

**Sin, I**

We have introduced the doctrine of sin by a biblical description of it. We have made these points: sin is an offense against God (most importantly), it includes both guilt and corruption, it involves our thoughts, words and deeds, and it is deceitful. The last point helps us remember that this is not merely an academic study. It is academic—we do not apologize for seeking to love God with our minds and understand His truth, although we do know that we are not going to understand Him perfectly in this life. But it is more than an academic study because it is God’s truth and His grace claims our lives, and also because sin is deceitful. Therefore, each of us should take heed if we think we stand, as in 1 Corinthians 10, lest we fall.

The next topic is the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin. God had created Adam and put him into a perfect environment. He told the first man that he was free to eat from any tree in the garden except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Lord had warned him in Genesis 2:17, saying, “For when you eat of it you will surely die.” Then God created Eve as a helper for Adam. In Genesis 3, the crafty serpent, an instrument of Satan according to other Scriptures, spoke to Eve and questioned the prohibition that God had given to Adam, by saying, “Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?” Eve restated the privileges and prohibition that God had given. I do not make a big deal out of her adding “and neither should you touch it.” It seems to me it was rather smart of Adam and Eve to hedge the Law around a little bit. I would not criticize their communication, although I have heard that done on occasion. But I do not think that is the point. Satan then denied God’s previous warning with a frontal attack: “You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” He questioned God’s goodness. Eve and then Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. Their sin was disobedience, unfaithfulness, and more, to their Creator. I propose that the death that they suffered was both immediate and ultimate. Immediately they died in that they were cut off from fellowship with God. For the first time they hid from Him. They knew His presence, but now they hid from that presence and began blame shifting. God confronted Adam as the head of his home, Adam shifted the blame to his wife, she tried to pass it on to the serpent, and so forth. They hid from God and shifted the blame when God confronted them with their sin. I thus understand the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 to be profound in its diagnosis of human sinning and even strategies that we use to deal with sin, and also indicative of the grace of God. In grace God confronted Adam (to overlook sin would not have been good). In grace God excluded them from the garden. Before He did that, in grace He also made a promise of the Redeemer, promising that the seed of the woman would deal a fatal blow to the serpent’s seed who, in turn, would deal a real but less-than-fatal blow to the seed of the woman, and ultimately that seed is Christ. In grace God excluded them from the garden lest they eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in a sinful condition, or, if you will, lest they exist as justified sinners. I would follow the traditional notion of clothing them with coats of skins involving animal sacrifice and a picture of forgiveness. So they were justified, but they were being sanctified and they would have lived forever as justified but still being sanctified and never glorified creatures; that was not God’s will. In grace He excluded them from the garden. Later they died physically. They would not have died had they not sinned. Spiritual and physical death of human beings is the consequence of their disobedience to God. Genesis thus recounts the fall into sin of our first parents. It does not go into theological analysis of the Fall. Derek Kidner in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Genesis*, explains that “the doctrine is latent: the teaching is latent in the chapter that sin came into the world through one man and death through sin emerges in sharp focus only in the New Testament. The Old Testament uses the story little, though it witnesses to humanity’s bondage. It has the materials of the doctrine but has not formulated it.” The apostle Paul would be the one to formulate the doctrine. The New Testament presents the doctrine of Original Sin in Romans 5.

You may wonder what we are to make of the scant mention of Adam and Eve in the Scriptures after the Fall and the expulsion. The fact that Adam lived 900 years and we are not told about what happened during most of those years does not indicate he was not in fellowship with God. God tells us what is most important. Adam then disappears from the record as the head of the human race as the story continues, but Adam and Eve are appealed to in the New Testament maybe more times than we realize: in Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Timothy 2, and John 8—a number of times and in different contexts. In the Gospels Jesus says that in the beginning God made them male and female and gave them in marriage and so forth. So there are probably more references than we realize, but Adam and Eve do drop out of the story because the story goes on, not dwelling on the beginning, but showing God's punishing of sin in the flood, claiming a man, Abraham, and making a covenant with him, and so on.

On a side note, the Bible does not specifically correlate the fall of Satan and the fall of Adam and Eve, as some have said Satan fell in the Garden of Eden at the same time. It rather seems, to me, better to say that the Fall was before Eden but did not bring sin into the world, because Romans 5:12 is explicit that it is through the fall of Adam that sin and death of human beings came into the world. There could have already been decay in the animal kingdom. There certainly was death of some plants if Adam and Eve ate the plants. So this is speaking of human beings and not of angels or of animals and plants.

Let us look at Romans 5:12 to 21 in context. The theme of Romans is given in 1:16-17 where we read of the Gospel, the revelation of the righteousness of God. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, and then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed." Paul then appeals to Habakkuk by saying, "The righteous will live by faith." Paul interprets Habakkuk 2:4 in the New Testament sense to mean the justified person will have eternal life through the means of faith. Here is the theme of Romans, but shockingly the next verse does not go on to speak of the revelation of the saving righteousness of God at all. If we set up the paradigm, the revelation of the righteousness of God, it is as if the apostle takes the word "righteousness" out and puts the word "wrath" in and leaves it there until he finishes his task of bringing the world into submission before God. Finally, in Romans 3:20, Paul thinks he has sufficiently discharged his duty of showing everyone's guilt and corruption before God. The Gospel is the revelation of the saving righteousness of God. Verse 18 does not talk about the Gospel but rather the wrath of God, which is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness. People anywhere under creation suppress the truth as they twist the revelation of God into things He has made. In Romans 2:1-16, people also do it because "the law of God is written on their hearts." They know right from wrong and they have one of two responses: as in 1:32, they plunge headlong into the wrong, taking as many fellow miserable sinners as they can with them, or, as in 2:1-4, they are hypocrites and condemn the wrong in others but do the same things themselves. All along Paul has been shooting his arrow right for the center of the target, the Jews. In Romans 2:17-29, if he can show the Jews are guilty, he has got the world by the tail, and, in fact, the Jews are thrice condemned. They are condemned by God's revelation in creation. They are condemned by their abuse of the law written on the heart because they criticize the Gentiles and then do the same things. But most of all, they are accused by the law of God written on tablets of stone and in the Old Testament Scriptures. God's wrath is revealed against the world. The summary is given there in Romans 3:10-11: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God," and on it goes. The theme of Romans is the revelation of the saving righteousness of God. From 1:18 to 3:20 God takes the broom of the Law and stirs up the dust of sin so everybody is coughing and hacking—you cannot even see it is so bad—then he returns to his theme of the revelation of the saving righteousness of God in Christ. Romans 3:21 says, "But now a righteousness of God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify." It is another way of saving that has been revealed. Now he is ready to give his explication of the theme he announced in chapter 1 with

the backdrop of sin and its ugliness so that grace appears all the more beautiful. Someone has likened sin to a black or deep purple velvet jeweler's cloth on which the diamond of grace is placed in the middle—it just gleams against that background. From 5:21 Paul does talk about the revelation of the saving righteousness of God in Christ—that is the doctrine of justification. As a subset, he introduces the concept, including faith, in 3:21-23. But here he says, “A righteousness of God, apart from law, has been made known.” Law here is shorthand for law keeping, for seeking to establish merit before God by doing the law; compare 19 and 20, the two previous verses. Now apart from any notion of merit before God through law, the saving righteousness of God has been revealed, to which the Old Testament testifies (he wants to be clear when he puts aside law) it is not law altogether and it is not the Old Testament, but it is rather law as a system of human merit. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith was introduced all the way back in the thematic statement in chapter 1 and more than once: “To everyone who believes, the Jew and the Greek, the just will live by faith.” As soon as he returns to his theme, he again sings the song about faith. He still has not got sin out of his system, so he says, “There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Again he summarizes the need; it is remarkable.

Verse 24 does not follow on the heels of 23 logically, but rather it follows the first part of 22. Verses 22b and 23 are a parenthesis. Here is the way 24 ought to be read: “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus.” In 3:24-26, Paul sets forth the basis of justification as the saving work of Christ, which is understood under two pictures: redemption and propitiation. He does not develop the idea of redemption here—he merely mentions the word—but we get the concept from studying his writings. Leon Morris in his wonderful book, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, summarizes it in the three points. John Stott in his wonderful book, *The Cross of Christ*, uses four. They are both correct. Redemption assumes a prior state of bondage. We were bound in sin. Redemption involves the payment of a price—in this case, the blood of Christ, His own atoning death. Redemption then involves a consequent state of liberty, the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. So there is a state of bondage, the payment of a price, and the consequent freedom that follows from this wonderful work of redemption from the redeemer. Christ's saving work is also propitiation and this is the concept that Paul develops here in Romans 3. God presented Him as propitiation. It is a sacrifice of atonement but it is more than that. It is a sacrifice of atonement directed toward God Himself that turns away His deserved wrath. God presented Him, Christ Jesus, as propitiation in His blood through faith. He did this to demonstrate His justice because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Note first the redemptive-historical contrast between sins committed beforehand and at the present time. What is going on? Briefly, Paul is referring to the Old Testament time and right up to the time of Christ in which the sins of God's people were truly forgiven by God but without God having made a final sacrifice of atonement. God forgave, as it were, by writing Himself “I owe you notes” because the blood of bulls and goats did not really make a payment for sin. They made atonement and there was real forgiveness granted by God, but those sacrifices did not accomplish it. They were merely pictures. They were prophecies in action. They were types of the great sacrifice for sin that the Lamb of God would accomplish many years later. From God's side, forgiveness was always on the basis of Christ's work whether viewed prospectively or retrospectively. Surely no one would limit redemption to those three hours when the Son of God hung upon the cross. That would be folly. But in God's unfolding plan the Gospel was communicated through the sacrificial system. What a beautiful picture. Placing both hands on the animal indicated identification and confession of sins such that the victim now bore the sins of the one making the sacrifice. The animal was slain in place of the man and the blood was shed and the priestly pronouncement of forgiveness was on the basis of that atonement made by the animal. God cited that it is on the basis of the atonement to be made once and for

all by the Son of God at the fullness of time. So God in His forbearance, which means clemency, and His long suffering, had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. Ultimately the Israelites did not make atonement and neither did the animals. God left them unpunished and had a lot of “I owe you notes” to deal with. But at the present time, He has set forth His Son publicly on a cross, hanging between heaven and earth, to demonstrate that God is just. What does the cross have to do with the justice of God? It has much to do with it, as well as with God’s power, love, holiness, and wisdom. But here justice is in the foreground. The cross demonstrated God’s justice because now His wrath is poured out on His beloved Son. Unsaved people want justice and on the last day they will get it, yet they will not want it because they will be judged according to their thoughts, words, and deeds, and they will get justice. They will be damned for their sins. They will not be condemned because they have not heard the Gospel, although the Gospel is the only remedy. From studying the judgment passages, we find that judgment is based on what people have done. God will judge them according to what they have done. It will be fair and they will be lost. We, as Christians, do not get justice; we get grace. But in another way, we do get justice because God justly forgives us by punishing His Son with the punishment that our sins deserve, which is propitiation. Later on we will study the work of Christ and see that the work of Christ is directed toward us. It is directed toward the Devil and his angels to defeat them. It is directed toward us to cleanse us, among other things. Most profoundly, the cross of Christ is directed toward a holy God Himself; it is God-ward and it propitiates the wrath of God. It is thus “a satisfaction,” Anselm called it, although he did not understand it in the full sense of the reformers. Calvin and Luther plainly taught exactly what I am teaching, that the justice of God was demonstrated in the cross of Christ.

It is at the present time that God demonstrated His justice, from Romans 3:26, so as to be just and the justifier of every man and woman who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The problem of Romans is not the problem of modern people. The problem of moderns is this: how could a loving God condemn anybody? According to the Bible that is no problem at all. Read three chapters of the Old Testament and three chapters of Romans. God could condemn all of us justly and it would not jeopardize His love; He does not owe us His grace. It would not be grace if He did owe it to us. He could condemn everybody because we deserve it. The problem of the Bible is this: how can a holy God maintain His moral integrity and save anybody? How can God save people without compromising His law and His own character? How can He maintain His justice and still acquit sinners? The answer is in the cross, since Christ bore the pains of Hell for us when He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” I did not say it correctly for if I do, I break down weeping and then I cannot go on with class, but the Son cried out that cry of dereliction, a cry of despair of one forsaken by God. In the three hours on the cross He bore the pains of Hell. The divine mathematics is something like this: an infinite and eternal God-man in a finite period of time can suffer eternal punishment. It is a substitution and the church has always taught us substitutionary atonement. Because of who He is, He could suffer for three hours the equivalent of eternal punishment, if you will. In any event, in the Garden of Gethsemane He further had cried out three times asking the Father to remove the cup of God’s wrath from Him, but God would not. He could not and still forgive sinners. The atonement is thus necessary and it vindicates the justice of God. It enables Him to maintain the moral integrity of His character and to declare sinners righteous. Praise God for love like that and for the cross of His Son. By virtue of that cross, God acquits sinners. I say it reverently when a sinner believes in Christ as Lord and Savior, there is only one verdict the holy God can give. God must declare righteous anyone who runs to Christ for refuge. God would be unjust to give any other verdict. Am I suggesting the Father is constrained? Not against His will. He delights to declare righteous anyone who believes in His Son because it honors the Son, but God has no choice. Understand that God gives the faith in the first place and it is only His preceding grace that brings us to that place. Although we usually do not know it then—we learn later when we read in His Word how wonderful and extensive His grace is—but the basis of justification is the work of Christ. The means of justification is faith. Let us not get things out of order. The basis of

justification is not faith. The basis is Christ's work and the means—the instrument whereby we grab hold of it—is faith. In saying this, we do not minimize faith, but we establish it, we give it its proper place, and it is a wonderful place. Look at all those verses in Romans (3:27 to 4:25) that discuss faith. It is worthy of a great exposition, but this is theology class and not Romans class, although reformed theologians ought to know the book of Romans. After 5:1-11 and the benefits of justification, Paul again comes back to the basis of justification and our Original Sin passage. We somewhat forgot about sin for a while. I will talk about faith after I mention this: in this Adam-Christ parallel, the point is not Original Sin—that is a subsidiary, though significant, point—it is that God saves sinners on the basis of the work of Christ, now understood as righteousness. If there is lifelong righteousness of obeying the law that is in view, it is not the main thing. It is His one act of righteousness, as Paul calls it. It is His death on the cross. The basis of justification, considered negatively, is Christ's death absorbing the wrath of God in our place. I will call that a minus, a taking away of wrath. Here it is positively: Christ procuring grace and righteousness for us.

Relate this basis of justification to faith now. Faith is not the basis, but it is the means. I like to use the illustration of the medicine and the spoon. If you have a sick child in your house some night it can be a scary thing. Blessed are you if you have the life-giving medicine. Two of our boys have asthma (so I know of what I speak). If we have got the right stuff in the medicine cabinet or the refrigerator, they bounce back. It clears those air passages and enables them to breathe. You can have a hundred or a thousand gold-plated spoons in your house or any kind of spoon, all the way down to plastic, but if you do not have the medicine, the spoon does not save. Faith is like the spoon and Christ's saving work is like the medicine. (Ignore the fact that you really could pour medicine without a spoon, because the comparison breaks down there.) The spoon is important—it conveys the life-giving medicine from the bottle to the sick person. It is important. We do not belittle faith when we say it is the means of justification because it is the means—for it is not by works, but by faith—but the basis of justification is not faith. The spoon does not really save in an ultimate sense. It is merely the instrument. It is Christ who saves. I will illustrate it this way: you could have mountains of faith in unworthy objects and not only will that not save you, but it can also be deadly. The followers of cults are not saved no matter how much they believe. They can give their lives for a guru, but it is worthless, is it not? It is less than worthless. Luther was right in saying, "A little bit of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ saves because Jesus saves and His work saves."

We notice that, in the grand scheme of things in the context of Romans, this passage is about justification. It is secondarily about Original Sin and, in fact, Paul draws a great comparison and contrast between the first Adam and condemnation and the second and last Adam, the Lord Jesus and justification. We will pursue that contrast next time.