

V. SATAN, SIN, AND THE CURSE

THE PINNACLE OF GOD'S CREATION, RAVAGED BY REBELLION

So far, all is well in God's creation. Mankind is enjoying perfect unity with each other, with the earth, and most importantly, with God. It is truly Paradise. But there is a new entity, and a plot twist, that will now be introduced into this great story of redemption.

⌘ SATAN AND DEMONS ⌘



Arch-Angel Michael Deposing Lucifer

Satan is quite an enigmatic creature. There is much we know about him, and there is much we don't know about him. Throughout history and in our own lives, he can at times be given far too much credit and power in our own lives and minds, and yet other times we can also overly-minimize his role in this world (such as quoted in the movie *the Usual Suspects*, where the character Verbal Kent says "the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." Too true of a statement!).

For us, we seek a right balance and perspective. At least, as right as we can get it with our limited understanding. We want to rightfully acknowledge his role in this world and the reality of his existence, while also not spending too much time focusing on him or his actions. This is no easy task, to be sure, but the more we know a good proper theology of God, our salvation, and all the other important topics in this study, my belief is that he will fall rightfully in his sorry place in this great story of redemption. Therefore, our aim is to focus on the glory of God and His power, rather than the misery of Satan and his empty threats.

There are two equal and opposite errors into which we can fall about the devils.

One is to disbelieve in their existence.

The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

-C.S. Lewis

Who is SATAN?

First of all, let's look at a brief "history" of Satan. Satan began his existence as an esteemed angel in heaven named Lucifer.³⁰⁹ In **Isaiah 14.12-21** it notes that Lucifer "said in [his] heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' Satan's sin was pride. He wanted to 'be like God.' He then led a rebellion in which most theologians believe a third of the angels followed him and subsequently became demons.³¹⁰ Additionally, **Ezekiel 28.11-15** mentions a few notables of pre-fallen Satan:

- He was the model of perfection.
- Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
- Every precious stone adorned him.
- He was anointed as a guardian cherub, ordained by God.
- Blameless from the day he was created until wickedness was found in him.

The Lord then goes on in **Ezekiel 28.16-19** to describe his fate by saying:

³⁰⁹ Isaiah 14.12. The NKJV interprets it as "Lucifer," whereas the literal translation is "Day Star," which could possibly have been his angelic name.

³¹⁰ Revelation 12.3, 4. Though much discussion is had over the timing and exact nature of this event, most scholars believe that the "third of the stars" are a third of the angels.

In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.¹⁷ Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you.¹⁸ By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you.¹⁹ All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.

In a nutshell, this once glorious guardian cherub felt that he could do things better and on his own.

Sound familiar? It is this same pride that is sadly the root attitude of all our sins. Because of this sin, it says that God caused him to be ‘fallen from heaven,’ ‘cut down to the ground,’ and that he will be ‘brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.’³¹¹

Now, instead of being known as splendid, beautiful, and wise, he has a partial list of other less impressive names:

- father of lies // John 8.44
- accuser of the brethren // Revelation 12.10
- the adversary // 1 Peter 5.8
- the enemy // Matthew 13.39
- god of this world // 2 Corinthians 4.4
- man of sin // 2 Thessalonians 2.3
- serpent/serpent of old/dragon // Revelation 12.9, 20.1
- power of darkness // Colossians 1.13
- prince of this world/power of the air // John 12.31, Ephesians 2.2
- the tempter // Matthew 4.3
- the wicked one // Matthew 13.19

Δ CREATED BEING, UNEQUAL WITH GOD

It is important to note that Satan is a created being.³¹² He is not as equal in evil power as God is in His holy power. This is no “clash of the titans” by any stretch of the imagination, even though he undoubtedly is the ‘ruler of the kingdom of the air’³¹³ and he presumably had the ‘power’ to give Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” (after all, Jesus didn’t rebuke his claim, but was rather actually tempted by it, assumingly because there was at least quite a bit of validity to his offer).³¹⁴ But this ‘power,’ as it were, is also completely under God’s sovereign rule, as we will soon look at in more detail.

DEMONS

Demons were holy angels that believed the deception of Lucifer and went with him in the rebellion in heaven.³¹⁵ They are now at work in this world with Satan, constantly at war and in dispute with the angels,³¹⁶ and ever-desiring to lead us astray by temptation and sin. They are the ones who go out, at Satan’s behest, to tempt us, lure us, and enslave us to sin. Though not a whole lot is known of the inner-workings of their assignments and plan, there seems to be a few things we do know.

- They are organized in rank.³¹⁷
- They have specific assignments.³¹⁸

³¹¹ Isaiah 14.12, 15

³¹² Ezekiel 28.11-15

³¹³ Ephesians 2.1-3

³¹⁴ Matthew 4.8-10

³¹⁵ Revelation 12.3, 4. See footnote above.

³¹⁶ Revelation 12.7 // Jude 9. In Daniel 10.10-13 it mentions that an angel believed to be Gabriel (cf.) speaks to Daniel and says to him that he would have been there earlier but he was resisted for 21 days by the “king of Persia.” Of course this shouldn’t be taken as the human king of Persia, since no man could really restrain an angel, but it is most likely a demon that is probably “assigned” to the king of Persia who had reason to not want Gabriel to take his message to Daniel. See also Isaiah 14 where the king of Babylon is addressed but it is clearly (most notably in verses 12-15) written of Satan. Also as we saw in Ezekiel 28.11-19 the king of Tyre is addressed but it is also clearly Satan.

³¹⁷ Colossians 1.16, 2.15 // Ephesians 6.12. We also see distinction of “rank” or “prominence” among holy angels, which would point to a similar type of structure for the demonic angels. See the section on angels for more on this.

³¹⁸ See section on angels for more on this idea.

- They can possess animals.³¹⁹
- They can oppress and attack people.³²⁰
- They can be entertained or spoken with.³²¹
- They *can be* (but aren't necessarily) the cause of unnatural disabilities in our life.³²²

Though there is definite distinction between Satan and his demons, throughout this study I will often refer to Satan and his demons collectively as "the enemy," and at times will specifically mention Satan or his demons. Note, however, that though the distinction does exist, many of their attributes, like the following ones, are shared.

He is NOT OMNIPOTENT

Though it should go without saying, it must be said that neither Satan nor his demons are omnipotent or all-powerful. Now that sounds obvious, but let's be clear that even in his un-all-powerfulness (add that to your dictionary), Satan is not even all-powerful enough to do as he pleases within his own will. In other words, he doesn't even have say over what power he *does* have and how he wields it. His power and authority is very limited to what God permits. We get a rare and very incredible little insight into this dynamic in the book of **Job**. We see that Satan needs to ask permission on what he wants to do and to whom.³²³ This should bring us much relief to know that *everything* is under God's good, just, and sovereign control, and that *everything* that happens is according to His perfect and good purpose, even acts of evil and hardship.³²⁴

As we see, though he does have much perceived and even tangible 'power,' we must also, as I have already, say the word 'power' with little quotation fingers because his power isn't all that real. He is on a very short leash, as it were, and his time is very limited. This, however, does not negate the real threat that he is on this earth and actively at work in this world.

He is NOT OMNIPRESENT

Satan is not everywhere. Now, I know what people mean when they say it, but we ought to check our theology a bit when we say that "Satan tempted me today." Now, not to hurt any egos or anything, but I may ask who you think you are to assume that Satan is personally assigning himself to you! Obviously, he is *somewhere* doing *something*, limited to one location, but my guess is that he's busy trying to fry some bigger fish, or, more likely, doing some paperwork and strategizing the assignments of his demonic army. The bottom line is that he is not everywhere, and though his demons are at large and the flesh that we still battle can and will tempt us, Satan himself is limited to one place at one time. He is not everywhere.

He is NOT OMNISCIENT

Satan is also not all-knowing, and neither are the demons. He does not know the future, nor can he read minds. Demons, in many ways, do in fact have a lot more info than we do, however. I am limited to my finite life and experience, but demons, on the other hand, have been around for thousands of years doing the work of Satan. They have been tricking, deceiving, tempting, and leading people astray for ages, and they have gotten really good at it, as they've had a lot of practice. They are also very well "networked." I recommend the fictional but insightful book *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis if you are interested, as it describes the "inner-workings" or "system" of demonic legions as being very well organized. Of course, the Bible doesn't give a *detailed* account of the infrastructure, but it does make mention of this hierarchy and these missions of demons as we have just read, giving way to the idea of a pretty well-greased systematic army.

All this to say that demons have a great deal of insight into how humanity and the world works. For instance, I know my wife very well, and if something bad happened at work, I can "predict" how she will react when I tell her later. I don't "know the future," but I know how she works so I can make predictions. Demons know how the world works in far greater and more intimate ways than we have, because they have a longer working knowledge as well as the fact that they have been hands-on and architects of many of the mishaps throughout the ages.

³¹⁹ Luke 8.26-39 // Mark 5.1-20

³²⁰ Luke 4.33-35, 41, 8.26-39 // Mark 5.1-20

³²¹ Mark 5.1-20

³²² Matthew 9.32, 33 // Mark 5.1-20. In Matthew 17.14-20 it relates a boy's epilepsy being related to a demon. However in Matthew 4.24 it lists people with various problems such as epilepsy and paralysis as separate from demon-possession.

³²³ Job 1.8-12, 2.3-8

³²⁴ Romans 8.28-39 // 1 Peter 4.19 // Philippians 1.29

As an example, a psychic could maybe tell you of an airplane crash coming up next Tuesday in Texas. When that happens, we think "wow, the enemy *does* know the future." But what we don't know is that the enemy is at work in Texas. Maybe somehow he caused a lazy employee to screw something up or somehow he was planning on tempting the pilot into drinking before flying.

With demons, like with human "magicians," any future telling is more of a "sleight of hand" or stringing events together or an intricate devising of probability. A psychic could get 99% of their predictions wrong, but if they hit one big one, we all of a sudden forget about all the missed attempts.

Lastly, one thing we *don't* know is how spiritual warfare works in totality. Does God let his angels know of certain future events? Do some of those messages or insights get confiscated from time to time, just like in real war? There is some interesting stuff on angel vs. demon interaction in the Bible that makes you think there is a whole lot more that goes on than we really know. Additionally, would God, from time to time, actually reveal some specific future events to the enemy for some purpose? Just as God allowed Satan to torment Job,³²⁵ and just as He sent an evil spirit to torment Saul,³²⁶ and He allowed the witch of Endor to bring Samuel the prophet "back from the grave" to speak (which even she seemed surprised at),³²⁷ could He also, for His divine purpose, reveal divinely known information to an unbeliever? Both of these questions can't be answered "no way," but neither can be answered "yes, definitely." After all, we do know that the enemy has been given some (restricted) permission to do actual signs and wonders, such as mentioned in **Revelation 16.14** as well as mentioned about Pharaoh's sorcerers in **Exodus 7.11, 12, 22**.

And this is *precisely* why we *must* know the Word of God! Signs, wonders, dreams, visions, and writing in the sky is not enough for us to know and discern God! We *must* be able to test everything to know for a fact that it is indeed God!

At the end of the day, we have to know that the enemy is slick, cunning, and really good at his job, is the ruler of the power of the air and god of this world, but that he is also on a leash and limited by what God allows. In addition to that, we as believers have the authority in Jesus' Name to cast out and send away demonic forces.³²⁸ For us believers, we have nothing to be afraid of, for "perfect love casts out fear"³²⁹ because "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."³³⁰

**Satan may be a serpent, but he is a toothless, venom-less serpent,
which simply just makes him an oversized worm.**

So What Happened?

So here we return to **Genesis 3**, we see the first couple, Adam and Eve, with the Garden at their disposal and God walking among them, and they are about to make the gravest of mistakes. One day in the Garden, as Eve was alone (this won't be the last time Satan uses isolation to deceive us), she strikes up a conversation with a serpent. This serpent, named Satan, deceives Eve into believing that eating the forbidden fruit will not kill her, but would let her become like God, which was completely contradictory to what God's Word. However, the serpent is cunning, and he twists the command of God in ways that seem to justify her actions and cause her to doubt the words of God (sound familiar? This, also, will not be the last time Satan uses and twists the Word of God.³³¹).

Here, in this moment, humanity's future is changed. Eve rejects the Word of God, chooses to worship self in her desire to become like God, and believes the lie. She then offers the fruit to her husband, who falls for her justification (this won't be the last time Satan uses those we trust and love to betray each other³³²).

The Curse(s)

Because of this blatant disregard for God's one and only command, not only did man shatter the image of God he once bore, but he also ensured that God's promise would come to pass; after all, God can't break a promise. Man and woman,

³²⁵ Job 1.8-12, 2.3-8

³²⁶ 1 Samuel 16.14-16, 18.10, 19.9. Also note Judges 9.23.

³²⁷ 1 Samuel 28

³²⁸ Mark 16.17. For more on this, see the resources at the end of this section that speak of "Spiritual Warfare."

³²⁹ 1 John 4.18

³³⁰ 1 John 4.4

³³¹ Matthew 4.5, 6

³³² Matthew 26.47-50

as God forewarned, would surely die. But there is more to this promise of death, as God also decreed specific curses on both the man and woman. On top of that, we interestingly see in **Genesis 3.16-19** a curse not only put on the two humans, but also on creation itself, even though, as **Romans 8.20-22** shows us that of course it wasn't by creation's own fault, but by humanity's doing.

Why curse creation? As we saw in the previous chapter, the Earth was given to man to be put under his dominion. It's like the old adage spoken when some unruly neighbors move in: "there goes the neighborhood."

As man goeth, so goeth the earth.

Let's look closer at these three curses, as well as the fourth curse given to Satan himself. We will start with the curse on creation since it affects the curse on man.

The Curse on Creation

As we know, when God created the heavens and the Earth and all that was in it, including the animals, He said that it was "good." But now, God says to Adam in **Genesis 3.17, 18**, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field."

God declared that from this day forward, creation would also "surely die" so to speak. His "good" creation would now be deteriorating and dying a slow death, bringing up thorns and thistles. We see this mysterious truth within the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that everything is in a state of decay and irreversible entropy. Everything in all of creation dies and shows evidence of this fact, be it rusty metal, shooting stars, dying trees, animals, and of course, humans. Look at what Paul says about all of this:

Romans 8.19-22

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

This gives us a clear picture of creation yearning, groaning, and longing for the day that it will be *released* from this curse.

Interestingly, a few key things are worth noting. For one, again we could ask ourselves why creation was even cursed to begin with? **Verse 20** here even makes specific notion that its frustration was not by its own choice, so why "punish" it? The answer to this lies within the original plan of creation order, that man was *given* the earth to be under his dominion and to subdue it. We are intrinsically connected to creation. As the Word even says, "all come from dust, and to dust all return."³³³ Now, this isn't some pantheistic doctrine, but an important note that shows the original design of God for His creation. We were made for the earth, and the earth was made for us.

This is precisely why creation is eagerly awaiting the final glorification of mankind. It can't *wait* for the curse to be revoked and done away with! This also gives us clear indication of what the future of mankind and creation will look like in the eternal state (more on that later in **Chapter XII**).

The Curse on Man

As we saw in the curse on creation, man, in addition to "surely" dying, also will have to work all the days of his life in order to survive. In **Genesis 3.19** the curse continues with God saying "'thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'"

Presumably, the "tending" of the garden that God mentions must have been pretty enjoyable, fulfilling, and not all that toilsome, because here, God is telling man that he'll continue doing what he was *created to do* and *supposed to do*, but instead of it being in enjoyment and fulfillment, it will be much harder, more painful, and it will be only by this hard, sweaty work that man will survive throughout his life. This, as we see, is still true, for in this world not only is harvesting and farming hard work, but man in general must work hard and toil if he wants to sustain himself and his family properly.

³³³ Genesis 3.19 // Psalm 90.3 // Ecclesiastes 3.20

And even as it were, the New Testament, in a way that seems to purposely reinforce the reality of this curse still being in effect, says in **2 Thessalonians 3.8-10** “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”

Lastly, this should be clear: the curse isn’t that we are to work. We were to work before the fall even happened. The curse is that work will be less enjoyable, toilsome, and difficult. A negative aspect was added to what was part of the original design.

The Curse on Woman

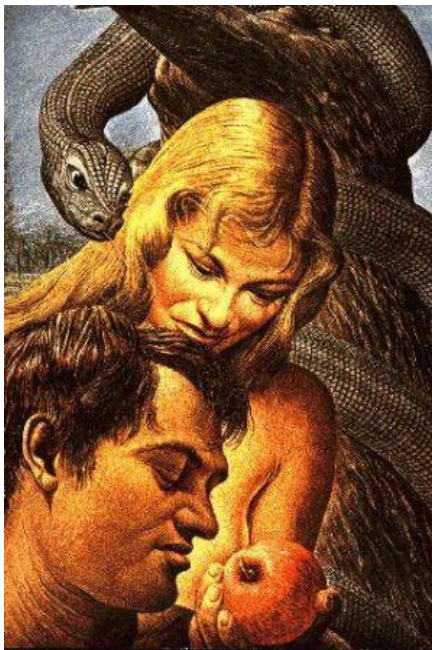
God also said to the woman in **Genesis 3.16**, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” First, we’ll simply state that part of the curse for woman was that she would experience painful labor when she gives birth. Again, we can presume that somehow, the human body (or possibly and simply divinely) caused the woman’s body to not feel pain during childbirth. This, however, has changed, and is obviously still a part of living in this fallen world.

The second part of the curse reveals a distortion of the relationship between man and wife. The word for “desire” is *teshuqah*, and is a rare term in the Bible, but is also found just one chapter later in **Genesis 4.7, 8** when Cain kills his brother Abel. In context there, God says that sin has “desire for you, but you must rule over it.” Cain’s sin had a desire to overtake Cain.

The picture is not that woman would have a nice, romantic desire for her husband, but quite the opposite, as this word *teshuqah* is a desire to be the master by usurping authority and wielding control, such as with Cain. Additionally, it says that man will “rule over you.” This word for “rule” is also not a positive one, but it is the word *mashal* which shows that man would abuse his role as head of the marriage and instead rule more as an authoritarian. The same word is given to Cain as he is instructed to “rule over” his sin. In other words, he wasn’t to rule his sin nicely like a husband to a wife, but to rule it as an authoritarian.

Redeeming the Original Design

In God’s original plan, woman was taken from man’s side to be his partner and helper. Being made in the image of God, they reflected the solidarity, unity, and diversity of the Trinity, as man would lovingly lead, guide, provide for, and protect his wife, as Christ does for the church. He was in fact given to be her leader, but not the *mishal* type leader.



Adam Failed as a Leader

Likewise, woman, as partner and helper, would joyfully submit to, love, and follow the lead of her head, as Christ does with His Father. Before the fall, she was indeed given to be a helper, and not a *teshuqah* desire to control him. This pre-fall design of Trinitarian, equal but diverse relationship, again, is what we call a *complementarian*♣ view of relationships and community, meaning that we are made to complement each other with our equal but unique roles and responsibilities. But now, in light of this new distortion, imagine if Christ was abusive or controlling with us, or if we Christ tried to usurp the authority of the Father!

So what we see now and today is husbands not doing their God-given tasks. Too often we see lazy men who don’t commit themselves to hard work and education, intimacy and vulnerability, and commitment to the Word of God; they end up not being able (or are unwilling) to lead their family physically, emotionally, or spiritually. We see men who don’t have the “do what it takes” mentality to fulfill their responsibility as the spiritual leader in the home. If you have failed in this area in the past, the good news is you do have God’s grace to enable you to get up and move forward!

We also see that men usually do one of two things with the God-ordained role of servant-leadership in the home. Husbands either abdicate their headship, as Adam did with his sin of omission (submitting to their wife’s *teshuqah*), or they enact chauvinistic rule over their wives and children (ruling with *mishal*).

The men that abdicate their roles are typically too concerned with what their wives *want* rather than what they *need*. They don’t want to rock the boat, and so they choose to just let things be. This is exactly what Adam did as he stood by Eve and let her do her thing. But who did God hold responsible after the sin was committed?

Adam, even though Eve sinned first.

Men, it is your responsibility to lead, guide, and care for your wives and families physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Don't put that on your wife, *she already has her own curse to tend to*.

On the other side of that is men who assert control and domination. This is equally as treacherous as the weak leader, as both of these responses insult the design of creation and the model of the Trinity. To be the head of the home does not mean to be the dictator, though sadly, through our sin, men selfishly aim to "rule over" (*mishal*) their wives. You are to love her as Christ loved the church, laying your life down for her and washing her with the Word of God.³³⁴

Both of these attitudes need to be repented of, and God's design for biblical manhood, fatherhood, and husbandry must be pursued by all Christian men who are in those roles.

With the women, it is all too common that wives will do precisely as this prophecy states, that they will seek to control their husbands. They do this through manipulation, taking control, and other means, even trading or withholding sexual intimacy in order to gain something from their husbands.³³⁵ It's a terrible attitude, and sadly, though it is born through this predisposition of sin and the curse, it is escalated most often by men who aren't doing their jobs in the first place and exuding poor, unbiblical, weak leadership, love and care. Now this shouldn't be used as an *excuse* for the women to take control, but it certainly enables it.

We could go on and on about this topic,³³⁶ but in the short of it, when you are struggling in your marriage, it is a good starting place to have this in mind: repent. When you face struggles, men *usually* need to automatically repent for poor leadership. They either need to repent of weakness and a *lack of* leadership (particularly spiritual leadership), or repent of being too controlling and stubborn. Women need to often repent of trying to be controlling, un-submissive, and also stubborn. These seem like harsh words, and our flesh fights against it, but it is a harsh and very real curse.

But as we seek redemption to be conformed into the image of God and the communal image of the Trinity once again, we see a satisfaction in life that we cannot receive by doing things our way, which is the way of Adam and Eve.

THE CURSE ON SATAN

God also then says to Satan, the serpent, "because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

It makes one wonder, since all the other three curses are indeed literal and are physically evident, could it (and should it) be the same for this curse? Has the serpent, who once declared his desire to be like God,³³⁷ now been literally banished to the lowest of lowly physical forms? Has his beauty in his existence as an esteemed angelic being now been replaced by being imprisoned in the body of the slithery disgust of a wallowing reptile? Is he now, instead of feasting like a prince, literally eating the dust of the earth? This would indeed be the ultimate humiliation for such a proud creature.

It is interesting that all the verses mentioning Satan as a being (as opposed to ones that speak of him as a representative figurehead of his army or forces³³⁸) don't definitely rule out the idea that the body of a physical serpent is housing the imprisoned spirit Satan.³³⁹ In the Scriptures, we find him telling God that he has been "going to and fro on the earth, and

³³⁴ Ephesians 5.25-33

³³⁵ 1 Corinthians 1-5

³³⁶ I can't begin to tell you how many incredible, thorough, inspiring, challenging, convicting, and liberating resources are out there on this topic. The key to a truly free marriage and family life is indeed found in the Scriptures, and it would be of incredible value to seek out books and resources that point you to those Scriptures. Check the resources at the end of the last chapter as well as this chapter for books, sermons, and articles. God's heart is for healthy and biblical manhood, womanhood, marriage, and family, and He wants to restore and redeem the Trinitarian model in your life.

³³⁷ Isaiah 14.12-15 // Matthew 4.9, 10

³³⁸ Matthew 16.23

³³⁹ One possible exception would be Luke 22.3 where "Satan entered into Judas." Of course this wouldn't make sense if he was a physical serpent, and it also doesn't seem like it is simply an evil spirit sent by Satan, but that it is Satan himself. Now, I don't want to stretch the Scriptures any more than the next guy, but I would simply offer a possibility: since 1) this is the only time we ever see Satan himself enter into anyone in the Word, 2) we know that he is, by God's permission only, able to become other forms such as angels of light, and 3) this was for a very specific and ultimately evil plan, the betrayal of the Christ, it is possible that in God's sovereignty He allowed Satan to disembody himself from the body of the serpent for this momentous

from walking back and forth on it,"³⁴⁰ encountering Jesus at real places in real conversations,³⁴¹ and being called "that ancient serpent."³⁴² Of course these could all still be speaking of a spirit only, as we traditionally have held, but they don't seem to rule out him being a prideful spirit imprisoned in a lowly physical body.

We know he isn't omnipresent, and we know he accomplishes his work through communicating with his powers and minions, and it would be very interesting to find out that this wicked deceiver who we give far too much credit for is even weaker than we think! As we see that part of his curse is that the offspring of the woman (Jesus Christ), will eventually crush his head, how great would it possibly be that when the curse speaks of Christ crushing His head, that Jesus may actually and literally step on him in that day where He lays hold of him and banishes him forever!

Regardless of his substance, whether all spirit or a spirit imprisoned in a physical body, we do know his ultimate fate. He will indeed be crushed by the Savior, one who will be worthy to redeem all that was lost. His days are numbered, and he will rightly pay for the havoc he has brought upon God's image bearers.

The Effects of Sin and the Curse

So now let's look at the actual effects of sin and the curse. We'll start broad and start narrowing down to specifics. First of all, we have to understand that sin is universal. There is some discussion over how exactly sin infiltrates our life, but probably the most common outlook, judging in part from **Romans 5.12-21**, is that Adam is, more or less, our human representative, and so because of his sin, every generation since him has now inherited sin from him. Just as true as every human since him has hereditarily been born with blood or skin (the most basic of human traits), we are all hereditarily born with what we call *original sin*,³⁴³ a phrase coined by Augustine.

Therefore, we have a few problems on our hand. First of all, we are not only born with sin already, due to this hereditary curse, but also that we are predisposed to *choose* sin because of a sinful nature. No one is exempt from this, and because of it, every human, save for the coming Savior, has broken God's holy law.³⁴³

1 John 1.8-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Romans 3.23

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Now, before we get up in arms and crying "unfair" to account us as guilty for someone else's fault, we should remember a couple things. First of all, Adam and Eve had perfect paradise with neither sin around them nor a sinful nature, and yet they still chose to rebel against God. So even if you wanted a fighting chance, or a head start per se, to forge your own sinless perfection in this life, you wouldn't make it far out of the gate. You would very quickly go the way of Adam.

Secondly, we must always remember that God always sees humankind as a people, a society, not simply a bunch of individuals. We are His creation. Though we do each have individual accountability that we must answer to, as we are created as individuals, the familial aspect of the people of God is always mysteriously "one" with our identity as individually created image bearers. To speak it plainly, we're all in this together.

Total Depravity

Since sin is universal, something we are both born with and into, and something that we would eventually succumb to even if we *weren't* born into it, it would be important to look at what this does to each person individually.

Each of us, though fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God,³⁴⁴ are born spiritually bankrupt.

occasion. Again, I'm not into "finding new doctrines," but I find it interesting, especially as I consider the humiliation that he would be enduring if it were so.

³⁴⁰ Job 1.7

³⁴¹ Matthew 4.1-11

³⁴² Revelation 12.9, 20.2

³⁴³ 1 Kings 8.46

³⁴⁴ Psalm 139.14

Psalms 51.5-6

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

In addition to sin being universal in that it affects every human from birth, it is also universal in that it affects every part of each human. Sin has infected every part of our life: our mind, our heart, our desires, our emotions, our speech, our actions, and our will. Not a single part of our make-up as human beings has been unaffected by sin. There is distortion of some sort in every faculty that we have.

Jeremiah 17.9, 10

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Proverbs 16.25

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

What all of this means is that we simply can't be trusted. Though made in the image of God, we are not by nature "basically good." We *were* at one point by nature "very good," but sin entered in with Adam. In our lives, we seek to make decisions and make choices, but we have to recognize that our hearts and minds are deceptive. Our flesh wants to feed itself and go its own way. We are selfish people.

This is commonly referred to as *total depravity*,♣ meaning that mankind is totally depraved in every way. Now, it should be made abundantly clear that this in no way means that we are depraved in every way, to the furthest degree at all times, doing the most evil we possibly can all the time. That would be called *utter depravity*.♣ This is not the case, because if it were, we would be in a world of hurt far more extreme than we are in now. Total depravity doesn't mean that we don't have any moral compass whatsoever, as Scripture is clear that even unbelievers do morally right things.³⁴⁵ As J.I. Packer says it, that we are "totally sinful not in degree, but extent."³⁴⁶

That said, it also must be made clear that when we do moral deeds on our own, none of these moral deeds are pleasing to the Lord. Good deeds are like filthy rags to the Lord.³⁴⁷ It's good to do good deeds, particularly when it brings glory to the Lord, but these aren't the things that *please* the Lord. Only a broken and contrite spirit and the things done in faith are what please God.³⁴⁸

R.L. Dabney, who was a mid 19th century Presbyterian theologian (and was also the chief of staff and biographer of Stonewall Jackson), puts it very nicely as he says:

By calling it total, we do not mean that men are from their youth as bad as they can be. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, "deceiving and being deceived" (**2 Timothy 3.13**). Nor do we mean that they have no social virtues toward their fellowmen in which they are sincere. We do not assert with extremists that because they are natural men therefore all their friendship, honesty, truth, sympathy, patriotism, domestic love, are pretenses or hypocrisies. What our [Presbyterian] Confession says is, "That they have wholly lost ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation." The worst retain some, and the better much, ability of will for sundry moral goods accompanying social life.³⁴⁹

I love how he puts this, that as sinful humans, even in our depravity, we can do "good" physical and socially moral deeds. Now, using the words Dabney uses, are we *always* pure in our friendship, honesty, sympathy, and patriotism? No! Why? Because we are totally depraved; sin has infiltrated and distorted every part of us. *But*, as he asserts, we are not utterly depraved to the fullest extent. We can experience and emit many moments, streaks, and even very consistent interactions of selfless friendship, honesty, sympathy, and patriotism.

That said, as he makes a right case, of utmost importance it is only the spiritual, faith empowered "good" through the grace of Christ that pleases God. Because of this depravity and spiritual bankruptcy, a few things happen to us.

³⁴⁵ Luke 11.13

³⁴⁶ Concise Theology, page 83

³⁴⁷ Isaiah 64.6

³⁴⁸ Psalm 51.17

³⁴⁹ From an article written by Dabney called "the Five Points of Calvinism," which can be found on www.spurgeon.org.

The Shattered Image of God

John Calvin wrote what is the best illustration for shattered lives that I've heard. He states that we are not empty cups needing to be filled by God; rather, we are broken mirrors that need to be put back together by God, beginning with our regeneration and continuing every day in our sanctification, so that we can better and better reflect God.

There are many great truths packed into this concise little statement. Let's observe them one by one.

1. **Not empty cups needing to be filled by God.** At first this seems like a fine analogy, showing that we were once filled with the communicable attributes of God, only to pour them out as we chose sin. However, it encourages a very self-centered gospel, a gospel that caters to our personal needs, feelings of despair, and emptiness. God becomes a gas can that fills us when we need it, or some comfort food when we are lonely. But no, the Gospel is not about us or our emptiness, it is about God and His fullness. He is not a genie in a bottle waiting to make our wishes come true, He is a God worthy of worship and pursuit. The quip of saying "there is a hole in your heart that only God can fill," is great, but also falls a bit short on declaring the true nature of man's need for redemption.
2. **Broken mirrors.** Yes, we are made in His image. In our "garden variety" state, we reflect His image, His character, His glory, as a mirror reflects the image in front of it. It reflects a true representation, a true image. However, unlike the empty cup in the first analogy, this mirror is shattered and no longer reflects the perfect beauty of God. You and I have become shattered, annihilating any ability for us, in and of ourselves, to reflect the whole, total, accurate, and glorious image of Christ.

Yet the beauty of this part of the analogy is that it also reminds us that though we are a broken mirror, we are still indeed a mirror, albeit a distorted and broken one.³⁵⁰ However, due to the fact that we are made in His image, we do still reflect His glory and image, but in limited ways, just as the shards of glass left on the mirror and the ones now on the floor still reflect, but only in part, and also distorted. Even as sinful people, we are all created with a conscience, a moral compass, and we do, from time to time, act selflessly. The Bible tells us that even evil dads know how to give good gifts to their children,³⁵¹ and that even the wicked are able to bless their friends.³⁵² Why is this? Because we are made in His image.

Yes, we are shattered, imperfect, grossly distorted, and totally depraved, and to be sure, born in sin.³⁵³ But again, let us not get "totally depraved" confused with "utterly depraved." To be totally depraved is to say that sin has ravaged every part of our lives, that it has corrupted our mind, heart, thoughts, and actions. It has spread like cancer, and, if gone unchecked, will continue to grow, spread, and maim more and more.³⁵⁴ Utter depravity, on the other hand, says that we are evil to the most extreme degree, in utter totality. This is simply not true, for if it were, there would be much more murder, rape, theft, and violence enacted by everyone in this world.

3. **Needing to be put back together again.** This is the beauty of it all. The Holy Spirit is given to us to pick up the pieces and put this mirror back together again, so that we can do as we were created to do as we reflect the image of God. What's even more so, for those who are concerned for getting "filled" by God as the empty cup being refilled, is that when we do begin to more and more reflect God's image, this *does* in fact fulfill us! We are now doing what we were designed to do: we are being the image bearers of Christ! We are reflecting His image! Reflecting His glory! *This* is what brings us ultimate joy, peace, and pleasure, because it is completely what we were created to live out. As the Holy Spirit puts Humpty Dumpty together again piece by piece and shard by shard through His sanctifying work, we more and more are being conformed and transformed back into the image of Christ³⁵⁵ (See **Chapter X** for more on sanctification).

³⁵⁰ Psalm 51.5

³⁵¹ Luke 11.11-13

³⁵² Matthew 5.46-48

³⁵³ Psalm 51.5

³⁵⁴ James 1.13-15 //

³⁵⁵ Romans 8.29

Our fellowship with God is impossible

The main word the New Testament uses for sin is *hamartia*, which means “to miss the mark” (*hamartiology* is “the study of sin”). To use an example, every once in a while I like to shoot darts. With darts, there is a bull’s eye, and to separate the bull’s eye from the other scoring areas there is a metal wire. When you shoot darts, you either “hit the mark (bull’s eye),” or you “miss the mark.” When you hit it (holiness and perfection), you are *separated* from sin (as God is). When you miss the mark (sin), you are separated from the bull’s eye (holiness). God is all holy, all perfect, all the time, with no spot or blemish. He is “set apart” from sin and cannot mingle with it. In fact, part of the meaning of “holy” is “to be set apart.” For us, we have missed the mark.



Now, like we mentioned with unbelievers being able to do socially moral things in life, we tend to judge our “acceptability” by “how good we are.” We somehow believe there is some scale of goodness, and as long as you get in the upper fifty percentile, you make it to heaven. Furthermore, we’re crossing our fingers hoping God is grading on a curve. But even if you were in the “upper ninety-nine percentile,” you still would “fall short.” You see, if you shot darts a hundred times and hit the mark ninety-nine times, you still miss once. You’ve missed the mark, and that is all it took for you to break God’s perfect Law.

We are Objects of Wrath

You’ve heard it said, “the captain must go down with the ship.” God hates sin, and because He is a just God, He must deal with it. His anger, rage, fury, and wrath burns against it because He is holy, set apart, and righteous. His holy law has been broken, and as a good and just Judge, He must convict and punish. Sadly, as we cling unrepentantly to our sin, we bring ourselves into the line of fire, with His wrath aimed directly at us as the lawbreakers.

I often think of an American value we have all heard throughout our life that it is “our policy to not negotiate with terrorists.”

Sin is a terrorist, and God will not negotiate with it; He will destroy it.

This is precisely what was meant in the aforementioned **Ephesians** verse that said “we were by nature objects of wrath.” We are law breakers. We are unholy. We have turned our backs on our Creator, the One who made each of us “fearfully and wonderfully”³⁵⁶ and in His image. God is a holy God and just Judge, and because of that He will not, He does not, and He even *cannot* negotiate with sin. Because of our sin, we are objects of His just and holy wrath.

We Will Die

In the Garden, God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit that they “would surely die.”³⁵⁷ Satan, in turn, convinces Eve that they would not surely die. Instead of trusting in God’s Word and promise, she believed the serpent and ate the fruit. Of course, as it’s told, they didn’t *instantly* die, but they would indeed *surely* die. However, God, again in His grace, prolonged their life in order to give them a chance for repentance. Death is not immediate upon sin, thankfully, but rather it is put off, for most folks until a later date in old age, because of God’s mercy. Being a patient and gracious God, He gives us a lifetime to choose repentance.

Death is not natural.

Death is an enemy that destroys what is *originally* natural.

The thing about death that I hear most often is that it’s “the most natural thing in life.” Though that seems like a true statement, it only seems true because it is sure to happen to all of us, much like taxes. But according to the Word, death is not “natural,” in that it was not part of the original design of nature that God created and declared as “good.” Rather, death is an infiltrator, an invasive pest that was invited into the Garden by us. Death is the enemy of God, and as I just described, it is a terrorist that will show mercy to no one. Death cannot be negotiated with. It cannot be bought off or bribed. Death will get what it wants. Death has a 1:1 ratio. There is still a 100% mortality rate in every country in the world, whether it be a first world or third world nation. This is not how it was supposed to be.

³⁵⁶ Psalm 139.14

³⁵⁷ Genesis 2.17

I thank God, as we will see, that God hates death, so much so that He “saves the best for last” when it comes to His final victory. **1 Corinthians 15.26** says that “the last enemy to be destroyed is death.” I like this, because as I picture some of my favorite epic movies, you always save the nastiest, meanest, most hated enemy for the last epic battle. And to me, part of why I like this is that God doesn’t even give Satan that “glory” of being the last enemy to be destroyed. In my own simple little mind, I like to see it as if God is sending him (and us!) the message to Satan of “you think a little bit too much of yourself. You’re not all that bad... it’s death that I hate the most! I hate seeing my children die. But you? You’re just a pest; death is my true arch-enemy.”

There’s a sweet satisfaction in that thought.

DISEASE, SICKNESS, PAIN, AND SUFFERING

I really dislike this subject. And I really don’t mind saying that, because, like death, I know that God hates it as well. But nonetheless, it is a part of this life, it is a part of our faith, and it is a part of God’s plan, purpose, and will. Not only that, but it is, sadly, a largely misunderstood and falsely taught subject. Now, I don’t want to convey that this is an easy topic, as there is so much mystery of God in this. But, like many other topics, there is much that we can and do know about it, and it would serve us well to explore it and understand rightly what role it has in our life and faith.

As sin made its way into life, first of all, our bodies started decaying, as did the rest of creation. In the early years of humanity, with bodies that were created to live for eternity, the men and women lived mostly it seems around the 700 year range, with the oldest recorded human, Methuselah, living 969 years.³⁵⁸ But as our bodies now decayed, along with creation, we began doing many things we didn’t quite do while in the Garden. We began eating food being brought forth from a now-decaying earth, we were sweating and toiling with much more grievous work than before, we incurred stress unlike before.

All of this resulted in our perfect DNA to slowly break down, our nervous system and various bodily functions began to misfire or “go bad.” Soon, the world would know its first baby born with a birth defect, something unknown before. After a while, the decaying bodies are experiencing disease due to their new inability to restore themselves like before. Before we know it, disease and sickness is the norm, and birth defects are becoming, more than ever, a common occurrence.

Ultimately, we know that all disease, sickness, cancer, birth defects, handicaps, sickness, stillbirths, SIDS, blindness, deafness, AIDS, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, autism, cerebral palsy, and on and on and on and on are all the result of decaying bodies brought on by the ongoing deforming and corrupting work of sin. Now, this is not to say that these sicknesses are a direct result or punishment of that particular person’s sin, but that their having of the sickness is due to the fact of humanity inviting sin into our life in the first place.

All these things, like death, are not natural. Disease was not in God’s original design. I’ll read or see in the news some of the most heartbreaking stories: babies born without a brain, conjoined twins where one must die or they both die, babies born with no limbs or born with two sets of limbs, and babies born with their legs on backwards. All of these do two things for me: they break my heart with compassion and tears for them and their families, hoping and praying that God would somehow be glorified (as it is with the case of a man named Nick Vujicic³⁵⁹), and yet it also infuriates my spirit toward sin and the enemy. I know that this is not part of God’s design and that it breaks His heart to see the ravaging effects of sin.

I suppose in reality there is a third thing that it does for me. It makes me look forward to the day when “all of His enemies will be placed under His feet.”³⁶⁰ I look forward to that day when the weak will have strength, the blind will see, and those who thirst will thirst no more.

“PROSPERITY” TEACHING: AN EMPTY PROMISE

As an important side note, I can’t go on without saying something about this particular doctrine. It is a common belief in the church today to say that it is “not God’s will that we suffer/get sick/get poor/insert negative life experience here.” Before I make mention of why this is such a distortion of the Gospel, I want to make sure that when I speak about this, I’m not simply talking about the extremes of the “health and wealth,” “gab and grab,” “name it claim it” folks, but also the Christians that would *not* categorize themselves in that grouping of believers.

³⁵⁸ Genesis 5.27

³⁵⁹ www.lifewithoutlimbs.org

³⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 15.25

Personally, I have never ever identified myself with the prosperity gospel sect of Christianity, but that doesn't mean I don't unknowingly believe in such a teaching in smaller part in my life. There are times in my life when I am faced with a tough decision to do things according to God's Word and in obedience to what I know I am supposed to do. In those moments, when I choose to be obedient, sometimes the situation gets worse. I am faced with bigger problems than before. Sometimes, in that moment, I will think "What happened, God? I did what I was supposed to do, but it got worse? Don't You bless obedience?"

This, my friends, if we're to be honest with ourselves, is the prosperity gospel in its infant stage.

Now, I don't mean to say that God doesn't bless us, and I don't mean to say that He doesn't love to bless us, even especially for our obedience. But *how* and *when* and *if* He blesses us, for whatever reason, even our obedience, is His own business in His own sovereignty. We don't rub His belly like Buddha or swipe an ATM Obedience Card so He can dispense blessings in increments of twenty for us. He's not a dog who does tricks on command. He will bless us when He wants to bless us, and He will bless us *how* He wants to bless us. When we expect that He must bless us in a way that we expect Him to, or in a way that *we deem* as a "blessing," we are walking on very thin ice and beginning to accuse God of wrongdoing.

The fact of the matter is that our obedience *will indeed get its reward*.³⁶¹ *We will reap what we sow*.³⁶² But this sowing and this reward will come when He wants it to in the form that He wants it to.³⁶³ And to be honest, sometimes we get the blessing and don't even know it! You may realize years down the road that the patience that everyone notices about you was actually a result of a series of trials you went through in your teen years.

The point is this:

**Our desire to be obedient shouldn't be so that we can get stuff from God,
but because we've *already gotten more than enough* from Him.**

Additionally, it's God's job to be God and do as He wills, whether we like the way He does it or not.

All this to say is that we will face persecution, and not *in spite* of the fact that we are being obedient, but *because* we are being obedient! We will face trials. We will also get sick. We will face hardship. And yes, we will surely die.³⁶⁴ The idea that suffering, pain, sickness, trials, and death is "not for Christians" is rooted in poor and destructive theology. I read a book recently that said that "the more occupied you are with Jesus the more money follows after you."³⁶⁵ I would love to have the author sit down and have a face to face with Paul, who suffered tremendously for his faith.

I have heard it said that "since Jesus broke the curse, we no longer have to be sick, because sickness is part of the curse." Unfortunately, again, this is a gross misunderstanding of the whole counsel of God. If He did in fact break the curse in totality and eternally, first of all, all of the curse would now be broken. However, as I see it, the elements of the curse are still in effect today. Let's make a quick mental checklist to make sure:

- The earth is still passing away; it has not been renewed yet.
- I was present at the birth of both of my boys, and I can assure you, my wife had pain in childbirth.
- I still must work for a living. I have little doubt that if I quit my job my family will go broke and hungry.
- Satan has not been crushed eternally.
- Most importantly, we all still die.

When Jesus died on the cross, He indeed broke the power of sin and death, but He has yet to destroy them in totality. In **1 Corinthians 15.54** it says that "*when* the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, *then* the saying that is written *will come true*: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" (NIV, emphasis mine). We're talking about a *future* event. In **Revelation 22.2-5**, in speaking of the future New Earth it says "No longer *will there be* any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb *will be* in the city, and his servants will serve him. They *will*

³⁶¹ Matthew 5.12 // 1 Corinthians 3.14 // 2 Corinthians 5.10 // 1 Corinthians 15.58

³⁶² Galatians 6.7, 8 // Hosea 10.12 // Psalm 126.5

³⁶³ 1 Corinthians 15.26 // 2 Corinthians 9.6 // Galatians 6.8-10 // Matthew 6.19-21, 19.21 // 1 Timothy 6.19

³⁶⁴ Genesis 2.17

³⁶⁵ *Unmerited Favor* by Joseph Prince, pg. 233

see his face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. There *will be* no more night. They *will not* need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God *will give* them light. And they *will reign* for ever and ever”(emphasis mine). Again, the curse has been broken, but it has not been done away with in totality.

Indeed, Satan has been dealt a death blow, and he has a mortal wound,³⁶⁶ but he will fight to the end, seeking to deceive and take as many as he could with him. Some have compared it to the difference in World War II between D-Day and V-Day. On D-Day, the Allied Forces dealt a crushing blow that would prove to be a permanent wound to the Nazi Regime. However, it wouldn't be until V-Day, eleven months later, when the Nazis finally, and in totality, were conquered by the Allies.³⁶⁷



V-Day in Time Square, 1945

Satan knows he has been dealt the death blow, and presumably, since he knows the Word well³⁶⁸ and quite possibly believes the Bible is true, he therefore knows how it all ends (though some would purport that Satan is so self-deceived and self-absorbed that he still thinks he can beat God and usurp the prophetic telling of the Word. I don't see this as impossible, and quite possibly highly probable, but I also don't know if I'd say he's quite that stupid). Regardless, he is still at work and now in desperation mode. Out of his hatred for God, he seeks to take the only thing that can be taken from God: His created image bearers. This, more than anything, can break the heart of the God who Satan despises.

It should also be said that Satan hates *you*. You have been created in God's image, and yet not only because of that fact, but also because you have the possibility to have redemption and spend eternity in God's presence in a perfect place, free from sin and death. Satan does not have this luxury any longer. He had it, and he lost it. So now, he burns in furious jealousy over you and me. It's similar to the little brat who wants to play with a toy. His friend wants it too, but he'd rather break the toy or hide it than have his friend play with it. Satan cannot stand the idea of us having what he had, and then some!

☪ God's SOVEREIGNTY AMIDST EVIL ☪

We got on this quasi-rabbit trail discussing the place of suffering, sickness and death amidst our life. We have seen clearly that these are all consequences of the sin that have entered into the world, and we have seen that they are unwanted enemies of God. But what, exactly, is God's role in all of it? Are these merely just "consequences" of a fallen world? Does He "send" sickness? Or does He simply "allow" it? Is it His will that we suffer? Or is it just more of a default, inevitable thing that gets set in motion because of sin?

These questions address the issue of what is called God's *sovereignty*. ♣ It's the idea that God indeed is in control as Lord, not Onlooker. Though we will cover this more in depth later as we look at the nature of salvation, let's look and see how this relates specifically to living in a fallen world with evil events around us. We'll do this first by seeing what the Scriptures say about His sovereignty in general.

WAYS THE WORD DESCRIBES WHAT GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS:

1. **He appoints and ordains.** 1 Thessalonians 5.9 // Titus 1.1-3 // Jeremiah 1.5 // 1 Corinthians 2.7-9 // Isaiah 37.26

God specifically states that He appoints very specific events, actions, and stories. In **Jeremiah 1.5** we see that He specifically appoints Jeremiah to a specific vocation chosen for him before he was even physically made. Additionally, **1 Corinthians 2.9** speaks of specific things and events that He has "prepared," or made ahead of time, for His chosen.

Jeremiah 1.5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

³⁶⁶ Revelation 13.3, cf. Genesis 3.15

³⁶⁷ D-Day was on June 6, 1944, when Allied Forces invaded the beaches at Normandy, France. The battle led to a decisive victory over the Nazi regime. V-Day, however, was the day the Nazis finally offered their unconditional surrender almost a year later, on May 8, 1945. This came nearly three weeks after the Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, committed suicide upon recognition of imminent defeat. Satan, as it were, will have no such luxury. He will face the eternal wrath of God, there will be no escape for him.

³⁶⁸ Matthew 4.1-11

1 Corinthians 2.9

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”

2. He plans and has a plan. Jeremiah 29.11 // Isaiah 14.25-27 // Job 42.2, 3

Like His appointments and ordinations, the Word says that God is a planner, not a disorganized, chaotic bystander. He has a specific plan that has purpose. There is no mistake in His plan, as it is perfect. Life isn’t just a series of randomly connected events, consequences, repercussions, and coincidences.

Jeremiah 29.11, 12

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

Isaiah 14.27

For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?

Job 42.2

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3. He works all things for good. Romans 8.28-30

Romans 8.28-30

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The greatest truth that we can remind ourselves is that He indeed works *all things* for good. Not just the good things for good, but “all things” for good. Do you know what the word for “all” that is used in the Bible meant in the original Greek? It meant “all.” Incredible, isn’t it?

WAYS THE WORD DESCRIBES WHAT GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS NOT:

1. It not *only* the fact that He knows what will happen. Ephesians 2.10 // Isaiah 25.1

Most people don’t like the idea of God allowing evil to happen, much less ordaining certain events or tragedies. They would rather think that God is more or less ambivalent in the whole matter and simply just “pushed the first domino” and watched a series of cause and effect and “random” consequences. Though this may on the surface satisfy the objection of God’s personal involvement in a fallen world, it automatically takes Him out of the equation of personal involvement in *any way*. This is an old heresy we saw earlier called *deism*, which views God very impersonally just floating above us in the sky watching everything unfold.

Rather, what we see in the Word is a very personal God who is intimately involved in everything that happens. He is not only watching things happen, but He has planned them to happen. Even the bad things.

Isaiah 19.17

And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians. Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose that the LORD of hosts has purposed against them.

Isaiah 23.8, 9

Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? ⁹ The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.

Isaiah 37.26

"Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins..." [says the Lord]

Judges 9.22-24

Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. ²³ And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴ that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

Additionally, when it comes to all the good things and in particular salvation, to say that God simply "knows who will choose Him" is taking away His loving engagement with His creation as well as His Lordship over His creation. He becomes a benign observer "hoping" that we will choose Him. But this, too, is not the case. He indeed has planned all good things, and is a God who pursues.

Ephesians 2.10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Isaiah 25.1

O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

Psalms 33.10, 11

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

2. It is not the cold action of a distant, sadistic God. Ephesians 2.4-10 // John 10.3, 4

God does not find joy in suffering, hardship, death, sin, sickness, or poverty. He abhors all these evils, and He is not simply watching from the sky as a mad scientist working on his latest scientific experiment, neutrally viewing death and sin spread throughout His creation. After all, He sent His own Son to die because of them in order that they may be destroyed!

Ephesians 2.4, 5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

2 Peter 3.9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Ezekiel 33.11

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

3. It is not completely understandable by us. Proverbs 25.2 // Deuteronomy 32.4 // Daniel 4.37 // Isaiah 55.8-12

In **Exodus 5.22**, Moses whines to God for what has happened after he went to Pharaoh to demand the release of the Hebrews to worship. Pharaoh toughens their workload, and so now Moses accuses God of not fulfilling His promise. Moses is very unhappy with the way things went down.

Exodus 5.22, 23

Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³ For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.

Moses is blaming God for *perceived* injustice or unfairness. I read through this and hear him saying “So is *this* why you sent me? To make things worse?! Really?! Nice plan! Ever since *I went* [seems to be taking a little credit] to Pharaoh to speak in *Your Name* [seems to be blame shifting], he has only made things worse! Your plan failed! Oh, and by the way, “God” [while he makes little quote fingers], *You* haven’t even rescued anyone either!!! FAIL!!!”

Whether you read it as dramatically as I do or not, Moses is for sure quite frustrated, and he is obviously not that impressed nor appreciative of God’s plan. If only he could have known those words of **2 Peter 3.9** mentioned above. God then spends the bulk of **Exodus 6** repeating His plan to Moses as if to say, “son, let’s start from the beginning. Here’s how it’s going to go. And yes, I will make it happen, *in my way*.” He is basically telling Moses to not be surprised and don’t whine when it doesn’t go his way, because this is the course that God has chosen for His purpose.

Interestingly, part of His way of seeing this happen is through the fact that God will harden Pharaoh’s heart. Of course, this is quite a controversial and not-so-easy-to-wrap-our-brains-it kind of a doctrine, but there is much here, and much we can learn about how God works in this fallen world. Here are two perspectives we can learn from to understand this mysterious truth more.

In this part of the story, and quite frankly, for much of Moses’ life from this point on, things don’t go well for Moses, and as a matter of fact, things got worse for the Israelites. But all things, including bad things, do indeed happen for a reason and with divine purpose.

As stated before, we still live in a cursed world, evidenced by the fact that all the curses of **Genesis 3.14-24** are still active (including the most undeniable fact that we all still die), as well as the fact that **1 Corinthians 15.54** and **Revelation 22.2-5** speak of a future and final destruction of the curse that is not yet.

Though the following list of things weren’t part of God’s original creation, since we invited sin and rebellion into creation by our own choice, they have become a part of our fallen world. These things now are not just *allowed* by God, but are even *ordained* by God to accomplish His will. This is *not to say* that God is the author of these evils or that He takes delight in observing them, but that in His Lordship He uses them to accomplish His perfect will.

DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND EVIL

In light of what we have seen about God’s sovereignty and then considering His relationship with sin, we ask many questions, such as “did God create evil/sin?,” “if God knew Satan would turn against Him, why did He make him?,” and “why doesn’t God stop evil and injustice?” These are valid questions, and important to try to get a handle on, as it affects how we see God, our lives, the lives of loved ones, and it affects how we pray.

First and foremost, we should understand some of the limitations of the words that we use to describe God’s relationship with sin (even that phrase, “God’s relationship with sin,” sounds pretty odd). We ask whether God creates, authors, wills, causes, ordains, chooses, predestines, permits, plans, allows, brings about, or makes sin to happen. Let’s look at a few key points as we try to grasp this.

1. **God is not the author of sin/evil.** God is all holy, perfect, and pure. He cannot “author” evil. In Him is light, and no darkness dwells. When we say He is Creator of all things, we mean that He is Creator of all things that are good.³⁶⁹ We never even have to qualify this statement either, not simply because it is an assumption, but because anything evil is not actual creation, but the distortion or destruction of creation. Therefore, when we say He “created all things,” that statement cannot include evil or sin. This must be made abundantly clear to us.
2. **God does not simply permit sin/evil to happen.** Some like the idea that God simply “allows” or “permits” bad things to happen. We like this because it takes God out of the responsibility for evil and suffering. But consider two things:
 - a. God’s simple allowance of sin and evil causes us to largely downgrade and reduce the “bad things” that happen as mere consequences of sin or a fallen world. They are, in fact, these things, but they do not come *about* only by being natural consequences. This degrades His Lordship. To say that He simply allows it and doesn’t actually ordain it depicts a God who is reactionary to His own laws, as if He is constantly “playing it by ear.”

³⁶⁹ Isaiah 59.2 // Zechariah 8.17 // 1 John 1.5

To say that all evil is only by the request of the enemy depicts a God largely uninvolved in the many details of hardship in this life. An absence of God's Lordship amidst suffering is a terribly alarming thought.

- b. God's simple allowance of sin and evil doesn't actually solve the problem of His ordaining usage of sin and evil. In using the example of Satan requesting to torment Job, was it not God who "fore-ordained" Satan to even ask this of God? Or does Satan work outside of God's sovereignty? And was it not God who "fore-ordained" His own choice to "allow" Satan to torment Job? Do you see what is happening here? We use a word like "allow" to appease our own understanding, but we didn't really solve anything. As a matter of fact, we made God smaller, simply because our understanding is smaller.

So what do we say about this? If God isn't the author of evil, but we see that He does plan or cause all things, how can we understand this? Well once again, acknowledging the limitations, at times, of our language, I want to give you an option adopted from John Frame's book, *The Doctrine of God*.

God is the Author of a Story Involving Evil, Not the Author of Evil

Frame describes this intricate and mysterious subject by relating God to an author of a story. This is a distinct difference between God being the *author* of sin and evil, but rather the author of a story *that involves* sin and evil. Let's use an example from one of the greatest (human) stories ever told: *Star Wars*.

I love the *Star Wars* movies (the real ones). George Lucas truly did create and depict a classic story line of good versus evil. Throughout the story, there is so much up and down, back and forth, victory and setback. In the first film, *Episode IV: A New Hope*, about halfway into the film the coolest guy in the film, Obi Wan Kenobi, gets killed by Darth Vader. Very sad, and I echo the sentiment of Luke by saying "Nooooooooo!!!!!"



But here's the question: who killed Obi Wan? Darth Vader?

Or George Lucas?

It may sound like a stupid question at first, but let's think this through. Though Lucas was in fact the author of a story that included evil, it was in fact Vader that killed our hero, right? Even though Lucas is the "sovereign author" and can create the story however he wants to (he could have spared Obi Wan), Vader was still the one responsible for the death of Obi Wan.

As we see, the author can be intimately involved in creating every nuance of the story, even the evil characters and evil plots, without being the one who actually commits the evils. What's further, we see by the end that the death of Obi Wan was actually for the glory of the greater good, even as he himself said to Darth a moment before he was killed, "If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than you can possibly imagine." Lucas, indeed, worked all things for good in the end.

This is yet another one of my silly examples to help us understand in relatable terms a deeper truth of God, yet it is, obviously, an imperfect analogy. But nonetheless, it was to the glory of Lucas that he created such a deep, dark, yet in-the-end triumphant story of good versus evil. The joy of the final ending of the three movies was so great only because the deepest and darkest moments allowed it to be.

Let me put it another way. If the three *Star Wars* movies didn't have evil, a bad guy, or a dark problem, would it not be the most boring set of movies you've ever seen in your life? I love these movies, but I don't want to watch Luke, Han, and Leia prance around the galaxy for six hours.

The thing is this. God is glorious no matter what He is doing. As I stated earlier, He could sit around and twiddle His thumbs and be perfect, holy, and glorious. But we, as His image bearers, would never know or be able to behold the true beauty of our covenant God and Lord of all creation unless His glory were set against a dark backdrop. As you look into the sky at night, you should be aware that the only way you can even see the beauty of those stars is because of the blackness of the night sky.

I know this may sound acceptable in concept, but when the reality of suffering, abortion, massacre, starvation, and death sets in, it may lose its potency with some. Though this is admitted, we must always remember that God's ways are not our ways,³⁷⁰ but He is in control, He loves us, He has a plan, and He will work all things for the good for those that love Him.³⁷¹

God is glorified when we are satisfied in Him. We become satisfied in Him when we behold His glory, and glory is best seen when it is cast against a dark backdrop. His glory is not increased or diminished because of the black backdrop, but it is finally perceived by us when it is against a black backdrop. God wants us to be satisfied, and He wants to be glorified.

1. **Sickness.** Job 1.3-8 // 2 Corinthians 12.7-10

Sickness is one of the effects of our bodies decaying since the introduction of sin and death by the fall. Throughout history, we have seen new diseases come onto the scene, as well as cancers, plagues, mental and physical handicaps, and birth defects. Though some of these are *direct* results of sin (fetal alcohol syndrome for instance), most of them are *indirect* results of sin. This means that we shouldn't believe that a baby born with a missing organ is born that way because God is either punishing the parents or punishing the baby, but that it is one of the unfortunate aftereffects of sin infiltrating our lives and distorting life. Sin has caused deterioration and mutation in our genetics. We are decaying. Sickness is the little brother of death; it's the foretaste of death, even the first fruits of death. We shouldn't view anyone with sickness or disease as "cursed," but rather, like *all of us*, people living *under the curse*.

That said, and this is important, sickness is not *merely* an effect of the fall. In his book, *If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, Randy Alcorn says that "Scripture sometimes regards physical afflictions as consequences of the Fall, sometimes as the work of demons, but ultimately sees them from God."³⁷²

Look and see what God says to Moses in **Exodus 4.11**: Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

Let me ask you something. What is truly more comforting? Believing that every sickness, disease, and death in this world is just a random effect of the fall and that God had nothing to do with it but is sitting back watching everything unfold day by day? Or knowing that God has given you everything, even bad things, with a precise and specific purpose that is meant to glorify Him and cause you to see and know His glory? Knowing that *nothing* in my life is mere circumstance, consequence, or random chance (those sort of rhyme) gives me great confidence and faith in the sovereignty, power, and glory of my God. It makes us able to agree with Paul's words:

2 Corinthians 12.10

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2. **Suffering and Trials.** Jeremiah 18.5-11 // 1 Peter 4.19 // Job 1.8-12 // 2 Timothy 2.3 // Philippians 1.29

Again, with suffering and trials, sometimes these things we bring upon ourselves. You can be going through trials because of mistakes you have made or as results of your direct sin. But we shouldn't view these as *simply* consequences, even though they are, but that they are specific consequences ordained and planned by God to discipline us (not punish us, if we are in Christ). He does this because of His love as a Father. He wants us to learn and grow, and we should be so *thankful* for the Father's discipline.

Other times, trials will come about in your life that are not a direct result of your sin, but are an indirect result of sin in this fallen world. It again is important for us to not think God is punishing us for something. He may simply be using it to help you grow in His grace, strength, or to teach you dependence on Him or give you some insight or foundation for later.

1 Peter 4.19

Therefore let those who suffer *according to God's will* entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. [emphasis mine]

³⁷⁰ Isaiah 55.9

³⁷¹ Romans 8.28

³⁷² pg. 231. This book is highly recommended if you have more questions on evil, suffering, sin, and the goodness of God.

2 Timothy 2.3

Share in suffering [not “claim” prosperity] as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1.29

For it has *been granted to you* that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake... [emphasis mine]

The **Philippians** verse is especially interesting, that suffering is seen by God as something that has been *granted to us on behalf of Christ!*

3. Persecution. 2 Timothy 3.12 // 2 Corinthians 4.16-18

The Word is clear that persecution is something that happens to us when we desire to live a godly life. I will hear many people claim that they are being persecuted, but they will use that type of wording as a way to say “don’t judge me” after they are doing something that was “right in their own mind.” Sometimes we easily justify our sinful behavior when people confront us and we say we are being persecuted. That’s not what this is.

Persecution is the result of standing up for our faith and then being challenged, ridiculed, harassed, threatened, beat up, or even killed because of it. And this is truly for the sake of the Gospel, not for something neutral.

This, too, is from God’s desire and will and for His purpose and glory.

2 Timothy 3.11-13

...my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Corinthians 4.16-18

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

4. Death. Hebrews 9.27, 28 // Genesis 3.22 // Romans 6.3-11 // 2 Corinthians 5.1-8 // Philippians 1.21-24

It is beyond clear that we all still die. The death ratio is still 1:1 (save for a couple guys such as Enoch and Elijah). But again, even with this reality, it doesn’t make death much easier to deal with when it is people that we love. We must always remember that death is the enemy of God, and that He hates death. But He does, in fact, use death as a means of enacting His righteous judgment on sin. He also uses the *postponement* of death (giving us long lives despite our sin and the fact that we deserve immediate death because of it) to patiently give us time and opportunities with a *real threat* of imminent end which *should* compound the reality that we need to make a real choice! In the end, the knowledge of death *should* be the wake up call to the fact that judgment is real. So, despite the fact that death is an enemy, God also uses it for His glory.

5. Sin. Romans 9.14-29

We also see that God particularly uses our sin, bad situations that we have dug ourselves into, and our poor choices for His glory. He uses them to teach us things, humble us, and learn so that we can share with others to prevent them from doing the same. Again, this isn’t to say that He *causes us* to sin, for we know that God doesn’t tempt us and that He always gives us a way out of sin.³⁷³ This, again, is where it gets very tricky and sticky for us to navigate through this minefield of seeming contradictions. Yet this is where the mystery and wisdom of God must kick in for us, that though we know these things to be true, they are not in opposition with each other.

³⁷³1 Corinthians 10.13

Going back to the story of Moses, we see that God Himself even “hardens Pharaoh’s heart.” But we shouldn’t see this as a cold, “sorry, buddy” approach that God had with Pharaoh. In fact, God gave Pharaoh a lifetime of riches, glory, and power. He also brought Moses to him and gave him multiple chances to repent and use his power to obey God and be a blessing to the Israelites. He even made it easy on Pharaoh by only asking him for a three day holiday weekend (rather than ask for the whole shebang of a permanent exodus). God really was trying to prove that Pharaoh’s heart was already hard, he was prideful, arrogant, and unrelenting despite all the blessing and patience God had for him. God was slow to anger and longsuffering with Pharaoh.

Paul addresses this in **Romans 9** in what is considered some “go to” verses on the issue of predestination.

Romans 9.14-26

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” ²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

We see here a few interesting things. First of all, the difficulty of this doctrine is well admitted. What is most interesting to me is that Paul gives what seems to be, at least humanly, a very unsatisfactory answer. The reader (both the Roman Christians and us today) are rubbing our hands together like we’re waiting for a Thanksgiving feast to be placed in front of us waiting for the final answer on this tough question. Instead, Paul says “who are you to ask?!?”

Instead of a Thanksgiving feast, we get a slice of humble pie. For one, even though the question and concern may be valid (“Then why does God still blame us? For who can resist His will?”), the answer is that it is not our right to know all things. In this answer, it seems as well that Paul himself may not fully know the answer, but that he has simply come to have peace with the mystery of it, and is embracing the elements that he does know about it. This should be the same attitude and approach that we have. Though there is *much* to know about this doctrine, and the things we do know will cause our hearts to be filled in awe, comfort, hope, and worship, there is also still much we will probably never know, even in eternity.

In it all, however, Paul gives us a clear picture, not only here but in other parts of the Word, that we are still indeed responsible for our actions even though God has predestined all things. This is a tough truth to wrap our brains around, but though “how” it works isn’t clear in the Word, the fact that it is there is indeed clear.

Even though God has planned everything, we are all still completely responsible for how we respond.

Lastly, we must always remember that again, even when God fore-ordains these bad things, we have to remember that God does not delight in them, but He uses them for a much greater purpose. Note again in **Romans 9.22** that God bears with sinful humanity with great patience. Additionally, read through these verses to give you a clearer picture of God’s patience yet impending wrath.

2 Peter 3.9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Ezekiel 33.11

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Romans 2.4-8

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

When it comes to hard times and suffering, it is important for us to not allow our hearts to be hardened, like Pharaoh did and like how Moses and the Israelites were on their way of doing. God will and wants to use *all things* for good for those who trust in Him. He will and wants to use all trials, suffering, persecution, disease, and tough times to draw us closer to Him, make us to be more like Him, mature us, and grow us. As a matter of fact, the following Puritan quote has brought me much comfort and insight into this.

The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay.

—Anonymous Puritan

This quote convicts me to come to appreciate and accept trial and suffering, knowing that if I don't, I run the risk of hardening my heart towards God, shaking my fist at Him, and blaming Him for injustice like Moses and the Israelites were doing. Instead, I don't want *any* of my hard times to be in vain, but rather I want them to be used for God's glory, for my growth, and for the benefit of those around me. With this in mind, these verses give me further hope.

James 1.2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 8.28-30

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 11.33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Hebrews 3.12-15

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

The main point in all of this is to not try to run from hard times, avoid them, be in denial over them, or "pray them out of our life;" rather we should expect them, endure them, give God glory in them, grow in them, and become closer to Jesus through them. It is a difficult thing to learn how to be grateful and say "thank you" in times of suffering and hardship, but when we do that, the roots and foundation of our faith will grow deep and strong. If we can learn to glorify Him in hard times, we will be able to endure everything. In the end, it gets down to our attitude within those times and the question we ask God.

Ask “Why me?” and your heart will be hardened by His grace.

Ask “What now?” and you will grow in His grace.

It's not wrong to ask questions, but we need to be asking the *right* questions with the *right* attitude. Asking “why me, Lord?!” with accusation and disdain will only lead to the hardening of our hearts. Asking Him “what now, Lord? What do you want me to learn in this?” with humility will grow you like you've never seen and make a mockery of the enemy. Your light will shine forth as you reflect the image of God and bring glory to His Name.

So in the end we see that like in **1 Peter 4.19** and the others mentioned, it says that it is indeed God's will that we will suffer. The purpose is clear, however. It says that our suffering produces perseverance, which produces character, and character produces a hope that does not disappoint.³⁷⁴ It also clearly shows that our faith through trials becomes a witness for both unbelievers and believers in our lives. All said and done, trials and suffering are ordained by God in our lives to build our character and testimony, which in turns bring glory to God, which then in turn brings souls to Christ.

We must also remember Job, where we get a peculiar little insight into suffering as we see the conversation Satan has with God and God permits Satan to do a certain amount of harassing. But yet again, these trials Job will face are not only allowed, but ordained by God. The end result? Job glorifies God in good times and in bad. In everything he is faced with He doesn't curse God. He proves Satan to be wrong and God to be worthy of worship. As a nice little bonus, Job is rewarded handsomely for his faithfulness (for the record, as I stated earlier, it was up to God to give Job the reward He gave him. God could have given him half of that, or none even. This story shouldn't be taken as a prescription for how God works when we are obedient, but a description for how God can work in light of our obedience).

The promise of suffering and persecution is the promise that you will never find in those little *God's Promises for Every Day Life* books that you buy and put on a coffee table or on your toilet. It is a guarantee that if you are following Christ, you will be persecuted, but this is one of those promises we would rather not believe. But this is all for God's glory. And not only that, but our times of suffering and trials are ordained by God *for a purpose*, and we have to understand God's wisdom as being much greater in scope than we can possibly see. We have to remind ourselves that His ways are higher than ours and His thoughts are above our thoughts.³⁷⁵ God is eternal, and He knows the end game before the game even started. We rest in the fact that all things will work for the good for those who love God.³⁷⁶

☪ WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? ☪

So now, getting back to the story of the first sin in the Garden and the curse being ordained, God has now taken His first plan of action. A just but merciless god would have rightly disposed of and convicted the law-breaker immediately by taking swift action upon him by causing him to “surely die” immediately for his actions. However, God is indeed just, but our God is also merciful, and instead of *immediate* punishment by His just wrath, He prolonged the punishment by committing the first sacrificial shedding of blood for sin (which won't be the last time blood is shed for sin!) as He made them tunics of skin to replace their fig leaves.³⁷⁷

In this act, God was showing us that we cannot cover ourselves with the work of our hands. But rather, blood needed to be shed for sin, and this new covering allowed them to live in this fallen world as it temporarily “covered” their sin. But despite this temporary shedding of blood, this sin has destroyed the perfect image of God within His people. He then banished Adam and Eve from the Garden so that they would not now, having become corrupt, eat of the Tree of Life and be eternally lost in this fallen state, eventually to die and remain dead forever, separated from God by their sin. They had effectively handed over the deed to the earth and their own lives, but God had a plan to break this curse and redeem us back unto Himself.

So the ball is in God's court. And we will see how this all-powerful Creator responds to His law breaking creation.

³⁷⁴ Romans 5.5

³⁷⁵ Isaiah 55.9

³⁷⁶ Romans 8.28

³⁷⁷ Genesis 3.21

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Why UNDERSTANDING SIN IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE

Result #1: It causes us to take responsibility.

We are blame-shifters. We don't like to admit fault, and in a day and age where we depend so much on medication, counseling, therapy, psychology, etc., it becomes very easy to work on the symptom of a greater problem. The thing is, there is nothing wrong in and of itself when it comes to these tools for help, but all too often they don't get at the root of the issue.

When we know what sin really has done and what it is, it helps us recognize that the problem is in our hearts, not in our circumstances.

G.K. Chesterton, a great theologian, once replied to a local newspaper for an essay on "what the biggest problem facing society is." He responded this way:

Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely,
G.K. Chesterton

As funny as it may be, Chesterton knew that we, as sinful law breakers, need to face the reality that we need redemption. We too often compare ourselves next to the "bad people," all the while keeping ourselves deceived that we *are* the bad people. We are *all* the bad people; sinners in the need of grace!

Result #2: It drives us to daily repentance.

Forgiveness for all of your sins happens once when you are justified. Repentance needs to be daily.

We need to repent every morning and every evening, and all the time in between. It is only repentance that truly keeps us depending on God's grace and not getting religious. Understanding the depth of sin and the depth of the curse *should* cause us to repent daily. You can easily judge how much you actually depend on God's grace by looking at your day and taking inventory on how much you've given to repentance.

If the number is small, or virtually non-existent, you are working by your own power and righteousness.

Result #3: It drives us to the Word.

As we see the reality of Satan, demons, sin, and our flesh, it should drive us to seeking out who God *really* is by seeking Him in His Word. If we know that there is a solution we should want to seek it out. Through the truth of what sin is and the truth of God's gracious offer, it should drive us to repentance and into the Word to get to know this great and awesome God even more.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

♣ Definition of Terms ♣

Complementarian: This term, in context of the Trinity, helps explain the dynamic relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see that they are equal in essence, holiness, attribute, eternality, and power, yet they are distinct in their role and interaction with each other and Their creation, all the while maintaining their complete God-ness and God qualities. It simply means that in their equality *and* their difference, they *complement* each other. See the section on the Church for more on how this affects our lifestyle as believers.

Original Sin: Original sin is the truth that we are conceived in sin because of Adam. Adam is the figurehead of the human race, and so we are born sinful (and pre-disposed to sin), not only because of this being seen as hereditary, but also because we are “in” him as a people.

Total Depravity: Total depravity means that mankind is totally sinful in every extent. This in no way means that we are depraved in every way to the furthest degree at all times, doing the most evil we possibly can all the time, but that every faculty of our body, mind, emotions, and heart has been distorted and maimed by sin. We simply cannot be trusted.

Utter Depravity: Utter depravity is the erroneous view that we are all evil all the time in every way. This would be what many hyper-Calvinists would hold to.

Inability: Inability means that we, because we are dead in our sins and trespasses, are unable to choose God on our own, because we are spiritually bankrupt. We need God to draw and raise us by His grace, and when we are given His grace, we *then* respond in faith.

Sovereignty: Sovereignty is the truth that God is in control of all things at all times. God plans, has a purpose, and does not simply watch things unfold and react to them. Rather, He sees everything from start to finish all at once. He is all-powerful in His sovereignty and is affected by no outside source.

Recommended Resources

Theology Books

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. Chapters 16, 21-24, cover God's sovereignty, creation, man and woman, sin, Satan.

Books

If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil by Randy Alcorn. An awesome book discussing suffering, evil, disease, sin, tragedy, and death. Questions he deals with are "Why does God allow suffering?," "If God is in control why doesn't He stop it?," "Who sends or causes bad things?," and numerous others.

The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis. A classic writing about the struggle of having pain in the life of faith.

God, Marriage, and Family by Andreas Kostenberger. Described as being a book "without peer," meaning that there is no other marriage and family focused Christian book that even compares to it. It's about 350 pages and incredibly and highly recommended. If you are looking to strengthen your marriage and make it more God and Word centered, this is the book for you. Invest!

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood by Wayne Grudem and John Piper. This book is more technical, like a theology reference book, but it is incredibly thorough and detailed.

Idols of the Heart by Elyse Fitzpatrick

Sermons

www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages This is Wayne Grudem's sermons going through his book, *Systematic Theology*. Go to the sermons on Chapter 16, 21-24.

www.desiringgod.org. This is John Piper's ministry. Along with audio or video sermons, he has the transcripts as well.

Web Articles

www.gty.org. This is John MacArthur's ministry. Type "marriage" as well as "image of God" and "creation" in the search engine for various articles.

www.desiringgod.org. This is John Piper's ministry. Type in "creation" for these articles:

- "What We Believe About Creation"