Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin Session 11, Biblical Description of Sin Continued

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 11, Biblical Description of Sin Continued.

We continue our lectures on the doctrine of sin, working with more introductory materials, as the writing of John Mahoney.

Point number 5, sin simultaneously involves commission, omission, and imperfection. Sin is easily categorized as a deed done, a deed left undone, or a deed done with the wrong motive. When thinking of sin as commission, the deed done, we're talking about doing or saying or thinking the wrong thing.

For example, John writes, when I was younger, I broke a window, lied to my dad about it, and blamed my brother for it. The lying was sin. I broke a moral code, knowingly and freely.

Sin as omission, on the other hand, is not doing or saying or thinking the right thing. Blaming my brother and failing to tell the truth is also moral fault. Further, imperfection is refraining from doing or saying or thinking the wrong thing, but instead doing or saying or thinking the right thing with the wrong motive or attitude.

Using the broken window incident from my personal life, had I told my dad the truth because I wanted to avoid the consequences, I would have acted correctly, but without the best motives, and therefore imperfectly. All moral acts are judged by the standard of God's holy character, expressed in his moral precepts. The Scottish Puritan John Calhoun defined the moral law as, quote, the declared will of God, directing and obliging mankind to do that which pleases him and to abstain from that which displeases him, close quote.

John Calhoun, a treatise on the law and the gospel. The Ten Commandments are typically seen as the published expression of God's moral law. Lying, stealing, killing, committing adultery, and disrespecting the sovereign Lord are overt acts.

Breaking them constitutes the commission of a crime against the highest moral standard. Eight of the ten foundational codes are stated negatively in order to mark specific moral boundaries. But perhaps the Ten Commandments were also intended to be moral guides.

I wouldn't say perhaps, I would say they were. For example, the prohibition against murder also seems to include the principle of the sanctity of human life. Thus, failing

to do all that we can to enhance human life is also a sin and falls into the categories of omission and imperfection.

Each sin, in varying degrees, includes commission, omission, and imperfection simultaneously. Two reasons for this application of the law are apparent. One actually comes from the way the fourth Sabbath-keeping commandment and fifth honoring parental authority commandments are stated.

They are positive in nature. That is, they are broken by failing to comply. Disobeying these commands constitutes an omission.

Consequently, failure to keep the Sabbath is also expressed as an overt act. Not reverencing the Sabbath denotes certain actions, words, or thoughts. Further, any lack of compliance from the heart, love the Lord your God with all your heart, is to keep the Sabbath imperfectly.

The other reason is the summary of the commandments given by Jesus. Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31. Love is a positive command.

The bar Jesus sets for obedience regarding the first four commandments is to love God, quote, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, close quote. Thus, have we ever fully complied with God's moral requirements? Jesus brings motives and attitudes into the mix. As a result, in the matter of the ninth commandment, no lying, are we always truthful to others and to ourselves? Have we reverenced God to the fullest of our ability, Commandments 1-4? When OMG is common even in our Christian culture, are we respecting his name and person completely? Sin includes our disposition, dispositions, and our acts of disobedience.

Within each sinful action or non-action is a set of attitudes and motives that are sinful as well. Greed is at the heart of stealing. Elisha's servant Gehazi followed the greed of his heart by lying to Naaman and receiving money and clothing that Elisha had previously refused.

Upon his return, he faced a haunting question from Elisha. Where have you been, Gehazi? You shouldn't mess around with a prophet. You shouldn't mess around with a true prophet of God.

2 Kings 5:25. Murder is an expression of hate. Joseph was almost killed and was sold into slavery because his brothers hated him. Genesis 37.4 and 5. Jesus clearly links the attitude with the action.

Matthew 5:21.22. The first epistle of John declares that the one who hates his brother walks about in darkness. 2:11. Is a murderer. 1 John 3:15. And a liar.

4:20. Lust in the heart not only can lead to adultery and sexual immorality but is also treated with similar seriousness as the act of adultery itself. Matthew 5:28. Note verses 29 and 30 in which Jesus calls for radical steps in dealing with lust. I might add that the 10th commandment prohibiting coveting goes to the heart immediately, as well as the attitudes and the motives.

Desiring one's neighbor's wife and possessions is sinning against the neighbor and, of course, God. Sin includes guilt and corruption. Normally, evil is classified into two types.

One is natural evil, disasters, and disease that are not tied to personal choice. Catastrophic events are called evil because of their often devastating effects. Natural evil is not directly produced by human sinfulness but as a result of it in a more general sense.

Romans 8:19-22. The fall ultimately lies behind natural evil. Yet, through the restraint of common grace, God's purposes are still served by natural evil. Isaiah 45.7. The one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being, and creating calamity rendered evil in the King James Version.

I am the Lord who does all these. The other form of evil is moral evil. So natural evil and moral evil.

We use the terms bad, focus on natural consequences, and wrong, focus on a broken moral law, to distinguish the two forms of evil. Moral evil is a violation of a specific moral law by one who acts willfully. The act makes us guilty before God.

Guilt is the companion of a broken law. Hearing is the reason guilt is universal. Adam's act in the garden constitutes all guilt before God.

Guilt has two aspects. One is personal responsibility. Traditionally, theologians refer to this blameworthiness as potential guilt.

It's the guilt that follows an actual sinful act, reflected in guilty feelings. The other aspect of guilt is liability to punishment, which is called actual guilt. All sin, quote, makes us guilty before God.

It is not as if we can rebel or disbelieve or be prideful or self-centered just a little, too little actually to incur guilt, for guilt comes from turning in the wrong direction, however small the following step. Matthew 5:19, James 2:10, and that is from the writings of Marguerite Schuster, The Fall and Sin, What We Have Become as Sinners, 2004. I might add from my own notes that sin includes guilt and pollution.

So, I'm combining what John Mahoney just said about guilt and adding to it pollution, or traditionally guilt and corruption. Pollution is a more modern way of saying that. It's good to see those two together.

They're both really fundamental in dealing with sin. And the guilt of sin means, as he has just told us, our guilt before God, our having sinned against him and deserving his punishment, our being under his wrath because of our sin, or Adam's sin. We distinguish between original sin and actual sin.

Original sin is the sin of Adam, imputed to the human race, as we'll see in Romans 5:12, and following. Actual sin are the sins we commit. Interestingly, it is Romans 5:12 to 19, or 21, depending how far you take that, which is the biblical exposition of Genesis 3 of the Fall, in terms of actual sin.

But, in the development of Paul's thesis in Romans, original sin is tucked back there in chapter 5, and after announcing his purpose to explain the gospel, 1:16 and 17, from 1:18 to 3:20, he doesn't deal with original sin, but actual sin. So, both our actual sins and original sins make us guilty before a holy and just God. Hence, guilt means blameworthiness, if you will, as distinguished from corruption or pollution, which is a moral category.

Guilt says whether we feel it or not, whether we act it out or not, we are in trouble with a holy God. We are guilty before him, Romans 3:19 and 20. Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Doesn't use the word guilt or guilty, but it has the concept very plainly. Likewise, Romans 1:18 speaks of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of people, who, by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth.

Guilt means we are answerable, culpable, and blameworthy to God, the very definer of right and wrong, based upon his own character of holiness and justice. Ephesians 2:3, Paul speaks of human beings being children of wrath, even as the rest. By nature, they are children of wrath, even like the rest of humankind.

Exactly what the ESV does, and we were by nature, that means by birth, children of wrath means people who deserve God's wrath, like the rest of mankind, ESV. We were by nature, objects of wrath, by nature, by birth, worthy to receive divine judgment.

It's a Hebrew idiom, for example, 2 Samuel 12:5, where he is a son of death, means he deserves to die. Children of wrath mean children, human beings, deserving

of God's wrath. So, we distinguish guilt, and by the way, it is to be distinguished from guilt feelings.

One can have false guilt feelings, you can feel guilty of something of which you are not guilty, or you can be guilty of something and have no guilt feelings. We're not talking about that. We're talking about actual, objective condemnation before a holy God.

Pollution, the traditional word corruption, means not only are we guilty before God, but we are ourselves corrupted by sin. So, there's a legal dimension, guilt, and there's a moral dimension. We're defiled, we're corrupted.

Pollution is a good word, as long as you don't see it as a veneer. The pollution spoken of here is like the Czechoslovakian town before any pollution controls under the old communism that I saw pictures of in National Geographic. Everything in that town was black.

I'm not talking about the skin of black people, which is beautiful skin like the other skin in the world. I'm talking about dirt and pollution on trees, which were black, green trees, houses, and human beings, who happen to be Caucasians, whose skin was black with pollution. What a textbook demonstration of the lack of communism's care for its people.

That's the pollution we're talking about. Not some little veneer you can scrape off, but corruption to the core of human beings. We sin because we are sinners.

There's that Genesis 6:5, every thought of human beings was only evil all the time. Good grief. Galatians 5:19-21 speaks of the deeds of the sinful nature, the deeds of the flesh.

So, important distinction. Guilt and corruption, or guilt and pollution. Guilt is a legal category.

Corruption and pollution are moral categories. The one puts us at odds with our maker and we are in trouble with him. We're condemned before him.

John 3-36, the wrath of God remains on unsaved people. Corruption, pollution, we actually sin because we're defiled. Our tongues are defiled, our minds are corrupted and defiled, and hence our actions are evil as well.

Continuing with Mahoney's good lecture notes, sin is a personal affront to the God of the Bible and his righteous character. I've seen some who don't like this notion, but it's a very biblical one. Isaiah's sinfulness becomes apparent when he encounters God's holiness, Isaiah 6. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I'm interested in what area he

picks out. I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the Lord of glory.

The same was true for Peter in the presence of Christ. Amazingly, at a great haul of fish, the timing of which and the quantity of which is supernatural, Peter says, depart from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man. Lord, what a demonstration of your power, I bow now before you, but now, no, what is behind this? Behind it is holiness as a sense of separateness; traditionally, theologians have to find holiness following the Bible's lead as God's separateness from us, and that's his moral purity, well that could be behind it, and also the fact that God is all of his attributes at once.

And so, the demonstration of power causes Peter to confess his own sinfulness, perhaps even at his unbelieving the words of Jesus. And you know, he's, I'm a professional fisherman. How many years have I done this? And you're just going to, maybe he thought that and didn't say it, but boom, the nets are full. He knows what's happening here.

The one who said, put your nets on the other side of the boat, spoke with the authority of God. And Peter trembles, which is not a bad response either, actually. Sin is not measurable except in light of God's character and law.

James Orr's sin is a problem of today; in 19:10, a well-known theologian who did a lot of good wrote that way; Orr wrote that sin, in other words, is not simply a moral, but it's peculiarly a religious conception. Sin is a transgression against God, the substitution of the creature's will for the will of the creator, and revolt of the creature's will from God. It is this relation to God that gives the wrong act its distinctive character as sin.

Psalm 51:4, it is therefore only in the light of God's character as holy, perfected in Christ's teaching in the aspect of fatherly love, and of God's end for man, it's only from those perspectives that the evil quality and full enormity of sinful acts can be clearly seen. I do not think we understand the full enormity of our sinful acts. Thankfully, God does, and he still loves us, and he's still in grace, provided Christ as our substitute.

Sin, therefore, is egregious and beyond human depiction. Amen. We can judge wrongs, pedophilia, substance abuse, senseless and wanton acts of violence, and sexuality only from our limited context.

How wrong they appear to us, and how devastating the consequences might be. God's estimation of the wrongness of our sin is made in regard to the splendor of his own holiness. Righteousness is a standard of moral uprightness that God expects of all people. Psalm 96:10 and 13, Jeremiah 9:24, it is God's holiness as applied to his relationship with his moral creatures. Righteousness is, therefore, the moral measure he uses to evaluate all our acts, words, and thoughts. And again, we can say with Isaiah we are undone.

Oh man, that's the study of the doctrine of sin, it is a constant reminder of the need for grace. Ralph Venning, in his classic work on sin, was a Puritan. The Plague of Plagues notes the relationship of sin to God's holiness. On the contrary, as God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy, so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful.

Genesis 6:5, close quote. Essentially, because it is against God, sin is a radical evil. Ted Peter's powerful book, parts of it you'd be glad, you would be not glad that you read.

Sin, Radical Evil in Soul and Society, 1994. Strong, not medicine, but disease. Because sin is sin against God, it's radical evil.

The extremity of sin's wickedness is exposed when seen in the light of the entire biblical revelation. A series of measurements will help us see sin's perversity. First, as we have seen, sin can be measured by the holiness of the one from whom we have revolted.

It violates the creator. Sin violates the creator. That's why people don't like this language.

And I don't blame them. And it's anthropomorphic language, to be sure, but... Sin is the very antithesis of God's moral character. Next, it is measured by the height from which we have fallen, the perfect righteousness and complete enjoyment of God that Christ possessed, as well as the depths to which we have come as a race.

It violates God's intent for us. Third, sin is measured by the length to which the Father went to redeem us. It violates the sun on the cross.

His grace is most amazing when seen from the perspective of our demerit. Along with this, fourth, sin can be measured by the end from which we are created. It violates God's image in us.

Christ is the bearer of the image, but so are we. How are we doing in relation to that task? How far short of this have we come? I thought this guy was a scholar. He sounds like a preacher now.

He's gone to Medlin here repeatedly. Fifth, we can measure the darkness of sin by the destination to which fallen humanity is rightfully headed. Revelation 20:11 to 15, that is called the lake of fire.

Finally, the measure of sin from a missional perspective is the unfinished task to which he calls his representatives. Our mission is to be light-bearers in a dark world, a world of over 7 billion individuals, most of whom live each day in complete spiritual darkness because of sin. How close are we to getting the gospel to the more than 7 billion people who now share the planet? After writing and editing a number of books on hell and then one on the necessity of getting the gospel to lost persons called Faith Comes by Hearing, a Response to Inclusivism, the book edited with Morgan, of course, the book opposes inclusivism, the view that although Jesus is the only savior, you can be saved by him without believing in the gospel in this life.

That is wrong. Exclusivism is right, as difficult as the truth might be. Jesus is the only savior, and one must believe the gospel in this life.

After that, I began a token representation of Transworld Radio, which beams the true gospel around the world every day to most places. I'll put it that way. I had to do something because people need to hear the gospel. Sin is a rogue element in God's creation.

Augustine understood sin as a provatio boni, the privation of good. Accordingly, good characterizes God's creation. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31.

For Augustine, sin is the negation of that good. Sin does not actually exist but appears in the absence of the good. Consequently, sin is not a feature of the created world.

In his work, The City of God, he illustrates his meaning with silence and darkness. He writes, quote, Silence and darkness may be perceptible to us, and it may be true that silence is perceived through the ears, and darkness through the eyes. Yet silence and darkness are not percepts, are not species, and the absence, but they're not species, they're not percepts, species, but the absence, provatio, of any percept.

Thus, sin is not a substance created by God, but is an absence within the good which he did create. Augustine's City of God, writings of St. Augustine, Fathers of the Church, 1952, chapter 12, section 7. Further, sin arose through willful choices made by creatures whom God had created. The only avenue through which sin appears in creation is the open door of free choice.

Consequently, sin is parasitic, a negative quality that has no actual existence in the created world but usurps the moral structures that God has instituted. In the similar

case of virtues, the parasite requires a host to live. In the same way, sin is a moral virus, and exists only in the context of the good purposes of God.

Mahony's work is penetrating, is it not? It is searching. It gives us much food for thought. Sin is a failure to image the creator to the world.

Heaven and earth are perpetually demonstrating God's glory. Psalm 19:1 through 6. Humankind is the highest of God's earthly creation, and shares the responsibility of spreading the fame of the triune God. We join with all nature in declaring the wonders of our great God.

We bear the image of the one who created us, and because of the shared image, we have been given dominion over the created order. Gerhard von Raad observes that this noble function observes about this noble function. Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claim to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God's image, as God's sovereign emblem.

He is really only God's representative, summoned to maintain and enforce God's claim to dominion over the earth. Gerhard von Rad's commentary on Genesis. As an evangelical, I would not endorse everything he's written, including in that commentary, but he was a bright mind and a leader in different areas of Old Testament study.

Although not an evangelical. Humankind's role of imagining God before the creation was horribly disrupted by the fall of Adam. First, the fall placed the entire creation out of sync with God's basic moral design.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility. The original intent for God's image bearers was to be benevolent rulers, not malicious tyrants. The effect on creation ecologically is striking.

Leon Morris notes that it lacks the purpose for which it was designed; it has no purpose. Instead of being a source of perpetual delight, creation is at odds with us. Paul goes on to describe the expectancy that grips creation in anticipation of the revealing of the sons of God.

Verse 19. C.S. Lewis pictures this beautifully in his series, The Chronicles of Narnia, in which the return of human monarchs along with Aslan restores Narnia. The corrupting of the image by Adam's fall also brought social collapse.

The three cycles of emerging human cultures in Genesis 4 to 11 exposed the violence and injustice of the fallen world. Advances in tool-making and the domestication of animals are turned into selfish pursuits. Paul Jewett observes, quote, that not only

does increased killing follow immediately upon the use of metals, but also the city that was a sign of a newly settled life, 4:17 of Genesis, soon becomes a city with a tower that symbolizes human ambition over-reaching itself.

Close quote. Paul Jewett and Marguerite Schuster, his disciple. Who we are, our dignity as human, 1996.

The task of believers as restored image-bearers is still the exercise of dominion in two strategic arenas. First, we are under a cultural mandate based upon Genesis 1:28. Genesis 1:28. Family, church, human government, business, agriculture, education are avenues through which the glory of Christ is expressed. It is our task to pursue his glory in all of these areas.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. And we're taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

Kenneth Myers writes that man was fit for the cultural mandate. As the bearer of his creator God's image, he could not be satisfied apart from cultural activity. Here is the origin of human culture in untainted glory and possibility.

It is no wonder that those who see God's redemption as a transformation of human culture speak of it in terms of re-creation. Kenneth Myers, all God's children, and blue suede shoes. The cultural mandate is an empty appeal without the other critical task we have as image bearers.

Transforming culture begins with transforming the heart of sinners. The gospel of Christ has that renovating power. Although the priority rests with the Great Commission, our responsibility to all creation is clear.

Whew. Sin invites the wrath of God. Romans 1:18 openly declares, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Close quote. God's wrath is an expression of his holiness or moral purity. Therefore, his wrath is simply his instinctive holy indignation and settled opposition of his holiness to sin, which, because he is righteous, expresses itself in judicial punishment.

Robert Raymond's *A New Systematic Theology*, 1998. Martin Luther wrote, the source of God's wrath is the fact that men are altogether godless and ungodly in their life and behavior. And that is what brings down God's wrath.

Man does not know God and despises him. This is the wellspring of all evil, the ferment that produces sin, the bottomless pit of iniquity, we might even say. What evils are bound to exist where God is not known and despised? Just as all sin possesses negative, passive, and positive active aspects, it invites a negative and positive response from God.

In Matthew 25:41, Jesus describes the final judgment of the lost. "Then he will also say to those on his left, depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."

The negative element is the removal from the sinner of all God's favor and presence forever. I should add his blessed, gracious presence forever. Depart from me, Jesus said.

This is the ultimate privation, the ultimate withdrawal of the good and the blessed. Sinners have lived with a desire to have God's absence, and now they have it. Miller Erickson paraphrases the exchange between God and the sinner.

"Sin is what man says to God throughout his life: go away, leave me alone. Hell is God's final saying to man, you may have your wish. It is God's leaving man to himself, as man has chosen."

Close quote. Millard Erickson, Is Hell Forever? Bib Sac, 1995. 259 and following.

See also Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, Editors, *Hell Under Fire, Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, Zondervan, 2004, for which we were nominated for Book of the Year. I didn't win, but that was a nice nomination, I must say. The second response is the positive imposition of punishment.

Into the eternal fire, Jesus said. Humankind openly rebels and transgresses God's moral will. Consequently, the sovereign Lord institutes punishment.

The scene of the final judgment of humankind in Revelation 20:11 to 15, pictures the same scene. The judge on a throne, the judge standing before him, and the judgment in the lake of fire. They're cast away from his presence and punished forever in that lake of fire.

The cross of Christ grants certainty of God's withdrawal of his presence and the infliction of punishment upon sinners. If he did not spare his own son, will he spare those who hate him? The only response of a holy God to sin is judgment. Venning observes, quote, what is a hell of wickedness that must be which none but God can expiate and purge? What a hell of wickedness that must be which none but God can expiate and purge? Sin is deceitful.

Sin is tricky. It doesn't come dressed up as an ugly creature and say, I'm sin, I'm going to get you. No, it comes dressed up as a beautiful creature and it tries to deceive us.

In Matthew 7, we see Jesus using humor. Sometimes, either you laugh or you cry in his condemnation of hypocrisy.

Matthew 7, three through five. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take that speck out of your eye when there's a log in your own eye? You hypocrite. First, take the log out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

It is a funny picture because can you imagine somebody with a log in his eye? Anywhere he turns, he's knocking other people over. It's absurd. How could you not notice a log in your eye? And yet we do the very thing to which this metaphor points.

We are quick to find faults in others, even little ones, overlooking major faults in ourselves. Does it have to be the same fault? I would say not especially. But sometimes, even that is true.

No, Jesus says, confess, deal with your own sin, and then try to help the brother or sister. Hebrews 3:12 through 14 says it right out. Or shows how deceitful sin is.

Of course, this is all personification, but it is also powerful personification. Hebrews 3. In context, the writer to the Hebrews is condemning the sinful disobedience and unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness. Take care, brothers.

Hebrews 3:12. Lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today.

That is a quotation from the Old Testament. From the Psalm. Psalm 95.

That is correct. Psalm 95:7 to 11. That use of the word today.

Exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Make no mistake about it. Sin is out to get us.

It wants to trip us up. It wants to lead us away from the Lord. In Bible college, we had different preachers come in, and it was quite a motley crew.

And this particular fellow, whom I'm going to quote, wasn't a great exegete or a great theologian—kind of a simple common man who loved the Lord in his word. So, I don't despise him in any way.

And of all those perhaps who were more sophisticated than he was, I don't remember their words. But I can't get his words out of my noggin. Either he says, this book, referring to the Bible, will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.

The guy just went to Medlin, didn't he? Wow. We need accountability with other Christians. With a personal friend, perhaps, or a family member.

We may encourage each other and warn each other daily so that none of us, the writers of the Hebrews, are interested in every one of his readers when he writes against the possibility of apostasy. It's a theme in this book, including here, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. I don't want to neglect the Older Testament.

And Jeremiah, of course, has a famous word in this regard. Jeremiah 17:9. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. It is thus very vulnerable to sin's charming enticements.

Who can understand it? I don't know why the next verse is often omitted. I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind. The Lord understands.

The Lord knows. And for those who are His own, He has given them His Spirit. And it is possible in Christ not to be sinless in this life, but certainly to overcome.

We will come back after a break, Lord willing, and in our next lecture, finish up this description of sin from God's Word as we continue to introduce the doctrine of Hamartiology.

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