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—J. V. Fesko,
Academic Dean, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,
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“Matthew Barrett has done a great service to the church with *40 Questions About Salvation*. As a pastor, I am always looking for solid and accessible books dealing with the basics of Christian theology from a biblical and Reformed perspective. This is a book I will heartily recommend to anyone asking questions about the doctrines associated with our salvation from the guilt and the power of sin. Questions for reflection are included, which makes this book suitable to personal and small group study.”

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—Fred G. Zaspel,
Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church of Franconia, PA;
Adjunct Professor of Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;
Executive Editor, Books At a Glance

40 QUESTIONS ABOUT
Salvation

Matthew Barrett

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To Cassandra

It has been a joy to watch salvation within your heart sprout like a fruit tree in rich soil, with lots of sunshine and water. I hope that when you put down this book, you will sit in awe of our great God and the salvation he has brought about within you by his grace alone.

Salvation belongs to the Lord!

—Jonah 2:9

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Preface: How to Read This Book

When I begin reading a book, I always appreciate a word of insight from the author as to why he wrote the book and how I, the reader, should approach the book. So I will do the same.

I have written each chapter so that you can read it on its own. Some readers who already have knowledge in certain topics may find it most helpful to just skip to those sections of interest. However, one will notice that in most chapters I reference other chapters. This is because each chapter builds upon the others. The reason for this is simple: This book is about the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), in which each stage in the salvation process is very much connected to that which comes before and after. So one will be best served to read the book from beginning to end since salvation is not something that comes in nice, neat compartments but is more like a chain in which each link is connected to the next. Should one link break (and be misunderstood), the whole chain of salvation will regrettably be affected.

One other important thought: Some readers may wish this book explored the numerous views out there on any given topic, as the innumerable “views books” do today. It should be stated at the start, however, that this is not the purpose of this book. While “views books” are valuable and have their place, this is not one of them. Rather, my purpose in this book is to present what the Bible teaches about salvation. So while I will refer to various views from time to time when necessary, I do not intend to interact with all the views (that would take another book in itself!) but to simply and concisely present what Scripture teaches about each step in salvation. This format is best suited for beginning students, churchgoers, and pastors—to whom this book is directed. That said, one should consult the bibliography where I point readers to more advanced resources (and list books according to topic and reading level).

Finally, I wrote this book not for the academic or advanced student, but at an introductory level. If you have not studied the doctrine of salvation before, or at least not in tremendous depth, this book is for you. It is meant to be a concise primer to each aspect of the order of salvation. Serious Bible-studying churchgoers, novice students, and pastors were in view as I wrote. I hope and pray that this book will act as a theological jump-start, motivating you to explore each subject in more depth as you grow in your love for God and his great plan of salvation.

Abbreviations

BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CNTC	Calvin's New Testament Commentaries
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
<i>EDT</i>	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
NACSBT	NAC Studies in Bible and Theology
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTC	New Testament Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
REDS	Reformed Exegetical Doctrinal Studies
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

PART 1

Sin and the Need for Salvation

QUESTION 1

What Is Sin?

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

—Romans 3:10–12

Paul’s message is loud and clear: Every single person is a sinner, guilty before a holy God. No one is righteous, no, not even one. All of us like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned to our own way (Isa. 53:6). There can be no doubt about it: Sin is real, and each and every one of us is a rebel against God. That raises the most basic of questions, however: What is sin?

What Is Sin?

Sin Is a Failure to Obey God’s Moral Law

Man as lawbreaker captures the essence of sin. Sin “may be defined as lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state.”¹ Man’s disobedience of God’s moral law is a theme that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Beginning in Genesis, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die (Gen. 2:17). However, Adam and Eve chose to listen to the serpent rather than God, violating his covenant stipulation. As a result, Adam and Eve lost their original righteousness and moral innocence when they broke God’s command. Suddenly they were guilty before God for their disobedience and they were morally corrupt. As we will learn in Questions 2 and 3, Adam’s guilt and corruption would not be limited to himself but would be inherited by his progeny as well, since he acted as their representative (i.e., original sin). But here our focus is restricted to the act of sin (i.e., actual sin) so that we can identify its essential nature or character.

1. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 233.

Satan's deceptive and murderous ways (John 8:44), unfortunately, would not stop with Adam but can be seen once again with Adam's first child, Cain. Cain and his brother Abel both made an offering to the Lord, but while Abel's offering pleased the Lord, Cain's did not (Heb. 11:4). Anger and jealousy consumed Cain, though the Lord warned him that if he did what was right he would be accepted. Yet, sin was crouching at Cain's door and its desire was for him. Cain, God warned, must rule over it (Gen. 4:7). Like his father Adam, rather than obeying God and submitting to his moral instruction, Cain in his anger killed his brother Abel, so that his blood cried out to the Lord (4:8–10). As you can see, the first chapters of Genesis vividly (and painfully) demonstrate that sin is a violation of God's moral commands.

Sin would characterize all of Adam's children thereafter as well. In Genesis 6 we read that the earth was corrupt in God's sight and filled with violence (6:11–12). The intentions of man's heart were evil from youth (8:21), so God sent a flood to destroy the whole earth, with the exception of Noah and his family, whom God graciously spared. The corruption of man did not disappear after the flood, however. God's just wrath was once again unleashed when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with sulfur and fire from heaven (19:23–29), for their sin was "very grave" (18:20).

The history of Israel is tainted by lawbreaking as well. One would think that God delivering his chosen people from an oppressive dictator like Pharaoh would result in steadfast obedience. And yet, even while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God himself, Israel had already rejected Yahweh as her God and instead crafted a golden calf to worship (Exod. 32). Israel defiled herself, turning against the commands of Yahweh, and exchanged the one true God for an idol made by the hands of men. Consequently, God's righteous wrath, which burned hot that day, came down against his people, demonstrating his holiness and intolerance for sin.

Sin pervades the rest of the story line of Scripture as well. The history of Israel is one of perpetual disobedience. As God's covenant people, under God's covenant law, they were commanded to love the Lord their God with all their heart (Deut. 6:5). This is the greatest commandment they received. Yet, throughout the Old Testament Israel repeatedly failed to uphold this commandment. The book of Judges summarizes the OT: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6b).

No act reflects the sinfulness of man more than the crucifixion of Christ himself. The sinfulness Paul speaks of in Romans 3 is put on full display when Jesus, the Son of God, was nailed to the cross by wicked men (Acts 2:23). It is tempting to think that if we were there we would have acted differently. Yet, many of those who put Jesus on the cross were the *religious* leaders in Israel. Though they looked clean on the outside, on the inside they were "full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt. 23:25–26). Many of the religious leaders were hypocrites, full of lawlessness, like whitewashed tombs, "which

outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27–28). They transgressed the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions (Matt. 15:2–3).²

The words of Jesus in Matthew 23 are important, for they demonstrate that sin, or lawlessness, is not merely a disobedient *act* but is a corruption of the *heart*. In other words, external behavior is the outflow of one's internal disposition.³ This much was evident in Cain's murder of Abel. While Cain's murder was a sin, his actions stemmed from the anger within his heart (Gen. 4:7). Jesus makes such a point in his Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:22). The Heidelberg Catechism reiterates the words of Jesus precisely: "By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God's sight all such are murder" (A. 106). Therefore, sin is not only a violation of God's moral law in one's external behavior, but it is first and foremost a violation of God's moral law in one's *internal* attitude and desires.⁴

The internal nature of sin is a reminder that sin not only is rooted in one's internal motivations and desires—whereby the sinner fails to conform to what God has commanded—but sin is first and foremost due to our *corrupt moral nature* (see Questions 2 and 3). Our nature (that which is our very essence) does not escape the grip of sin. In short, we are sinners *by nature*. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:3, we "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Or as David acknowledges, we were "brought forth in iniquity" and we were conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). In the end, when we rebelliously break God's moral law (Rom. 1:18–23; 2:23; 1 John 3:4), such an action is ultimately rooted in who we are as children of Adam in a post-Fall world. Most fundamentally, this means that sin does not first and foremost have to do with the bad things we do, but with our inherent condition as those in solidarity with Adam. Our sinful *actions* stem from our sinful *condition*.⁵ Our wicked decisions reflect our polluted identity.

2. "Transgression" is another word that appropriately conveys the meaning of lawbreaking (see Num. 14:41–42; Deut. 17:2; 26:13; Jer. 34:18; Dan. 9:11; Hos. 6:7; 8:1; Rom. 2:23–27; Gal. 3:19; 1 Tim. 2:14; Heb. 2:2; 9:15).

3. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 13.

4. For an extensive treatment of this point, see John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

5. "The basic assumption is that we become bad people by doing bad things and we can correct this by doing good things instead. By contrast, Scripture locates sin deep within the fallen heart and treats it first of all as an all-encompassing *condition* that yields specific actions" (Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 151).

Sin Is a Failure to Live in Covenant with God

This second point is a helpful qualification to the first point for this reason: Sin is not an impersonal violation of law but most fundamentally a violation against God himself. Remember, it is *God's* law that has been transgressed. Given that God is our covenant Lord, we can describe sin as covenant unfaithfulness. Ultimately, sin is not just a rupture in our covenantal relations with others but is most importantly a rupture in our covenantal relation with God (Ps. 51:4). Sin's offense is first vertical, then horizontal.

In the Old Testament God entered into a covenant relationship with his chosen people. As seen already, however, Israel's entire history was one of covenant infidelity. Though God's covenant was made with Abraham and confirmed with the patriarchs (Gen. 15:1–21; 17:1–14; 22:15–18; 26:24; 28:13–15; 35:9–12), and while God later covenanted with Israel through Moses (Exod. 6:2–8) and then Joshua (Josh. 24:1–27), nevertheless, Israel failed to keep the covenant God made with her at Sinai, despite the fact that God even sent prophets to warn them of the punishment that would result. Unquestionably, Israel's covenantal treachery was characterized by her habitual attitude of ingratitude toward God, her Savior and Redeemer.⁶

But God, in his great mercy and grace, spoke through his prophets of a day to come when he would establish a *new* covenant (Heb. 1:1–4). In this new covenant God would put his law within and write it on the heart. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," he promised through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:33). In the new covenant all would know the Lord, for he promised to forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more (31:34). Furthermore, God would give his people a new heart and a new spirit. He even promised to put *his* Spirit within, causing his people to walk in his statutes (Ezek. 36:26–27). Of course, this new covenant was accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ, the great high priest (Heb. 8–10), and applied by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–41; cf. Joel 2:28–32). New covenant believers, therefore, have been cleansed of all their uncleanness and idolatry (Ezek. 36:25). What great news: While man failed to live in covenant with God, God himself established a new covenant so that his redeemed people now live in communion with their Creator and Savior.

Sin Is Unbelief

So far we have looked at sin as the breaking of God's law and as covenant unfaithfulness, which really are the essence of sin. But describing sin *as unbelief* takes us deeper still into the inner chambers of the heart where we see the root reason and cause of man's transgressions. At the center of Adam and Eve's first sin is unbelief, a failure to trust in God.

6. David Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 317.

In Scripture unbelief is a central motif when describing sin. Those who receive eternal life are those who believe in Christ (John 3:16), while those who are condemned are those who do not believe in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18). According to Jesus, those who do not believe are spiritually blind (John 9:39–41). The sinner who rejects Christ and his words will be condemned by those same words on the last day (John 12:48). Additionally, when Jesus describes the Helper, the Spirit, Jesus states that he will “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me” (John 16:6–9). In each of these passages, unbelief is sin, a sin that will bring judgment. And what sin could be greater than unbelief in God's own Son (John 10:25–38; 12:37–39; Matt. 12:22–32)?

Sin Is Idolatry

Sin as unbelief is a natural segue into sin as idolatry.⁷ Those who do not believe in the one true God have instead turned to idols, idols of their own making. As we have already seen, certainly this was the case with Israel.⁸ Indeed, the first commandment makes clear Yahweh's stance on idolatry: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Nevertheless, from Sinai to Israel's exile, God's people chose to worship the idols of neighboring nations (Exod. 32:1–35; Num 25:1–5), despite the attempt of some to lead Israel in worshiping Yahweh alone (2 Chron. 15:8–18; 2 Kings 18:1–4; 23:4). In fact, idolatry was one of the major reasons God gave Israel over to her enemies resulting in her exile.⁹

Idolatry, however, is not limited to those who have special revelation (like Israel did). Those who only have general revelation commit idolatry as well. As Paul explains, though what can be known about God is “plain to them” (Rom. 1:19–20), they did not “honor him as God or give him thanks” but “exchanged his glory” for images of mortal man and animals (Rom. 1:22–23). They “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Rom. 1:25). Idolatry is the height of *selfishness* because rather than loving, serving, obeying, worshipping, and giving one's Creator the honor that is reserved for him alone, one has elevated another, perhaps even oneself, instead. As R. Stanton Norman explains, “If love of God is the essence of all virtue, then the antithesis is the choice of self as the supreme end.”¹⁰

7. Idolatry is when someone worships or exalts an object, person, and especially themselves in the place of God. Idolatry is trusting in a false god. In short, idolatry is worship of the creature (or created) instead of the Creator (see Gen. 11:4–9; Exod. 20:3; Deut. 5:7; Ps. 115:4–8; Isa. 40:18–20; Jer. 10:1–5; Mark 12:30; Rom. 1:22–25).

8. For an extensive study of idolatry, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

9. Smith, *With Willful Intent*, 317.

10. R. Stanton Norman, “Human Sinfulness,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 348.

The temptation for us today, in the twenty-first century, is to look back on the biblical time period and laugh: “How ridiculous to bow down and worship something you made with your own hands.” There are two problems with such an attitude. (1) Millions of people all around the world today still practice such a form of idolatry (e.g., Eastern religions). In other words, the hands-on, very material/physical idolatry we see in biblical times is very much alive today. Therefore, it should not be dismissed or taken lightly. (2) Such an attitude overlooks the definition of idolatry—namely, the elevation and worship of *anything*, material or non-material, above God and instead of God. While some may choose to bow down to a god they have made out of wood or stone, for others their idolatry is far more sophisticated, worshipping sex, drugs, money, fame, politics, ideologies, etc. In short, no unbeliever escapes idolatry. There is something or someone he is placing on the throne of his or her life other than God himself. There is something or someone he loves *more* than God. Naturally, then, idolatry is the very opposite of the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37–38; cf. Mark 12:30).

Sin as Pride

If idolatry reveals the selfishness of sin, pride will be exposed as well. Pride and selfishness go hand in hand, and both are present at the very start of mankind’s history.¹¹ Many of the early church fathers, medieval theologians, and Reformers made such a point. For example, Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 19:15, saw pride behind the first sin in the garden. John Calvin comments on Augustine’s point, saying, “Hence it is not hard to deduce by what means Adam provoked God’s wrath upon himself. Indeed, Augustine speaks rightly when he declares that pride was the beginning of all evils. For if ambition had not raised man higher than was meet and right, he could have remained in his original state.”¹² If pride is an exalted view of oneself or a trust in one’s own understanding (rather than God’s wisdom), then it is not hard to see why pride is sin.¹³

In Scripture, pride lurks behind the sinful actions of both individuals and nations at every turn. When God pronounces his judgment on Edom, it is because of her pride that he sends invaders to destroy her (Jer. 49:16). Pride deceives the human heart, making it think it is safe when in reality the judgment of God is at hand. Consider Daniel 4:28, where Nebuchadnezzar boasts,

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11. We can even go further and say pride, selfishness, idolatry, and rebellion all go hand in hand. See Norman, “Human Sinfulness,” 351–53.
 12. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.1.4.
 13. Gerald B. Stanton, “Pride,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 419; Donald K. McKim, “Pride,” *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 220.

claiming credit for the “great Babylon” which he built by his “mighty power” and for the glory of his majesty. What was God’s response? God brought him to his knees, to crawl on all fours, to eat grass like an ox. When God restored him, Nebuchadnezzar gave glory and honor to God alone (4:34–37) and acknowledged that those who “walk in pride he [God] is able to humble” (4:37; cf. Ps. 73:6). Nebuchadnezzar experienced firsthand the wisdom of the proverb: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18; cf. 28:5; Jer. 50:32).

Truly pride, as Proverbs 16:5 states, “is an abomination to the Lord” and will not go “unpunished” (cf. 6:17). It is no surprise that pride is considered the mother of other forms of sinfulness, including discontent, ingratitude, presumption, sensuality, perversion, treachery, extravagance, bigotry, hopelessness, indifference (apathy), and much more.¹⁴ This is not to say that pride is the essence of sin, but nonetheless pride is encompassing and acts in many ways as a parent to other types of sinfulness.

The Viciousness of Sin

No matter how hard we try to escape it, the reality is that sin is destructive, vicious, dangerous, and deadly. Why? Not merely because sin threatens our very existence, both physically and spiritually, but first and foremost because sin ruins our relationship with God, our Creator. If our chief end in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, then sin dismantles such a purpose. We fail to give glory to God and instead, as Calvin said, become idol factories.¹⁵ Our delight, treasure, and satisfaction in life is no longer in our Maker but in the things he has made. In short, the sinner is one who has “displaced God as the primary Object of his affection.”¹⁶ And we have done this, Paul states, by exchanging the “glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (Rom. 1:23). As a result, the one relationship we were made to live for has been destroyed. As seen with Adam and Eve, so also is it true with each and every one of us: Sin results in alienation. We live east of Eden.

Is this not a sobering reminder that sin’s grip is just as tight as ever? In every way we transgress God’s law, disbelieve his commands and promises, reject his covenant love, whore after false gods, and revel in our pride and self-righteousness. Sin is all around us. But worse, sin is everywhere within us. It defines us, our thoughts, our actions, and even our inclinations. There is no aspect of us that escapes sin. Paul’s words are our words: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24–25).

14. Smith, *With Willful Intent*, 155–334; Norman, “Human Sinfulness,” 339–51.

15. Man’s “nature is a perpetual factory of idols” (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.8).

16. Smith, *With Willful Intent*, 316.

Summary

Most fundamentally, sin is a failure to obey God's moral law. Sin, however, is not only a breach of God's moral law by one's external actions, but is rooted in one's internal attitude, motives, disposition, and ultimately is due to one's sinful nature inherited from Adam. Sin can also be defined as covenant unfaithfulness, unbelief, idolatry, and pride, among other things.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you failed to uphold God's moral law?
2. What does Scripture say are the consequences of rebelling against God's commands?
3. What is idolatry and why is it so offensive to the God who not only created all things but deserves our exclusive worship?
4. How does pride act as a mother that gives birth to other sins?
5. Do you think non-Christians understand what a personal offense it is to live for themselves rather than God's glory (review Romans 1–2)?

QUESTION 2

Do We Inherit the Guilt and Corruption of Adam's Sin? (Part 1)

Few doctrines are as offensive to modern sensibilities as the evangelical doctrine of original sin. How is it that Adam's children can be guilty of a sin they did not commit? Is it not unjust for God to credit or impute the guilt of Adam's sin to our account? Surely Scripture does not teach such a doctrine as this!

Such cries of protest have been voiced not only by those outside of the Christian tradition but also by those within the Christian tradition.¹ However, as we will discover in this chapter and the next, the doctrine of original sin is taught in Scripture. Yes, it does strike against our modern sensibilities, but this is because it is a sobering reminder of our identity in Adam, an identity that exposes our guilt and corruption before a holy God.

Defining Original Sin

It is best to begin by defining what original sin is not. Original sin is not *actual* sin. Actual sin refers to man's choice to violate God's moral law in his thoughts and actions (see Question 1). Original sin refers to the state or condition man is born into. The doctrine of original sin consists of two aspects: guilt and corruption.² Guilt is a judicial and legal concept, depicting man's relationship to the law of God. Guilt means that man has broken and violated God's holy law and is liable to be punished, as was the case with Adam in Genesis 3.

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1. Examples include: Karl Barth (1886–1968), Emil Brunner (1889–1966), Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971).
 2. "Original sin" is not referring to the first sin of Adam. Rather, the doctrine refers to the guilt and corruption all of mankind inherits from Adam. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 143.

In regard to original sin, however, we must speak of the *hereditary* nature of Adam's guilt. Theologians have titled such a doctrine *inherited guilt*, meaning that all of mankind is counted guilty because of Adam's first sin. Adam's guilt, in other words, is *imputed* to all mankind. "Imputation" means to "reckon" to another person's "account."³ When Adam sinned, the guilt he acquired was reckoned to all his progeny. As will be argued in what follows, Adam, acting as our representative, sinned and when he did so his guilt was transferred to his posterity so that all mankind is born into a state of condemnation and corruption. All of humanity stands in corporate solidarity with Adam.

On the other hand, corruption is a moral concept or category. The word "pollution" can be used as well since it describes our moral condition. In other words, while guilt addresses our status in relation to God's law, corruption or pollution addresses our moral nature.⁴ In reference to original sin, not only is Adam's guilt imputed to his progeny, but as a result so is his corrupt nature.

The question before us now is whether or not these components of original sin are imputed to Adam's race, and if so, then, how exactly. In what follows, we will first discuss several theories concerning the transmission of original sin and then we will turn to Scripture to see which one is best supported.

The Transmission of Original Sin

Historically there have been four major theories concerning the "transmission" of Adam's sin:

1. *Pelagianism*. Pelagianism is a rejection of original sin and instead argues that Adam merely set a bad example. Each person after Adam is born neutral. Sin in our world today can be explained by man imitating Adam's sinful example.⁵
2. *Mediate Imputation*. Mankind has inherited Adam's corruption. By means of such corruption (i.e., mediate) mankind stands guilty in Adam. Guilt, therefore, is based on corruption, not vice versa lest God be arbitrary.⁶ As Berkhof explains the view, "They are not born corrupt because they are guilty in Adam, but they are considered guilty because they are corrupt.

3. Charles Hodge, "Imputation," *ISBE* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:812; R. K. Johnston, "Imputation," in *EDT*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 554–55.

4. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 149–50.

5. E.g., Pelagius (c. 350), Albert Barnes (1798–1870), C. K. Barrett (1917–2011), Emil Brunner (1889–1966), and Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976). Two Catholics include Daryl Domning and Monika Hellwig whose view is dependent upon their denial of Adam's historicity.

6. E.g., Josué De La Place (or Josua Placaesus; 1596–1655), Samuel Hopkins, Timothy Dwight, Nathan Emmons, Henry Boynton Smith (1815–1877).

Their condition is not based on their legal status, but their legal status on their condition.”⁷

3. *Realism*. Advocates of realism argue that God has created us as one human race with one generic human (or seminal) nature.⁸ Physical presence, in other words, is the rope that ties us to Adam. When Adam sinned, therefore, human nature fell with him. Man is guilty since he shares in this generic human nature which was wholly in Adam when he sinned. This view especially appeals to Hebrews 7:9–10.
4. *Immediate Imputation (or Federalism)*. Advocates of immediate imputation argue that Adam's guilt is not mediated through corruption (as in mediate imputation), nor is our solidarity with Adam solely based on a realist conception of human nature.⁹ Instead, Adam's guilt is immediate. We inherit his guilt *directly* and, logically speaking, our inherited corruption follows as a result. Adam is not only mankind's physical (natural) head, but federal representative as well. Therefore, when Adam sinned he represented his progeny. As a result, Adam's guilt was imputed directly to all of his children. And since his guilt is credited to mankind, each person is born into a state of pollution. The federalist view appeals especially to Romans 5:12–21.

While we cannot enter into a detailed critique of each view, a couple of observations are necessary.¹⁰ First, the Pelagian view is out of the question as it is in direct conflict with passages like Romans 5:12–21, 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, and Ephesians 2:3 where Paul does connect our fallen identity to Adam not by Adam's imitation but by Adam's representation. In other words, Scripture does affirm original sin, whereas Pelagianism denies it. Out of all the positions mentioned above, the Pelagian position is unorthodox, declared heretical by early church councils (e.g., Carthage [418], Mileve [418], Ephesus [431]).

Second, the mediate imputation view struggles to explain why the guilt of Adam's first sin *alone* is imputed to us if it is mediated through the corruption we receive at birth. Also, texts like Romans 5:12–21 never indicate that

7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 243.

8. E.g., Tertullian (c. 160–220), Augustine (354–430), John Calvin (1509–1564), William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894), James H. Thornwell (1812–1862), and Augustus H. Strong (1836–1921).

9. E.g., Francis Turretin (1623–1687), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Savoy Declaration (1658), the Second London Confession (1689), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), John Murray (1898–1975), Louis Berkhof (1873–1957).

10. For a full critique, see Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 156–67; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 241–43.

Adam's guilt is mediated through corruption.¹¹ The word Paul uses to say that many were made sinners (*hamartōloi*) does not refer to being made corrupt or becoming corrupt. And last, the mediate view does not explain how it actually rids "guilt" from the original sin equation. Even if we merely say original sin means mankind inherits Adam's corruption, the very idea of corruption implies guilt's presence.¹²

Third, as attractive as the realist view is, it is incomplete. Yes, texts like Hebrews 7:9–10 show us that there is a unity at play between Adam and mankind in regards to a common human nature. However, Paul's analogy in Romans 5:12–21 says nothing of a generic human nature nor does he make this *the* rope that ties us to Adam and then to Christ.¹³

Additionally, the Adam-Christ language in Romans 5 is a parallel. Adam's federal representation results in the imputation of guilt, but Christ's federal representation results in the imputation of righteousness. Realism, however, breaks the parallel in Romans 5. On the one hand we are seminally united to Adam and in Adam, but it makes no sense to say that we are seminally united to Christ and in Christ. The realist has to concede, if his view is correct, that sinners are not identified with Christ in the same way as they are identified with Adam. By contrast, in the immediate imputation view the "means by which humanity participates in Adam's sin," says Fesko, "is the same manner in which believers participate in Christ's act of righteousness."¹⁴ We are legally

11. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 157. Berkhof acutely exposes other problems: "(1) A thing cannot be mediated by its own consequences. The inherent depravity with which the descendants of Adam are born is already the result of Adam's sin, and therefore cannot be considered as the basis on which they are guilty of the sin of Adam. (2) It offers no objective ground whatsoever for the transmission of Adam's guilt and depravity to all his descendants. Yet there must be some objective legal ground for this. (3) If this theory were consistent, it ought to teach the mediate imputation of the sins of all previous generations to those following, for their joint corruption is passed on by generation. (4) It also proceeds on the assumption that there can be moral corruption that is not at the same time guilt, a corruption that does not in itself make one liable to punishment. (5) And finally, if the inherent corruption which is present in the descendants of Adam can be regarded as the legal ground for the explanation of something else, there is no more need of any mediate imputation" (*Systematic Theology*, 243).

12. For a book-length treatment of this point, see J. V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputations*, REDS (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2016).

13. Berkhof adds several other critiques in need of mention: "(1) By representing the souls of men as individualizations of the general spiritual substance that was present in Adam, it would seem to imply that the substance of the soul is of a material nature, and thus to land us inevitably in some sort of materialism. . . . (3) It does not explain why Adam's descendants are held responsible for his first sin only, and not for his later sins, nor for the sins of all the generations of forefathers that followed Adam. (4) Neither does it give an answer to the important question, why Christ was not held responsible for the *actual* commission of sin in Adam, for He certainly shared the same human nature, the nature that *actually* sinned in Adam" (*Systematic Theology*, 241–42).

14. See Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ*, 211.

guilty in Adam, yet declared legally righteous in Christ, thanks to his righteousness being reckoned or imputed to our account.

Out of all the views, the immediate imputation view is biblical for a variety of reasons. First, we will discuss a theological argument for immediate imputation, one rooted in the flow of redemptive history. Second, and in the next chapter, we will turn to the more detailed exegetical support for immediate imputation.

Theological Argument from Redemptive History

Adam: Our First Covenantal Head

The point we must begin with is this: Immediate imputation provides the proper categories for interpreting the narrative that unfolds in Genesis 3, specifically the covenant of works Adam enters into at creation. As we will see in Question 7, the Genesis narrative, and especially Paul's interpretation of that narrative in Romans 5:12–21, assumes that God has established a covenant with Adam. This covenant has stipulations (do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), a sanction (death), and a promised reward (eternal life and communion with God). It also has a covenant maker (God) and a covenantal recipient (Adam) who represents his progeny (mankind).¹⁵ The covenant maker has condescended, stooped down to Adam, in order to enter into this covenant with him.

It is called a covenant of works because Adam's entrance into a permanent state of life, holiness, and communion with God is conditioned upon his obedience to God's command. Others call it a covenant of creation since this covenant is situated within the creation narrative. Regardless of what we label it, God had promised Adam (and by consequence, his progeny) life, though it is conditioned upon flawless obedience to his command during this testing period.¹⁶ Obedience, in other words, would have been rewarded with unlimited access to the "Tree of Life" (2:9; 3:22, 24; cf. Rev. 2:7). Submission to God's will would have resulted in Adam's justification.¹⁷

15. The covenant of/with creation shows similarities to other ancient Near Eastern treaties, which only strengthens the case for a covenant in Genesis 1–3. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 47–56.

16. "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works (Gal. 3:12), wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity (Rom. 5:12–20; 10:5), upon condition of perfect and personal obedience (Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10)" ("The Westminster Confession of Faith [1646/1647]," in *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century and Seventeenth Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600–1693*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014], 7.2).

17. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vols., ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2015), 4:138. Cf. Fesko, *Imputation*, 242–58.

Law and Gospel

In what we have outlined so far, notice the contrast between law and gospel. The covenant of creation tests Adam: Will he obey God's command, God's law? God's instruction has been made clear to Adam; it has been communicated by God to Adam verbally. And the moral obligation to obey one's Maker is something that inherently resides within Adam's own heart (and all since Adam), characterizing his moral DNA, since he is a creature made in the image of God. Since law is present, justice hangs in the balance, awaiting Adam's choice. As we will see soon enough, Adam's violation of God's law results in condemnation and the grave need for an external Word (a *verbum externum*) from God, an announcement of good news, news that can change Adam's status and condition (Gen. 3:15).¹⁸

The point is, at the very start of the Bible there is a contrast between law and gospel. The law holds us accountable and exposes our transgression before God our judge. The law brings us face to face with the righteousness of God. However, in the gospel God acts as our Savior and as a result we receive, as a gift, a righteousness *from* God.

Christ: Our New Covenantal Head

As we will see in the next chapter, Adam acts as our federal representative in this covenant of works, which Paul assumes in Romans 5 as he contrasts Adam's headship with Christ's headship. Unlike the Pelagian view, Adam is not acting for himself alone. No, he is our father, our head, our *covenantal* head in fact, and his choice has ramifications for us all. And unlike the realist view, Adam's tie to his progeny is not primarily biological but most fundamentally covenantal and forensic, as is apparent in how Paul parallels Adam's legal inheritance to Christ's.

Covenantal headship proves to be a crucial component. When Adam sinned, God imputed the guilt of the first sin of our covenant head to us, Adam's children.¹⁹ Why? Because we are legally (forensically) represented by Adam.²⁰ As a result, we are not only born inheriting guilt but Adam's depravity as well. Adam's corrupt nature becomes our own at birth. In contrast

18. For a comparison between the *verbum externum* (external word) of the gospel and the *verbum internum* (internal word) of the law, see Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 133.

19. When I say God imputed the guilt of Adam's sin, I assume under such a phrase both *reatus culpa* and *reatus poenae*. In other words, imputation includes both guilt and penalty, not merely the former. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.1.8; Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (1852; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, n. d.), 40; idem, *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae* (Hanoviae: Jonas Rosae, 1651), 43; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–97), 1:640–58.

20. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 242.

to the mediate imputation view, man is not born guilty because he is corrupt, but he is born corrupt because he is guilty in Adam.

The major advantage of the immediate imputation view is that it provides a rationale for *why* only Adam's first sin, and not all his subsequent sins, is imputed to our account. Adam's headship and representation applies only within the probationary period of the covenant of works. After that, the covenant has been broken; Adam and the rest of mankind now suffer the consequences. Adam's guilt is the basis for the corruption that follows. Mankind's only hope is the arrival of a second Adam, whose righteousness (instead of guilt) can be imputed to Adam's children. As Paul explains in Romans 5, this second Adam comes in the person of Christ. As our new covenant head, Christ represents us, obeying the law perfectly on our behalf, as well as suffering the penalty of the law that we have broken. While we were united to the first Adam and as a result inherited his condemned legal standing, we have now been united to the second Adam whose representation has resulted in the imputation of his righteousness, giving us a right legal standing before God. As Paul concludes with enormous excitement, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).

Conclusion

The insights of the realist view should not be cast aside, but adopted as far as they are biblical (e.g., Heb. 7:9–10). Yet at the same time, the realist position is insufficient in and of itself. Realism must be accompanied by, and grounded in, a federalist-immediate imputation view. In the next chapter we shall see why, biblically speaking, this is the case.

Summary

There have been many attempts to explain the transmission of original sin. The major views come down to four: (1) Pelagianism, (2) Mediate imputation, (3) Realism, and (4) Immediate Imputation. The immediate imputation position makes the best biblical sense of the covenantal structure described in Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12–21.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What consequences does the Pelagian view have for how we view mankind after the Fall?
2. What are the major weaknesses to the realist position?

3. In light of the differences between mediate and immediate imputation, should our inherited corruption stem from our inherited guilt, or should it be the other way around?
4. Which position best fits the context of Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12–21?
5. In what ways does Genesis 2 indicate that a covenant may be present in God's conversation with Adam?