

# The Doctrine of Sin

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's a doctrine of sin, at some levels not the most attractive or important of Christian tenets, and yet, in my view, as that religion goes, it is quite fundamental to any appreciation of our Christian faith.

I would much prefer to reflect on the cross of Christ and the glory of Christ's person, but unless we understand sin and its solemnity and the damage it's done to a human existence, we cannot ever hope to appreciate those other more fundamental doctrines.

In my view, religion begins with a sense of sin and all our perceptions of the glory of Christ, the cross and all its grandeur.

These things depend upon our own awareness of the damage done to our lives by sin. As Selm said long ago when challenged by the cross of Christ and told that his doctrine was too solemn and too severe, said in reply, But you haven't pondered how serious is the weight of sin.

It could be shown that all defective views of the atonement and all deficient understandings of the person of Christ are in fact an expression of inadequate views of sin.

[ 1 : 52 ] It is in the conviction of sin. It is in the conviction of sin that all perception of God's word and of the glory of Christ have their root and their origin.

I want first of all to reflect on the nature of sin. And there are four New Testament words which I think encapsulate for us what sin is essentially.

There is first of all the word Hamartia. A word which means, I suppose specifically, a falling short of the target.

The archer draws his bow, aims at the mark, but somehow the arrow falls short of the mark.

In the same way, our human lives fall short of God's ordained target. That target is that we should solely must enjoy God and to glorify him forever.

[ 3 : 05 ] But our lives fall short of the glory of God. They fall short of the end ordained by God for us.

God gave us his own standards. God proposed his own objectives. But our lives don't measure up to the standards which God has set for us.

They fall short of God's own standards. They fall short also, I think, even of the standards set by our own human consciences.

And so, our own hearts condemn us. And so, first of all, sin is a falling short of the objective that God has proposed for us.

Our lives are defective as far as the standards are concerned. Secondly, there is the word adikia, which means inequity or unrighteousness.

[ 4 : 13 ] The basic idea here is that God has given us a decay or a norm, maybe a straight edge.

That's a builder's concept. And our lives don't conform to God's straight edge, to God's standard. Essentially, they're not straight. That is the physical metaphor. They don't measure up to God's straight edge or almost they're not on the level.

I could move that slightly into this area, that our lives aren't straight. We don't give other people their rights.

They're not right in that sense. In a way, we ourselves have no rights. But others have rights. God has his rights.

[ 5 : 21 ] Other men have their rights. But the unrighteous life doesn't give others their rights. And I combine those two ideas to say that our lives aren't on the level because they don't give others their due.

They don't measure up to God's norm. Because God's norm was that our lives be straight. And that means they should give others, that is God and men, their due.

Thirdly, there is the word *paraptoma*, which means simply transgression. First, our lives fall short of God's objective.

Secondly, they are unrighteous or inequitable. And thirdly, their transgressive sin is transgression of the law.

The picture here is very much of a road or a path. A path, a path ordained by God. This is the way. Walk ye in it.

[ 6 : 38 ] But we transgress. We go off God's road. We have sought out our own devices. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to our own paths. In other words, there is God's ordained way, God's road, the road of God's law, the way God wants us to live.

But along comes autonomous man and says, well I don't like this road, it's too narrow, it's too difficult, it's too straight. And so we turn on to what's supposed to us, a broad and attractive way with much companionship, with much companionship and many apparent attractions.

And so we transgress. You know the word, the parachurch, the para this and that, the paramilitary, beside. And so it is the road that lies beside God's road.

We go off God's road onto a road of our own choosing. God said to us, love the Lord your God, love your neighbour as yourselves.

[ 7 : 49 ] But we said, we don't like that road and so we choose a road, road we do. So because we imagine that God's road leads nowhere, God's road isn't very fulfilling.

But this other road that we choose seems to promise so much more precious, so much fulfilment.

And so we go on to this road instead.

And so there is the life that falls short. There is the life that's not straight. There is the life that goes right off the road like a car going into the ditch.

And then there is the fourth word, the word *anomia*. Sin is transgression of the law or more precisely, sin is lawlessness.

Now this is in many ways the most important definition we have of sin in the New Testament. It reminds us that God has given us his law, his own *nomos*, his own directives and rules for our lives, summarised for us in the Ten Commandments.

[ 9 : 02 ] But man has rebelled against that law. And man has simply transgressed that law, but man has gone against it with the full force of his being and his personality.

So that sin is not only transgression of the law, it's also want of conformity to the law. And it is at last rejection of the law and rejection of the lawgiver himself.

I mentioned before the whole problem of autonomous man, autonomous. The man wants to be a law to himself.

God meant man to live a heteronomous existence, that is an existence under the law of another. Or if you'll bear with me more narrowly, a theonomous existence, an existence under the law of God.

[ 10 : 13 ] But man wants to be autonomous. Because he wants to be his own law, to be law to himself. And so he throws off God's law by falling short of it, by defying it and by rejecting it in principle.

And so sin is persistent, constant violation of the law of God in our own personal lives. Let me pursue this for a moment a little bit further.

This definition reminds us that sin in its very nature is anomalous. The English word *anomalous* comes from the same Greek word, *nomos*, law, without law.

If something is an anomaly, that means it goes against all law, against all reason. And that is a marvellous way of reflecting a policy.

Sin goes against all law, it goes against all reason. Sin is an anomaly. Sin is the ultimate anomaly, as I mentioned, I suppose, in these lectures, time and time again.

[ 11 : 38 ] Now, I raise that because there is something in us that is very, very reluctant to accept. That sin can't be understood.

We always want to approach the question of sin by asking how and why. How did it come? Why does God permit it?

We want to reason through all those questions. And when I say that I don't have answers to them then, people say, Ah, you theologians.

And I come back to this. Ah, but you forget. Sin is the end of law. Sin is an anomaly.

And an anomaly by definition is what is beyond reason and what cannot be understood. Let me put that on two or three different planes.

[12:38] How did sin come into heaven? There was this great, brilliant angel, now known as Saint, Lucifer, the light bearer.

He was perfectly blessed. He was magnificently intelligent. He was morally upright and integrated. Why should he choose to sin? How can I explain the Luciferian decision to rebel against God? I'm asking how to explain the lawlessness of the light bearer. Why did the light bearer choose darkness?

And I'm saying I have no answer at all to that. You go back to man in paradise. There is the first daughter. He is perfectly blessed.

[13:41] He bears the image of God. He again has a colossal intelligence. He has a great future before him. There is no need, no defect, no pressure, no threat, no danger.

Nothing to be gained. The satanic argument took to us so absurd in Genesis 3. And yet that first Adam, that first man, he freely chooses to sin.

Why? You are asking again, how do we explain the lawlessness of Adam? Let me give you something which is to me an even greater dilemma still.

Take the Christian. This newborn woman. In her, there is the seed of God.

This woman is indwelt by the Spirit of God. This woman is complete in Christ. This woman is united to Christ.

[14:49] Rooted and built up in him. And yet this woman, with all these inner spiritual impulses, this great internal dynamic towards holiness, with all these resources, she yet chooses to sin.

She sins, and I say this advisedly, she sins in union with Christ.

She cannot say to God, Lord, suspend the union while I sin. Because at this level, what God joins together, man cannot put asunder.

And there is this huge, this monstrous anomaly of a redeemed and renewed soul, united to a risen Saviour, committing an act of lawlessness.

I wish that I could arouse and stir your emotions, stir you to anger, to a sense of outrage, because we are so tolerant of sin in ourselves.

[16:13] C.H. Spurgeon said once, the only heresy to which I have any inclination is perfectionism.

And I can understand that, because he was trying to express how absurd it is that a believer should sin.

The apostle John says, in fact, that it's impossible. He cannot sin because he is born of God. And if I dare, if you'll bear with me, John's reason has a very modern ring about it.

He says, because he is born of God, because the sperm of God is in that person. And therefore he cannot sin.

And my concern is that day by day, we do this absurd thing, and this impossible thing, and take it in our stride.

[17:19] As if it were the most natural and the most obvious thing in the whole wide world, that we should sin. And great damage has been done by our facile attempts to evade the force of John's teaching.

John wants us to know that when we sin, we are committing the gravest anomaly, and perpetrating the most appalling absurdity.

Because, to go back to Paul, we are sinning in union with Christ. Sin is that which ought not to be. And especially the believer, it ought not to be. Well, so much for the nature of sin. A word, secondly, on the origin of sin.

Now here there is a very sharp divide between modern theories and biblical theology. According to all the modern theories of anthropology, man at his point of origin is a sinner.

[18:31] He is only one mutation removed from the brute. He is controlled by his animal nature, by impulse, by appetite, by lust.

He is a savage. And in his very first breath, he is a sinner, a low-born, depraved sinner.

That theory, apart from its biblical status, labours under the enormous difficulty that it makes sin a necessity of our human existence.

It roots sin, shall I say, in the constitution of man, even in the metaphysics of man. It is saying to us, man has always been a sinner.

He is a sinner by necessity of nature, by genetic programming, by force of environment. He is still catching up there, you see again, with your deterministic causal nexus.

[ 19 : 49 ] This human being, who has never been anything but a sinner, and cannot be anything but a sinner. I say that because the Bible story of the Fall is a relief from the problems inherent in such a doctrine.

According to this modern theology, man as created by God is a sinner.

According to the Bible, man as made by God was upright. He was made in God's image. He was absolutely sinless.

I want us to grasp, if we can, this simple fact. That the doctrine of the Fall, apart from everything else, relieves God of the guilt of creating a sinner.

In every modern form of non-evangelical theology, man is a sinner at his origin. That means that the responsibility for his sinfulness devolves upon his Creator.

[ 21 : 12 ] In the Bible, God creates man upright. Let me put it to you this way. I have a horror of anything which reflects adversely on Adam.

I do not like Adam in any way belittled. I even hesitate to contrast him too unfavorably with Christ.

There is that contrast. But still, this Adam, he was glorious. He was holy.

He wasn't neutral. Ambivalent between good and evil. But he had a positive bias and inclination to the good.

He was a magnificent specimen and example of the creativity of God. And let's resist any suggestion that belittles him, that detracts from his intelligence or his blessedness or his power.

[ 22 : 23 ] Because whatever man is, he is by virtue of us falling away from what God made us in our first parents.

And so we have this contrast between modern theories and the Bible's teaching. The Bible says, When God made him, man was perfect.

How did sin come? Well, it came in as we recall through the fall. Two or three points on that. First of all, a reminder that sin began in heaven among the angels.

It comes into our human existence only through this fallen angel, Satan, the great tempter. And what does he do?

Well, he gets at Adam through Eve. And he gets at Eve through deception.

[ 23 : 27 ] Those two points might be a comment or two. He gets at Adam through Eve. I raise that simply because so very, very often, temptation can come to us through those who respect and those we love.

The attack on Adam wasn't frontal. It was devious. It was through the woman. Not only does temptation come at us through those we love, There is a more solemn thing that very often we ourselves are temptations to those we love.

If we have respect or prestige, authority or command the affection of our fellow men or women, that means that it is in our power to become spiritual dangers to them.

As Eve did to Adam. The tempter coming at him through his closest associate. And the tempter coming at her by deception.

Eve, the woman, was deceived. You remember how we have the emphasis that the servant was so subtle. He was more subtle than any other beast of the field.

[ 24 : 55 ] And he comes subtly and he comes deceptively at the woman. What does he do? He sows in her heart the suspicion that God is being very harsh.

He says to her, Is it true that God's forbidden all the trees of the garden? You see all the trees. And he sows the seed of suspicion.

And it s a remarkable piece of literature because Eve s response is to say, No, he didn t forbid all the trees, but only one. He said, Don t eat it.

Don t touch it. God had mentioned not touching it. The suspicion, you see, God is harsh.

It s a very tough thing obeying God. And there s so much more pleasure than if you go down another road.

[ 26 : 01 ] And she catches the mood. Not all the trees, but one tree. And he said, Don t touch it. And you see again how he says to the woman, Has God said you'll die? You won t die?

He again erodes her confidence in God's threat, in the sanctions of the law. But he says above all to her, look, God is holding you down.

If you take this fruit, you shall be as God, and you'll know good and evil. He has sown the seed of suspicion. He has sown the seed of doubt.

You shall be as God. And the poor woman, she violates God's law in the great confidence that thereby.

She's going to be like God. She's going to know good and evil. I don't want to go into the details too far, but there is the most marvellous anticlimax in Genesis 3. You will know good and evil.

[ 27 : 17 ] And remember the sequel. The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew. They knew that they were naked.

And that's all it was. The great promise, you shall know good and evil. The marvellous resolution of it.

They knew that they were naked. The important point is what I began with. That sin does not go back to creation.

It does not go back into a human constitution, into an environment. It was the result of man's free decision.

He chose to sin. Thirdly, the question of the extent of sin. How far does it range or reach?

[ 28 : 21 ] There are two answers to that. First of all, sin is universal. That is, it embraces every single member of the human race.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Now, of course, there are variations in guilt and in depravity. But the Bible is adamant that sin is absolutely universal.

It doesn't mean that conviction of sin is universal. There are many human beings and they live lives of perfect complacency, with no sense of sin.

You remember David after his own sin. After all he had done. And yet, God did send a prophet to tell him that he was guilty of an enormous iniquity.

It's difficult to believe, after all he had done. That he had no sense of his own sin. But it's such a great picture of conviction of sin.

[ 29 : 36 ] A reminder that what happens at conversion is that God tells us the truth about ourselves. You are the man.

So the Bible says to us that sin is universal. It's found in every social class, in every age, every level of intellect, every human being.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It's universal. But more important, it is total. You know the phrase, total depravity.

It's a notorious phrase, one that gets people's hackles up. It means this. That according to biblical teaching, every single aspect of our human personality is affected by sin.

Not only is sin universal, in terms of affecting every human being, but in every human being, it is total.

[ 30 : 48 ] It affects us at every single level. Now the phrase is often misunderstood. We don't mean by total depravity that all human beings are equally evil.

We don't mean that any human being is as bad as he might be. We don't mean that human beings are all devils or demons.

There are real gradations in sin. There is real progress in sin. And there is real distinction between the human and the demonic.

We mean by total depravity that having made due allowance for every single variation, for all the restraints of common grace, for all the adornments of personality that we find in our human situation, that yet in every human being, the totality of his humanness is affected by sin.

His mind is sinful. He can't think straight. He can't make proper deductions. He cannot pursue proper arguments.

[ 32 : 12 ] In the gathering of information, in organizing it, in reasoning from it, his intellect is sinful. It will function in a way that is anti-God.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God. Human thought processes, human presuppositions and assumptions, human logic, is enmity against God.

It is completely wrong to imagine that the reasoning faculties remain unimpaired. They don't. The distortions of sin, the anti-God bias, has come in even at the level of understanding of logic and intellect.

We think crookedly. We think in an ungodly way. It's through two of our human emotions. Our feelings are depraved.

The wrong things make us happy. And the wrong things make us sad. And over and above that, of course, we have all the neuroses, the depressions, the neurotic anxiety, the discontent, the discontent, that has come into our human situation.

[ 33 : 38 ] Because sin is there in our feelings. That's why we have so much disorder, clinically, in the realm of the emotions. All of it rooted in sin.

That doesn't mean, but that it may yield to clinical treatment and require such treatment. But the disorder itself is rooted in sin.

There is sin in our affections, in the love that we manifest. Love, eros, the most beautiful and the most noble thing in the world.

And the most destructive, the most horrific, the most cataclysmic force in the universe, the force of eros, of love.

Because there too, there is sin. Sin in the will as bondage. I long to gather you, the Lord, as a hand gathers her blood under her wings.

[ 34 : 44 ] But you were unwilling. You would not turn because the will is enslaved. It refuses to turn to God. So there is sin in the minds and in the emotions and the affections.

Sin in the will and sin in the conscience. We can't assume that ah, yet, but the conscience, God's monitor, it remains unaffected.

Not at all. Very often, the light that is in us is darkness. Many of the fiercest of the church's persecutors have been men of stringent conscience.

Remember Saul of Tarsus. He thought he was doing God's service by strangling this church and its cradle. You'll find that time and again in history that those who have been most virulent in harassing God's church have been men of great principle and are standingly upright and are standingly upright Roman emperor and yet conscience and build to persecute the church of God. you yourselves and you know as you grow and mature you know you can't go by conscience because your conscience needs to be enlightened.

[ 36 : 18 ] Our consciences are depraved. and so there is this great fact this terrible fact that we are depraved totally.

Now it seems to me one of the great marks of a Christian that we have no quarrel with this doctrine. It is the one thing we contest empirically for ourselves and we know it's through.

I may have doubts at some points in my life about various aspects of biblical teaching but there is one thing I have always known assuredly that when the Bible says that the heart is deceitful above all things and hopelessly wicked that is absolutely true.

That's the way it is with me and the way it is with you. And at that point the Bible I think receives an unqualified empirical vindication because we know it's right when it says that all the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually.

The man and woman of God they know these things to be absolutely true. Will we speak of this total depravity? Let me put that whole thing another way.

[ 37 : 44 ] This in fact is broadly what we mean by original sin. That every human being is characterized by total depravity.

It's what the Anglican articles call birth sin. What philosophers call radical evil. Evil at the root of personality. And the Bible tells us it's the way that we are born.

My mother also me conceived in guiltiness and sin. This man went to God and he said to God Lord it's not the things I've done recently.

It's not that alone that bothers me. In fact it isn't what I've done that bothers me at all. It's the way I am. It's the shape.

The whole shape is wrong Lord. I was shaped but in an equity. And I went wrong I was wrong right in the womb.

[ 38 : 52 ] The whole mould was wrong. The whole programme was wrong. The trouble is me. My shape. I abhor myself. That's what Job said.

And we're saying the Bible is saying to us that this total depravity goes right back to the root. It goes right back to the womb right back to the birth.

That's the way that we were born. What the content of this is is expressed in the short of Catechism in this way.

the want of original righteousness and the corruption of our whole nature. Now in any book on Calvinism written by an academic or a cultured man of letters you'll find reference to this doctrine.

And you'll find greater scorn poured upon this whole idea. Total depravity corruption of our whole nature. And yet that is the Bible's teaching.

[ 39 : 59 ] The corruption of our whole nature. Humanness is found in every human being and all the humanness found in every human being.

Our whole nature every aspect of our humanity is affected by by this sin by this corruption.

You see some of the philosophical theologians have said to us that sin is a defect. It is the absence of equality. It's negative.

It's the absence of good. But the Bible says to us that this sin is no mere defect. It is a corruption. it is a putrefaction. It's a cancer in the life of the human being. A rampant productive energetic multiplying self propagating entity.

[ 41 : 01 ] It's fierce. It's fire. It's living. It's a real force this sin. The corruption of our whole nature. Not a defect as Augustine said.

But a tremendously powerful force. while our century has experienced its force in a degree beyond precedent in human history.

We've seen it in the horrors of the pogroms and the horrors of the Holocaust. We've seen what human beings who are not savages but human beings who in Germany were literate, were artistic, were creative, were intellectuals, were sensitive, were good fathers, were good husbands, were loyal friends.

That's the horror of it. These men weren't monsters, they were human beings. And I don't think we have the right to stand by and say that we don't belong with them, that they're highly different from us, that we could never have done that ourselves.

because there is God showing us in the macrocosm, this great picture, this great tabloid of what our nature is capable of, given the requisite conditions, so much for the extent of sin.

[ 42 : 30 ] It's universal across the whole human race. It is total, affecting every single aspect of our human functioning.

And what of the effects of sin? We've seen something of its nature, its origin, its extent. What about its effects?

I suppose that we responded once by saying that sin leads to death. And of course, that's through death in all its forms.

Let me put it in a different way if I can for a moment. I think in Genesis 3, the key theme, the key element with regard to the effect of sin is not simply death, but alienation.

The alienation that sin has brought into human existence. And that goes along three or four separate lines. there is alienation first of all within man himself.

[ 43 : 44 ] They knew that they were naked. I don't want to press that too far, but it really means that they were overwhelmed with a sense of shame, with a sense of the vulnerability of their own lives.

They had to hide themselves from God, they had to cover up before God. They were divided, they were ashamed of themselves. That's a tremendous problem.

That's the source of agorosis, the divided self, the self at war with self. That's the problem of the depressive, the problem at last of the schizophrenic person.

That we have this division, this tension within ourselves. I mentioned earlier on that in conviction of sin we are brought to self-loathing.

And yet I feel bound to make the point before you go away with an entirely wrong impression. But it is also so important within salvation, redeemed by God as God's sons and daughters, to learn to live with ourselves.

[ 45 : 01 ] Because I believe that this sense of shame, this self-loathing is taken away in salvation or should be. Because I'm told there that I am precious to God, I matter to God, God accepts me.

And although it is important to have and to know conviction of sin, I do believe too that we in the Reformed Churches need to remind ourselves of the importance of this as well, that God has patted us on the head and said, you're very, very precious.

And that from that point on we begin to build a legitimate and God given self-esteem. and I think that if there is an above average prevalence of neurosis within some believing communities, it is due to the neglecting of this aspect, this voice from God that says you are the salt of the earth.

It's a remarkable thing the Lord, she said away back in Matthew chapter 5 and she would say it so emphatically using a personal pronoun which she didn't need to use grammatically to emphasize you, you are the salt of the earth.

And I really want God's people, want us all to heal, if we're in Christ to hear God sing that to us. Certainly we're sinners, we know our name but in redemption God has given us back, ourselves put together again, integrated.

[ 46 : 44 ] And I've got a point in life where I feel that I need the motivation not only of criticism and denunciation but I need every day a word of encouragement.

I need someone, God to say, look, you do matter, you have, you yourself, I accept you as you are. You know that's what love is, all of you know that.

Love, the love that takes a person on board with a view to changing him, that love is doomed to fail. Love accepts as one is.

That's a tall order in my case but that is still the way it's got to be. And God I think wants us to know that. So there is this within ourselves of this alienation of the person from himself.

They knew that they were naked. there is alienation too between person and person. Adam and his wife fall into instant tension because of their sin.

[ 47 : 45 ] The woman whom thou gavest life. And there is the whole relationship has fallen apart because sin has divided. They were going to be like God do you know.

They probably didn't know that. Or did they know? Maybe they did know. that within the Godhead there was the most marvelous and the most intimate fellowship of person with person. And here they do this thing to make them godlike and divine.

And they at once show how ungodlike and how undivine they are by falling into the disaccord and disharmony.

And again is to me such a great part of redemption that God does not simply reconcile us to himself but reconciles us to one another.

That middle wall of partition in Ephesians 3 let's remind ourselves all the time it is not a partition between God and man it's a partition between Jew and Gentile between man and man between group and group and God has taken that barrier down in the Lord Jesus Christ and it's so important we want to evangelise the world effectively to ensure that our own churches are places of reconciliation where people find acceptance and harmony and accord so there is alienation within the man alienation between man and man alienation too between man and his environment the ground is cursed I don't need to go far into that but man and the created order working in such harmony man subduing it man exercising dominion and then in sin it all goes wrong and all the tensions we have today with our own environment a very important area too of

[ 49 : 57 ] Christian reflection that we have to earn our bread by the sweat of our fists and sadly the way we do so and do so so responsibly is often piling up problems for those who are coming after us because in our stewardship we are so prodigal and so vandalistic tension between man and his environment sin did all of these things but above all they've got this they've put alienation between man and God Adam hides from God he hides from God he was made for God and now he's on the run from God and he's covering himself with fig leaves before God I mentioned before you see what sin does to the intellect it's brought out very powerfully in the literature of

Genesis Genesis 3 this man who had been so clear headed and so clear sighted moments before and now he's hiding from God under a tree thinks God can't see him under a tree that's what the story tells us his mind has gone haywire and none because of the state in that same position we think that God doesn't see us when we sin we think we can hide from God because of the rationality we've been so divided from God that's what sin does it alienates along all those perspectives man from himself man from man man from his environment and man from God let me close on two notes first of all by reminding ourselves of the fact that sin remains in the regenerate it remains and regenerate now it seems that it ought not but it does we are born again we are

Christians and yet it can rage within us this fact of indwelling sin the lawlessness of our own Christian lives and can't you take every one of those four words I mentioned our lives fall short of our potential you know that as a Christian our lives are not straight they don't give God or others their due our lives are transgressive how marvelous that Isaiah should say all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his own way not the Gentiles but we we Christians that's where it begins the sins of the church of God and the people of God we have turned and we've turned everyone to his own way our own particular proclivities his own personal and distinctive sins and the lawlessness the anomalous the absurd of your own life you know what it is to stand over your own conduct your own feelings your own ambitions your own failures in utter and total despair what on earth am I doing how did I get here what am I where am I how how on earth am I in this

particular situation because our lives as Christians are so anomalous though I don't say of course that they're more anomalous than those of others but I do hope that our perceptions and sensitivities and sensibilities are more heightened than those of others and it's a huge mistake to forget the power and force and prevalence of this factor in our own lives in my view you have to build a whole spiritual strategy on this fact of your own infirmities as you plan to use your liberty and do this and do that and go there and go here you have to bear in mind all the time ah yes but I'm spiritually so inflammable and with the best word in the world

I must reckon with that fact this intensely personal fact that in me there is sin and that one thought from hell one suggestion one occasion to sin can set my whole life ablaze and that means that we Christians have to live in my judgment very very far from the boundary you cannot really live spiritually on the at the outer limits of the permitted that's a great fallacy you see I think that so often we do that how far can I go and so you go as far as is legal and you forget that the limits of the legal may not be the limits of your tolerance of temptation and you must learn to draw the boundary not at the at the legal but at the level of your own temptability it isn't an abstract seeing this in dwelling sin it's so personal it's me in me there is this in dwelling sin even though I am in Christ indwelt by his spirit born again and so splendidly resourced to use the current jargon and yet for all that for all those resources still so temptable and the last one I want to make is this it is to all this sin that Christ is an answer is the answer

I said before that the evangelical religion begins with a sense of sin I believe that if we eliminate this emphasis you will never produce evangelicals evangelicalism is not first and foremost belief in an inerrant bible it begins with a certain kind of self understanding or the knowledge of our own guilt our own depravity our own alienation from God and that is the best in fact in my view it's the only hermeneutic the only key to the scriptures is the sense of sin the only proper standpoint from which to you Christ is as a lost sinner the only proper perspective on the cross is the perspective of a convicted sinner it must begin with that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost and what a splendid job the Lord has made of it on the two levels which I've hinted at

[ 57 : 17 ] I suppose often in these talks the forensic and the ontological Christ has the total answer Christ puts me right with God all my sins forgiven my reputation vindicated and I given the legal status of a son a daughter a member of the family of God that's my standing I come back to it time and time and time again I have exactly the same relationship to God as Jesus Christ what is that Christ is a son what am I I am a son ah but there's a difference you say yes there is indeed he begotten I adopted but there is no difference in the rights an adopted son has the same rights as a born son you ask any solicitor that's the position that's where we are we have fellowship with Christ in his whole standing before God

God in Christ has put us so absolutely right he has dealt with all the guilt of mercy the sad thing is that we so often leave it there and that we forget that Christ is also the answer to sin ontologically and structurally Christ puts us right with regard to the power and prevalence of sin and in the Bible that in fact is the overriding concern in the Bible the cross of Christ the whole redemptive work of Christ does not terminate on justification it terminates on sanctification to conform us to the image of his son and Christ will so deal with us that our lives will one day no longer fall short of the mark they will no longer be inequitable they will no longer be transgressive they will no longer be lawless but our lives will conform exactly to God's objective for us our life will meet the target our life will be straight our life will be on God's road our life will be lawful and Christ will enter all the alienation he'll put us together within ourselves he'll put us right with each other he'll put us right with our environment

I believe that the great mandates given to the first Adam are republished in the last Adam and I expect at the present level of my thinking I expect that in the world to come we should engage not only in religious pursuits but also in scientific and technological ones because he has put under the last Adam the world come whereof we speak but above all Christ will end the alienation between ourselves and God and bring us so close to God that it passes our belief his prayer was that where I am there they may be also I shall be as close to God as near to God psychologically spiritually emotionally effectively I shall be as close to God as his only begotten son

Jesus Christ himself sin is the plight of man Christ is the remedy for that plight the advantage of reflecting on sin as the plight is it will teach us as never before to appreciate the glory of God's preparation and God's remedy and the gospel of his grace I shall leave it there any questions would you say that while Adam and Eve were in their state of innocence that the ten commandments of

the law of

God were operative but because they had not transgressed they were not shown forth in other words if you walk about this land and that you don't break the law in a sense you're innocent of breaking the law so would you say these laws were operative then had been almost put into I think the law was at that time written on Adam's heart and it wasn't simply negative in terms of thou shalt not it was positive thou shalt love and Adam was certainly loving both God and man in his unfallen state and in fact he was obliged to do so he was bound to love both God and man but the law is in a negative form because we are prone by nature to resist the law and therefore it says it's put in form thou shalt not to counter our own hostility to the law but law is fundamentally positive if I can be a bit bolder for a moment

[ 63 : 17 ] I believe that Christ is still fulfilling the law in heaven he is loving God and loving man and I believe that we ourselves will obey that law eternally we won't feel the law as any kind of burden or weight but we shall delight to obey God's law and the Lord himself said that in Psalm 14 if I to do thy will I take delight he loved to do God's will I think it would be unfortunate to assume that law is oppressive it isn't oppressive to the God fearing God loving person because then to love God is spontaneous but spontaneity doesn't mean that it isn't a requirement so I think that certainly yes there was law in paradise it wasn't on tablets of stone and it wasn't negative but the obligation to love God and man was certainly a part of Adam's existence any other questions that I've come across is that there are certain people who believe that sin was an accident that God had foreseen that was our mind and hiccup in this creative space of order apart from believing that there is nothing that isn't in God's total control

I haven't been able to come up with a better I don't think you like is there another reason why sin was allowed to happen in God well I can maybe be facetious for a moment it seems to me to be a fairly major not a minor hookup at all but a fairly major hookup that's what I think you're asking why did God permit sin the only answer offered that historically has been the answer given by August in terms of the phrase Felix culpa or happy fault the view that it's a good thing that Adam fell and it's a good thing because had Adam not fallen Christ would not have come and that because there is so much glory and grace and mercy shown in Christ we should shall I say be thankful for the fall because he gave us this revelation of

God in Christ Christ I recoil from that argument I recoil from it because it is justifying sin and I come back to the point that sin absolutely ought not to be that nothing can justify it and that it really is utterly and totally anomalous I do not myself at all understand why God permitted it there is no use saying that if Adam hadn't fallen Christ might have come in some other form because that's a universe we can't assume exists and I don't go beyond frankly the endeavor to instill a sense of horror that sin did actually occur and in my own judgment not even all the good that has come out of incarnation at torment and salvation can justify or explain to me why

God permitted it and I prefer to leave it frankly as an anomaly in big bold letters and to refrain with speculating as to why God permitted it yes do we have much light from the scriptures as to how sin is present in hell I don't think with any direct light or much direct light I can argue inferentially that sin is receptacle of all the abandoned sinners who have ever been men and demons I can infer that they retain their character in that receptacle and that they keep on sinning that hell is a place not only of endless ungodliness but also of endless inhumanity and hatred and I can probably infer as well that the sinners who are condemned to hell progress progress in sin and become more and more self-centered more and more inhumane more and more demonic and more and more wretched but

I cannot begin to at the moment collate verses from all the new testament which would help me fill in the outlines beyond that but am I meeting your question David at the right level maybe I'm not grasping it yes I think that's the general idea that there are no innocent people in hell I believe that the judgment day God will listen to every single plea and mitigation we can offer and every excuse we will receive it's just evaluation I would say that God will send no one to hell if he can help it he will send only those who must go if it's the right thing to do because he has no pleasure in condemning the wicked but I do believe that those who are condemned to hell will retain their hellish and demonic character while in hell and that they will hate

[ 69 : 46 ] God and hate one another with consummate and progressive hatred it is a place of self destructiveness and a place also where we are destructive towards others I have compared it I suppose often to a black hole in which there is from which no light can escape and upon which it's

difficult to make pronouncements but it's a place which is utterly and totally anomalous it is without law without restraint without light without love there is no mitigating factor whatever in hell it is a place where men experience God's wrath without any mitigation of any kind as Christ did of course on the cross of Calvary he did not spare his own son in that sense the punishment of sin is sin it's the assignation of the soul to an endless and progressive career in sin in company with other sinners against whom we shall sin and who will sin in turn against ourselves and that combination is the formula

I think for infinite misery well I would think very much along those terms Mr.

McLeod I couldn't begin to quote chapter and verse for this either but the point we have to make here is that temperament is not modified instantly by conversion and that people who have certain defects of character before conversion will carry those with them into their converted state and for example if you're depressive that's going to carry over into converted state if you have a drink problem before conversion that again may be carried with you into converted state and I think that will be continued but I do also hold of course that grace does modify temperament but it does so progressively not instantaneously it can be a lifelong process to modify temperament can I have a shot there is another question can I have mine first and then I'll have another one if you would be able to develop at all what you said about the balance between conviction and self loathing recognising our self worth in

Christ what for instance might you be able to say to a person like myself who perhaps needs to ponder more what I am in Christ and is a bit fearful that through that I may be tempted to neglect the knowledge of sin that would lead to conviction and hopefully sanctification I think that questions of balance are always very difficult to answer and I am tempted to say go to both extremes on this in a way we cannot overemphasize our own sinfulness or make over allowance for it it is such a powerful and a pervasive force in our own lives but the answer probably lies does it not Mr.

Mackay in saying that yes you are an appallingly guilty sinner but even as you are God loves you and you begin to plant your foot on that particular rock self-esteem does not depend in my judgment on being generous to our own faults it means recognizing them openly in actual fact I would tend to suggest if I think on my feet on this one that it is from self-esteem that the capacity comes to assess oneself properly I think that if you don't have self-esteem given to you by God as one of his own children it's very difficult to face truth about yourself but if you do have the security that whatever the truth about you is God accepts you God loves you I think that does enable you to explore and to accept the truth about yourself so in that sense

[ 74 : 47 ] I really am going to both extremes I would say in my own case I think the self-esteem bit can be overworked in current thinking but not in our circles and in my own view self-esteem must exist over against them in coexistence with the most horrendous self-knowledge and I won't see those two as being in tension I do come back to this that the moment I know that whatever I am God accepts you literally it makes no difference to God that on that point on I really am equipped to get on with it but it does become difficult is at a practical human level you know like when one is a church in Glasgow and you then begin to work out who are you to do it and at that point what I do is quite simply I say well I didn't ask they asked so it's up to them you know

I mean that may be a simplistic way but I've said more than once that the one reason that I preach is that the church asked me to and I lay the whole onus for that on the church and I hope it isn't a cop out but that is in the context again of what one feels and knows about oneself but I do think that Luther would have taught us that we are to agree with the devil when he says the wolf thinks about us and we are then to say but the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses from all sin and you remember you hurl the ink well at the devil as well or your word process I suppose would be more accurate but that would be a bit expensive but whatever it is no I kept that question a long time you said Christ is the answer to sin structure could you say a little bit about what you understand about structural sin and in what sense

Christ is the answer to well I was well I was coming to this at the point that in the reformed tradition the protestant tradition we are so conscious of justification by faith and forgiveness of sins and peace with God and we do tend I think to the importance of transformation and I think that in the new testament that is a very important aspect of the whole of our salvation the transforming of our characters structural sin means to me that our personalities are warped bent distorted divided and neurotic and that in Christ these problems are progressively eliminated and that he deals with our shape and he conforms us to his own form his own image and at last even to his own glory difficult

to sort of put this more pictorially but I think in a way that original sin means that the original mould was wrong we came out the wrong shape we are then put into a new mould in Christ and we come out at last

Christ shaped and that would mean to me that the problems of intellect and emotion and affection and will and conscience and relationship these are to me all structural problems now if you have a different psychology and you are a Freudian or whatever it would mean that Christ deals with your ego and your id and so on that you dealt with at that level but I suppose that's probably old hat by this time of day but however you analyse human nature I believe that Christ puts you together again and that can be defined either as in terms of our becoming Christ like or our being given the capacity to love because God is love and at the end of the day to be Christ shaped is to be loving God loving and man loving and that is the goal I think of structural change in the Christian to equip him for love and that can include

God bless MacKay's question both the ability to love and the ability to be loved which is a thing that many Christians find very difficult to accept either God's love or other human love there's something in us in the perversions of our egotism that we can often feel important if we can see ourselves as unwanted and that gives us a ground to quarrel with God and with reality and that's why I think that despite expectations the self-esteem born of the assurance that God loves you is not egotistical it in fact takes from you all ground of quarrel with God and it can be more difficult to learn to accept love than it is to learn to give it John would you like to say anything about the old man in death and death

[ 80 : 30 ] I need to see my audience first of all well my view on that as you may know Mr.

Hurt is that the old man was crucified at the moment of reunion with Christ and that is simply to try to do justice to the Bible's own way of putting it the old man is the unregenerated self he is a pre-Christ man and that man no longer exists he has been ended annihilated in new birth and union with the saviour it's very important to distinguish that old man from indwelling sin indwelling sin has not been crucified it is still very much a reality but indwelling sin in my understanding belongs to the new man and that's the anomaly it's very comforting to say when I sin that was the old man but I don't I can't do that because my old man no longer exists and I can't blame him for anything so I must blame the new man for what

I do I'm not two men I'm only one man I'm a new man and that new man sins and that new man sins are anomalous and intolerable and must be attacked in the most explicit way possible I also dislike to hear people talk of the believer having two natures because that is a confusion in my judgment in so far as Christ has two natures human and divine a believer has only one nature a human nature now that human nature can exist in four states innocence fallen regeneration and glory four states of that human nature but it can't be two natures so I have one nature which is human and it is in a state of regenerateness and in that state I carry this burden of indwelling sin but the old man in my view ceased to exist the moment

I became a Christian I think you could allow one follow up question to that but no new questions it's the sort of area where somebody might immediately want to say oh but what about so if that sort of question is hanging very out they might ask what balance as you did well I think you're lucky that's a group of the oh this one Mr.

McDonald you've got a question Alastair you're right yes that would be a last I'll ask Dr. Ford that is a question that they conduct occasionally trying to witness to someone and I'm thinking here about the the the biblical option of how Phil was had and sinned the punit tour who was in federal head with him who sinned in Adam how would we answer someone who says that they had no consent in that federal relationship with Adam that they weren't present when Adam sinned and they didn't share in Adam's first transgression and they say to us it would appear that they were innocent but they were made guilty because of Adam's sin God accepted I know it's scriptural but is the doctrine of our union with

[ 84 : 30 ] Adam the only reason or biblical reason why it's just I made a decision before I came tonight not to mention that doctrine at all because it is a far bend doctrine very much one I think for the family of God and not as a rule for the outside because it is very complicated Paul's teaching is clear that the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to all his natural descendants the response to your difficulty would have to be that nobody is condemned for that guilt alone that it is not imputed to any innocent person it is imputed only to people who are corrupt in their whole nature and

I would need to argue that only in the context of that depravity and corruption are people condemned the complication with it is the death of infants who in Romans 5 arguably are subject to death simply for Adam's sin the other complication there is that that does not mean that they're condemned to a lost eternity so you can see why I was trying to I was going to emphasize that doctrine at all but it only occurs in Romans 5 it is so specific as to be quite indubitable you know that the imputation is a reality but there is no imputation apart from corruption and there is no condemnation on the basis of that

Adamic sin alone now at college we did at one point discuss this in reform theology there's been a divisional opinion on it in that some theologians argued for an immediate imputation of Adam's sin in other words guilt was imputed to the innocent which was Hodge's position Dabney contended against that that it was imputation only to the corrupt and depraved and that you don't have imputation in isolation from corruption and depravity so we're going into a very scholastic and academic area there but no doubt there are those who raise that difficulty and my short answer is that God does not impute Adam's guilt to the innocent he imputes it to people who are corrupt in their whole nature and I would challenge anyone who wrote the Bible that anyone is condemned to hell because of Adam's sin alone I said we would leave it there and a wee bit relaxed because of your brief mention of infants now it may be that you you leave it there for tonight but it does come up again and again and again both within the family and outside the family and I just wonder because of those who constantly have the temptation to worry about these things if you did want to say a little bit more well

I don't go beyond the confession's own statement on this that elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated by Christ through his spirit the confession doesn't tell us whether all such infants are elect many of them or few of them it simply says that elect infants dying in infancy maybe and so on or are regenerated and saved by Christ through his spirit I was saying in response to all such question that the Bible does not give us reason to believe that any infant dying in infancy is lost there is really no evidence in either way on that particular on that question and it is open to us to believe that all such infants are in fact elect and therefore going to be saved that's a complication I put on to the difficulty in Romans 5 is that Paul explained to us that infants die because of Adamic sin Paul does not go on to say that they go to hell because of Adam's sin and I will not draw that inference but the 19th century men like Hodge and Kuyper and Warfield they were very very confident that all infants dying in infancy were elect but I myself although I would like to believe that I do not have biblical warrant for it and I've got to stay with this other statement that there are elect infants but we don't know just what proportion such infants constitute I'm sorry that at so many points I have to confess that I don't know it's much harder for me than it is for you let me say I would love to be confident in all those areas but I've got to hold back because I don't really have light on some of the questions and part of my function is to communicate to you the need for restraint as well and to know when you're falling over the cliff and revelation has ceased

[ 90 : 19 ] I don't know but it's one of the one I would just say one of the most instructive aspects of these lectures that we are being lectured by a professor that is able to say I don't know and we thank you for that Joe I don't