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CONDEMNING REJECTION: THE BASIS OF GOD'S  
CONDEMNATION OF HUMANITY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
Dr. Oren Martin

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Master's of Theology

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Alexander James Dotson  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

CONDEMNING REJECTION: THE BASIS OF GOD'S  
CONDEMNATION OF HUMANITY

Alexander James Dotson

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Oren Martin (Advisor/Reader)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and grandparents, who have given me a Godly foundation on which to build and succeed in pleasing Him.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LXX	Greek Septuagint
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

## PREFACE

I first became interested in this topic while writing a paper on the origin of evil in my early college years. Defining what exactly evil is became a challenge to me as I researched the many different works on the subject. Because of other circumstances and projects though I had to put my interests on the back burner. My father and I, over a year ago, had been discussing different theological topics and we could not help but notice some problems with different evangelistic methods. We asked why some of them were not effective? Working through our thinking process, we eventually came to a conclusion that many different evangelists had a definition of sin that was behaviorally based instead of something deeper. Especially in light of Jesus comments on what was sin in the Sermon on the Mount. Through the next couple of months I went back through my old research thinking that I could get a good idea on defining what exactly sin was. To right a wrong first, a person has to know what wrong they committed. To be saved, a person has to begin by knowing what exactly their offense against God is. In the process of this research, I have also learned that the implications of my findings hit more than just evangelistic methods. I have concluded that the answer is much deeper than sin being mere behavioral actions, and that humans are condemned based on more than just behavior. I will detail this idea in my thesis.

I would like to first thank my father John Dotson and my grandfather Jim Andrews. Both of whom are former seminary and bible college professors and have helped me immensely in finding sources for me to use. I would not have been able to think through some difficult theological points in this paper without their help and I do not know what I would have done without their assistance.

Many thanks also goes to my mother, grandmother, uncle, and Lynn Mackey. They all have graciously given their time to me to go through pieces of this paper and make sure what I am saying is grammatically correct. Along with this I would also like to



thank the writing center at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I am also extremely grateful for my advisor, Dr. Oren Martin, in this process and has my thanks. He has helped me through the research process and given me valuable guidance and advice. Not only through this paper but also listening to life issues on the times we have met he has been a positive influence on my life. My thanks appreciation for him dealing with the multiple emails and being patient with me while I have been stressed during this paper.

Dr. Bruce Ware, Dr. Robert Vogel, and recently Dr. Gregg Allison have been great helps through my seminary career. Their advice on theological matters, writing style, and even life issues have been great helps to me. I do not think that I would have done nearly as well in my time here at Southern without their help and advice.

Finally, I would like to thank my home church Lake Bible Church in Portland, Oregon, as well as my church here in Louisville, Ninth and O Baptist Church. Their support has been great and appreciated through the last four years.

Alexander Dotson

Louisville, Kentucky  
July 2015

## INTRODUCTION

Sin and condemnation are not popular concepts in American culture. Telling people that they are condemned because of their sin can bring a hostile reaction. Even in some so-called “Christian” circles, sin is not a popular topic, as Rob Bell once said in his book *Love Wins*,

"Of all the billions of people who have ever lived, will only a select number 'make it to a better place' and every single other person suffer in torment and punishment forever? Is this acceptable to God? . . . Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life? This doesn't just raise disturbing questions about God; it raises questions about the beliefs themselves...what kind of God is that?"<sup>1</sup>

Generally, people can't stand being told that there is something wrong with them or what they are doing. Often, attempts to circumvent this reaction has led to questions and debates over what constitutes sin.<sup>2</sup>

If a person tells a lie, is it just the lie itself that is sin or is there an internal process that is also condemnable in the eyes of God? For instance, an evangelist comes up to an unbeliever and makes the argument that the person they are talking to is a sinner, but the evangelist may attempt to show how a person is sinful based on their behavioral external actions. The person being spoken to believes that they are a sinner based on their external behavior. This can lead to a belief that God condemns primarily on what a person does in terms of external actions. Yet, is this what Scripture teaches? Perhaps there is more to the concept of sin than just the external actions.

There are many actions that are sinful, but with a definition of sin that only highlights the external actions misses the bigger issues. The Gospel, with a behavioral definition of sin, becomes nothing more than behavioral correction. Sin being nothing

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<sup>1</sup>Rob Bell, *Love Wins: a Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Rich Barlow, 'Evolving Ideas of Sin', *BU Today*, last modified 2015, <http://www.bu.edu/today/2012/evolving-ideas-of-sin/>.

more than behavioral actions does not accurately depict what Christ taught and minimizes His sacrifice. There is something deeper when it comes to the problem of sin in the life of a human being. What if sin is something so corrupt that it invades even human will? What if when the Bible speaks of enslavement it meant that the very thoughts and heart of a person are corrupted by sin? This means that sin is something much more than just an external action. Instead, external actions are an indication of the corrupted internal state.

### **Thesis and Methodology**

This paper will argue that divine condemnation is based on an internal human rejection of God that manifests itself in external sinful actions. Sin is not primarily external actions, but mainly a rejection of God and His ways. Scripture shows that, while sins in the form of outward actions are bases for divine displeasure, sins (plural) are actually just symptoms of an innate human corruption stemming from the Adamic fall. That disposition is the evil platform in every human being from which sins in their more visible forms (sinful actions or behaviors) surface.

I will begin my arguments by defining sin primarily as rejection toward God, His ways, and His will. This will be argued by through an exegetical study of two key passages that define what sin is. Beginning with James 1:14-15, this passage is a basis for the definition of sin and showing that desires give birth to sin. While there have been discussions on the usefulness of word studies, they are important for this study. Bernard Ramm writes, “Words are the unit of thought in most of our thinking and writing; they are the bricks of our conceptual formula. Any serious study of the Holy Scripture must engage in the study of words.”<sup>3</sup> While there are some aspects of Ramm’s theology that this author would argue are even dangerous, on this point he is right. Words give the

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<sup>3</sup>Bernard L. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 128.

building material for concepts and doctrines, and when looking at the doctrine of sin the definitions for the words “sin” and “desire” have significance in the argument.<sup>4</sup> The second passage that will be used as evidence in defining sin, 1 John 2:15-17, will give more insight into what the difference is between good and evil desires. In these passages, human sin begins internally with evil desires. Specifically, there are three types of evil desires mentioned in this passage that will be discussed. I will also argue that the motivating desire behind the three mentioned is to be self-sovereign. Both of these passages will show the genesis of this internal process.

The foremost example of the genesis of sin in the life of a human is best shown where sin began: Genesis 3. I will argue that Adam and Eve’s rejection of God, and the corruption passed down by that rejection, has brought about condemnation. Not just condemnation for the first two human beings, though, but condemnation for their entire race who have also rejected God. Condemnation has been earned collectively through the sin of Adam, who is representative of all humanity, and has transferred a state of rejection to all of humanity. This passage will serve to argue that the core evil desire that motivates sinfulness is a desire for self-sovereignty, which must reject God to be indulged.

I will also argue for the condemnation of humanity being primarily for human rejection of God. As in the section on the definition of sin, I will be taking a look at two passages that show the concept of God’s condemnation of sinful humans. The first passage that shows the concept of condemnation of internal sin is found in Matthew 5. Here, Jesus speaks about the internal desires of anger and lust being precursors for murder and adultery. This is significant for the argument that God condemns not just the act itself, but the heart and desires behind the it. The second passage, Romans 1:18-32,

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<sup>4</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 105-106.

will show that the core desire of self-sovereignty and rejection of God is the primary reason for condemnation. God's response to human beings rejecting Him is that He rejects sinful men by giving them into their own sinfulness, which then will ultimately enslave them, destroy them, and finally condemn them to an eternal death.

The conclusion to this paper will also briefly discuss how this can be repaired. Through Jesus Christ, the rejection that has condemned humanity can be forgiven. Human lives can be changed and the relationship with God can be repaired, which can heal the corruption that sinful rejection brings.

## DEFINITION OF SIN

### **Defining Sin-James 1:16-17**

The greatest corruption within mankind is sin. Yet, defining what exactly sin is, or more specifically, finding one singular definition for sin has been problematic for theologians.<sup>5</sup> Sin can be presented as many different things: an act, an evil thought, or something deeper perhaps. Cornelius Plantinga writes that, "Our base problem is unbelief. Failing to trust in the infinite God...But why doesn't the heart want God...Why doesn't the heart seek final good where it can actually be found?...Because the heart wants what it wants."<sup>6</sup> Unbelief and a failure to trust begin at the core of a human being. The heart is at the core of man's choices and the core of this discussion. It is where the birth of sin is located. To define sin rightly, the origin of sin in the heart of man must be discussed. Douglas Moo also writes that, "It is also important to note that sin involves not just our actions; it is rooted in our very pattern of thinking."<sup>7</sup> This means that sin not only begins in the heart but also affects our thinking and choice processes. Therefore, when

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<sup>5</sup>Brant Lee Doty, *What the Bible Says About Sin* (Joplin, MO: College Pr Pub Co, 1996), 16.

<sup>6</sup>Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (San Francisco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 61-62.

<sup>7</sup>Douglas Moo and Donald Carson, *Fallen: a Theology of Sin (Theology in Community)*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

dealing with a definition of sin, the thought and choice processes within the heart are what must be focused on. Focusing on only the outward actions gives a definition of sin that is lacking.

Geisler's Systematic theology makes this observation, "According to Scripture, the origin of sin is found in free will. God gave us the power of choice, which in of itself is a good thing. Tragically, human beings misuse their God-given freedom."<sup>8</sup> - According to Geisler, God gave man the ability to select between good and evil, between Him and sin. It is within this choice that the study on sin can begin. Sin is a choice carried out by man. John Feinberg agrees, in part, in his book, *The Many Faces of Evil*, by saying that, "I think many moral philosophers would agree that the point of sin's 'conception' is when a person wills to do the act if she could. Once that choice is made, then it remains only for her to translate that choice into overt public action."<sup>9</sup> - However, Feinberg also warns against using the terms free will and choice when talking about mankind's responsibility for sin:

"However, I don't appeal to free will in part because that might appear to invoke the free will defense, but as a compatibilist I dare not do that. Instead, I go "behind" will to desires. In accord with James 1:13-15, I hold that morally evil actions ultimately stem from human desires. This doesn't mean desires in and of themselves are evil or that desires do the evil. What it means will become apparent shortly. In James 1:13-15, the author describes having a concrete case temptation arises and leads to moral evil (sin)."<sup>10</sup>

Feinberg gives good insight into what is going awry in the heart of man. Throughout the Bible, sin is described in different ways, but its origin can be traced through one particular passage in Scripture. This passage will be a foundation to the rest of this thesis.

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<sup>8</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, vol. 3, Sin/salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 82.

<sup>9</sup>John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 170.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 169-70.

At the beginning of the book of James, the author writes the process of the development of sin. He says that, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death (James 1:14-15).” James, in the previous verses, explains how God is not to be blamed for either sin or temptation. No one is tempted by God, and He is not the author of sin. Temptation itself is not sin either as Moo points out,

“Temptation, James has said, involves the innate desire toward evil as it is enticed by the superficial attractiveness of sin. If a person should welcome rather than resist that temptation, desire conceives; and if not turned away immediately, it produces sin. James implies that temptation, in and of itself, is not sinful. Only when desire ‘conceives’—is allowed to produce offspring—does sin come into being.”<sup>11</sup>

Men sin when they do not flee from temptation that is produced from their own flesh. The flesh produces temptation that lead to evil desires which give birth to sin if the process is not stopped at temptation. Winkler agrees in his commentary, “The efficient cause of sin is found, not in God, but in the evil heart of man... Whatever the circumstances of the case may be, that which allures men to sin (as fish or game are enticed by bait) is within us, not without.”<sup>12</sup> Winkler makes the point here that God cannot tempt anyone towards sin. Temptations begin from within the heart of man. Temptations entice a man to sin. This is the point that James is getting at when looking at the origin of sin, sin begins in the hearts of men.

### **Words for Sin**

The main word for sin in Greek is *ἁμαρτία*, which correlates with the Hebrew word for sin, *חַטָּא*. As Doty explains,

“In the New Testament the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *חַטָּא* is *ἁμαρτία*—"to miss the mark," or "to err." The terms share the same original concept, that of a

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<sup>11</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *James*, in 2 ed. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 76.

<sup>12</sup>Edwin T. Winkler, *Commentary On Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Pub Soc, 1890), 23.

marksman whose projectile is wide of the target; however, in biblical use that thought is figurative. Translators have rendered the word as "sin," "trespass," "error," "offense," and "fault," according to preference and/or context. It refers both to wrong deeds and the thoughts and motives which prompt them. It is a guiding power, and even a governing force within the individual's will, which finds its usual expression through the deeds of the flesh."<sup>13</sup>

### **𐤒𐤕𐤍-Miss the mark**

*The Theological Wordbook by Harris and Old Testament Synonyms by R.B.*

Girdlestone give solid definitions of each word related to the idea of sin. Harris defines the Hebrew word 𐤒𐤕𐤍 as, “Miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness...The root occurs about 580 times in the Old Testament and is thus its principle word for sin. The basic meaning of the root is to miss a mark or a way. It is used two or three times in Ugartic to mean ‘sin’.”<sup>14</sup> Girdlestone says it means, “𐤒𐤕𐤍, which originally signifies to miss the mark, and answers to the Greek ἀμαρτία notifying the fact that all wrongdoing is a failure or a coming short of that aim which God intended all His children to reach.”<sup>15</sup> Here there is a common theme of missing the mark. This mark is God’s mark or His standard for human beings. By sinning human beings have missed the mark God has set for them and have destroyed the standard that God made for them.

Girdlestone goes further,

“If man was originally made in the image of God, it must have been implanted in him as a first principle that he should live as God lives. Every departure, therefore, from the law of Right is coming short of the purpose for which man was made, and a missing of the goal which ought to be reached.”<sup>16</sup>

And Harris says,

“The verb has the connotation of breach of civil law, i.e. failure to live up to its expectations, in Gen 40:1...In many instances in which the verb occurs in the Qal

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<sup>13</sup>Doty, *What the Bible Says*, 173.

<sup>14</sup>R. Laird Harris and Archer, Gleason L. And Waltke, Bruce K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 277.

<sup>15</sup>R. B. Girdlestone, *Girdlestone's Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 76.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



stem the object is either God or his laws, or else the verb is intransitive. In so acting, man is missing the goal or standard God has for him, is failing to observe the requirements of holy living, or falls short of spiritual wholeness. The participle seems to designate the sinner in Prov 13:22; Isa 65:20 and all instances in Eccl. But in Isa 1:4 it designates the quality of being less than acceptable to God. Thus like in other words related to the notion of 'sin' it assumes an absolute standard or law. ... $\alpha\upsilon\tau\eta$  means 'to miss, to fall short of the standard.'"<sup>17</sup>

God has an absolute standard, or law, that He has put into place in this world. Man has sinned and therefore missed this standard. God made man in His image and therefore had put this standard in the heart of man. Man, in rebelling against that standard, rejected the Law of God. Man's purpose is to be an image-bearer of God and therefore be obedient to that standard. By missing the mark, man has corrupted that image.

### **$\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ , $\alpha\varsigma$ , $\eta$ -Missing the Mark**

Botterweck goes onto say that, " $\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$  is literally a missing of the mark but the etymological meaning is largely lost sight of in the NT. It is the comprehensive term for moral obliquity. It is used of sin as a principle or source of action, or an inward element producing acts."<sup>18</sup> - This definition parallels the Old Testament definition that sin is missing the mark.<sup>19</sup> As in the OT word, the mark is defined by God, and human sin is missing that standard He has set for humans. What is interesting here is that sin is looked at as motives and even thoughts, not just behavior. Going further,

"A governing principle or power, e.g., Rom. 6:6, '(the body) sin', here sin is spoken of as an organized power, acting through members of the body, though the seat of sin is in the will;...the aorist tense in each place, referring to an act of sin; on the contrary...the present tense indicates, not the committal of an act, but the continuous practice of sin."<sup>20</sup>

Hermann Cremer agrees with this in his Greek lexicon saying, " $\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ -

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<sup>17</sup>Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 277-278.

<sup>18</sup>G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 32.

<sup>19</sup>Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 277.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 32.

would seem to denote primarily, not sin considered as an action, but sin considered as the quality of action, that is, sin generically... According to this, sin is not merely quality of an action, about a principle manifesting itself in the conduct of the subject.”<sup>21</sup>—According to Cremer, sin is not merely an action, as defined by the word *ἁμαρτία*, it is also something deeper. It is evident from Cremer’s book that sin is also within the very will of the human spirit. Sin is something that is contrary to the will of God in terms of an inner condition that manifests itself in conduct. Trench defines it this way,

“*ἁμαρτία* It may be regarded as the missing of the mark or aim; it is then *ἁμαρτία*: the overpassing or transgressing of a line; it is then *παράβασις*: the disobedience to a voice... this will be *παράπτωμα*: ignorance of what one ought to have known; this will be...diminishing of that which should have been rendered in full measure, which is *ἥττημα*: non-observance of a law, which is...*παρανομία*: a discord in the harmonies of God's universe... Only this much is plain, that when sin is contemplated as *ἁμαρτία*, It is regarded as a failing and missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is God.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Word for Desire**

From this definition and the others presented, it can be concluded that this word “sin” means something outside of the normal realm that God has made. Sin is not something natural, yet instead is something that is failing—a failing that begins not in action, but with sinful desires. The word “desire,” is key in discovering what the origins of sin are in the human heart.

James gives the design for how sin begins in verse 16. Burdick says in his commentary on James,

“James pictures man’s ‘evil desire,’ first, as attracting his attention and persuading him to approach the forbidden thing and, second, as luring him by means of bait to yield to the temptation... The author’s intention is simply to trace the results of temptation when one yields to it. The order is evil desire, sin, death.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 100.

<sup>22</sup>R. C. Trench, *Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 240.

<sup>23</sup>Donald Burdick and Glenn Barker, *Hebrews through Revelation*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Germany: Zondervan, 1981), 172.

James explains that sin begins when one is not only tempted, but also enticed by his own lust. Then James shows how lust, when it gives birth to sin, leads to death. In short, sinful lusts lead to God's condemnation. However, the question remains: how exactly is sin related to the term "lust"? The word for lust in this passage gives a clue on how to define the process of sin.

### **ἐπιθυμία, ας, ἡ-Lust**

While the NASB translates ἐπιθυμία as lust in this passage, the word ἐπιθυμία more literally means desire. Feinberg says,

"The English translation somewhat blurs the meaning of the passage in the Greek. The word translated 'lust' is ἐπιθυμία, which has the basic meaning of 'desire.' Often lust is thought of only in terms of sexual desire, but ἐπιθυμία refers to desires of any kind. According to verse 14, desires are carried away and enticed. The first word...has the meaning of being moved from one's original position in this case, a mindset against doing moral evil. The second word...has the meaning of alluring. The idea is that the thing that desired act as 'bait' or a lure on the one who desires it and draws him to it."<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, writes Botterweck,

"ἐπιθυμία-denotes strong desire of any kind. The various kinds being frequently specified by some adjective...In Romans 6:12 the injunction against letting sin reign in our mortal body to obey the lust thereof, refers to those evil desires which are ready to express themselves in bodily activity...Such lusts are not necessarily base or immortal, they may be refined in character, but are evil if inconsistent with the will of God."<sup>25</sup>

Desire is not necessarily something evil or wrong, though. P.H. Davids writes in his commentary that, "This is one of the clearest instances in the NT of the appearance of *yēšer* theology (e.g. Windisch, 8; Cantinat, 86–87). In Jewish theology the evil impulse is not per se evil, but is simply undifferentiated desire. Desire by nature will transgress the limits of the law; thus the uncurbed *yēšer* will certainly lead to sin."<sup>26</sup> What Davids is

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<sup>24</sup>Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 170.

<sup>25</sup>Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary*, 25.

<sup>26</sup>P.H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 83.

saying is that desire that is not reigned in will eventually lead to sin. Yet, desire itself is not the problem. Likewise Stephen Smalley says, “ἐπιθυμία is an ambivalent term in NT vocabulary, Sometimes it has good connotations but more often it carries a pejorative sense of ‘evil desire, lust, false ambition.’”<sup>27</sup> -

Desiring God, or the things that He wills, is not wrong. Desire itself is not something that is wicked at all. Moo agrees with other scholars and adds specifically that James,

“In keeping with the movement of the passage from Sirach quoted above, James now attributes temptation to each person’s *evil desire*. No Greek word corresponding to ‘evil’ is found in the text, but the NIV rendering is nevertheless justified. ‘Desire’... can have a neutral meaning in the NT (cf. Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23), but the context here makes it clear that James uses it with its more typical NT sense: fleshly, illicit desire.”<sup>28</sup> -

The question is, what desires are sinful or what makes desire evil? Feinberg says,

“Morally evil acts, then, ultimately begin with our desires. Desires alone are not evil, but when they are drawn away and enticed to the point of bringing us to choose to disobey God's prescribed moral norms, we have sinned. Desires aren't the only culprit, for will, reason, and emotion, for example, enter into the process. But James says that individual acts of sin ultimately stem from desires that go astray.”<sup>29</sup> -

Evil desires come from the heart and become sinful external actions. What makes these desires evil is when those desires go against the will of God. Defining sin as partly desire is key, but desire itself is not something evil. Sources show that ἐπιθυμία, or “lust”, is used primarily as a negative to show lust as sinful. Trench says,

“ἐπιθυμία, is the larger word, including the whole world of active lusts and desires, all of which the sark, as the seat of desire and of natural appetites, impels; while the pathos is rather the 'morosa delectatio,' not so much the soul's disease in its more active operations, as the diseased condition out of which these spring.”<sup>30</sup> -

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<sup>27</sup>Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John*, in vol. 51 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 36.

<sup>28</sup>Moo, *James*, 74

<sup>29</sup>Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 170.

<sup>30</sup>Trench, *Synonyms New Testament*, 324.

The seat of desire is in the soul, the very deepest part of a human being. Feinberg also says, “This term indicates a strong desire for that which is forbidden. It is a form of lust, a strong will focused upon possessing anything for which no rightful claim may be made.”<sup>31</sup> - Here, word for lust is focused on anything that a person desires, but cannot or should not possess. This also agrees with the previous definitions that show that the word is used to describe desires that are outside the will of God. The point is that desires are in the core of the heart. The core of the heart is where sin begins because desires of the heart can either be good or evil. What makes the difference is whether those desires are within the will of God, and are pleasing to Him, or whether a person is focused on driving towards those evil desires. William Barclay writes,

“What is responsible for sin is a person’s own evil desire. Sin would be helpless if there was nothing in human beings to which it could appeal. Desire is something which can be nourished or stifled...but people can allow their thoughts to follow certain tracks, and their steps take them into certain places and their eyes linger on certain things, and so stimulate desire...if someone encourages desire for long enough, there is an inevitable consequence. Desire becomes action.”<sup>32</sup>

People choose between letting their desires be nourished out letting them die. Allowing desires to grow will eventually lead someone to act. At some point desires go from good to being evil on the road towards sin, and then that sin leads to death. Ross puts it this way,

“The mere fact of our being tempted does not involve in itself anything sinful. It is when the desire of man goes out to meet and embrace the forbidden thing and an unholy marriage takes place between the two, that sin is born. Once sin is born, it grows, and...when it is fully grown, it brings forth death...death spiritual and death eternal.”<sup>33</sup>

And Feinberg adds,

“To sum up, then, as to how an evil action comes to be, an individual has certain basic desires or needs which aren't evil in themselves. He initially doesn't purpose to

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<sup>31</sup>Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 170.

<sup>32</sup>William Barclay, *James* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>33</sup>Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, in the *New International Commentary On the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 34.

sate those desires in a way that disobeys ethical norms. However, a desirable object comes before him, and he's attracted to it. He forms the intention to have it, even though acquiring it is prohibited by moral precept. Then, when the allurements become strong enough, he wills to acquire or do the thing he desires. At that point sin is committed. Then, bodily movement (whatever it might be) to carry out the decision occurs. Once the act is done, it is public knowledge that the moral law has been broken."<sup>34</sup>

Evil desires that are buried deep within the human soul are what give rise to sin. These desires are what begin the dark pathway that leads to God's condemnation. Nevertheless, the question remains: what exactly are these desires? The main argument is that the sin humanity is primarily condemned for is a rejection of God. What are these desires and where does the rejection of God fit into these desires? This is where the next passage in John's epistle comes into play, because what these evil desires are comprised of are spelled out.

### **Defining Evil Desires- 1 John 2:15-17**

John writes in his epistle about what exactly evil desires look like and why they run counter to God. He writes,

“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.”(1 John 2:15-17)-

The first part of this passage describes two different sides that men can direct his affections. The affections can either go to the world or the Father. Ross says,

“Or, to put it otherwise, ‘world’ here means all that is alienated from and opposed to God, the world which lies in the evil one.... John's dualism is ethical, not cosmological. Like the biblical authors generally he does not regard God's creation, the material world itself, as inherently evil; it is man's inclination to follow evil instead of good by worshiping material things (rather than God the Creator) which is condemned.”<sup>35</sup>

The world, in terms of the created world, is good. It is the ethical system

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<sup>34</sup>Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 171.

<sup>35</sup>Ross, *Epistle of John*, 164.

within the world, or the lack of an ethical system, which is condemned by John. The world is used by John as a term to describe the side that opposes God. Smalley adds,

“Right behavior must follow right belief; for only by the former can the latter be attested. God's gift of love and life must be properly used: by loving him in return, and by rejecting worldliness. John continues his appeal for the genuine Christian to avoid worldly attitudes, and therefore worldly conduct, by exemplifying what is meant by ‘worldly things’. In doing so he explains why the world's love and God's love cannot exist together, ‘For everything in the world derives from the world.’”<sup>36</sup>

From the world comes things of the world, and these things go against God.

There are only two sides, as Smalley points out. The desires of men can either go towards God and things that are good or toward the world and evil.

### **Desires of God or Desires of the World**

Mankind has an ethical choice between the desires of the world and the desires of the Father. People have chosen to worship the material world and the creation rather than the one who created them. Smalley is correct in saying that there is no middle ground, that desiring the things of the world and evil are completely incompatible with a person who strives to honor God and desire what He desires.<sup>37</sup> They are not dualistic opposites in terms of being equals. Instead, they are two completely different sides that cannot coexist. Good comes from God and from following Him. Evil comes from the world and desiring those things.<sup>38</sup>

The desires of the world come completely from the world and are hostile towards God Himself, and all that comes from Him, especially His Son (John 15:19). The world aims to take over and destroy the things of God, starting with the beings made in His image (John 8:34, Rom 5:12). Jean Calvin writes about this, saying, “The sum of it is that, as soon as the world offers itself, our desires are carried away by it like unbridled

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<sup>36</sup>Smalley, *1 John*, 83.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ross, *Epistle of John*, 165.

beasts, because our heart is perverse. And so various lusts, all against God, rule over us.”<sup>39</sup> This is where temptation becomes sin. A person desired something that goes against the desires of God. Instead of turning away from that thought they lust after what God has forbidden, that person rejects God in favor of themselves. In a sense, they have come up with the desire to be gods on their own. This is because they do not like the rules that the true God has put into place, even though those rules were made out of love.<sup>40</sup>

### **Three Desires of the World**

John defines the desires that come from the world in three concepts. Because these desires are portrayed in an evil light by John, they can alternatively be translated as lusts as well.<sup>41</sup> These three aspects are the “lust of the flesh,” the “lust of the eyes,” and the “pride of life.” They stem from an ultimate desire of wanting to stand apart from God, to be independent of God and His will.<sup>42</sup> This evil desire is within the hearts of every man. In this self-sovereignty men can then satisfy their desires of the flesh. Daniel Akin writes,

“Yet it is obvious that in our present text John emphasizes the negative meaning of these terms that arises from the tendency of human beings to fulfill the natural desires they have that are contrary to God’s will. We are not sinful because we sin. We sin because we are sinful. We enter the world with a nature and bent predisposed to sin.”<sup>43</sup>

Men are controlled from birth by their own wicked desires. These desires are

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<sup>39</sup>Jean Calvin and Ross Mackenzie, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 254.

<sup>40</sup>Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 373.

<sup>41</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words: With Their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (Nashville, TN: Royal Publishers, Inc., 1952), 697-98.

<sup>42</sup>Bray, *God Is Love*, 374.

<sup>43</sup>Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, and 3 John*, ed. Dr. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 109.



wicked because they go against the will of God. *The Dictionary of New Testament* says that,

“The desires determine and enslave a man. While he becomes the slave of their allurements and temptations (Eph 4:22), his ‘heart’, i.e. the center of his whole personality (Rom. 1:24), comes under their control. When that happens, all decisions of the will, and even the best and highest impulses and powers of a man are determined by these desires. Only the life that is turned to God's will and regulation is subject to God and determined by him, presents the opposite picture.”<sup>44</sup>

In man's pursuit of worldly desires, apart from God, they become slaves to those desires. Again, there are two sides to this picture. There are persons who follow God and those who follow worldly desires. Those who follow God will attain true freedom (Gal 5:1). However, those who reject God in pursuit of their own freedom ultimately obtain slavery to their immoral desires. Yet, people still would rather be slaves to their desires, thinking that they are self-sovereign, than follow God.<sup>45</sup>

And this is the core of sin: a desire to be not just independent from God but to be god.<sup>46</sup> These desires are focused on how people can elevate themselves above God so that they do not need God. It is not out of a sense of admiring anything good or emulating God, who is good and defines good (Gen 1:10). This is what makes a desire evil. Is a desire leading a person towards God and what pleases Him, or is it a desire to be apart and reject God? Ross writes that,

“The first two are wrongful desires of what is not possessed; the third is a wrongful with regard to what is possessed, The first two may be vices of a solitary; the third requires society. We can have sinful desires when we are alone, but we cannot be ostentatious without company. These evil things, John says, did not originate with the Father. They sprang from the corrupt heart of man, after a man had been seduced by the ‘the ruler of the world’.”<sup>47</sup>

The desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life are nothing but aspects

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<sup>44</sup>Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament*, 457.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 374.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ross, *Epistle of John*, 166.

of the same basic desire, a desire to be self-sovereign.<sup>48</sup> This came about not from God but instead from the heart of man, who desired to be apart from God. All three of these desires comprise the entirety of a human being and its material senses.<sup>49</sup>

### **Lust of the Flesh**

The first one (the lust of the flesh) is a desire that is based around desiring something for the body.<sup>50</sup> It is something the person considers to be good for their fleshly selves, to satisfy a bodily need. Barker writes in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*

“The phrase ‘the cravings of sinful man’...describes the principle of worldliness from which love of the world flows. ‘Flesh’ refers to ‘the outlook orientated towards self, that which pursues its own ends in self-sufficient independence of God’ and in self-sufficient independence of one’s fellow man. The ‘flesh’ not only becomes the basis for rebellion against God and for despising his law but also connotes all that is materialistic, egocentric, exploitative, and selfish.”<sup>51</sup>

These desires are bent towards a need to fulfill something bodily. However, not all bodily needs are evil. These are bodily desires towards something corruptive that God has forbidden. While there have been arguments that this refers exclusively to a sexual need, Akin cautions against that interpretation,

“Although these types of desires must certainly be included, even emphasized in what John describes, one narrows the meaning of the phrase too much if this becomes the exclusive meaning of the text. John would include anything and any way in which humans improperly fulfill fleshly desires (overeating, drunkenness, etc.).”<sup>52</sup>

These desires of the flesh are not limited to sexual desires but are any bodily desire that go against the designs of God.

### **Lust of the Eyes**

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<sup>48</sup>Bray, *God Is Love*, 374.

<sup>49</sup>Ross, *Epistle of John*, 165.

<sup>50</sup>Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament*, 678.

<sup>51</sup>Burdick, *Hebrews Through Revelation*, 321.

<sup>52</sup>Akin, *1 John*, 109-111.

The second desire mentioned is the lust of the eyes. It will be noted that this desire satisfies a desire of something seen.<sup>53</sup> Desiring to see something good is not inherently bad. Something else makes this desire bad. This desire has more to do with the mind and what is being put into the mind. Barker goes on to say, “The ‘lust of the eyes’... the tendency to be captivated by outward, visible splendor and show, but more probably the basic thought is of greed and desire for things aroused by seeing them...Eve’s view of the forbidden tree as ‘a delight to the eyes’...as obvious examples.”<sup>54</sup>

Again, this should not be limited to sexual desires. Akin notes,

“The eyes in and of themselves cannot be said to be guilty of sinful desires. Our eyes are a precious gift from God (Prov 20:12). They are, however, often the means by which sinful desires are introduced into the mind of the individual. Eyes are windows into the soul... all of these temptations of the world focus on enjoyment in the present without an analysis or understanding of the future ramifications.”<sup>55</sup>

What is seen by the eyes is transferred to the mind and the soul. There is more to evil than corrupt sexual desires. Anything that men desire to see that corrupts the mind against God is the lust of the eyes.

### **Pride of Life**

The third aspect here does not possess the word for desire listed in it, yet still has that connection;<sup>56</sup> it is the pride of life. What exactly does the pride of life mean? Taking pride in what God has made for humanity is not a bad thing as long as obedient praise is given to the One who made it. Barker says,

“The corporate adjective...is used in Romans 1:30 and 2 Timothy 3:2. It describes a pretentious hypocrite who glories in himself or in his possessions...Bruce says, ‘If my reputation...matters more to me than the glory of God or the well-being of my

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<sup>53</sup>Burdick, *Hebrews Through Revelation*, 321.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Akin, *1 John*, 109-111

<sup>56</sup>Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament*, 32.

followers, the ‘pretentiousness of life’ has become the object of my idol-worship.”<sup>57</sup>

Being prideful of one’s self and accomplishments in the world’s standard is the problem. Akin puts it this way,

“This pride that results from and in worldly possession is an affront to God, for it leads to a glorification of the self and a failure to realize the dependence of humanity upon God, the Creator, for existence. In this area of temptation, individuals make idols of their livelihood, social standing, and any other status symbol that the world determines is important but that matters little to God. Pride, prestige, power, and position count for nothing in the kingdom of God. The value system of this world is turned on its head when God provides the evaluation.”<sup>58</sup>

Pride in worldly things bring nothing to the kingdom of God. People that put pride in the temporary things of this world are guilty of giving into the pride of life. They are guilty of putting themselves above God. This is the problem with all three desires, they reject God in favor of indulging worldly wants.

### **Conclusion on Definition of Sin**

It is not desire itself that is wrong; it is what the desire is directed towards.<sup>59</sup> If God is the creator of all that is good, and is the epitome of good itself, than all things outside of Him and His will are evil (1 John 2:15-17). Therefore, whenever man desires or lusts after something that is not within the will of God or pleasing to Him who is the author of good, then it must be possible to conclude that the human is sinning by indulging those lusts (Matt 5:27-28). To yield to those lusts, they must also first reject God by ignoring Him.<sup>60</sup> This is the base of sin, a rejection of God so that a person dilutes themselves into believing they can be self-sovereign and indulge in the lusts that they desire.<sup>61</sup> For evil desires to be indulged, God has to be removed from the picture first.

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<sup>57</sup>Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament*, 321-322.

<sup>58</sup>Akin, *1 John*, 109-111

<sup>59</sup>Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, 289.

<sup>60</sup>Bray, *God Is Love*, 374.

<sup>61</sup>Bray, *God Is Love*, 374.

The people who indulge in these desires not only remove God from the picture, but try to set themselves up as God so that they can do what they want (Rom 1:21). First John shows that these lusts are at the core of sin. These evil desires have a rudimentary cause. This base cause is a rejection of God in the life of a human being. There are instances of this rejection throughout Scripture, but one in particular should be taken note of.

There are scholars who find a picture of these evil desires when looking at what happened when sin first entered into the hearts of man. Some scholars have argued that when Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the above three aspects are pictured clearly in the narrative. Barker writes,

“Some have found in John's threefold description of worldly desires and attitudes, which are to be avoided by the Christian, a parallel with the three factors which (according to Gen 3:6) lead eve to disobey God: she saw that the fruit of the for bidding tree was good for food, pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom.”<sup>62</sup>

Smalley agrees with this, saying, “Echoes of the temptation in Gen. 3 are to be detected at a subsurface level in this verse. The most likely source of the teaching, however, is the rabbinic doctrine of the ‘evil impulse’ that goads men and women into sin.”<sup>63</sup>

## THE EXAMPLE OF SINFUL REJECTION

### **The First Sin-Genesis 3**

Human sin can be traced to the very beginnings of human history. In Genesis, the corruption of sin started with the first humans in the garden.<sup>64</sup> It was there that mankind first chose to reject God in favor of the chains of their own desires. Genesis begins with God’s creation of the universe, the world, its creatures, and then humanity.

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<sup>62</sup>Burdick, *Hebrews through Revelation*, 321.

<sup>63</sup>Smalley, *1 John*, 36.

<sup>64</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 112.

Humanity was meant to be different from all of creation as they were to be the image-bearers of God.<sup>65</sup> They were designed to have a relationship with the creator that no other part of creation had.<sup>66</sup> This relationship involved mankind's obedient worship of a loving God who would take care of them. As Wenham writes, "Man's labor in the garden is indeed a kind of divine service, for it is done for God and in His presence. Only one restriction is placed on man's freedom: he is forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge. If he does, he will immediately die."<sup>67</sup> Yet, something occurred that would ruin all of it, the entrance of human sin. Moses writes in chapter 3 of Genesis,

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?"' The woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.'"(Gen 3:1-7)-

In the beginning of the passage, the relationship between God and man can be seen in the titles that Eve uses for God. Wenham writes on this in his commentary, saying,

"This title includes the divine epithet 'the Lord God,' which is characteristic of chaps. 2-3, but of nowhere else in Genesis. Usually one or the other name is used, but here the two are combined, suggesting no doubt that this story reveals both God's character as the sovereign creator of the universe (God) and His intimate covenant-like relationship with mankind (the Lord). ..Both traits are prominent in the first scene (2:5-17) which shows the Lord God creating man and a perfect environment for him. It discloses God's sovereignty over man His creature and His loving concern for his well being."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 11.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>67</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, in vol. 1 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 87.

<sup>68</sup>Wenham, *Genesis*, 87.

Through the use of these titles the progression of the deception and temptation can be observed. First it is seen when the serpent does not use the proper titles for God. Then, Eve followed the lead of the serpent by echoing how he referred to God. Wenham continues in the commentary,

“Yet in the very opening question, ‘Has God really said...you must not eat from any of the trees?’, there are several clues that should alert listeners less naïve than Eve to the serpent's sinister intentions. First, the snake speaks boldly of ‘God’ (the distant creator) instead of ‘the Lord God’ (creator and covenant partner) used elsewhere in these chapters. Second, though God allowed men to eat freely of all the trees save one, the snake asks whether God has forbidden men to eat from every tree. How did he know about the prohibition at all, and then get it so wrong? The very way the question is put suggests malevolent intent. But Eve appears quite oblivious of these dangerous nuances and simply corrects the snake's mistakes: ‘God allows us to eat of all the trees except one which we cannot even touch lest we die.’ But in her words we have the first hints of her distancing herself from her creator. While openly acknowledging His bounty in allowing them to eat most of the trees, she adopts the snake's less friendly title of ‘God’ instead of ‘the Lord God,’ and adds that He is perhaps a little harsh imposing the death penalty for merely touching a tree.”<sup>69</sup>

Wenham makes the point that evil desires have already started to creep in to the heart of Eve. Yet, Eve is not the only one who should be held to account here. Later on, the passage also indicates that Adam was with her throughout the conversation.<sup>70</sup>

Desire had crept into his heart as well. But desire for what? Wenham goes on to observe here,

“The woman's covetousness is described in terminology that foreshadows the tenth commandment. ‘Delight,’ and ‘desirable,’ are from roots meaning ‘to covet’ (Deut 5:21; Exod 20:17). She ‘gave it to her husband with her’: this last phrase emphasizes the man's association with the woman in the eating (cf. 6:18; 7:7; 13:1). Indeed, his eating is the last and decisive act of disobedience, for immediately the consequences of their sin are described.”<sup>71</sup>

When Adam and Eve ate, they coveted something. The eating of the fruit was the culmination of this building desire. This desire manifested into their active

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

disobedience. What was this evil desire?

### **The Desire for Self-Sovereignty**

Adam and Eve desired the fruit and coveted it before they ate of it. Evil desires began to pollute them even before the external act itself. Why? Because there was more to the first sin than just the act of eating the fruit itself. Doty points out in his book, “At the seat of all sin is human selfishness...self-will rises above the will of God in human conduct; self-sufficiency supplants faith; self-will displaces submission; self-seeking overwhelms benevolence; and self-righteousness overrides humility and reverence.”<sup>72</sup> And later on, Doty comments, “At the center of sin is self: sin is self-sufficiency; self-will; self-seeking; self-righteousness; self glorification.”<sup>73</sup> The point that Doty makes is that at the center of sin is a selfish pride. Adam and Eve, at the moment of temptation, looked at the serpent and the fruit and thought that they did not need God. They saw that the fruit was good to them, and their flesh craved it. However, what of the commands of God? Keil and Delitzsch, in their commentary on the Pentateuch, make this observation,

“As this trust of God's command leads to a disregard of it, so the longing for a false independence excites a desire for the seemingly good that has been prohibited; and this desire is fostered by the senses, until it brings forth sin. Doubt, unbelief, and pride were the roots of the sin of our first parents, as they have been of all the sins of their posterity.”<sup>74</sup>

Adam and Eve thought that they could choose better than God. They desired to be self-sovereign and apart from God. The fruit would give them what they thought would be their freedom from God. This was the pride of life and the center of their sin. The genesis of these desires was a rejection of God. Where the temptation towards these desires became sin was when they rejected God in favor of indulging these desires. Adam

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<sup>72</sup>Brant Lee Doty, *What the Bible Says About Sin* (Joplin, MO: College Pr Pub Co, 1996), 18-19.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>74</sup>C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary On the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: Hendrickson Pub, 2006), 95-96.



and Eve could have walked away at the serpents first words,<sup>75</sup> instead, they heard him out and indulged their desires. What should be noticed here is that the sin preceded the sinful act of eating the fruit. The rejection of God and the indulging of the desires preceded the external action of eating.<sup>76</sup> E. G. Robinson makes an observation in his book,

“Sin is not a mere act...something foreign to the being. It is a quality of being. There is no such thing as a sin apart from the sinner, or an act apart from an actor. God punishes sinners, not sins. Sin is a mode of being; as an entity by itself it never existed. God punishes sin as a state, not an act. Man is not responsible for the consequences of his crime, nor for the acts themselves, except as they are symptomatic of his personal states.”<sup>77</sup>

Sin is not a mere act, as Robertson puts it, but something far more corruptive and sinister.

### **Sin is an Inherited State**

Sin is more than just an act; it is a person’s state before God. Every person on the planet is in this state of sin. It is a state of rejection and rebellion against God that were inherited from Adam.<sup>78</sup> The church fathers called this doctrine “Original Sin.”<sup>79</sup> Throughout church history, different theologians have defended this doctrine, but this doctrine has prevailed from Augustine through Calvin. Gregg Allison also echoes the views of church fathers and theologians defending the views of Calvin and Augustine by asserting,

“Pride was at the heart of Adam's disobedience to the will of God. If he had not been puffed up with ambition, Adam would have lived forever in the upright state in which he had been originally created. In addition to pride, another problem at the heart of our first parents' disobedience was unfaithfulness to the word of God. As a result of the fall, all the wonderful gifts that characterized Adam as a being created in the image of God were lost. They were replaced by new traits, horrible ‘gifts’ that

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<sup>75</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 131.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>77</sup>Ezekiel Gilman Robinson, *Christian Theology* (Rochester, NY: 1894), 162.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 143

belong not only to Adam but to his descendants as well.”<sup>80</sup>

Sin did not stop with Adam, but instead, the corruption of sin has now tainted every individual. His rejection of God has become the *modus operandi* of every human being ever to walk the earth.<sup>81</sup> How can this be? How can humans be affected or judged for something Adam and Eve did?

Wenham says,

“The sin of the first man was more than a paradigm of every sinner's experience; it was indeed the first sin, which has had dire consequences for the whole human race. Subsequent sinners have not had the same advantages as Adam in Eden. Building on Paul's exposition of Gen 3, the Christian doctrines of original sin and guilt have been developed.”<sup>82</sup>

Calvin also makes the assertion that,

“After the heavenly image (the image of God) was obliterated in him (Adam), he was not the only one to suffer this punishment. In place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice—with which gift he had been clothed—there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice. But he (Adam) also entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries. This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed ‘Original Sin,’ meaning by the word ‘sin’ the deprivation of a nature previously good and pure.”<sup>83</sup>

The miseries and punishments that befell Adam after his disobedience also corrupted his offspring. Every human is tied to the corruption that Adam brought and all of the plagues, as Calvin puts it, came with that corruption. Worst of all, this corruption brought about death. Allison notes, “The apostle Paul links death, judgment, and the condemnation of all humanity to the one sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12-19), and he spoke of the ‘law of sin’ wreaking havoc in human beings (Rom. 7:23).”<sup>84</sup> Then, later on, Allison begins to trace the views of the church fathers starting with Tertullian who said in his

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<sup>80</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 354.

<sup>81</sup>Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: a Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 385.

<sup>82</sup>Wenham, *Genesis*, 90-91.

<sup>83</sup>Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 245.

<sup>84</sup>Allison, *Historical Theology*, 343.

writings,

“The soul of a human being—which may be compared with the beginning sprout of a tree—has been derived from Adam as its root. It has been propagated among his descendants by means of women, to whom it has been entrusted for transmission... We have indeed borne the image of the earthly (the image of Adam), by sharing in his transgression, by her participation in his death, and by our banishment from Paradise.”<sup>85</sup>

Adam was the root for all of humanity. The roots of the tree were poisoned by sin, therefore all of the branches were poisoned as well. Humanity is now in the image of Adam, not the image of God. Tertullian, then, affirmed that human sin is, “Evil which arises from its (the soul’s) corrupt origin”<sup>86</sup>- Augustine makes his viewpoint known saying,

“To the first man who, in that good in which he had been made upright, had received the ability not to send, the ability not to die, the ability not to forsake that good itself, was given the aid of perseverance... For pride is the beginning of sin (Ecclesiasticus 10:13). And what is pride but the craving for undue exultation? And this is undue exultation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself this happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. As a result of Adam's fall, humanity lost the freedom of will it once enjoyed: Accordingly, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right until, being free from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness. Indeed, rather than being able not to sin, all people after the fall are not able not to sin.”<sup>87</sup>

Augustine points out that because of the fall of Adam, people are not only infected by this corruption of sin, they are slaves to it. Calvin builds on Augustine’s viewpoint saying,

“The Lord entrusted to Adam those gifts that he willed to be conferred upon human nature. Hence Adam, when he lost the gifts received, lost them not only for himself but for us all. Period. Adam had received for us no less than for himself those gifts which he lost, and they had not been given to one man but had been assigned to the whole human race. There's nothing absurd, then, in supposing that, when Adam was despoiled, human nature was left naked and destitute, or that when he was infected with sin, contagion crept into human nature. The beginning of corruption and Adam was such that it was conveyed in a perpetual stream from the ancestors into their

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<sup>85</sup>A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV: Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 200.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>St. Augustine, *City of God* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1958), 271-273.

descendants.”<sup>88</sup>

Adam and Eve’s state of rejecting God in favor of their own sinful desires has been passed down to their descendants. Their descendants have also made the decision to reject God in favor of their desires.<sup>89</sup> There is no one who is innocent, because every person on the planet is given the same choice. In the same situation as the first humans, they would make the same choice.<sup>90</sup> Sin is an inherited state of rejecting God and rebelling against Him. In response God has to deliver the consequences as Wenham points out,

“Confronted and interrogated by God they are made to confess their disobedience, though they try to minimize their culpability by suggesting that someone else is more to blame (3:9-13). Then follows the verdict and sentence of the divine judge. In turn each is condemned to some permanent disadvantage in life.”<sup>91</sup>

The sin of the first humans brought about punishment for them and also their children.

### **Conclusion on the Genesis of Sin**

Adam and Eve are condemned not only to death but to curses even in life (Gen 3:16-19). This condemnation has also been handed down to humanity. What this concept of condemnation looks like will be looked at next chapter, but to conclude this section, Wenham shows that,

“Gen 2-3, then offers a paradigm of sin, a model of what happens whenever man disobeys God. It is paradigmatic in that in that it explains through a story what constitutes sin and what sin's consequences are. The essence of man's first sin was his disobedience to the only divine command he had received: not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The consequences of his actions are both physical—toil, pain, and death—and spiritual—alienation from God. The spiritual consequences follow the act

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<sup>88</sup>Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 249-250.

<sup>89</sup>Joseph Prud'homme and James Schelberg, “Disposition, Potentiality, and Beauty in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Defense of His Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin,” *American Theological Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (January 15, 2012): 36-37.

<sup>90</sup>Prud'homme, *Edwards*, 48-49.

<sup>91</sup>Wenham, *Genesis*, 89.

of disobedience immediately, the physical penalties-pain, suffering, and death-may take longer to become evident...In this sense the story is paradigmatic. But in all societies, and especially the tightly knit family society of ancient Israel, the behavior of parents has great impact on their children for good or ill. It therefore follows that the disobedience of the first couple from whom Genesis traces the descent of the whole human race must have had grave consequences for all mankind. In this sense, then, the story offers a protohistorical account of man's origins and his sin."<sup>92</sup>

Genesis 3 gives the foremost example of the progression of sin and the beginnings of the corruption of humanity. Adam and Eve rejected God in favor of doing things their own way. In response, God condemned them, and the first humans brought corruption and death, both physical and spiritual. In the next chapter this concept of condemnation will be discussed further, showing that God condemns the internal sinful state, characterized by sinful desires, which stem from a rejection of Him. -

## CONCEPTUALIZING CONDEMNATION

### **Inner Evil Desires are Condemnable-Matthew 5:21-30**

Jesus Himself shows that the condemnation for sin goes far beneath the surface of sinful external acts in His sermon on the mount. Matthew writes in his gospel,

“You have heard that the ancients were told, YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER and Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; ...You have heard that it was said, YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”(Matt 5:21-30)-

In this verse, Jesus speaks on two specific acts of sin, but there is something crucial that needs to be addressed here. The progression of both acts of sin that Jesus mentions is interesting in that it contrasts with the contemporary thought of the Jewish culture of that time.<sup>93</sup> Yet, Jesus is not abolishing the law by contrasting what He is saying compared to what the Jewish people had tried to build the culture around. On the contrary, Jesus is the fulfillment of it. D.A. Carson writes, “Just as Jesus fulfilled OT

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<sup>92</sup>Wenham, *Genesis*, 91.

<sup>93</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon On the Mount: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006.), 86.

prophecies by His person and actions, so He fulfilled OT law by His teaching. In no case does this ‘abolish’ the OT as canon...instead, the OT’s real and abiding authority must be understood through the person and teaching of Him to whom it points and who so richly fulfills it.”<sup>94</sup> The covenant made by God to Israel, which included the law, saw its fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus was not abolishing the covenant or the law, but instead, as the very fulfillment of the law, was showing what it really meant. He says that “you have heard...” but then moves onto say “but I say...” in contrast to what the people had been told by the religious leaders at the time. The heart behind the act mattered.<sup>95</sup> Sin doesn’t begin with an exterior action, but is born from something deep within.<sup>96</sup> Hagner writes in his Word Commentary,

“Jesus penetrates to the spirit of the commandment. Since the spring of a person's conduct is the heart, or inner person, the transforming power of the kingdom must be especially experienced there. Anger and insults spoken from anger are evil and corrupting, and they therefore call forth God's judgment, just as the act of murder itself does. Accordingly, the worship and service of God cannot be performed as long as anger infects the soul. Thus, the recipient of the grace of the kingdom is one who initiates and seeks reconciliation, both with members of the community of faith and with adversaries.”<sup>97</sup>

Allison adds, “This sin manifest itself in evil actions, destructive words, improper motivations, wrong attitudes, and a depraved nature.”<sup>98</sup> Jesus’ first example involves a person who is angry with another person. This person might not actually commit a murderous act, but still desires it in his or her heart. This, Jesus says, is the problem. The person who desires it is just as guilty as the person who actually commits

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<sup>94</sup>Donald Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 144.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 159.

<sup>97</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, in vol. 33a of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 118.

<sup>98</sup>Allison, *Historical Theology*, 342.

murder.<sup>99</sup> Why? Because the intent of the heart is where the sin is birthed.<sup>100</sup> A person who desires ill will upon someone is just as culpable as another who actually commits the act itself.

In the same way, Jesus tells the people that they have heard that they should not commit adultery, but He takes it further by saying that the someone who even lusts or desires a spouse not their own, is guilty of the same crime as the one who is angry.<sup>101</sup> The lust or coveting of someone else spouse is just as wrong as adultery itself. Hagner comments,

“The sin of adultery, like other sins, find its root in a person's inner thoughts. Thus, to look deliberately at a woman lustfully, i.e., desiring or imagining a sexual relationship with her, is to commit adultery in one's heart and thus to violate the deepest intention of the law as now revealed by Jesus. The idea of sinning in the heart through one's desires (for rabbinic parallel, cf. b. Yoma 29a; b. Hal. 1) is already contained in the ten commandments, where one is forbidden to covet, among other things, the wife of a neighbor (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21). Pg 120”<sup>102</sup>

The word “desire” is fundamental. A person who even desires a spouse not their own is sinning just as much as someone who does the act itself. This is explained by the fact that a person who is lusting has rejected what God has commanded in favor of indulging the lust. Adultery and murder are not just acts, but begin with anger and lust.<sup>103</sup> These sinful desires incorporate all three lusts found in 1<sup>st</sup> John and follow the pattern of James 1. A person who gives into lust gives birth to sin. Hagner goes on,

“Jesus again deepens the OT commandment by interpreting it to include what occurs ‘in the heart’ prior to and as the foundation of the external act. Thus, again, he shifts the attention from the external act to the inner thought. There, in the inner person, lie the real problem in the initial guilt. To lust after someone sexually is to nurture a burning desire for the person in one's heart. Such lust has a consuming effect. Where lust exists, the discipleship of the kingdom requires dramatic and

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<sup>99</sup>Boice, *The Sermon On the Mount*, 91-92.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 169.

<sup>102</sup>Hagner, *Matthew*, 120.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 169.

determined action to rid oneself of the cause.”<sup>104</sup>

In both cases, though, the sin began in the heart and signifies a rejection of God, which is the real sin. How so? In both examples, the person who sins is rejecting God by seeing something he or she wants or want to do but God has forbidden it.<sup>105</sup> God has forbidden murder and adultery, but the person wants it and lets those desires fester. What someone is actually saying is the exact same as what Adam and Eve said in their hearts “God, your ways are not good enough, and I can do this life better.” The person who desires to murder wants vengeance against whatever offense was dealt against him.<sup>106</sup> Instead of letting God take care of it and level justice, to them, God’s justice is not sufficient.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, a person who lusts after someone says to God that His ways are not sufficient. They want that other person no matter the consequences, and God is standing in the way of their happiness. This is the essence of these sinful desires and is exactly what Jesus is condemning. It is what God condemns and what will receive punishment. Allen agrees, saying,

“Not only will the external act receive due punishment at human tribunals, but the internal feeling that prompts it is liable to the verdict of condemnation which will be pronounced by God. In other words, both prohibition and penalty must be interpreted spiritually as well as literally...The law says that murder should be punished by the proper authority. Christ says that the feeling of anger which prompts the crime will meet with the divine condemnation... the sins of the inner life are as culpable as those of the external act.”<sup>108</sup>

The point, here, is that the desires themselves are condemnable. But why? Why are thoughts and internal desires condemnable? Because they reject God and indulge the desires. Therefore, in response to sin, God rejects that person (Isa 59:2). This is

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<sup>104</sup>Hagner, *Matthew*, 121.

<sup>105</sup>Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 170.

<sup>106</sup>Boice, *The Sermon On the Mount*, 92-95.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 97-99.

<sup>108</sup>Willoughby C. Allen, *St. Matthew-International Critical Commentary* (Edinburg: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000), 48.



condemnation, it is a punishment from God in response to His judgment on the charges against humanity.<sup>109</sup> The primary charge against humanity is rejection of Him. In both of these cases, Jesus says that the person who desires these things is guilty. The thoughts themselves are condemnable because they reject God by saying that His ways are not good enough for the individual and that the individual knows better than God.

### **Rejection Leads to Condemnation-Romans 1:18-32**

A final key passage in dealing with the issue of humans being condemned for rejecting God is found in the first chapter of Romans. Paul lays out in Romans the complete Gospel message. He begins the book by showing man's state before God and God's response. As Cranfield points out in his commentary, "The carefully balanced structure of the central part of this sub-section looks as if it may have been specially designed to suggest a correspondence between sin and punishment."<sup>110</sup> And later on he says,

“ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων indicates the object against which God's wrath is directed. The wrath which is being revealed is no nightmare of an indiscriminate, uncontrolled, irrational fury, but the wrath of a holy and merciful God called forth by, and directed against men's ἀσέβειαν and ἀδικία.”<sup>111</sup>

God does not just deal out wrath randomly. Instead, God's wrath is directed for a reason and in response to a transgression. His wrath and condemnation, in this case, is directed against humanity. In verse 18, Paul shows why the wrath of God has been brought against humanity and what it looks like. Paul writes,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to

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<sup>109</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words: With Their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (Nashville, TN: Royal Publishers, Inc., 1952), 213-214.

<sup>110</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans 1-8*, in vol.1 of *International Critical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 106.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.

them... For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened... Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them... For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions... And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper... and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”(Rom 1:18-32)

To begin, James Dunn makes an interesting observation between this passage and the account of Genesis 3,

“Significant for the initial setting up of the argument is the obvious deliberate echo of the Adam narratives (Gen 2-3) in vv 19-25: it was Adam who above all perverted his knowledge of God and sought to escape the status of creature, but who believed a lie and became a fool and thus set the pattern (Adam = man) for a mankind which worshipped the idol rather than the Creator (Hooker, Wedderburn). The use of more widely known Stoic categories, particularly in vv 19-20, 23, and 28 (Polenz), would increase the universal appeal of the argument.”<sup>112</sup>

Here, Dunn shows that there is a parallel here between the progression of the sin of humanity and the sin of its progenitor. Adam’s sin of rejecting God in favor of himself has now become his descendants sin. Dunn continues,

“It is sufficiently clear that Paul also had in mind the figure of Adam and the narrative of the Fall (Gen 3), as of course is true also of the Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24. There is no specific allusion to Genesis, but it was hardly possible for a Jew to think of man's place in creation, his knowledge of God, and his loss of that knowledge in a (single) act of willful rebellion, without reference to Gen 2-3. Paul's indictment of humankind is also his description of Adam (=man): Adam/man who did not honor God as God or knowledge his creaturely dependence on him, Adam/Man who thought he himself could be as God, wise in his own right without need of God's wisdom, and who by that very act darkened his own counsel and clothed himself in folly. Thus it is that the Genesis narrative provides Paul with a penetrating analysis of contemporary man.”<sup>113</sup>

There can be no conclusion drawn about sin without remembering the first sin in Genesis 3. Paul is showing in this passage that all are guilty of the same sin, not only because the sinful state has been transferred to them from Adam, but because they have

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<sup>112</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, in vol. 38a of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 53.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

rejected God as well.<sup>114</sup>

What is key here is that man rejects God. This is the sin for which mankind is condemned for. Thomas Schreiner says in his commentary,

“Failing to glorify God is the root sin. Indeed, glorifying God is virtually equivalent with rendering Him proper worship since Paul describes (v. 25) the same reality as surrendering the truth of God for worship of the creature (Hooker 1959-60: 305). We saw in 1:17 that the righteousness of God is rooted in His desire for the glory and honor of His name...It is hardly surprising to see, then, that the essence of sin is a rejection of God’s glory and honor. Sin does not consist first and foremost in acts that transgress God’s law, although verses 24-32 indicate that sin is the transgression of the law. These particular acts are all rooted in a rejection of God as God, a failure to give Him honor and glory.”<sup>115</sup>

Schreiner shows that Paul’s main point is that sinful acts themselves, while condemnable, are just branches of a root sin. This root sin is a rejection of God. Men have seen God through His attributes and His creation and decided, like Adam, that they don’t want any part of Him. Dunn puts it this way,

“Humankind is inexcusable because the human response called for by God's self-revelation in and to his creation is acknowledgment of his magnificent splendor and power as Creator, and the humble gratitude due from the creation to the Creator. Yet, despite having this knowledge of God, despite knowing God in so far as he had made himself known to them, humankind refuse that response.”<sup>116</sup>

Mankind knows about God and what God wants from them because it has been revealed to them from the beginning. This makes the rejection so much more condemnable. Men have seen the glory of God and reject it. Cranfield comments,

“γινόντες τὸν Θεὸν: that is, knowing God in the sense that in their awareness of the created world it is of Him that all along, though unwittingly, they have been objectively-aware. They have in fact experienced Him—His wisdom, power, generosity—in every moment of their existence, though they have not recognized Him. It has been by Him that their lives have been sustained, enriched, bounded. In this limited sense they have known Him all their lives...Having experience of God's self-manifestation, they ought to have glorified Him as God and given Him thanks,

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<sup>114</sup>Walter Nagel, “Sin as the Cause of God’s Wrath,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 23, no. 10 (1952): 725.

<sup>115</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1998), 88.

<sup>116</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 71.

but they did not do so.”<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, Cranmer notes, man has not only rejected God in favor of themselves, but actively tries to suppress the truth that he knows about God. Calvin writes in his commentary,

“He clearly declares here that God has put into the minds of all men the knowledge of Himself. In other words, He has so demonstrated his existence by His works as to make men see what they do not seek to know of their own accord, viz. that there is a God...but they became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened, i.e. they forsook the truth of God and turned aside to the vanity of their own reason, which is completely indiscriminating and impermanent.”<sup>118</sup>

People actively suppress the truth of the glory of God. The result of this is a darkening of their hearts that gives birth to even more corruption. Men, in their foolish pursuits to suppress the truth, become even more foolish. And Cranfield continues on this trail,

“The words which follow are a penetrating description of the essential nature of sin. The verb *κατέχειν* is used in a sense of 'hold down', 'suppress', and the present participle is to be understood as having a cognitive force. Sin is always (cf. v. 25) an assault upon the truth (that is, the fundamental truth of God 'as Creator, Judge, and Redeemer', which because it is the truth, must be taken into account and come to terms with, if man is not to live in vain), the attempt to suppress it, bury it out of sight, obliterate it from the memory; but it is of the essence of sin that it can never be more than an attempt to suppress the truth, an attempt which is always bound in the end to prove futile.”<sup>119</sup>

In response, man stands condemned to the wrath of God.

What this entails is not only eternal death in hell but a life here on earth that is completely corrupted. Mankind has rejected God, and He in turn has given men exactly what they want. Calvin comments on this, “Paul, therefore, now uses the signs to prove the apostasy and the defection of men, for the Lord punishes those who have alienated themselves from his goodness by casting them headlong into destruction and ruin of

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<sup>117</sup>Cranfield, *Epistle of Romans*, 116-117.

<sup>118</sup>Jean Calvin and Ross Mackenzie. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960.), 32-33.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 111-112.

many kinds.”<sup>120</sup> Dunn writes, “In brief, his resolution is that the effect of divine wrath upon man is to show that man who rebels against his relation of creaturely dependence on God (which is what faith is) becomes subject to degenerative processes.”<sup>121</sup> If men do not want God, they will not get God and all the good that He offers. Humans will die in their corruption and be forever punished in hell, away from God.<sup>122</sup> Mankind stands condemned because they have rejected God in favor of what they desire, and in response, God has delivered them to the hands of His justice.<sup>123</sup>

There is a digression that describes how God has delivered His justice. It starts with giving them over to the lusts of their hearts so that their bodies would be dishonored. Calvin comments on this,

“By connecting the evil desires of the human heart with uncleanness he indirectly gives us to understand the fruit which our heart will bring forth when it is once left to itself. The expression among themselves is emphatic, for it significantly expresses how deep and indelible are the marks of vile conduct which they have imprinted on their bodies.”<sup>124</sup>

God has seen that men desire a satisfaction for their evil fleshly desires that will inevitably lead to destruction. In response, God has given them over to these abominations, and this results in the destruction of their bodies. Leon Morris comments on this irony of justice simply saying,

“Their immersion in their sin is itself their punishment... This represents the attempt of man to control his destiny in independence of God. He rejects the revelation God has made and this leads to idolatry as he manufactures idols in the likeness of his body. This in turn leads to immoral types of worship.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Calvin, *Epistle of Romans*, 34-35.

<sup>121</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 55.

<sup>122</sup>Nagel, *God's Wrath*, 735-736

<sup>123</sup>Nagel, *God's Wrath*, 735-736

<sup>124</sup>Calvin, *Epistle of Romans*, 35.

<sup>125</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 74-100.

Humans traded God for their own selves. They did not want to worship God, yet, in their sin, they still worship something. This something, though, are things of their own making. In a sense, men worship themselves. Men only fall deeper in their corruption by rejecting the true God. God, in response, gives them up to this dishonor and foolishness.

They also knew what the truth of God was but rejected it in favor of a lie. They rejected the real God in favor of idols of their own making. Cranfield writes,

“ἀλλ’ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν instead of glorifying God and being grateful to Him, they become futile in their reasonings...One particularly significant usage in connection with idolatry, idols being referred to as *ματαιία*, that is, mere useless nothings...Paul no doubt means to indicate the futility which is the inevitable result of loss of touch with reality.”<sup>126</sup>

Mankind would rather worship gods of their own making rather than the God of truth, as Dunn writes,

“The *reductio ad absurdum* is reached with v 23: they exchanged the glory which they refused to recognize or acknowledge in the incorruptible God, in preference for not merely created beings in all their corruptibility, but for the image of such beings, or rather, and even more ridiculous, the likeness of the image of such beings.”<sup>127</sup>

Ultimately, humans desire what Adam and Eve desired, they desire their own self-sovereignty. Dunn also points out, “The implication then is of a deliberate act of disqualification. It was not simply a case of humans being distracted by something else and losing sight of God; they gave God their consideration, and concluded that God was unnecessary to their living (that is, presumably God as Creator with rights over his creation).”<sup>128</sup> In response to this, God has given them over to degrading passions. Morris says that, “‘Because of this’ carries the argument along logically, as often in Paul. The reason in question is not, of course, given in the doxology, but in the idolatry referred to

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<sup>126</sup>Cranfield, *Epistle of Romans*, 117.

<sup>127</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 72.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

immediately before it. The punishment for the conduct involved in idolatry was their being given over to shameful lust.”<sup>129</sup> The humans idolizing of creation rather than the Creator has corrupted even the created order itself. It was part of the right and true order of creation for man to be with woman, just like it was part of the created order for man to be in right relationship with God. Yet, when man rejected the created order by worshipping the creation over the Creator, they rejected all of the created order (Rom 1:27). Therefore, they began indulging in passions and desires that went completely against what God had designed. In response, God gave them over to their passions for the purpose of their self-destruction.

This is not, though, a God who is just leaving humanity to themselves and letting them die on their own. Condemnation and wrath are active, and God is active in this process of condemnation. The sin of mankind demands active justice. Morris points out that, “Paul is thinking of what God has decreed rather than simply of the natural result of people’s actions.”<sup>130</sup> God has decreed that sin will bring about condemnation. These degrading passions are something that God handed men over to in response to their rebellion.

Finally, they knew in their minds the God who gave them life, but instead of acknowledging Him, they rejected Him in favor of themselves and their own desires. In response, God gave them over to a depraved mind, a mind that is corrupted and indulges in all different kinds of wickedness—wickedness that humanity wanted and lusted after (Rom 1:28-29). Not only that, but humanity gives approval to those who practice those same acts (Rom 1:32). Humanity applauds the rejection of God, as Cranfield writes,

“Before proceeding to show that those who strongly disapprove of the sinful actions which have been listed are themselves under the same condemnation, Paul slips in an indication that those who approve of others' wrong-doing are under

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<sup>129</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 74-100.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

condemnation as well as those who do these things... That the man who applauds and encourages others in doing what is wicked is, even if he never actually commits the same wicked deed himself, not only as guilty as those who do commit it, but very often more guilty than they.”<sup>131</sup>

The people who give approval, who do not even do the act but encourage it, also stand condemned before God. There are some men out there who see evil, they know what it is, but do nothing. There are also some who stand there in the face of evil and applaud. This shows that the rejection of God is not some passion in the heat of the moment decision, but something deep rooted, as Dunn puts it,

“It is this character of so much of man's social relations, as a deliberate rejection of what is known to be best, as willful rebellion against God's ordering of things, which Paul reemphasizes with one final flourish. ‘They not only do such things but give their approval to those who do so too.’ Their rejection of God is not merely a spur of the moment, heat of the instant flouting of His authority, but a considered and measured act of defiance. This is an important insight into one aspect of human sinfulness-its character of rebellion against what is known to be right or best, its act of defiance in the face of known and perilous consequences of the act.”<sup>132</sup>

This, Paul contends, is just as wrong as doing the act itself.

Notice, however, that even though all of the descriptors that Paul says are acts of sin condemnable in of themselves, they all come from the root of humanity not even wanting to acknowledge God. This is the main point: men rejected God, His ways, and even their fellow man. Their rejection is manifested in all different kinds of sinful acts. As a consequence, they were condemned and given over to the very things that they wanted, but the very things that would also destroy them. Dunn comments on this, “The evil against which the divine wrath is initially directed is described in the most general and all embracing terms: against all disregard or contempt for God and for the rights of our fellow human beings.”<sup>133</sup> That is true justice and condemnation. God’s condemnation is perfect and just and He shows that by showing what happens to people

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<sup>131</sup>Cranfield, *Epistle of Romans*, 134-135.

<sup>132</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 76.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 70.



who reject Him. God cannot just let the wicked acts of men go. If God is to be good He must condemn evil, and those who practice it, as Cranfield puts it,

“But a consideration of what Dodd calls 'the highest human ideals of personality' might well lead us to question whether God could be a good and loving God, if He did not react to our evil with wrath. For indignation against wickedness is surely an essential element of human goodness in a world in which moral evil is always present. A man who knows for example, about the injustice and cruelty of apartheid and is not angry at such wickedness cannot be a thoroughly good man; for his lack of wrath means a failure to care for his fellow man, a failure to love.”<sup>134</sup>

He gives men what they want, and men experience the wrath of God. In a sense, men, by rejecting God, condemn themselves.

To conclude the section on this passage, it is clear that humanity's rejection of God has led to His condemnation of them. Humanity has rejected reality, “All their thinking suffers from the fatal flaw, the basic disconnection from reality involved in their failure to recognize and to glorify the true God.”<sup>135</sup> God has revealed Himself to humanity, and humanity has rejected the Creator, leading to the corruption of the world. This is the core of human sin and the condemnation that follows, as Dunn puts it,

“In Paul's perspective this attitude of awe (the fear of the Lord) and thankful dependence is how knowledge of God should express itself. But human behavior is marked by an irrational disjunction between what man knows to be the true state of affairs and a life at odds with that knowledge. This failure to give God his due and to receive life as God's gift is Paul's way of expressing the primal sin of humankind.”<sup>136</sup>

Humanity should be grateful to God for everything. Instead, all humans have done is spit in the face of God. Human sin is marked by an irrational drive to usurp God in their own lives. Truth is put aside in favor of corruption. In response, God has given humans over to their own corruption.

And later, to put a period on the subject, Dunn says,

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<sup>134</sup>Cranfield, *Epistle of Romans*, 109.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>136</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 59.

“For one last time, lest there should remain any doubt, Paul emphasizes the direct link between humankind's rejection of God and its disordered state. It all stems from the basic refusal to recognize God. The first clause brings out the character of this refusal as a deliberate act of human pride and self-sufficiency: they considered whether God should be retained as a factor of importance within their fuller reflective knowledge and decided against it; they tested the worth of acknowledging God and found Him wanting. And once again, as in v 22, the consequence is phrased in a abiding epigram: God handed them over to a disqualified mind.”<sup>137</sup>

There are consequences for rejecting God. The consequence is condemnation and wrath characterized by God giving people over into corruption. The message is clear, reject God in favor of the corruption of sin, God will give you exactly what you want. What people want will eventually destroy them.

### CONCLUSION

God's condemnation of humanity is based primarily on a sinful state which is characterized by a rejection of God in favor of indulging evil desires. This is because sin can be classified not necessarily as an external action or behavior, but instead, as an internal process generated by running to evil desires that run contrary to the will of God. Humans must reject God and His ways to indulge their evil desires. Whether men commit the external act itself or not is irrelevant in terms of their culpability.

First, it was shown that sin is an internal process that is birthed by desires. These desires are evil because they go against the will of God and pursue the things of the world instead. To pursue these worldly desires, a person has to reject God. Therefore, James 1:14-15 and 1 John 2:15-17 give a good definition for the genesis of sin being internal desires that reject God. Secondly, it was shown in Genesis 3 that mankind carried out evil desires in the garden. This led to a sinful state of rejection being passed down from Adam to every man. Not only has every person inherited this state, but also has rejected God personally. So humanity is guilty both collectively and individually. Finally, it was shown that God has responded to sin with condemnation. In Matthew 5, Jesus says

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<sup>137</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 74-75

that the internal evil desires are just as bad as doing the act itself. The act is just the manifestation of the internal processes, so people who indulge in those desires but do not externally act are just as culpable as someone who actually murders or commits adultery. Romans 1:18-32 concludes the argument by showing that people rejected God, and in response, God has delivered them to destruction. The core of sin was the rejection of God. God's condemnation brought about His rejection of them. His condemnation of humans has led to not only their destruction here on earth, but their destruction eternally.

But this is not the end of the story. God, being a merciful God, sent a solution for this broken relationship. This broken relationship that is characterized by humanity's sinful rejection of God can be healed through the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus. A wrong view of sin does not show the beauty of this picture. Humanity rejected God, He condemned humanity, but in His love and mercy still offered a chance for humanity to be made right. God could have left man and rejected humanity completely. Instead, Jesus became a man and came down as a sacrifice. His sacrifice became a bridge for humanity to be able to reconcile with God. This is the beauty of the gospel message. Humanity rejected God, He condemns a sinful humanity. Yet, God does not abandon humans but sacrifices Himself for the ones who rejected Him. Rejection can become reconciliation.



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## ABSTRACT

### CONDEMNING REJECTION: THE BASIS OF GOD'S CONDEMNATION OF HUMANITY

Alexander James Dotson, Th.M.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015  
Advisor: Dr. Oren Martin

The purpose of this research was to look at what sin or sins was human condemnation based on primarily. This study takes a look at the words or concepts, passages, and interpretations of the text and doctrines associated with the terms of sin and condemnation.

In concerns to sin, this paper argues that the core of sin is an internal rejection of God. This is shown by looking at key Biblical passages and the words for sin and desire to find out how exactly sin is defined biblically. This section also deals with the historical and different systematic definitions of sin while taking a look at the doctrine of Original Sin and how sin was an inherited state of rejection.

The concept of condemnation is also examined and defined in this paper. It is argued that condemnation is the result of God's judgment on humanity because of their rejection of Him. This is shown through a similar method as defining the concept for sin.

## VITA

Alexander James Dotson

### EDUCATION

B.S., Multnomah University, 2010

M.Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Hillyard Baptist Church, Spokane, Washington, 2004-2006

Pastoral Intern, Lake Bible Church, Portland, Oregon, 2008-2011