

Romans (33): The Law and Sin (cont.)

Introduction

Let us read the passage under our consideration today, **Romans 7:13-25**.

¹³Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Rom 7:13-25)

Because it has been several weeks since we have been in this epistle to the church at Rome, it would do us well to refresh our understanding of the flow of the apostle's argument in this portion of his epistle. Of course the subject of the larger context is the believers' sanctification. The blessed Holy Spirit is setting before us through the hand of His apostle how He enables His people to become more like their Savior in holy character. The definition for sanctification that we have cited is that of the 35th question and answer of **The Westminster Shorter Catechism** (1647).

Question #35: What is sanctification? Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace,¹ whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,² and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.³

Sanctification begins with the regeneration of the sinner, the believer's initial conversion through repentance from sin toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. God will complete His work of sanctification after this life is finished and Christ returns. Paul had written elsewhere: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). But how does God carry on this work of sanctification in His people? This is what we have set before us in Romans 6 and 7, and a good portion of chapter 8.

¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:13. "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

² Ephesians 4:23, 24. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

³ Romans 6:4, 6, 14. "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

We saw earlier in Romans 6 that the beginning point of our sanctification lies in our *self-identity* as Christians. The importance of this principle was set forth in the first command that Paul had expressed to his readers of this epistle. It reads, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). The believer is to identify himself with the new life that God has given him in Jesus Christ, not with sin that still plagues him, sin that had once controlled him prior to his conversion to Jesus Christ. The Christian must know *who* he is first, if he is *to become* more like he is in sanctification.⁴ Paul had declared that it is because we are Christians, alive unto God through Jesus Christ, that we let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, that is, refuse to obey its passions (cf. 6:12). Rather, we are to present ourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life (cf. 6:13).

Paul then made this statement: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not *under law* but *under grace*” (6:14). Being under grace rather than under law means that God is able to empower us to live rightly, rather than justly condemn us for sinning against Him. God had set us free from the dominion of sin and its consequences. In contrast to who we were before conversion we read, “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:22f).

In the opening verses of Romans 7, we have the explanation how we were delivered from the damning sentence of God’s law upon us due to our sin. Through the believer’s union with Jesus Christ when He was crucified, died, and rose from the dead, the believer died with respect to the law and is now under grace to Jesus Christ, rather than the law that brought guilt and damnation.

But if we consider that God’s law caused the damnation of people for their sin, one might draw the wrong conclusion that there was something inherently defective, even sinful about the law itself. Paul therefore sought to vindicate God’s law from being devalued or wrongly charged with being the believer’s problem. God used His law to bring sinners to know they are sinners so that they might receive the free grace of salvation in Jesus Christ. God used His law to bring people to become aware of their sinfulness, thereby drawing people to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul described how the law had convinced him of his sinfulness; he thereby demonstrated that God’s law was free from defect, that God’s law is indeed righteous. He had written in **verses 11 and 12**,

“For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

We now come to our passage, Romans 7:13ff. We read in **verse 13** yet another example of Paul’s use of the rhetorical question. “*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means!*” Paul had described the law as “good” in verse 12, and here he repeats the description. “That which is good” is Paul’s reference to the law of God.

Now what is meant when we say, “The law of God is holy, righteous, and good?” The law is “*holy*” in that it reflects God’s holy character. Holiness is an attribute of God which describes His “otherness” from His creatures, that is, He is distinct and unique from all that He created. For God to be holy means that He is of a completely different kind of essence than that which He created.⁵ Moreover, it is implied in this “otherness” that God is infinitely pure and therefore the consequences of violating His commands are certain and severe.

God’s law is not only holy, but it is “*righteous*.” In this context a synonym for “righteous” might be “just.” The law of God is that standard which God sets forth as the norm of what life should be like for someone to live to please God and be “like” God to the degree that He has created us to be. The definition of “righteousness” in many biblical contexts is a life ordered according to the standards of God’s revealed law.

⁴ We addressed this important subject on Sunday, December 23, 2012, which is designated #FBC691.

⁵ For a study of the idea of holiness in the OT world, see William Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the OT* (London: Epworth Press, 1983), pp. 21-50.

But God's law is also "*good*." The law of God is "good" in several respects. First, the law is good because it is a manifestation of God's holy character. (This is the same idea as above that God's law is "holy." God's law is good because it is holy as God is holy. God's law is righteous because it reflects God's standards of what is right. But second, the law is good in what it promises to the law keeper. When God had first given His law to Adam and Eve, He had promised them everlasting life of enjoyment of His favor and blessing. If Adam had kept God's law, he would have experienced God's undiminished goodness, His blessedness, for himself and all of his posterity. The greatest of good things that people could possibly desire and enjoy would have come to those who live according to God's law. God had specified to the children of Israel what they would enjoy if they kept His law. We read in **Deuteronomy 28:1-14** of God's promises to Israel conditioned on their obedience.

"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.

³Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

⁴Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.

⁵Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

⁶Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

⁷The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.

⁸The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

⁹The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. ¹¹And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. ¹²The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. ¹³And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, ¹⁴and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

Now, it must be understood that God was not giving a second "covenant of works" when He gave Israel His law through Moses.⁶ In other words, God gave His law not as He had given it to Adam, as a means of meriting God's favor, which would have been a covenant of works. Rather, God gave His law to Israel as a manifestation of His covenant of grace with His people. He had delivered them from bondage and brought them, into the land of promise due to His grace, due to His promise that He had given to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But at Sinai God gave His law as the standard by which they were to order their lives in faith and obedience to their covenant God. There was a sense, however, in which the law at Sinai was a "republication" of the covenant of works, in that God's law always served as a teacher of what they would deserve (i.e. death), if they did not continue in faith to their covenant God.⁷

⁶ This is one matter that is generally, but not always, distinguishes covenant theologians (us) from our dispensational friends. They tend to teach that God gave the law of Moses as a covenant of works rather than an administration of His covenant of grace.

⁷ One way to show that the law at Sinai was given as an administration of His covenant of grace is that the writer to the Hebrews tells us clearly that Israel failed initially to enter the promised land, not because they had failed to merit doing so because they had broken the law, but rather, it was because they had no faith. "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19).

And so, the law of God is “good” because it promises good to the law-keeper. The problem, however, is that because of Adam’s sin, as well as because of our own sin, no one can experience the “good” that God has promised to law keepers, for no one keeps the law or can keep the law. Only the Lord Jesus kept the law, but because He did so, He was able to secure all of the good promised to the law keeper to be enjoyed by those whose faith is in Him.

And so, Paul addressed the supposed but unjust accusation that some might level against God’s good law because of the death that it brings upon people. “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means!” Paul then stated that it was sin that was the cause of his death sentence, not God’s good law. Paul declared in **verses 13b**, “*It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*” The New King James Version states it similarly, “*But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.*”

The great evil and the cause of all misery and suffering is sin. When we look at the world in which we live, when we see the wickedness of mankind, the cruelty that a man will inflict on his fellow man, we see the cause here, in this matter of sin.

Now this is as far as we are going to progress in Romans 7 today. I had originally intended to address the contents of the entire two paragraphs before us in detail (7:13-19, 20-25). But the subject matter of verse 13b calls for our attention and focus. It follows that if God had given His law *so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly*, then we should do what we can to understand or comprehend in a measure this goal of our God. Paul seems to suggest that a prerequisite to growing in our sanctification is to have an understanding in a measure of the exceedingly sinfulness of our sin. The Puritans of the 17th and early 18th centuries were ones who gave great emphasis to the believer’s sanctification. The early Reformers, men such as Luther, Calvin, Ursinus, Bucer, and Zwingli, gave great attention to the subject of the believers’ justification, salvation from the *penalty* of sin. But the Puritans, such as John Owen, Thomas Watson, Thomas Goodwin, John Bunyan, and later, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, gave great attention to the subject of the believers’ sanctification, salvation from the *power* of sin. It is understandable, therefore, to read of many Puritan books that addressed the exceedingly sinfulness of sin. Consider these titles (which are just a representative few that I happen to have in my own library):

- *The Evil of Evils, or the Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, by Jeremiah Burroughs
- *The Mischief of Sin*, by Thomas Watson
- *The Sinfulness of Sin*, by Ralph Venning
- *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*, by Obadiah Sedgwick
- *Man’s Guiltiness before God*, by Thomas Goodwin
- *Alarm to the Unconverted*, Joseph Alleine

One could perhaps say without too much danger of misstatement, that a person’s degree of growth and attainment in holiness, in sanctification, will be proportional to his understanding of the degree of the depth, defilement, and deserved damnation of his sin. *Charles Spurgeon* (18th c.) wrote of this correlation between knowledge of sin and true advancement in spiritual godliness:

A spiritual experience which is thoroughly flavoured with a deep and bitter sense of sin is of great value to him that had it. It is terrible in the drinking, but it is most wholesome in the bowels, and in the whole of the after-life. Possibly, much of the flimsy piety of the present day arises from the ease with which men attain to peace and joy in these evangelistic days. We would not judge modern converts, but we certainly prefer that form of spiritual exercise which leads the soul by the way of Weeping-cross, and makes it see its blackness before assuring it that it is “clean every whit”. Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned,

with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.⁸

Spurgeon, although raised in a godly home and attended church all his life and was reading His Bible and the Puritans from an early age, credited his five years of deep conviction of sin prior to his conversion at 17 to shaping the whole of his Christian experience and fruitful ministry of the Gospel. He wrote of the onset of his period of conviction:

My heart was fallow (i.e. hardened like an unplowed field), and covered with weeds; but, on a certain day, the great Husbandman came, and began to plough my soul. Ten black horses were his team, and it was a sharp ploughshare that He used, and the ploughers made deep furrows. The Ten Commandments were those black horses, and the justice of god, like a ploughshare, tore my spirit. I was condemned, undone, destroyed—lost, helpless, hopeless—I thought hell was before me. Then there came a cross-ploughing, for when I went to hear the gospel, it did not comfort me; it made me wish I had a part in it, but I feared that such a boon was out of the question. The choicest promises of God frowned upon me. I prayed, but found no answer of peace. It was long with me thus.⁹

Spurgeon wrote that a keen understanding of one's own sin as taught by the Holy Spirit, is evidence of God's electing love of that sinner:

Hardly a glimmer of the humbling truth of our natural depravity dawns on the dull apprehension of the worldly-wise, though souls taught from above know it and are appalled by it. In divers ways the discovery comes to those whom the lord ordains to save...

There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign grace is dear to those who have groaned deeply because they see what grievous sinners they are. Witness Joseph Hart and John Newton, whose hymns you have often sung, or David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, whose biographies many of you have read. You seldom hear much of God's everlasting covenant in these modern times, for few men feel that thorough conviction of sin which comes directly from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In the economy of redemption the effectual operation of the Spirit in enlightening the heart concerning its own sinfulness is sure evidence of the Father's personal love to His chosen people, and of the special atonement that the Son of God made for their transgressions.¹⁰

And so, let us take some time and speak specifically about the subject of sin. *Sin* is a word that is rarely used in our society. Even a non-Christian psychologist, **Karl Menninger**, noted and lamented this fact in his book, "*Whatever Became of Sin?*", published in 1973. He wrote these words,

In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of "sin," a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles--sin with an "I" in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal--or asleep? Wrong things are being done, we know; tares are being sown in the wheat field at night. But is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sins? Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it?¹¹

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Volume 1, The Early Years* (Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 54.

⁹ Ibid. p. 53.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 52.

¹¹ Menninger, Karl, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (Hawthorne Books, 1973), p. 13.

In contrast with society, Christians recognize the reality of sin and the need to be saved from it. But even among Christians sin is often viewed as a trifle when compared with the biblical presentation of sin as immensely vile and perverse which deserves the wrath of God. Our view of sin will influence our understanding of all other things. It will influence how we view God. We will think little of God's holiness, justice, His wrath if we think little of our sin. But we will also think little of His love, mercy, and grace if we think little of our sin. The reason people do not regard Christ as a great Saviour is because they do not see themselves as great sinners in need of one. It will influence how we view ourselves. Do we see ourselves as helpless and needy of God's mercy and grace? Or are we quite self-sufficient and have it all together. Can we go days without prayer? It is because we see sin as a minor thing. Are we selfish? Do we demand our rights? Are we proud? If so we do not see our sin.

Sin will also affect how we view others. If we do not see the evil of the sin in ourselves, we will tend either to justify it in others or condemn in others what we do not see to be in ourselves. We will either be as the Corinthians who boast and became arrogant over their tolerance when we should have mourned and taken action against a sinning one (1 Cor. 5:1f), or we will go to the other extreme as the "sons of thunder" who would call down fire from heaven to consume others which called for the Lord's rebuke, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of" (Luke 9:54f). We will not be moved with compassion as we should, to rescue or to warn. Jude instructed his readers, "Have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh" (Jude 22f).

We could argue from Romans 7 that in order to experience the grace of God in our sanctification we must be keenly aware and thoroughly convinced of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin" (cf. 7:13). As a pastor I have often observed that a major reason people make a mess of their lives and their children is that they view sin as a trifle. Consequently they do not watch themselves closely nor do they set bounds for their children. They see no danger because sin does not alarm them. Perhaps sin is not attractive to them, but neither is it repulsive. Sin does not scare them. Maybe they do not indulge themselves in grossly sinful activities, but because sin is not a hated and feared thing, they are overtaken by degrees by its deceitfulness. They do not detect sin because they are not watching out for it. They do not see it as "crouching at the door" ready to pounce on them and their children (cf. Gen. 4:7). After a period of time elapses, they find themselves and their families hopelessly entangled in a web of sin from which there is no escape or recovery, apart from a great work of grace.

When considering the subject of sin in the Bible, it is important to distinguish between *sin as an act* and *sin as a principle*, that is, committing sin and being a sinner by nature. We have addressed this earlier in the epistle, but let us rehearse the matter in more detail.

1. Man's acts of sin

The hideous nature of sinful acts in Scripture may be discerned in a number of ways. (1) Sin may be considered in the specific **words** that are used to depict sin itself. (2) The **metaphors** by which sin is described further enhance the evil nature of sinful acts. (3) The wickedness of sinful acts may be seen in **the authoritative pronouncements** respecting specific sinful deeds. (4) The measure of sin's evil may be seen by **the effects or reactions recorded respecting sinful acts**. (5) Last, and most clearly, the evil of sin may be seen by viewing **what was necessary to effect pardon for sin-- the crucifixion of God's dear Son**.

(1) There are a number of **words** used in the Bible to express the idea of sin. In the Old Testament some of the more frequently used Hebrew words are *Hatat*, *Yaohn*, *Pasha*, and *Ra*'.

Hatat (חָטָא) is translated most frequently as "sin." It describes a person who sins as one who has fallen short of a standard or a goal, as an arrow falls short of its target. It may be a failure to attain to a "path of right duty against man" (as in 1 Kings 18:9, and 2 Kings 18:14); or it describes the failure to attain the goal or path of right and duty against God, which is most frequent (as in Exodus 20:20, Joshua 7:11, Psalm 4:4).¹² Sin in this sense is universal, "for there is no man who does not *sin*" (1 Kings 18:46), and "Indeed,

¹² William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, n.d.), p. 306.

there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never *sins*” (Ecc. 7:20). These sins may be committed knowingly or in ignorance. The mark or goal set forth in Scripture from which man has failed to attain is the standard of God’s glory--His own nature. It was God’s design for man created in His image to manifest His glory. But man has fallen far short of this mark, as Paul expressed clearly in Romans 3:10, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Yaohn (יָוֹן) is translated as “sin,” “fault,” “iniquity,” “mischief,” “guilt,” or “punishment of iniquity.” This depicts sin as having “its roots in an evil disposition.”¹³ It suggests the evil motivation that leads to sinful acts. “For your *guilt* teaches your mouth, and you choose the language of the crafty” (Job 15:5). “They have turned back to the *iniquities* of their ancestors who refused to hear My words” (Jer. 11:10). In both of these instance, evil moved these people to act as they did. This evil principle itself is a cause of guilt and warrants the judgment of God. ““Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your *iniquity* is before Me,” declares the Lord” (Jer. 2:22).

Pasha (פָּשָׁא) is “unquestionably the gravest word for sin, especially on the lips of the prophets.”¹⁴ It speaks of a revolt or rebellion against God. It is translated as “transgression.” It is the deliberate violation of God’s Law. It is the purposeful refusal to submit to God’s rule. It is a deliberate stepping over the bounds which God has prescribed. Since it is a refusal to live within the limits of God’s law, it is rebellion, revolt, and treason against God who is the Sovereign of the Universe. Elihu accused Job falsely, “he adds rebellion (*Pasha*) to his sin (*Hatat*); he claps his hands among us, and multiplies his words against God” (Job 34:37).

Ra’ (רָע) speaks of the ethical nature of sin. It is a word which conveys the idea of “bad,” or “evil.” As adjective it may describe the wickedness of actions. “Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this *evil thing* you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day?’” (Neh. 13:17). It also may be used to describe the sins committed in men’s thoughts. This word describes men’s thoughts just prior to the flood. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart were only *evil* continually” (Gen. 6:5).

In Psalm 51 David confesses his sin before the Lord using all of the above Hebrew words.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness;
 According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my *transgressions* (*Pasha*).
 Wash me thoroughly from my *iniquity* (*Yaohn*),
 And cleanse me from my *sin* (*Hatat*).
 For I know my *transgressions* (*Pasha*),
 And my *sin* (*Hatat*) is ever before me.
 Against Thee, Thee only, I have *sinned* (*Hatat*).
 And done what is *evil* (*Ra’*) in Thy sight,
 So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak,
 And blameless when Thou dost judge.”¹⁵ (Psalm 51:1-4)

In the New Testament there are the **Greek** words *harmartia* (ἁμαρτία) meaning “sin”, *parabasis* (παράβασει) is transgression. The word *adikia* (ἀδικία) is “unrighteousness.” The term *asebeis* (ἀσεβής) is “ungodliness.” “Lawlessness” is *anomia* (ἀνομία). “Fornication” is the translation of *ponerias* (πορνείας) and “evil passion” or “lust” is the translation of *epithumia* (ἐπιθυμία). Because of the time, we will not address the nuances of each word. The variety of words used to convey the idea of sin shows its many faceted and extensive and pervasive presence in the human condition.

¹³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 263.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The transliterated words in parentheses are not the precise forms of the words used but are the roots from which they are derived. This was done so the reader could distinguish and identify the words under discussion.

The words used in Scripture to connote sinful acts shows the hideous nature of sin. Acts of sin are evil deeds done which cause individuals to fall far short of God's design for them; but further, they are acts of rebellion against God our rightful ruler. In committing them we do show our stubborn, independent, rebellious spirit and contempt for God Himself and His right to rule over us.

(2) The **metaphors** used in Scripture to describe sin further enhance the evil nature of sinful acts.

Arthur Pink graphically identifies a number of biblical metaphors for sin.

- (1) the scum of a seething pot in which is a detestable carcass (Ezek. 24:10-12)
- (2) the blood and pollution of a new-born child, before it is washed and clothed (Ezek. 16:4,6)
- (3) a dead and rotting body (Rom. 7:24)
- (4) the noisome stench and poisonous fumes which issue from an open sepluchre (Rom. 3:13)
- (5) the lusts of the devil (John 8:44)
- (6) putrefying sores (Isa. 1:5,6)
- (7)..a menstruous cloth (Isa. 3:22; Lam. 1:17)
- (8) a canker, or gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17)
- (9)..the dung of filthy creatures (Phil. 3:8)
- (10) the vomit of a dog and the wallowing of a sow in the sinking mire (2 Pet 2:22)¹⁶

(3) The wickedness of sinful acts may be seen in *the authoritative pronouncements* respecting specific sinful deeds. These are many and varied. God Himself declares, "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). These citations could be multiplied before us.

(4) The measure of sin's evil may be seen by *the effects or results of sinful acts* recorded in the Scriptures. When one reflects on the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, Achen's sin, King David's sin of numbering the people, the sin of touching the ark and even peering into the ark. And in the New Testament we read of the sins of Ananias and Saphira.

There are also communal effects of sin to be considered. This is seen most clearly in the Old Testament Scriptures. The thinking of the ancient world was that one's sin, even if committed in "private", always had ramifications for the community. This idea is lost to our world. It is assumed that what one does is one's own business and "hurts no one else," therefore, society has no right to impose its standards upon individual behavior. But consider this description of the biblical world view:

In this connexion, however, another side of the matter very alien to modern ways of thinking has to be observed. As we commonly understand it today, not only is the consequence of the sin narrowed down to fall only on the individual and his spiritual life, but the evil that accompanies the sin is also confined to the evil act itself. The act no doubt sometimes has serious visible consequences for the man who does it, that is, when he gets himself entangled in some way or another in the evil he has wrought. But such consequences are to a greater or lesser degree fortuitous, and no one is surprised if such a punishment fails to come to pass. In contrast, for the people of antiquity sin was something much wider in its effects. The evil deed was only one side of the matter, for through it an evil had been set in motion which sooner or later would inevitably turn against the sinner or the community to which he belonged.¹⁷

(5) The evil of sin may be seen most graphically when considering that only the death of God's Son could affect pardon for sin.

¹⁶ Arthur Pink, Gleanings from the Holy Scriptures o

¹⁷ Gerhard von Rad, **Old Testament Theology**, vol. 1, The Theology of Israel's Historic Traditions (Harper & Rowe, 1962), pp. 264f.

2. Man's sinful nature

I suppose if there is a word less used in the world today than "sin", it would be the word "sinner." To declare that man is a "sinner" is not a nice thing to say among civilized sophisticated people. It conjures in the mind a hypocritical black-garbed, flint-faced, fiery preacher who totes a black Bible, thumping on a pulpit, performing verbal abuse and producing guilt and emotional damage to simple uneducated people who know no better than to listen to him and believe what he says. Although most people would admit that they commit acts of sin, I wonder how many people would readily admit they are *sinners* as the Bible depicts a sinner to be.

When speak of man's sinful nature, we are speaking of the doctrine of original sin. Here is the definition rendered in **The Westminster Confession of Faith**:

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. (Art. 6)

The doctrine of original sin is not a direct reference to what Adam and Eve did; rather it speaks of the result of Adam's sin, we were all as a result born into this world sinners. Man was created originally in the image of God, perfect in holiness in His nature, being free from sin. But he transgressed the command of God and fell, resulting in he and his posterity becoming sinful in nature, subjects to satan and servants of sin, incurring the wrath of God whereby they suffer misery and death forever, incapable of recovery unless the Lord Jesus sets them free. That is what we mean by original sin.

We mentioned earlier that in order for you to be one who is being sanctified, you must be keenly aware and thoroughly convinced of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin" (cf. 7:13). This means not only that we should be aware of the *acts* of sin as exceedingly sinful, but that our very *nature* is exceedingly sinful. Therefore it is good that we consider in what ways our nature is sinful.

What were the effects of the fall upon mankind as a race? Every part of his being has been effected---his mind, affections, and his will.

1. He is blind to the fact that he does not see himself as a sinner reveals is blindness to the fact, for God's Word says he is. He is absolutely blind to His terrible condition; if he were but to get a glimpse of what he would one day face when he stands before an angry God, he would go mad, faint from the fear. But He cannot see.

2. He is ignorant. He does not know who God is, of what God expects of him. He is ignorant of the ways in which God governs His world. He is ignorant of God's presence beholding every deed, considering every thought, and recording every infraction against His holy law.

3. He is proud. If through the means of common grace, he is given a measure of understanding, he is too proud to acknowledge shortcomings, yet alone to seek counsel as to how his condition might be remedied.

4. He is rebellious/self-willed. He wants to be the master of his own life, not submitting to any man or God Himself; yes, he may attempt to change this or that, but it is only because he wants to do so, not because God may have commanded Him to do so.

5. He is enslaved. Bound by his wicked thoughts, controlled by his passions, led about by his wicked thoughts; unknowingly, he is enslaved to the devil (Eph. 2:2)

6. He is helpless. He cannot distinguish spiritual truth from error, he is helpless to do so. And even if he could, he does not have the power nor the will to walk in it. He is without strength to lift himself from his condition.

7. He is lost, unable to find His way to God; he is lost, alienated, and unable to find his way to God.

8. He is dead. He is void of the kind of life there is in the presence of God and describes man's inability to rise above his condition.

In short, we see the Bible teaching what most Protestants have taught since the Reformation: Man is **totally depraved**. Another definition other than that which was given above may be as follows:

Man was created originally in the image of God, perfect in holiness in His nature, being free from sin. But he transgressed the command of God and fell, resulting in he and his posterity becoming sinful in nature, subjects to satan and servants of sin, incurring the wrath of God whereby they suffer misery and death forever, incapable of recovery unless the Lord Jesus sets them free.

This requires some words of explanation. First, this does *not* mean that every man is at the worst state he can be, that every man expresses the full extent of his evil nature as much as possible at all times. And so, the doctrine is not *utter depravity*, or *absolute depravity*. But if it were not for the common grace of God each of us and all in society would manifest evil in our lives to the fullest measure. God has given us society, laws, a legal system, fear of man's opinion of us, and fear of temporal consequences, which things prevent us from manifesting our sinful natures more than what we do. It is not because of a love of God and righteousness that fallen man does not live more wickedly.

Second, the doctrine of total depravity does *not* mean that man is incapable of human good.

The solemn doctrine of total depravity does not mean that there are no parents with genuine love for their children, and no children who respectively obey their parents; that there are none imbued with a spirit of benevolence to the poor and kind sympathy for the suffering; that there are no conscientious employers or honest employees. But it does mean that, where the unregenerate are concerned, those duties are discharged *without* any love for God, any subjection to His authority, or any concern for His glory. Parents are required to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1, 4). Servants are to obey their masters "in singleness of heart, as unto Christ." Do the unconverted comply with those injunctions? No, therefore their performances not only possess no spiritual value, but are polluted. Every act of natural man is faulty. "The plowing of the wicked is sin" (Prov. 21:4) because it is for selfish ends. Then is it better not to plow at all? Wrong, for slothfulness is equally sinful. There are different degrees of enormity, but *every* act of man is sinful.

The condition of the natural man is such that in the discharge of his first responsibility to his Maker he is utterly unfaithful. His chief obligation is to live for the glory of God and to love Him with all his heart; but while he remains unrenewed he does not have the least spiritual, holy, true love for Him. Whatever there may be in his domestic and social conduct which is admirable in the eyes of others, it is not prompted by any respect for the divine will. So far as man's self-recovery and self-recuperation are concerned, his depravity is total, in the sense of being decisive and final. Spurgeon stated:

Man is fallen; every part and passion of his nature is perverted: he has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the soles of His feet: yea, is dead in trespasses and sins and corrupt before God. O pride of human nature, we plow right over thee! The hemlock standing in thy field must be cut up by the roots. Thy weeds seem like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them, till all thy beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble.¹⁸

Third, total depravity does *not* mean that unsaved man is incapable of discerning to a degree the distinction between good and evil. That he can and does is one cause of his aggravated condemnation. He has been given a conscience by which right and wrong can be distinguished. However, because of sin, even

¹⁸ Arthur Pink, *Gleanings from the Scriptures; Man's Total Depravity* (Moody Press, 1969), p. 124.

his conscience is corrupted so that he cannot discern the presence of all of his sin or the exceeding sinfulness of his sin.

Fourth, it *does* mean that he is incapable of doing anything so as to merit God's favor with respect to salvation. All his good deeds are performed without a view of glorifying God. It means in his natural state he is incapable of doing anything or desiring anything pleasing to God. It means that his loves and loyalties lie in things other than God and His will. He loves darkness rather than light. He chooses to serve self rather than God.

Fifth, by *total* depravity we mean that man is as bad off as he can be, that there is no part of him which has been unaffected by the fall--his mind with its understanding, his heart with its affections. His loyalty is supremely to himself and satan. It means apart from a work of God's grace in regeneration, he will continue in this state, for he is both unwilling to change and incapable of remedying his condition. It means that although free offers of pardon and salvation may be presented, because his will is so bent on ordering his own existence and he is unwilling to be subject to the law of God, if left to himself, will reject offers of mercy and persist in his self-directed existence to his own destruction. It means that man does not have a "free will" if what is intended by that term that he is free and able in and of himself to choose to respond to God's commands apart from being born again. It follows that if he is to be saved, God must choose to save him and work His grace in him so that he will be saved, for if left to himself, he cannot and will not choose God.