

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	39		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Ephesians 2:1-6		
Date:	February 9, 2025 (a.m.)		

CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN FOR OUR SALVATION (Part III)

Original sin (*peccatum originalis*), said Martin Luther, was not, as the medieval scholastics taught, the mere absence of original righteousness but “the loss of all uprightness and of the power of all our faculties of the body and soul and of the whole inner and outer man.”¹ Luther describes this fallen condition as *incurvatus in se*, “curved in on themselves,” i.e., prone to evil, loathing the good, preferring darkness to light, and foolishness to wisdom.² The Apostle Paul does not say “in Moses all die,” or “in Abraham all die,” but he does declare, says Luther, very forcefully “in Adam all die.” Luther’s emphasis on original sin is as strong as it is constant. By one sin Adam makes all those “who are born of him guilty of this same sin of his and gives them what he has, though it is quite foreign to them. In like manner, Christ makes all those who are born of Him righteous and saved through His righteousness, which is foreign to them and unmerited by them. Therefore, as we are damned by a foreign sin (*alieno peccato*), so we are redeemed by a foreign righteousness (*aliena iustitia*).”³

“Anyone concerned about the problems of life,” observed Martin Lloyd-Jones, “and the world as it is today, is confronted by two undeniable facts. First there is the universality of sin. Of course all do not call it sin, but even so they have to admit and to confess this, that there is something which is spoiling and ruining life. They have to admit further, that mankind at large seems to prefer to do that which is wrong rather than that which is right; that if you tell a child not to do a thing, he will want to do it immediately and will, as often as not, proceed to do it. The man of the world admits this frequently without your asking him and says gratuitously, *Of course, I am not claiming that I am a perfect saint*. He is ranting thereby the universality of sin. There is no such thing as a *perfect saint*. It is a fact that sin is universal. The second fact is the universality of death. *Every man who lives is born to die*, as the poet Dryden puts it. Think of a baby born five minutes ago. *Ah, you say, there is someone at any rate who is beginning to live*. But I have an equal right to say, *There is someone who is beginning to die*. The moment you come into this world you are beginning to go out of it. The moment you breathe for the first time it is only one of a series that is going to lead to the last. *It is appointed unto all men once to die*, says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the two facts raise the question, *How do you account for the universality of sin and the universality of death? Why are we all what we are by nature? Why this conduct, this misbehavior of which we are all guilty? And why do we all die? Why are those things universal?*”⁴ Paul traced the fall of man to the one act of Adam in the Garden of Eden, we learned in our last study. There, acting as our representative, Adam failed his probation, and as a result plunged the whole race, for whom he stood, into the guilt of sin. His sin was imputed to the race universally. Thus, Paul can say, “for all sinned” (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). In fact, other things resulted. Not only was the first sin of Adam imputed to the race, but man has also inherited a corrupt nature, called by the older theologians *peccatum originalis*, original sin.⁵ In addition, he now has an inability to respond savingly to the Word of God (cf. Rom. 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14), and eternal punishment is sure to come to him if there is no response to the gospel of Jesus Christ in faith. It is true to say, in the figurative sense of idiom, that man is now “under foreign domination.” There is another point that Paul makes in the section we are to study that is interesting, as

well as important. Adam is said to be a type of Christ, that is, an illustration of our Lord. Of course, as one studies the section, it becomes evidence that Adam is a type of Christ largely by contrast, at least here. There are some other ways in which the first Adam illustrates the Last Adam, if the total biblical picture is considered. That we shall do when we come to the matter later in this study. We turn again now to consider the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity and some of the things that arise from it. We pointed out that sin, condemnation, and death came from the first Adam, while righteousness, justification, and life come from the Last Adam. The master-thought of the section that begins with verse 12 of Romans 5 and concludes with verse 21 is the unity of the many in the one. Adam and his posterity are affected by his sin; while the Last Adam and His people are affected by His righteous act, that is, the victorious redeeming work of the cross.⁶

Whatever Became of Sin? This was the intriguing title of a book written in 1973 by noted psychologist Karl Menninger. He complained that the loss of the sense of sin was undermining all sense of moral responsibility. The last two decades have demonstrated that Menninger's concerns were well-founded. More recently, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. has perceptibly written that this same loss of the sinfulness of sin has permeated the church. Contrasting the older (and biblical) view of sin with the contemporary therapeutic one, he writes: "the newer language of Zion fudges: *Let us confess our problem with human relational adjustment dynamics, and especially our feebleness in networking.* Or, *I'd just like to share that we just need to target holiness as a growth area.* Where sin is concerned, people mumble now. Why should we speak up? Why retrieve the awareness of sin? Why restate the Christian *doctrine* of sin? The reason is that although traditional Christianity is true, its truth saws against the grain of much in the contemporary culture and therefore needs constant sharpening. Christianity's major doctrines need regular restatement so that people may believe them, or believe them anew. Its classic awarenesses need to be evoked so that people may have them, or have them again. Recalling and confessing our sin is like taking out the garbage: once is not enough. But anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach; in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. Preachers mumble about sin. The other traditional custodians of moral awareness often ignore, trivialize, or evade it."⁷

I. **CONDITION OF MEN (Eph. 2:1).**

Verse 1 opens with the conjunction *kai*, translated "and." It serves to connect this section with the preceding. The power that quickened Christ from the dead has quickened you who were likewise dead in the sphere of sin. **Note:** The words "hath he quickened" (as in the King James Version) are not in the Greek text at this point. The idea of "quickening" does not come into view until v. 5.

A. *The Fact - Dead (nekros, dead, lifeless, without life).* The death spoken of here is not physical death (it will lead to physical death). Men are said to be "dead" in sin. They are dead while they live, because they live in sin (cf. Colossians 2:13, 14). In Scripture the term "life" is often used to express union with God, while "death" expresses alienation from God with the accompanying conditions of corruption, misery and helplessness.

B. *The Sphere - Transgressions (paraptōmasin) and sins (hamartiais).* The words are closely related in meaning, but there is a distinction. *Transgressions* refer to "falling" and may refer to overt actions of disobedience, while *sins* (the classic term) "to miss the mark" and may designate the sins of heart and thought and the inclination of the will (cf. Psalm 29:13, 14 where both are used). Both terms are no doubt used to express the fullness of man's rebellion against God. Each word carries the definite article, which declares the strong awareness of personal wrongdoing.

II. **THE CONVERSATION OF MEN (v. 2a).**

I am resorting to the Old King James Version expression, "conversation," to denote manner of life. Paul now describes more particularly the lifestyle of those who lived in transgressions and sins.

- A. **The Manner** – *You followed* (Greek *periepatēsate*, literally to walk about). It is used to denote a manner or course of life. That which characterizes a person’s behavior. Thus living and walking are synonymous. Unregenerate men literally are “death-walkers.”
- B. **The Pattern** – *The ways of the world* (*ton aiōna tou kosmou*, literally the age of this world). The expression is Hebraic and is often found in Rabbinic writings where it stands in contrast to the glorious age to come (i.e., the Messiah’s advent). It is a favorite expression of the Apostle Paul (cf. Romans 12:2; Galatians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 7:31) and is used to express the evil and transitory nature of the present world.

III. **THE CONTROLLER OF MEN (v. 2b).**

If things were not bad enough, what with man being dead in sin, we learn that the actual situation of man entails the active agency of the most wicked being in the entire universe: Satan.

- A. **His Domain** – *The ruler of the power of the air* (*ton archonta tēs exousias tou aeros*). The picture presented here is that Satan is the ruler of the demons and other agencies of evil (cf. Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18; Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:22; esp. Ephesians 6:12). Although not seen, Satan and his forces actively control and exert an evil influence on the lives of men, primarily in blinding men to the truth of the Word of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4).
- B. **His Function** – *He works* (*energountos*, literally energizes) in the lives of men. “The phrase,” comments J. A. Robinson, “is carefully chosen so as to suggest that the world-power as a whole stands in sharp contrast to God. It is *a spirit*, and it *worketh* – the same forcible word which has been used twice already of the Divine working.”⁸
- C. **His Subjects** – *The sons of disobedience* (*tois huiōis tēs apeitheias*). This also is a Hebraic expression indicating their chief characteristic. This disobedience is unbelief (cf. Hebrews 4:6, compare with 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

IV. **THE CONDEMNATION OF MEN (v. 3).**

Not only are men dead in sin and under the controlling influence of Satan, but they are subject to the wrath of a holy God.

- A. **Man’s Habitation** – Paul declares that *all of us* (without exception) *lived* (*anestraphēmen*, literally to conduct one’s life). The word has special reference to man’s social behavior, whereas the word used in verse 2, *peripateō*, is used more of personal conduct.
- B. **Man’s Actions** – Men live in the sphere of the flesh. They are controlled by *cravings of the flesh* (*tais epithumiais tēs sarkos*). Men live according to the dictates of their nature; they are “sons of disobedience” and behave as such. Furthermore, their sinful impulses are geared in accordance with the evil desires of the mind (*tōn dianoiōn*). Man’s nature controls his thought patterns. An unregenerate person will *only* choose and think in harmony with his nature. He will not do otherwise. To expect him to do so is like expecting a tiger to choose to become a vegetarian.
- C. **Man’s Dessert** – Men are *by nature children of wrath*. James Boice points out that, “In the Old Testament, there are more than 20 words used to express God’s wrath. More than 600 important passages deal with it. In the New Testament, the chief terms are *thumos* (from a root which means “to rush along fiercely” or “be in a heat of violence”) and *orgē*, the term used in Ephesians 2:3. *Orgē* comes from a root meaning “to grow ripe for something” and indicates God’s gradually building and intensifying opposition to sin. *Orgē* is the word most often used for “wrath” in the New Testament. Taken together, these passages indicate that God’s wrath is consistent, controlled, and judicial. That is what makes it so frightening. The doctrine of wrath does not mean that God merely gets angry from time to time, lashes out in anger, and then forgets about it. It is rather that his wrath is an inevitable and growing opposition to all that is opposed to his righteousness.”⁹

John Stott has summed up the passage, “Paul was under no illusions about the degradation of mankind. He refused to whitewash the situation, for this might have led him to propose superficial solutions. Instead, he began this paragraph with a faithful portrayal of man as subject to three terrible powers, namely *sin*, *death* and *wrath*. Yet he refused also to despair, because he believed in God. True, the only hope for dead people lies in a resurrection. But then the living God is the God of resurrection. He is even more than that: he is the God of creation. Both metaphors indicate the indispensable necessity of divine grace. For resurrection is out of death, and creation is out of nothing. That is the true meaning of *salvation*.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION: Paul has set forth in 2:1-3 the terrible situation that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, are in by nature. Humanity is not on trial before God; the verdict is in, and the sentence has been passed – GUILTY – one and all. No one deserves salvation; all need it, but none deserves it, nor even seeks it! (cf. Romans 3:11). Our condition is such that we surely cannot earn salvation. Sinners, living in sin and being controlled by “the ruler of the kingdom of this age” (and willing subjects at that), were by nature (*phusei*, literally “innate disposition,” compare Galatians 2:15; 4:8) “objects of God’s wrath.” Sinners therefore need mercy. But if the standard by which mercy is given is merit, we are doomed. J. C. Ryle was one of the great preachers of the 19th century. An Anglican Bishop, he exercised a ministry that through his writings still has influence today. In one of his books he declared, “As a minister of Christ for more than a quarter of a century, I know something of man’s exceeding blindness to his own natural state. Listen to me once more, whilst I ply your conscience with another argument. Oh, that God may open your eyes, and show you what you are! Sit down, and take pen and paper, and count up the sins that you have probably sinned since you first knew good from evil. Sit down, I say, and *make a sum*. Grant for a moment that there have been on an average, fifteen hours in every twenty-four during which you have been awake, and an active and accountable being. Grant for a moment that in each one of these fifteen hours you have sinned only two sins. Surely you will not say that this is an unfair supposition. Remember we may sin against God in thought, word, or deed. I repeat, it cannot be thought an extreme thing to suppose that in each waking hour of your life you have, in thought, or word, or deed, sinned two sins. And now add up the sins of your life, and see to what sum they will amount. At the rate of fifteen waking hours in a day, you have sinned every day thirty sins! – At the rate of seven days in a week, you have sinned two hundred and ten sins every week! – At the rate of four weeks in every month, you have sinned eight hundred and forty sins every month! – At the rate of twelve months in every year, you have sinned ten thousand and eighty sins every year! – And, in short, not to go further with the calculation, every ten years of your life you have sinned, at the lowest computation, more than ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND SINS! I invite you to look calmly at this sum. I defy you to disprove its correctness. I ask you, on the contrary, whether the sum would not be far more correct if the total number of your sins was multiplied ten-fold? – Oh, cease from your self-righteousness! Lay aside this proud affectation or *not being so very bad*, in which you are trying to wrap yourself up. Be bold enough to confess the truth. Listen not to that old liar, the devil. Surely in the face of that damning sum which I have just cast up, you will not dare to deny that *you have many sins*.”¹¹ He concluded his appeal by saying, “I can well fancy that you feel at a loss, and know not what to do. I can well believe that you do not see which way to turn, or what step to take, or in what manner to follow out my counsel. *I bid you go and say so to the Lord Jesus Christ!* I bid you seek some quiet solitary place, and pour out your heart before Him. Tell Him that you are a poor miserable sinner. Tell Him that you know not how to pray, or what to say, or what to do. But tell Him that you have heard something about His blood cleansing a man from all sin, and entreat Him to think on you, and cleanse your soul. Oh, take this advice – and who can tell but you may say one day, *the blood of Christ does indeed cleanse a man from all sin*.”¹²

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited in T. George “modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul* eds. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, M. A. Seifrid (Baker, 2004), p. 453.

² *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Romans* Vol. 25 ed. H. C. Oswald (Concordia, 1972) where he writes: “The reason is that our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them (as is evident in the case of legalists and hypocrites), indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.” (p. 291).

³ *What Luther Says* III ed. E. M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 1295.

⁴ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5 Assurance* (Zondervan, 1971), p. 190.

⁵ Original sin is not a substance or a positive attribute but a defect in human nature caused by the fall and consisting in the loss and consequent absence of original righteousness, *iustitia originalis* and of the *imago Dei*. This *peccatum originalis* is (1) the *culpa haereditaria*, or hereditary guilt, which is imputed to all mankind because of the sin and guilt of Adam – in Reformed theology this imputation rests on the federal headship of Adam. It is also (2) the *corruption haereditaria*, or hereditary corruption, which, because of the guilt and corruption of Adam and Eve, is transmitted to all their descendants by generation. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 221. Indeed the sin of Adam, properly speaking, is a *transgression (prevarication)* and a violation (*transgressio*), but original sin is not a transgression (*prevarication*) but only “sin” (*peccatum*) and the guilt (*reatus*) of his (*Adam’s*) transgression. Just as the righteousness of the saints is not the fulfilling of the Law by them but only the sharing of Christ’s fulfillment, which He Himself has accomplished. Cf. *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Romans* vol. 25 ed. H. C. Oswald (Concordia, 1972), p. 46.

⁶ the substance of this analysis is again taken from S. Lewis Johnson, my former prof. of Theology cf. his article “Romans 5:12 – An Exercise in Exegesis and Theology,” *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (Zondervan, 1974), pp. 298-316.

⁷ C. Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. x.

⁸ J. A. Robinson, *Commentary On Ephesians, Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 49.

⁹ J. M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Baker, 1997), p. 49.

¹⁰ J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979), p. 85.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Old Paths: Being Plain Statements on Some of the Weightier Matters of Christianity* (rpt. James Clark, 1972), p. 153.

¹² op. cit., p. 176.