



GREAT BIBLE DOCTRINES: SIN—INDIVIDUAL AND CORPORATE

TO: LEGISLATORS

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The governing authorities' proper understanding of sin cannot be over-emphasized. Not only does the teaching of Scripture regarding this subject relate specifically to personal life, but it is foundational to one's professional understanding as a governing authority. Can you clearly think through the biblical answers to the following?

- ★How do you explain the dual nature of man?
★Does sin infect and affect more than just the person?
★How if it does, affect the whole world?
★If the world is infected by sin, does it follow that Civil Governments are inherently evil?
★If Governments are sinful, then why are you a part of Government?

These and other important topics will be addressed in the following study from my Great Bible Doctrines series. A biblically-accurate, informed understanding of what the Scripture says about sin will help you in a myriad of ways! Read on!

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**GREAT BIBLE DOCTRINES: SIN—INDIVIDUAL AND CORPORATE****I. INTRODUCTION**

In this particular study of the ten great Bible doctrines I have specifically chosen to focus in on the doctrine of Sin. In that there are many passages on this subject throughout Scripture, I would like to focus-in on certain aspects that I think are most relevant to, not only the personal life of a legislator, but his or her thinking and formation regarding public policy: How should a proper biblical understanding of certain aspects of sin inform and influence your thinking?

Given this limited map for the study of sin herein (the recurrent teaching in God's Word relative to these boundaries), first to be explored will be an accurate biblical definition of sin and then, how does one best understand its origin and transference?

Once established this study will quickly pivot to surveying its manifest nature in the world (from and individual understanding of sin to a corporate understanding of sin). When discussing sin in a fallen world, special investigation and understanding of what this means and does not mean is critically important for a governing authority. Accordingly I think you will find this study stimulating, insightful and quite helpful.

II. SIN'S DEFINITION

I like theologian Grudem's working definition of sin: "Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 490). The Sermon on the Mount makes it repeatedly clear that sin is more than outward conformity to God's moral standards; it involves one's attitudes as well. For instance, in Matthew 5:22 anger is deemed sinful; so is lust (Matthew 5:28). Additionally, in that "we were by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), God imputes a new nature into the believer at the point of salvation and expects him or her to live according to their new nature (cf. 2Cor. 5:17; 2Pe. 1:4). The Greek word for Sin *hamartia* means "To miss the mark."

Sin is more than self-centeredness. I remember one of my climbing friends in the tent next to mine in the middle of the night (during a huge wind storm at 18,000 feet I might add) asking me to help him memorize some Scripture. Half asleep with chilled breath my first thought was "how selfish of him." All things considered he was expressing a good form of selfishness! In fact much self-interest is approved in Scripture. When one is seeking to grow in their sanctification or to "buffet [their] body and make it [their] slave" (1Cor. 9:27), they are (empirically speaking) harboring and acting-out on selfish desires. God approves of such. In an opposite sense, one can manifest *selfless* devotion to a false religion and not attain God's standard of sinlessness. So, selfishness is not a good one-word definition of sin.

Sin needs to be defined the way God defines it in His Word. Anything uncharacteristic of the communicable attributes of God present in an individual is sin: It is to miss the mark of His perfect acts, attitudes and nature about everything at all times.

III. SIN'S ORIGIN

Sin was present in the angelic world before creation when Satan and his demons rebelled and were cast out of heaven (cf. Isa. 12:12-15). Sin entered the created world via the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:1-19). Eve trusted herself and then Adam trusted in himself over and above God thinking they "knew better" than God, in essence being above God and His ways (Gen. 3:5), putting themselves in His place.

IV. SIN'S MANIFESTATION IN THE INDIVIDUAL

The Bible is clear that Adam's sin spread to all mankind in the sense of individuals. Paul states in Romans 3:23 states, "For all have sinned...." The Psalmist says, "They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Psa. 14:3), and Solomon adds, "There is no man who does not sin" (Eccl. 7:20).

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This is because sin is inherited from Adam. Paul explains it this way in Romans 5:12, “Therefore sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned.” Later he adds, “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men” (speaking of Jesus). “For by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19) (again, referencing the work of Christ on Calvary).

The best way to think about this is that the total human race was represented by Adam in the Garden when he was tested. Unfair? God is God and this is the economy He chose.

**IF ONE REASONS ADAM’S IMPUTATION
OF SIN AS UNFAIR, THEN ONE MUST
ALSO REASON CHRIST’S IMPUTATION
OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS UNFAIR**

David best summarizes the existence of representational and inherent individual sin in Psalm 51:5....

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Every part of the individual being has been affected by sin. In that mankind possesses an inherent sinful nature, he has a predilection for, and does sin. Created in the image of God, which explains his goodness, he is nonetheless fallen, thus explaining his dual nature (unlike any other worldly philosophy).

The fall affected more than the soul of man; in addition it infected the whole of the world. Critically important is this: The governing authority need possess a working comprehension of not only the theology of individual sin, but the theology of corporate sin.

Many passages speak of sin’s manifestation in the world, stating the whole world is fallen, in contrast

to defining sin as only individuals being indwelt and fallen. However, many conservative theologians stop at individual sin and do not develop the concept of corporate sin. And yet the biblical concept of corporate sin is an area especially important to the understanding of the governing authority and their policy formation (e.g. Government exists in a large part to quell sin and evil).

Equally important to the effect of sin on a personal basis is its effect on the whole world; the world is fallen in every aspect. Conservative theologian Millard Erickson puts it best: “The Bible teaches that evil has a status apart from and independent of any individual human will, a subsistence of its own, an organized or structured basis. We occasionally refer to this reality as ‘the World’ [*kosmos*]” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pg. 660). Theologian Sasse adds that the Greek word *Kosmos* is often times used in Scripture in juxtaposition to The Kingdom of God...I.e. the **world** is used by the Bible writers to depict the very embodiment of evil (cf. Hermann Sasse *kosmos TDNT*; vol. 3, pg. 868).

A. THE FOUNDATIONAL PASSAGE

This expansive idea of not only individual but corporate manifestations of The Fall is supported by the expressly resultant aspects stemming from The Fall. Notice those in Genesis 3:17b-19a...

Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground...

The fall of Adam cursed the earth. Have you ever wondered why nothing is easy in this life? It’s hard to earn a living. It’s hard to eat right. It’s hard to stay in shape! It’s hard to keep government on track. All serve to illustrate Genesis 3! Until His return mankind exists in a fallen world—both in the sense of individually fallen and corporately fallen. Again and again, this hamartiological



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distinction is critically important for those who serve in government.

The following passages teach the corporateness of sin via the word **World**:

B. THE FUNCTIONAL PASSAGES

Taken from Genesis 3 forward into the NT this concept of universal fallenness is depicted (in part) in the following passages:

1. John 7:7

The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.

2. John 15:18-19

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

3. John 17:14

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

4. ICorinthians 1:21

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

5. John 17:25

O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me;

6. John 1:10-11

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

7. Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

8. John 8:23

And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

9. John 18:36

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.

10. James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

11. 1John 2:15-17

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

12. 1John 5:4-5



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For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

States Erickson regarding the biblical use of the word **World**:

“THE WORLD REPRESENTS AN ORGANIZED FORCE, A POWER OR ORDER THAT IS COUNTERPOISE TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.”

This is clear from the above passages. Of the same importance to the understanding of civil leaders is what the biblical word **World** is often wrongly associated with...

C. THE FIDDLY PASSAGES

If one understands Civil Government to be a part of the biblical definition, and encompassed by the biblical concept of the **world** then it follows that Civil Government is inherently evil—and so why are you a part of it?

1. Luke 4:5-7

The main passage for the supposed biblical basis of Civil Government being part and parcel of the **world** is Luke 4:5-7. Herein Jesus is being tempted by the Devil. Notice what the Devil claims to possess and rule over:

And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."

Satan is inferring that he is the sovereign ruler of the **world**. Basic to Bible study is to realize the existence of *narrative* passages. Such passages are not doctrinal or necessarily instructive for living—

rather they are meant to inform the reader as to what happened. Luke here is quoting what Satan said to Jesus; it doesn't mean it's true. Keep in mind what else Scripture says about Satan in John 8:44 where Jesus says: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

In Luke 4 when Satan said to Jesus regarding His supposed ownership of the **world**: "For it has been handed over to me" he is lying! God never handed His sovereign ownership and control of the world and Civil Government over to the devil as much as the devil would like to think that! For any Christian to employ Luke 4 as a pretext for Satan owning Civil Government is to fall for the same lie he postured to Jesus. Nowhere in Scripture does God say that Satan is the ruler over Civil Government.

What follows are two more "fiddly" passages.

2. John 12:31

Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out.

Folks sometimes cite this passage as a supposed proof text for the "All Governments are Evil" position. Notice there is no tie-in between the **ruler archon** (most likely a reference to one of Satan's minions; cf. Eph. 6:12) being expressly related to or over Civil Government. The passage doesn't serve the effort to make that point.

3. 1John 5:19

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

The Apostle John is very contrasting in his writing style. Contextually he states that ultimately if one is not in Christ and serving His Kingdom purposes, he is in the **world** and serving toilsome purposes. The Greek word for **evil one** *poneros* means



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“wicked, toilsome, and bad.” Thus this passage is not necessarily a description of Satan per se, but of the fruits of Satan and a fallen world (cf. Gen. 3). Nor does the passage explicitly state or indicate that this evil controls Civil Government. (Granted, Satan influences, but that is different than stating he possesses sovereign control).

Many other passages are cited by the separatists in their quest to biblically unite **sin** *hamartia* and the **world** *kosmos* to Civil Government *huperecho exousia*. Such interpretations of these cited passages and others can be explained away. If such a conclusion was biblically possible (and exegetically I do not believe that is possible) then there exists a huge, major problem in the sense of a theological conundrum:

**IF ALL OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT IS
CONTROLLED BY SATAN THEN WHY
ARE BELIEVERS COMMANDED TO
SUBMIT TO IT?**

A “Satan controls all Civil Government” theology fails at this point.

D. THE FOCAL PASSAGES

The biblical idea of an overall, corporate fallen world should not be viewed as a blanket allusion to Civil Government. Rather, the parallel and underlying thought of **world** should be associated with satanic forces of evil. Notice this in Ephesians 6:12...

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

In this vastly insightful and helpful passage, at least three hierarchical levels of satanic beings are evidenced: The **rulers** *arche*, The **powers** *exousia* and The **world forces** *kosmokrator*. These definitive levels of satanic beings and their respective power and activities are herein directly connected to and

synonymous with the biblical concept of the **world**. (The last Greek word depicting a satanic being *kosmokrator* contains the same root word for **world** *kosmos*). This further evidences and connects the idea of the **world** to Satan.

It then follows that the biblical concept and use of the word **World** has more to do with the great Bible doctrine of Satan, even though worldliness manifests itself in the great Bible doctrine of sin.

Civil Governments (cf. Rom. 13:1-8) likened to other God-ordained institutions such as Commerce, Family, Marriage, or the Church are therefore best understood—theologically—as neutral institutions subject to the influence or control of either good or evil spiritual forces (the Believer or Satan’s ponds).

**IMPORTANTLY AND CONCLUSIVELY IN
TERMS OF THE DOCTRINE OF
CORPORATE SIN, ALL GOD-CREATED
INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT INHERENTLY
WICKED**

They can be used for good or evil depending on the outcome of the competition between the agents of God vs. the agents of Satan. (Cf. 1Cor. 9:24ff, 2Tim. 2:4). State O’Brien in regards to Ephesians 6:12 (*The Letter to Ephesians*, p. 466):

Paul’s cogent point here is that the Christian life as a whole is a profound spiritual warfare of cosmic proportions in which the ultimate opposition to the advance of the gospel and moral integrity springs from evil, supernatural powers under the control of the god of this world.

He goes on to say (p. 470)....

Many contemporary Christians seem to be unaware that there is a war in progress, or if they are, they consider it to be fought at a purely human level, and therefore earthly resources will be entirely adequate for conducting the campaigns.



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As this study suggests, for want of good theology, many believers will not even enter the competition, let alone being concerned as to how they may fight! And yet these same individuals will wholeheartedly wage war against Satan relative to building and strengthening the institutions of Marriage, Family and Church? Such further illustrates the incongruity of their theological camp that flies the flag: “Christians, Stay Out Of Government!”

cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The believer needs to walk with a clear conscience, keeping his or her sin account current with Christ. One cannot walk in the power and control of the Holy Spirit who continually quenches the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit whenever His conviction is present. Keep a short leash on your sin; keep erasing it from your life and thereby maximize your God-purposed potential in office and thereafter!

V. APPLICATION**A. TO THE PROFESSION**

Some well-meaning folks have erred at this point in their historic theological construct and ensuing decisions, believing that the Bible’s teaching on **World** equates to Civil Government, and therefore the believer need separate from governmental involvement based upon the plethora of passage (some of which were listed herein) under the guise of being separate from the **world** (cf. 2Cor. 6:17). This theological gaffe—an improper pasting of the corporate dimension of the doctrine of sin onto the institution of Civil Government—directly relates to why today so many otherwise well-meaning churches view involvement in Civil Government as capitulating with evil—and thus they reason among other things, that believers should not run for office! This is the logical conclusion of this theological false dichotomy. (Pass along this study to those folks).

If on the other hand God’s creation of Civil Government cannot be, and is not inherently evil (per Rom. 13:2) then Christian involvement and competition with the Devil (per Ephesians 6) to shape the same for good is a more than a noble pursuit for the life of the believer, and should be viewed theologically in the same vein as being agents of salt and light (per Matthew 5:13-14).

B. TO THE PERSON

1John 1:9 states to believers, “If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to