new person “who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Eph 4:24) The original image was both righteous and holy. The third aspect of the original image that is the pattern of our “image renewal” is “true knowledge.” (Col 3:10) Thus, Adam as the original image bearer was not only sinless but was conditionally “righteous.” Clearly this refers to his position before God and status before his law.

He also possessed “true holiness” indicating his reverence for the Lord.<sup>25</sup> The third quality is “true knowledge” or perhaps “full knowledge.” Paul seemed to be contrasting this knowledge with the false or heretical notions that were threatening the church in Colosse. Thus, when applied to Adam, it indicates an accurate appraisal and understanding of God and his truth.<sup>26</sup> Thus sanctification consists in the recovery of these elements of the original image.

The righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of the original human condition are also reflected in Christ who is the true Image (Col 1:15). The incarnation of the Son of God depicts clearly a sinless, pre-fall humanity. Further, Christ himself exercised control over nature that was God’s original intent for Adam and all humankind before the fall.<sup>27</sup> Jesus’ victory over Satan in the wilderness as well as his continual triumph over all moral evil is a historical realization of the obedience demanded of Adam by the covenant Lord. The humiliation of Christ reflected in Philippians 2:5ff is a reversal of the failure of Adam in the garden.<sup>28</sup>

Other biblical assertions indicate an original righteous state. The nobility and dominion of humankind as image-bearers is also clearly reflected in Psalm 8. Paul recounted the descent of humankind into idolatry and immorality in Romans 1. His account however hinges upon the possession of a true knowledge of God inherent in all persons (1:19-22). The knowledge of God was rejected and the result was false worship and expanding arenas of immoral practice. Paul also acknowledged that the created order “groans” because it has been “subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it (8:20).” Paul’s claim seems to hinge on a prior state of righteousness.

The notion of an original idyllic state is completely rejected by evolutionists. Accordingly, humankind is a product of evolutionary advances, both physically and morally. Christ, then, is viewed as the culmination of this process. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin claimed about the incar-

nation that “there had to be a transcendent act which, in accordance with mysterious but physically regulated condition, should graft the person of a God into the human cosmos.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, “the Incarnation means the renewal, the restoration, of all the energies and powers of the universe.” So instead of Christ reflecting a pre-fall condition, he is understood as the culmination of an evolutionary process.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, among the more current Christian evolutionists, Adam is viewed as a child in terms of moral development.<sup>31</sup>

### CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

“I have been *here*. Now I am going *there*. Where? ... No, I won't have it!”<sup>32</sup> The very thought of death was too much for the dying man in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, as it is for many. And the thought of death's shadow hanging over life means finitude, creatureliness, and, for some, even hopelessness. Our reaction to it is often like his: “No, I won't have it!” Yet, it is non-negotiable and inescapable. And, like sin from which it arose, it is universal. Philip Hughes wrote:

Death is so ungodlike, and there is nothing that more devastatingly demolishes the aspiration of the rebellious man to be as God than the inexorable fact of death. Death is the irrefutable demonstration that man is not God. Death, by which even the ablest and most dominant of men are stripped of every faculty and power, is more than just the termination of human life; it is the failure of human life and the final frustration of every claim to self-adequacy.<sup>33</sup>

Death entered through the sin of Adam. Scripture is quite clear about it: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). While the initial experience for Adam and Eve was spiritual death, physical and final deaths were also inaugurated. The prohibition given by the covenant Lord in the garden included death (all three forms—spiritual,

physical, and final) as a consequence for eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17). Death then is “both a consequence of sin and a divinely imposed penalty on it. It represents the well-earned wages on our sinful labors. Sin brings its own punishment. Every sin is, moreover, a mortal sin.”<sup>34</sup>

Death is more than the end of human existence. It is a clear declaration of the covenant Lord that everyone is guilty and under a judicial sentence. Accordingly, death reflects God's faithfulness to the original covenant he made with Adam as our representative.<sup>35</sup> Even though disputed by some, it is best to think that God established with Adam before the fall a covenant of “works” or a covenant of “life.” Adam then acted on our behalf before God as our covenant representative (Rom 5:18-19). Adam was not held to a series of requirements in order to attain righteousness as in a regimented program of discipline. All he had to do was refuse the fruit of one tree. In other words, Adam was not tied to a series of legal requirements to gain righteousness; he already possessed it. Thus, the prohibition acted as law in that it did not have the capacity to grant life but only to impose a penalty. Clearly, the death of every human, including Christ, is a demonstration that the original covenant is still in force in the race.

Paul speaks of death reigning (Rom 5:14, 17) and of sin reigning “in death” (Rom 5:21) as a result of Adam's choice. Paul even personifies sin and death as they are viewed as powers over the entire human race. As Leon Morris rightly observes, “There is an impressive absoluteness about *reigned*. Death's sovereignty was complete.”<sup>36</sup> Or, as Charles Hodge observed many years ago, even sin reigns in or through death: “Death spiritual as well as temporal—evil in its widest sense, as the judicial consequence of sin, was the sphere in which the power and triumph of sin was manifested.”<sup>37</sup> Scripture is clear: the historical date in which their dynasty began was the moment Adam sinned and God's covenant was broken.

Death is used in three ways in Scripture. First,



death is *spiritual* (Eph 2:1; Ezek 18:4). Robert Pyne wrote: “To be spiritually dead is to be alienated from God, to have no vital relationship with Him.”<sup>38</sup> Sins effects were devastating. The absence of a God-orientation in the human soul produces a continuous tidal wave of selfish, self-glorifying, and self-gratifying activities; the outcome according to James is death (Jas 1:15). It is the source of our corruption. Spiritually dead people are dominated by the flesh (Rom 8:6) which produces quite an array of “works”—among them, “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (Gal 5:19-21). Further, according to Ephesians 2:2-3, spiritually dead people are not only controlled by the “flesh” but are also dominated by the “world” and the “the prince of the power of the air.” The effects of spiritual death were immediate for Adam and Eve, who hid from each other, from God, and from themselves, shifting the blame for their action from themselves to each other and then to God himself.

Second, death is also *physical*, which is used in Scripture for the termination of humankind’s earthly existence. In Hebrews 9:27, the author declares that “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.” The author viewed physical death as a certainty for all (“appointed”) as well as the doorway to judgment. In this way, physical death for humankind is distinct from all other living organisms. Death for humans contains the “sting” of sin (1 Cor 15:56). The writer of Hebrews continues with a reference to the Messiah who in his death bore the sins of “many,” (Heb 9:28) and thus he tasted “death for everyone” (Heb 2:9) and “abolished” it (2 Tim 1:10). In this way the nature of human death is best understood in light of Christ’s death on the cross. It is clearly a penal consequence and therefore carries a meaning it does not have for the rest of creation. When viewed psychologically, human death is unique in that we can contemplate our

death. We have a knowledge of our mortality more than any created thing which also orients us to the future. This orientation toward the future forces us to “look on death and fear it alone.”<sup>39</sup> Made in the divine image, we are self-conscious and consequently are given the capacity to contemplate our own mortality.

Third, death is also *final, endless separation from God*. Scripture refers to it as the “second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). The final stage of human history is the sobering scene of the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15). There the “dead” appear before the Lord and are judged. Those whose names are not written in the “book of life” will be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). They will be accompanied by “Death and Hades” (Rev 20:13). Just as Adam and Eve were banished from the Tree of Life at the initial stage of human history, even so lost humanity will be banished forever from the presence of God at its end.

The good news of the gospel is that our Lord Jesus Christ conquered death in all its expressions—spiritual, physical, and eternal. Paul declares that we who were once dead in sins are made alive “together with Christ” (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). Regarding physical dying, Jesus told Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Jesus promised to take death out of dying. Through his death Christ became a “propitiation” (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2), appeasing the wrath of God. Thus, those who share in the first resurrection are not under the threat of the second death (Rev 20:6). Now, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54; Isa 25:8). Paul’s usage here encompasses every facet of human death and he exclaims, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57).

The biblical picture of sin is clearly tied to the historicity of Adam. The egregious nature of sin as a transgression of God’s covenant and as an affront to his holy character clearly requires

an actual “fall.” Adam and Eve were not children who knew no better. They knowingly rebelled against a clear prohibition and acted in contradiction of the righteous human nature given them at creation. Their act opened the door for sin and death to reign over them and over the race they represented. We will note below several particular issues within biblical hamartiology that demand the historicity of Adam and Eve but before we treat these we need to review the options regarding the biblical story of the fall.

### **SURVEY OF THE CURRENT INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS**

The interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis has a long and colorful history. In regard to the challenges posed by science, three broad approaches are taken: concordism, anti-scientism, and fideism.<sup>40</sup> Concordism holds to the final harmony between Scripture and science, noting how each discipline verifies the other. Anti-scientism is equivalent to scientific creationism, which questions modern scientific approaches, methods, and conclusions. Henri Blocher termed the third fideism, which contends that Scripture and science cannot be harmonized and are treated as distinct disciplines. Clark Pinnock titled these approaches: broad concordism, narrow concordism, and non-concordism.<sup>41</sup> Thus it appears that the viewpoints are divided between those who are convinced that Scripture and science can be partners in the discussion and or antagonists. These are helpful distinctions, but seem too broad for the present context.

Another set of interpretive approaches builds upon the nature of the text of Genesis. On the one hand there are the literalists; things happened exactly as described in the text. The strict literalist interprets the accounts of creation and the fall as actual history within a biblical chronology (several thousand years vs. hundreds of thousands; young-earth creationism). Two presuppositions seem to guide their interpretation: (1) the absolute authority of the text as written by the original

author and (2) the rejection of the findings of science regarding the age of the earth and humankind. Scripture then becomes the grid by which scientific analysis is done. The Creation Research Institute and Answers in Genesis are outspoken proponents.

Moving beyond the literal are the literary approaches. These obviously de-historicize the text and therefore remove the need to affix dates. The range of literary options is also wide (the text is not historical at all—myth, saga, legend—or fits a more literary genre). Many evangelicals use the literary approach but hold to the actuality of the events. C. John Collins for example uses discourse analysis to interpret the text of Genesis 1-4, but holds to the historicity of the events recorded.<sup>42</sup> Another literary approach is called the “literary framework” view which takes the days of creation as a way presenting God’s creative work.<sup>43</sup>

In a recent work, Denis Alexander, noted scientist and evangelical, grouped the major interpretive options into five helpful categories.<sup>44</sup> By these five categories he nicely summarizes the basic interpretative approaches people follow in regard to the science-Genesis interface. In what follows, I will utilize Alexander’s five categories since I find them especially useful in light of the recent contributions from Peter Enns and the BioLogos Forum, a perspective which Alexander clearly embraces. As we will discover, Alexander adopts the third category. Let us now look at each of these categories in turn before we bring back the entire discussion to whether the biblical doctrine of sin requires an historic Adam.

The first model is the “ahistorical” view. Alexander describes it as a non-concordist position that suspends all connections between the theological narratives of Scripture and the findings of science. Typically, the text of Genesis is treated as mythical or in the case of some as a saga.<sup>45</sup> W. Sibley Towner writes:

Genesis 3, too, looks like ‘faded myth,’ for it is a narrative laid in the fabled setting of Eden, and

it offers etiologies for the serpent's lack of legs, women's labor pains, and the drudgery of men. However, for the big question, 'Why does sin exist in a good world made by a good God?' it has no answer. It offers no etiology of evil. Instead, it functions like a paradigm of human experience and behavior. With a sad and tender, almost humanistic, touch, it presents the plight of those who have to grow up and leave the garden. That is to say, it tells the story of us all.<sup>46</sup>

Towner's existential interpretation parallels in large measure that of Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>47</sup> The danger to the scriptural view of the nature and origin of sin is clear when we de-historicize the text. Alexander rightly notes: "The Fall in this view is the eternal story of Everyman. It is a theological narrative that describes the common human experience of alienation from God through disobedience to God's commands."<sup>48</sup> Clearly the "ahistorical" view has no answer for the universality of sin nor for the deep corruption of the human heart which gives rise to sinful human actions.

The second model is the "gradualist" view. Another proto-historical view, the gradualist contends that the events of Genesis 3 are not historical as normally understood. The term "gradual" refers to the dawning consciousness about God among an advanced group of humans over 200,000 years ago in Africa (placement in Africa reflects the current opinion among paleontologists).<sup>49</sup> As they responded obediently they knew more of God's presence and blessing. As Alexander describes the position: "Therefore the earliest spiritual stirrings of the human spirit were in the context of monotheism, and it was natural at the beginning for humans to turn to their Creator, in the same way that children today seem readily to believe in God almost as soon as they can speak."<sup>50</sup> In this way, as Alexander continues, "the Fall then becomes the conscious rejection of this awareness in favour of choosing their own way rather than God's way."<sup>51</sup>

In regard to the "gradualist" view, several issues are raised by the threefold grid (nature, origin,

and consequences of sin). One is the condition of the ones God held responsible. If they were like children who had spiritual "stirrings," how were they qualified to act on behalf of the race? And, as children who grew to choose "their own way," what was their actual sin? This appears to call the Creator into question in the matter of sin and judgment. A second issue is the nature of the fall. Was it a conscious crime against heaven or a mistake made by untrained children? The final issue is raised by the outcome of their action—spiritual death. Generalizing the fall by linking it to "the conscious rejection of this awareness [of God]" seems to diminish the cataclysmic nature of spiritual death and its attendant features (physical and final death).

The third model is the "consistent" proto-historical view, a view which Alexander adopts. Accordingly the Genesis account gives us an appropriate frame of reference for the events surrounding the fall. Thus the name "consistent" refers to the geographical and cultural similarities between the biblical account and the recent findings of science. Although more weight is given to the scientific data regarding the identity of Adam and Eve, this view does seek to explain the biblical account regarding the emergence of *homo divinus*<sup>52</sup> or the appearance of the image of God. While they were not fiat creations of God, Adam and Eve possessed the image and consequently represented every other human living at that time. Alexander identifies them as "Neolithic farmers in the Near East, or maybe a community of farmers, to whom he chose to reveal himself in a special way, calling them into fellowship with himself"<sup>53</sup> Thus, the fall "becomes the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the expressed will of God, bringing spiritual death in its wake, a broken relationship between humankind and God."<sup>54</sup> In regard to the spread of sin, Alexander proposes that Adam was a federal head over all who existed at the time; his disobedience then became the disobedience of all.<sup>55</sup> My serious reservations about this view are taken up below.

The fourth model is Episodic (or Progressive)

Creationism. It is represented by such evangelicals as Bernard Ramm,<sup>56</sup> Hugh Ross,<sup>57</sup> and Millard Erickson.<sup>58</sup> Denying macro-evolution, episodic creationism concedes to science the age of the earth (supposing vast amounts of time in each creative “day” or *yom*) while proposing that the Creator intruded into the created order at specific moments to introduce something new (*de novo*). Thus, following the biblical storyline more closely, image-bearing humans were directly created by God and were placed in a unique context from which they fell. As Alexander points out, episodic creationism holds that death preceded the fall but that death among image-bearers includes both spiritual and physical death.<sup>59</sup>

The fifth and last model is young-earth creationism. Taking the text of Genesis quite literally, this view contends that “our planet was created by God around 10,000 years ago, that all living things were created within six literal 24-hour days by a series of miracles, and that in particular Adam and Eve were created miraculously out of the ground on the sixth day.”<sup>60</sup> Young-earth creationism is distinct from the other views in its understanding of physical death in all the created order as related to the fall of Adam. The results of the fall and the introduction of death were catastrophic. Alexander noted “marked changes in the laws of science so that, for example, the second law of thermodynamics now began to apply, whereas it had not applied before, leading to death and degradation in the biological world.”<sup>61</sup> While adhering most closely to the biblical record, young-earth creationism also virtually rewrites science (“creation science”) in an effort to refute Darwinian evolution.<sup>62</sup>

Much could be stated about Alexander’s list of options and in truth, they represent a continuum of thought in regard to the historicity of Adam. On the far end (“ahistorical” model), Genesis is treated purely as a literary piece and mostly under the category of “myth.” As we move across the models they become more “literal/historical” in their treatment of Adam. Alexander, who holds

to the third model (“consistent” proto-historical) treats the biblical account figuratively while maintaining the historicity of Adam and Eve, while the fourth model (“progressive creationism”) interprets Genesis 1-2 more figuratively to account for the age of the earth, but treats the account of the fall literally/historically. On the right end of the continuum is the “young-earth” model which stresses the literal/historical nature of both Adam and the fall. My overall concern in this article is not to evaluate Alexander’s classification system but to test these various approaches *theologically*. In other words, it is my contention that these various models are not being informed fully by the inclusion of a careful analysis of the nature, origin, and consequences of human sin. For example, Alexander explains the fall as a rejection of the light that had been given by God. He proposed the following scenario:

If we were looking down on planet earth from the moon with our “spiritual life detection glasses” on, thousands of years ago, then suddenly we would have noticed a bright light appear in the Near East, shedding its light round the world, only to be dimmed, but not extinguished, as sin and spiritual death entered the world.<sup>63</sup>

Alexander is admitting the historicity of the fall and the actual existence of a first male and female image bearers. However, his position raises a number of concerns, especially the concern that he cannot adequately explain the biblical doctrine of sin. Let us now turn to this last point.

### **BIBLICAL HAMARTIOLOGY DEMANDS A BROADLY LITERAL- HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF ADAM**

Alexander’s scenario, along with many of the other models, while they sound plausible to many, are far too abstract to explain the specific parameters concerning the egregious nature of sin and the extreme consequences caused by it. Three critical

elements of the biblical view plead for a more literal-historical interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and thus an affirmation of an historic Adam. Let us look at these three points in turn.

*An historic Adam can only explain the biblical concept of sin based upon a fall from a previous state.*

What is the pre-fall condition of our original parents? Were they children or were they fully functioning, righteous individuals? As with the “what-happened-in-here” illustration at the opening of this article, something changed when Adam sinned. Clearly we aren’t who we were created to be. Blaise Pascal wrote in his *Pensées* (117): “Man’s greatness is so obvious that it can even be deduced from his wretchedness, for what is nature in animals we call wretchedness in man, thus recognizing that, if his nature is today like that of the animals, he must have fallen from some better state which was once his own.”<sup>64</sup>

We know that death—spiritual, physical, and eternal—was imposed. The biblical exposition of human corruption is clear (Rom 1:18-32; 3:9-20). In fact, according to Paul, the entire created order was placed under a ban (Rom 8:18-22). Something of a catastrophic nature occurred. It is my conviction that the severity of the fall can only be explained when we recognize the height from which Adam and Eve fell. Sin is a contradiction of the very natures of God and humans. It is upon this basis that the biblical picture of the outrageous nature of sin is exposed.<sup>65</sup>

What is the problem with the evolutionary models? It is simply this: they all must affirm that humans evolved physically and morally. For example, inherent within Alexander’s favored model is the emergence of a pre-Adamite race who, coming to its pinnacle in a particular male and female, were given the image of God. Yet, Genesis 1:31 describes the original state as “very good;” it was not an achievement. The implication is that materially, psychologically, and spiritually the created order was exactly as God intended it. Adam’s original condition before God was clearly moral upright-

ness; he was righteous before the Creator. He enjoyed immediate access to the Lord, for which only righteousness qualifies. Ecclesiastes affirms this, declaring that “God made men (*adam*) upright, but they have sought out many devices.” (Eccl 7:29) References to the image of God in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 as noted earlier also indicate that the original image manifested “true knowledge” (Col 3:10) as well as “righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Eph 4:24)

Traditionally, at least from the Augustinian perspective, Adam and Eve’s pre-fall condition is called original righteousness. Two aspects of this condition are critical. One is the actual state itself, described in Ecclesiastes 7:29 as “upright.” Thomas Boston noted that the term “upright” here means that Adam was “straight with the will and law of God, without any irregularity in his soul.”<sup>66</sup> He explained: “The sum of what I have said is, that the righteousness wherein man was created, was the conformity of all the faculties and powers of his soul to the moral law.”<sup>67</sup> The other significant feature of this original righteousness is its correlation with God’s image in humankind. Thus Adam’s righteousness represented his standing before God and his law when he was created. Consequently, righteousness was not an added benefit that was lost (as in the Roman Catholic view) but was a functional aspect of his nature. Adam was created to walk in holiness before God, and thereby enjoy God’s presence and blessing. Righteousness then constituted his natural, pre-fall state.

Is this original state of righteousness important to the biblical view of sin? It is when we are following the biblical presentation of the horrific nature of sin itself. If Adam were only a child morally then the fall is more of a mistake based in human ignorance.<sup>68</sup> Sin, then, is not such a big deal. But Scripture tells another story. Jerome Walsh concluded: “No matter how petty or private the deed may seem, it is a violation of the sacred at the heart of reality; and it involves a rejection of the whole divinely established order of creation.”<sup>69</sup>

If Adam, on the other hand, was righteous, not just morally neutral or even good, and the bent of his human nature was toward godliness, then his choice to disobey the command of God is a total contradiction. It is first a complete renunciation of his Creator in total rebellion against him. He asserted his rights over the rights of the Creator. In this way, sin began as idolatry (note the parallel effect in the race, Rom 1:18-32); Adam chose to serve another god. Adam's disobedience was also a contradiction of his own human nature. He acted against himself. Sin for him was not a failure of judgment, it was a willful rejection of the God who made him and of the noble human he was created to be. Only the height from which he fell can explain the depth of degradation to which he came. In this way sinning is the highest form of insanity. To finish this first point, the major sticking point for the evolutionary model and the figurative interpretations of Genesis 3 is Adam's original condition.

*An historical Adam can only explain the fact of the temptation to which he succumbed.*

In the New Testament, the pattern of human temptation is outlined in James 1:13-15. James affirms that God is holy and thus cannot be tempted nor does he tempt anyone to moral failure (Jas 1:13). Thus, what God permits as a test to strengthen moral stamina and develop character, Satan uses to allure an individual to sin. Then, James analyzes the nature of temptation: allure-ment, lust, and then sin. While James's analysis is strategic in understanding temptation among fallen humans, Adam's case was different—he had no sinful desires. Jesus, the second Adam, also had no sinful desires but he could still be tempted. Consequently, Adam's righteous standing before God did not insulate him from being tested; the limitations of his humanness qualified him for that.

What is the point of emphasizing the temptation? It is simply this: Adam's temptation mandates a specific historical context for the fall just as Genesis 3 portrays it. Temptation is an entice-

ment to sin or disobey a direct moral prohibition. As such temptation involves real people, in real time, in a real context, with real consequences or outcomes. First there is a tempter whose motives or intentions are malicious. While temptation can arise from a sinner's own lust, Adam required an actual foe, someone who operated according to a definite plan and made strategic moves to trap him.<sup>70</sup> Second there is an enticement, something that is desired. What was offered that attracted a sinless human? In the case of Christ, Satan offered him a way of accomplishing his divine mission without following the Father's will. In the same way, Adam had been given a threefold command to "multiply, fill, and subdue" God's creation (Gen 1:28). Perhaps, Adam and Eve saw the tree of knowledge as a possible means to that end. Robin Routledge suggests that perhaps the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a "means by which human beings might attempt to take control of their own destiny. By eating the fruit they would come to possess for themselves the knowledge of what was beneficial or harmful, and so could break free from dependence upon God and on his word."<sup>71</sup>

In addition, temptation also includes other real time, historical features. As an enticement to disobey, it requires the presence of a specific prohibition, not just the rejection of the upward draw of the evolutionary process. According to Paul, Adam transgressed a known law (Rom 5:14) for which he was held accountable. Scripture identifies the specific command. Temptation also occurs in a specific context. Nigel Cameron observed: "The world which God made for man to inhabit was 'very good.' It had been prepared to receive him as its crown, and the setting was constructed so as to be ideal for the probation to which Adam and Eve were called. The world was not created with the fall in prospect, still less with the curse already let loose."<sup>72</sup> Next, temptation possesses an inducement to act, an invitation to make a choice. Adam certainly had the capacity of alternate choice that is, choosing contrary to his own

nature. Finally, temptation contains consequences after the choice is made. Hugh Ross observed:

Some critics seem thrown, even outraged, that so undramatic an action as biting into some fruit could possibly carry such horrendous consequences: the curses spelled out by God in the verses that follow and banishment from the garden. But these critics miss the point. They fail to recognize the terrible danger and consequences involved in the creature's expression of autonomy from the Creator.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond the curses announced in the text, the gravity of the act is weighed by the consequences that accrued to each of Adam's posterity. With so much resting on the outcome of this encounter, it appears best to follow the biblical storyline of a single pair of humans who were directly created by God and placed in an environment that was conducive to obedience.

*An historic Adam can only explain the universal spread and transmission of sin.*

Paul is clear: all of us are sinners and under the dominion of death because of Adam's transgression (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22). The Bible doesn't give details concerning the method of sin's spread, but it is clear that Adam and Eve (Gen 3:20, Eve is called "the mother of all the living") are considered the progenitors of the entire human race (Luke traces Christ's genealogy all the way back to Adam, 3:38; cf. 1 Cor 15:45) and that their disobedience was imputed to all their heirs. But is this point plausible to maintain if one denies the historicity of Adam and the fall?

Denis Alexander echoed Derek Kidner and others in using a federal model to explain the spread of sin.<sup>74</sup> William Dembski in a recent treatment of theodicy takes the same position.<sup>75</sup> Alexander argues that Adam served as a representative of all: those who came after him, as well as those who lived before him, and those who were living at the same time. So, just as Christ's sacrifice answered

retroactively, laterally, and preemptively—those who lived before his death, at his death, and after his death—these scholars reason that Adam's disobedience was applied in the same way. The premise of course is that there were other image-bearers who were living at the time of Adam and Eve. Dembski even goes so far as to explain natural evil such as violence and destruction prior to Adam's existence as reflecting his future fall.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that Adam represented image-bearing people, just as Christ is our redeeming representative (Rom 5:18-19). But to stretch Adamic representation to include other image-bearing humans living at the time of Adam appears to concede too much to the evolutionary scheme of human origins. Three issues are raised by this view.

One is the image of God itself. Scripture declares Adam to be the first image-bearer (Gen 1:26-27, realized in 2:7-8). It is the image of God that signifies our true humanness. Certainly the only ones impacted by Adam's fall were image-bearers. But if we assume, as Alexander does, that there were other image-bearers at the time of Adam, would they not have had a sinless moral direction, intellectual acumen, and volition just as Adam did?<sup>77</sup> How would this have worked in the spiritual experience of these humans? Were they spiritually alive and then all at once dead spiritually? Another issue raised by this view is the nature of corruption. Did these image-bearers simultaneously become corrupted and *en masse* begin hiding from each other and from the Lord, which was Adam and Eve's initial response after sinning? The last issue raised by this view is that it challenges the entire concept of representation. Scripture refers to Christ as the "head" of the redeemed (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18). In Romans 5:12-21, Paul treats Adam and Christ as our representative heads; Adam represented the entire race of fallen sinners and Christ is head of the redeemed from among that larger group. These were unique positions. Each representative was fully qualified to serve in that capacity. They were so designated within a covenant context. Thus,

each representative stood in a unique position in relation to those represented; what transpired in the head was realized in the larger body.

## CONCLUSION

After a thorough study of the doctrine of sin as well as the interpretive options for Genesis 3, I am more convinced now that a literal-historical approach to the text is essential. The term “literal” is used to describe historical literality, not scientific precision. The reason for historical literality is specificity, which is demanded by the theological affirmations about human sin. The story of the fall told by Moses perfectly supports all later revelations about sin. There are a number of specific features of the story that support this conclusion:

First, Adam and Eve were directly created by the Lord (Gen 1:27; 2:7); they were not taken from an existing stock of hominids. We affirm that humans bear the image of God from the moment of conception. The image is not an “add-on” but is the unique component that makes us human. Further, Adam and Eve were not created morally neutral but were righteous before God. Michael Williams rightly concludes: “If we miss the biblical emphasis upon the goodness of God’s original creation, we will also fail to see the blasphemy of sin for what it truly is: a rebellion against God and his good gifts, a rebellion from the loving word of God, a rebellion that brings discord and fracture into God’s creation.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, we may add, Adam and Eve were also created for a specific purpose—dominion—and their creation qualified them for it.

Second, Adam and Eve were placed in a unique environment called Eden (Gen 2:8-14). The garden was an ideal environment for them to worship and work. While many hold that Adam and Eve’s direct communication with the Lord was an anthropomorphism,<sup>79</sup> the Scripture clearly represents their encounters as theophanies. This is critical in the story because it acknowledges the Lord’s actual pursuit of them after the fall, even to the point of the cross.

Third, Adam and Eve were placed under a clear probation (Gen 2:16-17). There was a clear prohibition that involved a specific spoken word, a specific tree, a specific set of options, a specific decision, and a specific consequence. All of this demands an historical context.

Fourth, Adam and Eve were specifically tempted to break a single command God had given them. God is not the author of sin; sin is an intruder. Williams notes: “The Bible does not describe an eternal struggle between good and evil. Sin is not an eternal principle, a necessary or structural element of either the universe or human beings, or the product of God’s creative intent.”<sup>80</sup> The Bible is clear that sin did not originate in the universe with the fall of Adam but was introduced by Satan prior to the fall of Adam. The originator became the instigator of human testing. Clearly, he targeted Eve because she was a real person who offered a genuine opportunity for sin to invade humankind. Satan therefore sought to engender “doubt & desire” in her.<sup>81</sup> Blocher notes: “Since the narrative aims at being more than just a tale, it certainly intends us to discern within sin itself, as contained in this particular sin, doubt concerning God—doubt about his motives, doubt about his goodness, and, above all, doubt about his love.”<sup>82</sup>

Several matters are clear about their decision to disobey God’s law. One, their sin was a choice, elevating human choice above God’s commands. Next their sin reflects the emergence of pride and unbelief, which are the dual sources of all sins. Additionally, their sin was of such a nature that God was completely offended by it; thus, it was a rejection of a Father’s love and goodness (cf. Jesus’ parable of the prodigal, Luke 15:11ff). Finally, their sin was prompted by the appealing nature of the tree. Blocher asks: “But what is the meaning of the attractive appearance of the tree, if we agree on its symbolic nature?”<sup>83</sup>

Fifth, Adam and Eve and were banished from the unique place the Lord had created for them after they disobeyed (Gen 3:22-24). If one embraces Greg Beale’s view of the creation as a



temple, the banishing of Adam and Eve from the garden was more a matter of restricting their access to God's presence.<sup>84</sup> But clearly there is more to this. God banished them and us as a matter of judgment as well. How else do we explain the depth of human depravity?

Sixth, Adam and Eve's children bore their image as rebels against the Lord, i.e. transmission of sinfulness to children. It is very difficult to explain the universal transmission of sin apart from the historicity of Adam and his entire family.

Seventh, God promised to restore the fortunes lost by Adam in the last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ. As many have noted, the entire structure of Scripture begins to break down, especially the Adam-Christ relation apart from the historicity of both heads. Adam, is the first man and representative head of the old creation, while our Lord is the first man and head of the new creation and his new covenant people. However, if the first man is not historical and the fall into sin is not historical, then one begins to wonder why there is a need for our Lord to come and undo the work of the first man. In other words, apart from an affirmation of the historical Adam and his fall into sin on behalf of the entire human race, the entire rationale for the plan of redemption and the sending of God the Son begins to slip through our fingers. In the end, what is at stake is the foundations and underpinning to the gospel itself, which is no small issue!

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Wenham, "Original Sin in Genesis 1-11," *Churchman* 104 (1990): 309-21.

<sup>3</sup>Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (San Diego: Creation Life, 1976); Norman L. Geisler and J. Kerby Anderson, *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

<sup>4</sup>John F. Walvoord, "Thirty-Three Words for Sin in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 100 (1943): 164-76; see also, C. Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin*

*and of the Ways of God with Sinners* (London: Epworth Press, 1953).

<sup>5</sup>A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1907), 601-606.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 550.

<sup>7</sup>Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 171-72. See also Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 412; William Dembski, *The End of Christianity* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 27-46.

<sup>8</sup>James Orr, *Sin as a Problem of Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 7-8.

<sup>9</sup>Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 31.

<sup>10</sup>Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 7-8.

<sup>11</sup>Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

<sup>12</sup>Venning, *The Plague of Plagues*, 177-89.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Menninger, *Whatever Happened to Sin* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).

<sup>14</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, in *Writings of Saint Augustine* (trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 12.7.

<sup>15</sup>Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 44-56.

<sup>16</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 111-12.

<sup>17</sup>"Scientific research and scientific theorizing are Pelagian in principle. They presuppose that if experimentation is carried on under very strict rules and theories are formulated with utmost rational care, scientists will arrive at the truth. Science allows for no cosmic demon (which René Descartes [1596-1650] postulated to universally deceive us), nor fallen sinful humans who prefer deceit or error to truth." Ramm, *Offense to Reason*, 153.

<sup>18</sup>For example, see George Murphy, "Evolution, Sin, and Death" [cited 12 April 2011]. Online: <http://biologos.org/blog/evolution-sin-and-death/>.

<sup>19</sup>Louis Berhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 240.

<sup>20</sup>Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 18.

- <sup>21</sup>Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 149.
- <sup>22</sup>James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1895), 83.
- <sup>23</sup>Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 162.
- <sup>24</sup>Original righteousness is used here in contrast to the Roman Catholic view of "likeness" as an added benefit Adam needed to remain faithful. Clearly the image of God as reflected in Adam was perfectly operational. In this regard it gave Adam a perfect symmetry between devotion to the Lord, devotion to his spouse, and devotion to the preservation of the created order.
- <sup>25</sup>Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 612.
- <sup>26</sup>William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 150-51.
- <sup>27</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (ed. Roy B. Zuck; Chicago: Moody, 1991), 17-18.
- <sup>28</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A NT Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 114.
- <sup>29</sup>Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *The True Image: Christ as the Origin and Destiny of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 229.
- <sup>30</sup>Hughes also commented on J. R. Illingworth, "The Incarnation in Relation to Development," in *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (ed. Charles Gore; London: Murray, 1891). *Lux Mundi* is an expression of liberal thought among the anglo-catholics of the late nineteenth century.
- <sup>31</sup>Daniel K. Brannan, "Darwinism and Original Sin: Frederick R. Tennant's Integration of Darwinian Worldviews into Christian Thought in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science* 1 (2007): 187-217.
- <sup>32</sup>Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (trans. Robert Nesbin Bait; New York: Tribeca, 2011), 57.
- <sup>33</sup>Hughes, *The True Image*, 122.
- <sup>34</sup>Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 334.
- <sup>35</sup>Schuster, *The Fall and Sin*, 3-29.
- <sup>36</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 233.
- <sup>37</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 178.
- <sup>38</sup>Robert Pyne, *Humanity and Sin: The Creation, Fall, and Redemption of Humanity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 163.
- <sup>39</sup>Helmut Thielicke, *Living with Death*, (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 12.
- <sup>40</sup>Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 20.
- <sup>41</sup>Clark Pinnock, "Climbing Out of a Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 143-155.
- <sup>42</sup>C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 249-78; idem, "Adam and Eve as Historical People," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (2010): 147-65.
- <sup>43</sup>Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 49-59.
- <sup>44</sup>Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2008).
- <sup>45</sup>See, for example, W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
- <sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 41-42.
- <sup>47</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (2 vols; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943).
- <sup>48</sup>Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 254.
- <sup>49</sup>Alexander, "Models for Relating Adam and Eve with Contemporary Anthropology, Part 2" [cited 9 April 2011]. Online: <http://biologos.org/blog/models-for-relating-adam-and-eve-with-contemporary-anthropology-part-2>.
- <sup>50</sup>Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 236.
- <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.
- <sup>52</sup>An expression used by John Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 48.
- <sup>53</sup>Alexander, *Creation of Evolution*, 236.
- <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 255.

- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., 237; William Dembski makes a similar claim in *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).
- <sup>56</sup>Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 205.
- <sup>57</sup>Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).
- <sup>58</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 481.
- <sup>59</sup>Alexander, *Creation of Evolution*, 256.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., 236.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., 256.
- <sup>62</sup>Henry Morris, *Biblical Creationism: What Each Book of the Bible Teaches About Creation & the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., 275.
- <sup>64</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, (trans. A. J. Krailsheimer; London: Penguin Books, 1995), 117.
- <sup>65</sup>The terms that Scripture uses for salvation actually imply this prior exalted position. Terms such as reconciliation, redemption, and regeneration denote bringing back or restoring what was lost. Cf. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 57-58.
- <sup>66</sup>Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 38.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., 40.
- <sup>68</sup>Daniel Brannan comments, "Irenaen thought considers Adam as a child who was deceived and beguiled by Satan. Thus Adam was not responsible for disobedience since he did not have free choice since such that ability was not yet developed. Consequently, Adam did not commit the first sin, Cain did. Instead, Adam was enslaved to death by Satan as a result of being fooled; Christ comes to set us free from that enslavement. So, the Fall is a blessing in disguise to make us more grateful for the gift of immortality in Christ," Brannan, "Darwinism and Original Sin," 192, n. 12.
- <sup>69</sup>Jerome T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977) 161-77.
- <sup>70</sup>Note E. J. Young's lucid treatment in *Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966); cf. also Walsh's excellent analysis.
- <sup>71</sup>Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 148.
- <sup>72</sup>Nigel Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 66.
- <sup>73</sup>Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 94.
- <sup>74</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 26-31.
- <sup>75</sup>William Dembski, *The End of Christianity*, 50.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup>Derek Kidner held that the conferral of the image of God on Adam's contemporaries was also based upon a federal "headship" of Adam. Kindner, *Genesis*, 26-31.
- <sup>78</sup>Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 65.
- <sup>79</sup>Tremper Longman, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 29.
- <sup>80</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found*, 64.
- <sup>81</sup>Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 138.
- <sup>82</sup>Ibid., 139-40.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup>Greg Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 161-218.