

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA WHY THE DOCTRINE OF SIN MATTERS

Lesson 1

The Unpopular Doctrine Why the Church Must Teach About Sin

No One Can Understand the Gospel Who Has Not First Understood the Catastrophe

“Where Sin Increased, Grace Abounded All the More”

Key Texts: Romans 3:10–18, 23; 5:12, 20; 6:23; 1 John 1:8–10

“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:20–21, NASB 1995

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Introduction

We come now to a doctrine that the contemporary Western church has largely preferred to avoid. Not because it is difficult to find in Scripture, it is everywhere, but because it is difficult to hear. Hamartiology, the theological study of sin, confronts the human heart with the most uncomfortable of all possible truths: that we are not merely imperfect, not merely broken, not merely struggling, but morally guilty before a holy God, constitutionally corrupted by an inherited nature bent toward rebellion, and utterly incapable of rescuing ourselves from the ruin we have brought upon the entire race. The culture has learned many euphemisms for this catastrophe. The church has, in far too many places, adopted them.

And yet, no doctrine in the whole of systematic theology is more essential to the gospel than a robust, scripturally faithful, theologically precise account of what sin is. The cross makes no sense without it. The wrath of God has no rationale without it. The grace of God has no depth without it. The resurrection has no urgency without it. To flatten, minimize, or sentimentalize the doctrine of sin is not to make Christianity more attractive; it is to make the gospel unintelligible. Where the disease is no longer understood to be fatal, the physician's cure will be received as unnecessary medicine.

This first lesson of twenty-four in our Hamartiology series establishes the theological, pastoral, and cultural foundations upon which the whole study will rest. Before we examine the origin of sin in the garden, the mechanics of original guilt and corruption, the nature of total depravity, the bondage of the will, the manifold consequences of the fall, and the believer's ongoing warfare with indwelling sin, we must ask and answer the most foundational question of all: why does this doctrine matter, and why has the church in our day become so reluctant to teach it? The answers to those questions will shape everything that follows.

The governing conviction of every lesson in this series can be stated plainly: a right understanding of sin is not the enemy of joy, hope, or grace; it is their necessary precondition. Only those who understand the depth of the pit can truly marvel at the grace that descended into it. Only those who have stood before the mirror of the law and seen themselves clearly can fall upon the mercy of God with the desperation and gratitude it deserves. To know the doctrine of sin rightly is not to wallow in guilt but to be prepared, at last, to hear the gospel as the extraordinary, undeserved, sovereign intervention of a God whose grace is greater than all our sin.

There is a sense in which Hamartiology is the most personally invasive of all the theological disciplines. When we study Christology, we look up toward the glory of the incarnate Son of God. When we study Theology Proper, we look outward and upward toward the infinite perfections of the divine nature. When we study eschatology, we look forward toward the consummation of all things in the return of Christ. But when we study Hamartiology, we are required to look inward, into the chambers of our own hearts, into the genealogy of our own moral condition, into the precise nature of the offense we have committed against the holy God who made us and to whom we owe everything. This inward look is painful, and it is meant to be. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life begins with exactly this kind of searching, Spirit-illuminated self-examination, and the doctrine of sin is the theological map by which that examination is rightly conducted.

It is also worth noting, at the very outset, that Hamartiology is not merely an abstract doctrinal category but a pastoral emergency. Every person in every congregation is living with the consequences of sin in some form, in the brokenness of relationships, the grip of habitual patterns of disobedience, the weight of guilt and shame, the confusion of trying to understand suffering in a fallen world, the ongoing battle with temptation, the grief of watching loved ones make choices that lead to their destruction. The doctrine we are about to study is not an academic exercise reserved for seminary classrooms; it is the theological equipment without which the pastor cannot shepherd, the counselor cannot heal, the evangelist cannot compel, and the believer cannot grow. We undertake this study not as spectators of an ancient theological debate but as those who are up to our necks in the very reality the doctrine describes.

I. Hamartiology Defined

The Study of Sin Through the Lens of Scripture and Redemptive History

A. What Hamartiology Investigates

Hamartiology, from the Greek *hamartia* (sin) and *logos* (word, study), is the branch of systematic theology that investigates the nature, origin, extent, and consequences of sin. This encompasses the full range of what Scripture teaches about human rebellion against God: the primordial temptation and fall in Genesis 3, the anatomy of what sin is and the many biblical terms used to describe it, the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity, the inherited corruption that pervades every faculty of human nature, the bondage of the human will, the manifold consequences of sin in this age and the age to come, and the ongoing reality of indwelling sin in the life of the regenerate believer.

The Greek word *hamartia*, from which our English term is derived, carries the root meaning of “missing the mark”, falling short of the standard set by God's own holy character and revealed law. But the biblical vocabulary of sin is far richer than this single term. Scripture also speaks of sin as transgression (*parabasis*, crossing a boundary), as lawlessness (*anomia*, the willful rejection of divine law), as rebellion (*peshā*, the deliberate insurrection of a creature against the Creator), as debt (*opheilema*, a moral obligation owed to God that we have failed to discharge), and as unbelief (*apistia*, the failure to trust God that lies at the root of all specific sins). To study Hamartiology is to take the full measure of this vocabulary and to receive from it the full-orbed biblical picture of what sin is.

What unifies all of these distinct terms is their common orientation: they are relational and vertical before they are behavioral and horizontal. Sin, in the biblical understanding, is not primarily a failure of self-actualization or a disruption of social harmony; it is a rupture in the relationship between the creature and the Creator, a defiance of the divine authority, and an offense against the divine character. This is why David, in Psalm 51, can cry out “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight” (v. 4, NASB 1995), not because Bathsheba and Uriah were unharmed, but because the deepest dimension of his transgression was not horizontal but vertical. Every sin, at its core, is a statement about God: a denial of His authority, a rejection of His goodness, a declaration of independence from the One in whom we live and move and have our being.

This Godward orientation of sin has decisive implications for how we understand its remedy. If sin were primarily a social or psychological problem, it could in principle be addressed by social and psychological means. But if sin is first and foremost a moral offense against an infinitely holy God, then its remedy must be equally theological: an act of divine forgiveness, a provision of divine righteousness, a transformation of the human nature that has been corrupted at its core. This is precisely what the gospel provides, and precisely why Hamartiology, rightly understood, does not lead to despair but to the foot of the cross.

B. The Neglected Yet Necessary Doctrine

The doctrine of sin occupies an indispensable structural role in the whole architecture of Christian theology. It is not a peripheral doctrine that the church can safely minimize without consequence; it is the dark backdrop against which every other doctrine of grace is illuminated. Remove it, and the whole system collapses. The doctrine of God's holiness requires an account of what has violated it. The doctrine of Christ's atoning work requires an account of what it atones for. The doctrine of the Spirit's regenerating grace requires an account of the spiritual deadness from which sinners must be raised. The doctrine of justification requires an account of the guilt that must be forgiven and the condemnation from which the sinner must be freed. Hamartiology is not one doctrine among many; it is the necessary foundation upon which the entire superstructure of redemptive theology is built.

John Calvin understood this with characteristic clarity. In his treatment of human nature in the Institutes (II.1–5), Calvin insists that the knowledge of ourselves, including the knowledge of our utter ruin in Adam, is inseparable from the knowledge of God. We cannot know the height of divine grace until we have seen the depth of human sin. We cannot receive the gift of justification until we have understood the enormity of the guilt from which we are freed. The Reformation's recovery of the five solas was, at its deepest level, a recovery of the full, devastating,

Augustinian account of human sinfulness, and therefore of the full, breathtaking, sovereign generosity of divine grace.

The history of doctrine confirms this with sobering consistency: every theological tradition that has minimized sin has also minimized grace. When Pelagius in the fifth century denied that Adam's sin had corrupted human nature and enslaved the human will, he did not merely alter one peripheral doctrine; he unraveled the entire logic of the gospel. If human beings are naturally capable of choosing God, then the sovereign regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is merely helpful rather than absolutely necessary. If the human will is not in bondage, then salvation is a cooperative achievement rather than a monergistic gift. If guilt is not inherited and total, then the cross is a moral example rather than a vicarious substitution. Augustine saw this clearly, which is why he devoted the latter decades of his ministry to the most sustained and rigorous doctrinal combat in the history of the patristic era. The stakes were not academic; they were the gospel itself.

The neglect of Hamartiology in our own day is less overt than Pelagianism but no less consequential. It does not typically announce itself as a theological program; it manifests as a pastoral mood, a communicational preference, a homiletical sensibility. Preachers preach less about sin not because they have rejected the doctrine but because they have quietly concluded that their congregations find it unattractive. Counselors speak of wounds and disorders rather than of guilt and rebellion not because they disbelieve in sin but because the therapeutic framework seems more immediately helpful. Parents avoid direct moral language with their children not because they are Pelagians but because they have absorbed the culture's discomfort with moral judgment. The cumulative effect of these individual accommodations is a church that has functionally abandoned one of the most essential doctrines of the Christian faith, not by formal denial but by quiet neglect.

II. The Modern Avoidance of Sin

How the Culture and the Church Have Learned to Speak Around the Catastrophe

A. The Cultural Redefinition: Dysfunction, Brokenness, Mistakes

The contemporary Western culture has developed a remarkably comprehensive vocabulary for avoiding the word "sin" and the moral reality it names. Where the Scriptures speak of rebellion, the culture speaks of dysfunction. Where the Scriptures speak of guilt, the culture speaks of shame, which is to say, of a feeling rather than a fact, a psychological state rather than a moral and legal condition before a holy God. Where the Scriptures speak of depravity, the culture speaks of brokenness, which implies something that has been damaged from without rather than something that is corrupted from within. Where the Scriptures speak of transgression, the culture speaks of mistakes, which implies that the primary problem with human moral failure is not its offense against God but its inefficiency in producing the outcomes we desire.

This cultural redefinition is not merely a matter of vocabulary. It reflects a fundamental shift in the understanding of the human condition and human accountability. In the biblical worldview, sin is primarily a vertical offense, an act of rebellion against the Creator who made us, to whom we owe total allegiance, and before whom we will one day stand in judgment. In the therapeutic worldview that has replaced it, moral failure is primarily a horizontal problem, a disruption of human wellbeing, a symptom of psychological wounds, an expression of environmental disadvantage. The solution, accordingly, is not forgiveness but healing; not justification before God but self-actualization; not the cross but the couch. The church that adopts this vocabulary has not merely changed its words; it has changed its gospel.

The intellectual genealogy of this cultural redefinition is traceable. The Enlightenment's confidence in human reason and moral progress produced in the nineteenth century a liberal theology that systematically reinterpreted the Christian doctrines of sin and salvation in immanent, humanistic terms. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Protestantism, defined sin not as guilt before God but as the retardation of the development of the "feeling of absolute dependence." His theological heirs moved progressively further from the biblical categories, until by the mid-twentieth century, theologians in the mainline Protestant tradition were routinely speaking of sin as estrangement, finitude, or social oppression rather than as moral guilt before a holy and righteous God. This

trajectory did not remain confined to the liberal academy; it percolated, through a hundred cultural channels, into the assumptions of ordinary people, including ordinary church people, about the nature of the human problem.

The result is a pastoral crisis of the first order. A culture that no longer believes in sin cannot believe in forgiveness, because forgiveness presupposes guilt, and guilt presupposes a moral law, and a moral law presupposes a Lawgiver before whom we are accountable. The logic is inexorable: remove sin from the vocabulary, and you eventually remove God from the equation entirely. The church that accommodates itself to this cultural trajectory does not make itself more relevant; it makes itself less distinctly Christian. The only antidote is a return to the full, unguarded, scripturally grounded proclamation of what sin actually is, not because it is comfortable but because it is true, and because it is the only soil in which the seed of the gospel can take root and grow.

B. *The Church's Temptation: Relevance Over Revelation*

The temptation facing the contemporary church is not the temptation to deny the doctrine of sin explicitly. Few pastors would mount a pulpit and announce that they no longer believe in sin. The temptation is subtler: to allow the functional weight of the doctrine to atrophy while preserving its formal presence in the statement of faith. It is the temptation to preach on brokenness rather than guilt, on healing rather than forgiveness, on spiritual growth rather than repentance, on God's love rather than God's wrath, and to do so not because these themes are absent from Scripture but because they are more immediately palatable to an audience formed by therapeutic culture.

The Apostle Paul anticipated precisely this temptation when he warned Timothy that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3–4, NASB 1995). The church that softens the doctrine of sin in order to be more winsome is not being more gracious; it is being less truthful. And a gospel that does not tell the truth about sin cannot offer the full glory of a grace that is genuinely greater than all our sin.

The irony of the therapeutic accommodation is that it does not actually help people. The person sitting in a pew who has been taught that his problem is dysfunction or woundedness rather than sin will go home with a framework that explains his struggles in terms that require a human solution. He will pursue therapy, or self-help, or spiritual practices aimed at improving his emotional health, and he will remain, for all his effort, in the condition that only the gospel of grace can address. The person who has been taught that her problem is moral guilt before a holy God, real guilt, not merely a feeling, incurred by real transgressions against a real law, has been given the one framework within which the cross makes sense as the one and only sufficient remedy. She has been given not comfort but truth, and truth, in the end, is the only thing that sets anyone free (John 8:32).

It should also be observed that the avoidance of the doctrine of sin is not, in the end, a kindness to the congregation. It is a form of pastoral malpractice. The physician who withholds a devastating diagnosis from his patient in order to spare him distress is not being compassionate; he is being negligent. The patient has a right to the truth, and the truth alone makes possible the treatment that can save his life. In the same way, the congregation has a right to the full counsel of God regarding its condition, and that counsel includes the full biblical picture of sin in all of its dimensions: its origin in the fall of Adam, its universality in the human race, its depth in the corruption of every human faculty, and its consequences in the wrath of God that hangs over every unrepentant sinner. A church that does not preach this does not preach the whole gospel, and a church that does not preach the whole gospel is not, in the fullest sense, a faithful church.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:23, NASB 1995

III. The Theological Necessity

Why a Robust Doctrine of Sin Is Essential to Every Other Doctrine of Grace

A. Without Hamartiology, the Cross Has No Content

The cross of Jesus Christ is the central event of all human history and the definitive act of divine love and justice in the entire biblical narrative. But the cross only discloses its meaning against the backdrop of a fully articulated doctrine of sin. Why did the eternal Son of God become incarnate, suffer, bleed, and die? Because sin had incurred a debt of guilt that the creature could not discharge, a sentence of wrath that the creature could not bear, a corruption of nature that the creature could not reverse, and a condition of spiritual death from which the creature could not rise. Remove the doctrine of sin, and the cross becomes the story of an inspiring martyr rather than the story of a substitutionary Savior bearing the wrath of God in the place of guilty sinners. The atonement has content only when hamartiology has done its diagnostic work.

The Reformers understood that the doctrine of penal substitution, the teaching that Christ bore in our place the punishment that our sins deserved, stands or falls with the doctrine of sin. If human beings are not morally guilty before God, then Christ does not need to bear our guilt. If human beings are not under the wrath of God, then Christ does not need to propitiate that wrath. If human beings are not spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, then Christ does not need to provide us with resurrection life. Every benefit of the atonement is the answer to a specific aspect of the human predicament that Hamartiology describes. To hollow out Hamartiology is, inevitably and irrevocably, to hollow out Soteriology.

The logic of Isaiah 53, that magnificent prophecy of the suffering servant, makes this connection with unforgettable power. “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6, NASB 1995). The first clause is Hamartiology; the second is Soteriology. The second clause only makes sense because of the first. The iniquity that is laid upon the Servant is the iniquity that the preceding clause has just described: the universal straying of the sheep, the individual turning of each one to his own way. Remove the first clause, and the second becomes a theological abstraction. Receive the first clause in its full severity, and the second becomes the most glorious sentence in all of Scripture.

The same logic structures the most tightly argued christological passage in the New Testament. In Romans 3:21–26, Paul’s announcement of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel comes immediately on the heels of his three-chapter indictment of the entire human race. The “but now” of verse 21 is one of the most pregnant phrases in all of Scripture, but it has force only because of what has come before. The “but now” is the turn from condemnation to justification, from wrath to propitiation, from the universality of sin to the free gift of righteousness. Strip away the condemnation, and the “but now” loses its drama. Receive the condemnation in full, and the “but now” becomes the most welcome conjunction in the history of human language.

B. Without Hamartiology, Grace Is Not Amazing

The great hymn of William Cowper and John Newton captures the instinct of every genuinely converted soul: “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” The word “wretch” is not poetic hyperbole; it is theological precision. The soul that has genuinely encountered the holiness of God and seen itself in the light of that holiness, the soul that has heard the diagnosis of Jeremiah 17:9 (“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick”) and recognized itself in it, that soul finds the grace of God unspeakably, unutterably amazing. The soul that has been shielded from the full severity of the diagnosis will find grace pleasant, perhaps, or comforting, or helpful, but not amazing. It requires the full weight of the bad news to feel the full glory of the good news.

This is why the Apostle Paul, at the very climax of his exposition of the gospel in Romans, cannot resist an aside that is also a doxology: “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20, NASB 1995). Paul has spent three chapters establishing the full extent of human guilt before God with the relentless precision of a prosecuting attorney. He has left every mouth stopped and the whole world accountable to God (Romans 3:19).

He has pronounced the universal verdict: “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God” (Romans 3:10–11, NASB 1995). And it is precisely because he has established the full depth of the darkness that his announcement of the grace that has outrun it produces not merely comfort but wonder, the wonder of a soul that has seen both abysses at once and cannot comprehend the love of the God who has bridged them.

Consider the testimony of the woman in Luke 7 who anointed the feet of Jesus with her tears and her ointment. The Pharisee who hosted the meal was offended; the woman’s reputation was known in the city, and her presence was an embarrassment. But Jesus’ interpretation of her worship is the key to the entire scene: “Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47, NASB 1995). The extravagance of her worship was proportional to the extravagance of her forgiveness, which was in turn proportional to the extravagance of her sin. It is not that those whose sins are fewer love God less; it is that those whose sins are understood more fully, who have, in a word, been given a more accurate Hamartiology, love more deeply. The doctrine of sin, rightly received, does not produce despair; it produces the most abandoned, grateful, tear-stained worship the human soul is capable of.

It is for this reason that the great revivals of church history have consistently been accompanied by a deep and widespread conviction of sin. The Welsh Revival of 1904–1905, the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in New England, the ministry of George Whitefield on both sides of the Atlantic, in every case, the extraordinary movements of the Spirit that brought hundreds and thousands to genuine repentance and faith were preceded and accompanied by an extraordinary sense of the reality and weight of sin. The Spirit does not bypass Hamartiology on the way to grace; He uses it as the instrument of the very conviction that makes grace not merely intellectually credible but personally irresistible. The church that wants revival would do well to recover, first, the full biblical doctrine of sin.

IV. The Pastoral Urgency

What a Congregation Believes About Sin Determines the Health of Its Discipleship

A. The Church That Minimizes Sin Minimizes Grace

The pastoral consequences of a weakened Hamartiology are immediate and pervasive. A congregation that has been taught to think of sin primarily as dysfunction or brokenness will bring a therapeutic rather than a penitential posture to the Christian life. It will seek healing rather than forgiveness, self-improvement rather than mortification, the management of symptoms rather than the death of the old man. It will tend to interpret spiritual struggle as evidence of psychological damage rather than as the normal condition of a soul engaged in genuine warfare against indwelling corruption. It will find the ordinary means of grace, Word, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, church discipline, corporate confession, insufficient to the task, because those means are designed to address guilt and corruption, and a congregation that does not believe it is guilty and corrupt will not find them compelling.

Conversely, a congregation that has been carefully and faithfully taught the full biblical doctrine of sin will find the ordinary means of grace to be exactly what they need. Corporate confession will be a genuine unburdening of genuine guilt. The Lord’s Supper will be the grateful reception of an atoning sacrifice for real sins. The preaching of the cross will produce real tears and real gratitude, because the congregation has been taught to understand what the cross was accomplishing and what it was accomplishing it for. Pastoral counseling will be able to address the root of human problems, sin, rather than merely the symptoms. Church discipline will be understood as the loving effort to restore a wandering sheep rather than as an intrusive imposition of institutional authority. Hamartiology, rightly taught, is the foundation of a healthy ecclesiology.

This pastoral dynamic can be observed with particular clarity in the practice of corporate worship. The great liturgical traditions of the church have consistently placed the confession of sin near the beginning of the gathered service, before the reading and preaching of the Word and before the celebration of the Supper. This ordering is not accidental; it is theologically intentional. We come into the presence of a holy God first as sinners who need to confess, and only then as redeemed sinners who are invited to hear the Word of grace and receive the tokens

of the covenant. When the confession of sin is removed from the worship service, as it has been in many contemporary evangelical churches, the entire structure of the service is subtly reoriented. We come no longer as penitents but as consumers; no longer as those who need the grace that is declared but as those who have come to enjoy an experience. The recovery of corporate confession in the gathered worship of the church is not a piece of liturgical antiquarianism; it is a pastoral necessity rooted in the full biblical doctrine of sin.

The impact of a weakened Hamartiology on evangelism is equally significant. The evangelistic appeal that begins with God's love and plan for your life, and withholds the doctrine of sin until later, or omits it altogether, produces not converts but consumers. People who come to Christ without a genuine understanding of sin will tend to come for what Christ can do for them rather than for what Christ has done for them. They will remain, at the deepest level, self-oriented rather than God-oriented; they will relate to Christianity as a resource rather than a rescue. The evangelism that takes Hamartiology seriously, that is willing to make people uncomfortable before it makes them comfortable, is the evangelism that produces the kind of conversion that lasts, because it is the kind of conversion that understands what it is being converted from.

B. *The Posture of the Student: Personal Confrontation, Not Academic Inquiry*

This series is offered, before it is anything else, as an invitation to personal confrontation. To study the doctrine of sin rightly is to study oneself rightly. The texts we will examine are not merely historical or theoretical documents; they are the living and active Word of God, "sharp as any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12, NASB 1995), and they will cut. The student who approaches Hamartiology with the detached curiosity of the disinterested academic will miss the most important thing the doctrine is designed to produce: the broken and contrite heart that God has promised not to despise (Psalm 51:17).

And yet the goal of this personal confrontation is not morbidity or despair. The doctrine of sin is not the final word in any lesson of this series; it is always the penultimate word, the dark backdrop that makes the final word, grace, more radiant. Every lesson in this series will conclude in the gospel, because that is where the diagnosis always leads. The physician does not examine the patient in order to condemn him; the physician examines the patient in order to heal him. And the God who has ordained that we know the full truth about our sin has done so not to drive us away from Him but to drive us toward the only One in whom the catastrophe of sin is decisively, completely, and forever answered.

The appropriate posture for this study, then, is neither the cold objectivity of the academic seminar nor the anxious introspection of the spiritually scrupulous conscience. It is rather the posture of the publican in Luke 18 who "was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" (v. 13, NASB 1995). This man knew his condition. He did not minimize it, explain it away, or project it onto others. He saw it with a clarity that was the gift of the Spirit's convicting work, and he brought it directly to God, whose mercy alone could address it. And Jesus' verdict upon him is the verdict that should encourage every student of this doctrine: "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other" (v. 14). The one who sees his sin most clearly and brings it most honestly before God is the one who goes home having received the grace that the doctrine of sin was always designed to help him find.

A final word of pastoral guidance: this study will be difficult in proportion to the degree to which the Spirit is doing genuine work in your heart. If these lessons produce nothing more than intellectual interest, that is a sign that the material is being processed at a level too shallow to be transformative. But if they produce a growing awareness of the depth of your own sin, a sharper grief over the ways in which you have offended the God who made you and loves you, and a more desperate and grateful clinging to the cross, that is the Spirit of God using the doctrine of sin for precisely the purpose for which God gave it: not to produce despair, but to produce the repentance that is inseparable from saving faith, and the gratitude that is inseparable from genuine worship.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

Romans 8:1–2, NASB 1995

V. The Methodological Principle

Scripture Alone as the Sufficient and Authoritative Guide

A. *The Governing Rubric: Affirm What Scripture Affirms*

The methodological principle governing every lesson in this series mirrors the principle established in our Angelology series: we will affirm everything Scripture teaches about sin and refuse to speculate beyond what Scripture reveals. In the case of Hamartiology, this principle carries a specific practical weight. The doctrine of sin is one in which both secular culture and significant sectors of the church have pressed hard against the biblical testimony. The secular culture denies the vertical dimension of sin entirely, reducing moral failure to psychological and sociological categories. Significant streams within Christianity have softened the doctrines of original sin, total depravity, and the bondage of the will under the influence of Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian anthropologies that the Reformation rightly identified as theologically inadequate.

The Reformed tradition, grounded in the conviction that Scripture is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, has no principled basis for either accommodation. If the Holy Spirit has chosen to describe the human condition in terms of total corruption, moral inability, inherited guilt, spiritual death, and enslavement to sin, then the church is bound to receive that description as the Word of God and to form her theology accordingly. The history of doctrine makes clear that every dilution of the biblical doctrine of sin produces a corresponding dilution of the biblical doctrine of grace. Pelagianism leads to a Christ who is an example rather than a Savior. Semi-Pelagianism leads to a salvation that is partly a human achievement. The full, unguarded, Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin is the only theological position that can sustain the full, unguarded, Reformational doctrine of grace.

This methodological commitment to sola Scriptura in the study of Hamartiology has both a positive and a negative dimension. Positively, it means receiving with full doctrinal confidence everything that the Bible teaches about sin, however counter-cultural or personally uncomfortable that teaching may be. The natural mind resists the doctrine of total depravity, because it is a direct assault on human self-esteem. The therapeutic culture resists the doctrine of original guilt, because it attributes a moral condition to the individual that he did not personally choose. The contemporary church resists the doctrine of divine wrath, because it seems inconsistent with the image of a God whose primary attribute is love. The student of Scripture who is governed by sola Scriptura receives all of these doctrines, not because they are comfortable but because they are revealed, and the One who reveals them is the only One who has the authority to define the terms of human existence before God.

Negatively, this commitment means refusing to accommodate the doctrine of sin to any framework external to Scripture, whether that framework is the therapeutic model of modern psychology, the sociological categories of contemporary critical theory, or the philosophical assumptions of any other tradition of human thought. The Scriptures are not the raw material from which we construct a more sophisticated and culturally acceptable account of the human condition; they are the final and sufficient authority from which all theological conclusions about the human condition must be derived. Where Scripture speaks, we speak. Where Scripture is silent, we are silent. And in the doctrine of sin, Scripture speaks with an insistence and a thoroughness that admits of no minimization.

B. *The Scope of This Series*

Twenty-four lessons across nine units will cover the full range of material that a responsible biblical Hamartiology requires. Unit 1 (Lessons 1–2) establishes the prolegomena: why Hamartiology matters, what dangers attend its neglect, and how the church has engaged the doctrine across its history from the patristic era through the modern period. Unit 2 (Lessons 3–6) examines the origin of sin in the fall of Adam: the anatomy of temptation, the immediate consequences of the fall, the rapid spread of sin from the garden to the flood, and Paul’s universal indictment of the entire human race in Romans 1–3.

Unit 3 (Lessons 7–9) investigates the nature of sin itself: the full biblical vocabulary, the crucial distinction between original and actual sin, and the question of degrees and categories of sin. Unit 4 (Lessons 10–12) addresses the imputation of Adam’s guilt and the competing theological traditions. Unit 5 (Lessons 13–15) examines total

depravity in depth, including the noetic, volitional, and affective effects of the fall. Unit 6 (Lessons 16–17) treats the bondage of the will. Unit 7 (Lessons 18–20) surveys the consequences of sin, spiritual, physical, and eternal. Unit 8 (Lessons 21–23) addresses sin in the life of the believer, including remaining sin, mortification, and divine discipline. Unit 9 (Lesson 24) brings the series to its doxological conclusion: where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

This scope reflects the conviction that a theology of sin cannot be done piecemeal. The various doctrines within Hamartiology are organically connected: original sin leads logically to total depravity, total depravity leads logically to total inability, total inability leads logically to the necessity of sovereign regenerating grace, and sovereign regenerating grace leads logically to the Reformed soteriology that is the explicit theological framework of this series. The student who engages this curriculum from beginning to end will find, by the final lesson, that the doctrine of sin has not made the Christian faith less attractive but more compelling, because a gospel that has fully diagnosed the disease is the only gospel that can offer a remedy that is genuinely, and not merely sentimentally, sufficient.

VI. The Doxological Conclusion

Hamartiology Terminates in the Worship of the God Whose Grace Outran Our Sin

There is a moment in the fifth chapter of Romans that is, in miniature, the whole burden of this twenty-four-lesson series. Paul has been building an argument of extraordinary theological power. He has established the universality of human guilt. He has laid out the mechanics of Adam's transgression and its consequences for the entire race. He has described the reign of death from Adam to Moses and the superabundance of condemnation that the law brought into focus. And then, at the very point of greatest theological intensity, he writes the sentence that contains within it the entire logic of the gospel: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20, NASB 1995).

This is not merely a rhetorical flourish; it is a theological claim of the highest possible significance. Whatever sin has done, however far it has reached, however deep it has corrupted, however irreversible its consequences in the natural order, grace has not merely matched it but outrun it. The grace of God in Jesus Christ is not commensurate with the catastrophe of sin; it is greater. Not just great enough to cover what sin has done, but superabundantly, extravagantly, inexhaustibly greater. This is the note on which this series will end, twenty-four lessons hence. But it can only end there if it begins here, with an honest, rigorous, unflinching look at exactly what it is that grace has outrun.

The study of Hamartiology, pursued faithfully and humbly through the Scriptures, will not produce a morbid, guilt-ridden spirituality in the soul that receives it with faith. It will produce a worshipping soul. It will produce the soul that kneels before the cross not merely as a historical event but as the answer to my specific, personal, fully-understood guilt, and rises from that kneeling with the kind of gratitude that the one who has been forgiven much feels for the One who has forgiven much (Luke 7:47). To know your sin is to know your need. To know your need is to know your Savior. And to know your Savior, to know Him truly, fully, in all the dimensions of what He has done for you, is to worship.

The doxological orientation of this series has a specific exegetical grounding. Romans 11:33–36, the great concluding doxology of the doctrinal section of Paul's letter, erupts from the apostle's pen at the end of his eleven-chapter exposition of sin, grace, election, and the purposes of God in redemptive history: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (NASB 1995). This doxology is not an interruption of Paul's argument; it is its necessary conclusion. The God who has been revealed in the doctrine of sin as perfectly holy, absolutely just, and relentlessly righteous in His condemnation of human rebellion is also the God who is revealed in the doctrine of grace as unsearchably

wise, unimaginably merciful, and sovereignly purposeful in the redemption of His people. The doxology is the only adequate response to both.

Every lesson in this series will be offered in the conviction that the proper terminus of all theological reflection is not intellectual satisfaction but doxological response, not the closing of a textbook but the bowing of a knee. The student who completes this series and comes away merely more informed has not yet received what the Spirit intends the doctrine of sin to produce. The student who comes away more broken over her own sin, more astonished by the grace that has addressed it, more grateful to the Savior who bore its penalty, more zealous for the holiness that is the regenerate soul's response to undeserved mercy, and more earnest in the daily warfare of mortification and faith, that student has received exactly what the doctrine of sin was always designed, in the economy of God's grace, to give.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:4–6, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Hamartiology	From the Greek hamartia (sin) and logos (word, study). The branch of systematic theology that investigates the nature, origin, extent, and consequences of sin. Hamartiology encompasses the full biblical and theological account of human rebellion against God, from the primordial sin of Adam in the garden to the ongoing reality of indwelling sin in the believer, and from the universal scope of original corruption to the certainty of final judgment upon unrepentant sinners.
Hamartia	The primary Greek word for sin in the New Testament, literally meaning "to miss the mark." Used extensively by Paul and John to denote the condition of moral failure and the specific acts that flow from it. In Romans 3:23, Paul employs the cognate verb: "all have sinned [hemarton] and fall short of the glory of God." Hamartia describes sin both as an inherited condition of the human race and as the concrete acts by which individual sinners violate the law and character of God.
Total Depravity	The Reformed doctrine that sin has corrupted every part of human nature, mind, will, affections, conscience, and body, so that no faculty remains unaffected and no area of human life is exempt from sin's influence. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as wicked as they could possibly be, but that the corruption of sin is extensive rather than partial, pervading every dimension of human existence. This doctrine is foundational to the Reformed understanding of the necessity of sovereign grace in salvation.
Original Sin	The sin of Adam in the garden, together with its twofold consequence for all his natural posterity: original guilt (the legal liability imputed to every human being because Adam sinned as their federal representative) and original corruption (the inherited moral pollution and spiritual inability that pervades every faculty of human nature from conception). The classic biblical foundation is Romans 5:12–19. The Reformed tradition affirms both aspects of original sin against Pelagianism (which denies both) and Semi-Pelagianism (which denies original guilt).
Federal Headship	The covenantal principle by which Adam acted not merely as a private individual but as the representative of all his natural posterity, so that his transgression became the legally imputed guilt of the entire human race. The same federal principle governs the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all who believe: "Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men" corresponds to "through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men" (Romans 5:18). Federal headship is the structural logic that connects Adam's first sin to universal condemnation and Christ's perfect obedience to universal justification for the elect.
Total Inability	The consequence of total depravity: the unregenerate person is spiritually unable to do anything truly pleasing to God, to understand spiritual truth savingly, or to come to Christ in repentant faith apart from the sovereign, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Scripture describes this inability through the metaphors of death (Ephesians 2:1), slavery (John 8:34), blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), and hostility (Romans 8:7). Total inability is not a limitation on the human will from the outside, but an incapacity arising from the inside, from the deep corruption of a nature that is, by its own inclination, turned away from God.
Imputation	The legal act by which God reckons, or counts, something to the account of another person. In Hamartiology, the imputation of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12–19) means that Adam's guilt is legally credited to all his posterity by virtue of his federal headship. The corresponding doctrine in Soteriology is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all who believe (2 Corinthians 5:21). These two imputations are inseparably linked: to deny the former is to undermine the latter, for the same representational logic governs both.

Term	Definition
Pelagianism	The theological system associated with the British monk Pelagius (c. 360–418 AD), who taught that Adam’s sin affected only Adam himself, that human beings are born morally neutral without original sin, that the human will retains full capacity to choose good without supernatural grace, and that grace is merely helpful but not strictly necessary for obedience. Condemned at the Councils of Carthage (418 AD) and Ephesus (431 AD). Pelagianism denies the necessity of grace, renders the cross unnecessary, and contradicts the plain teaching of Romans 5 and Ephesians 2. Augustine’s refutation of Pelagius remains the definitive theological response.
Mortification of Sin	The ongoing, Spirit-empowered, gospel-motivated warfare of the believer against indwelling sin. Drawn from Romans 8:13 (“if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live”) and given its most powerful exposition by the Puritan theologian John Owen in <i>The Mortification of Sin</i> (1656). Owen’s governing principle, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you”, captures the unceasing and urgent nature of this warfare. Mortification is not behavior modification or self-punishment but the progressive weakening of sin’s power through the means of grace, penitent prayer, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.
Simul Justus et Peccator	Latin: “Simultaneously righteous and a sinner.” Luther’s formulation of the paradoxical condition of the believer in the present age. The Christian is fully righteous before God by the imputed righteousness of Christ (justification) and yet simultaneously sinful in himself by the presence of indwelling corruption (remaining sin). This formulation prevents both self-righteousness (the believer is not sinless in himself) and despair (the believer is fully righteous in Christ). It reflects the biblical testimony of Romans 7:14–25 and 1 John 1:8–10, holding together the certainty of justification and the ongoing reality of sanctification.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that sin is not a metaphor, a psychological construct, or an artifact of ancient moral codes, but a real, universal, and devastating moral condition that pervades the entirety of human nature and separates every human being from the holy God who made them. We must believe that this condition is not merely behavioral, a pattern of choices that could in principle be reversed by sufficient willpower or education, but constitutional: an inherited corruption of nature that has affected every faculty of the soul, rendering the unregenerate person spiritually dead, morally unable, and by nature a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3).

We must also believe that this is not the final word. The God who has revealed to us the full truth of our condition in sin has done so precisely because He has also revealed to us the full sufficiency of His remedy in Christ. Every doctrine of sin that we study in this series is the necessary preparation for a doctrine of grace that will follow, and that grace, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, glorification, is as specific and as comprehensive in its application as the ruin it addresses. To believe rightly about sin is to believe rightly about the gospel.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The Psalmist's agonized prayer in Psalm 51, written in the aftermath of the most public and most devastating moral failure of David's life, models the emotional register that a right understanding of sin produces in the heart that has been genuinely illumined by the Spirit. "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:1–3, NASB 1995). The man after God's own heart did not minimize what he had done; he stated it with full clarity and then cast himself entirely upon the mercy of God. This is the emotional movement that Hamartiology is designed to produce.

Desire, above all, the kind of honest self-knowledge that the Spirit alone can give, the willingness to see yourself in the mirror of the law without flinching, and then to see in the cross the answer to everything that mirror reveals. The soul that refuses to look clearly at its sin will find the gospel merely pleasant; the soul that has looked clearly and been broken by what it saw will find the gospel unspeakably glorious.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Begin this series with a slow, devotional reading of Romans 3:10–23. Read Paul's catena of Old Testament indictments not as a description of especially wicked people but as the universal verdict upon the entire human race, including yourself. Ask the Spirit to make these texts personally convicting rather than academically interesting. Write down, honestly, which of the descriptions in Romans 3:10–18 you most resist applying to yourself, and why.
- Read Psalm 51 in its entirety as a model of penitential prayer. Note the vocabulary David uses: transgressions, iniquity, sin (verse 1–2), evil (verse 4), iniquity (verse 5). He does not soften the diagnosis. Then note the resources he clings to: lovingkindness (hesed), compassion, the cleansing power of God. Spend time in prayer using Psalm 51 as your model, confessing specific sins and casting yourself upon the specific mercies David names.
- Evaluate the functional theology of sin in your own congregation. How prominently does the reality of sin, not merely "brokenness" or "struggle" but guilt, corruption, and moral accountability before God, feature in the preaching? In corporate prayer? In the structure of the worship service? Is there a regular practice of corporate confession? If not, what would it look like to reintroduce it, and what would that require theologically and pastorally?
- Read primary sources. For this series, the following are essential: Augustine, *Confessions* (especially Books I–VIII) and *On Nature and Grace*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.1–3 (on the knowledge of humanity, free will, and original sin); Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525); Jonathan Edwards,

Original Sin (1758); John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (1656); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (his Hamartiology section remains the finest concise Reformed summary); and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part III (on sin and its consequences). These are not supplemental reading; they are the theological tradition through which the church has worked out the full implications of the biblical testimony.

- Pray with awareness of the Spirit’s convicting ministry. Jesus taught that when the Spirit came, He would “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8, NASB 1995). Ask the Spirit to do His appointed work in you throughout this series, not to produce guilt for its own sake, but to produce the godly sorrow that leads to repentance, and through repentance to a deeper and more grateful experience of justifying grace.

Key Texts: *Romans 3:10–18, 23; 5:12, 20; 6:23; 1 John 1:8–10; Psalm 51:1–5; Ephesians 2:1–10; Jeremiah 17:9*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before beginning this study, how would you honestly describe the working theology of sin that shapes your actual praying, your interpretation of your own failures, and your understanding of what the gospel is rescuing you from? Is sin, in your functional spirituality, primarily a matter of guilt before God, personal dysfunction, bad habits, or something else? Share honestly, and plan to return to your answer at the close of the series.

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Romans 3:10–18 carefully. How many distinct aspects of human sin and moral failure does Paul catalogue in this passage? What is the cumulative rhetorical and theological effect of stacking these indictments one upon another? What does verse 19 (“that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God”) establish as the purpose of the entire argument?
3. Read Romans 5:12–21. How does Paul describe the connection between Adam’s one transgression and the condition of all humanity? What is the structural parallel he draws between Adam and Christ in verses 15–19? What does the word “through” (Greek: δι’ henos) in verses 12, 17, 18, and 19 contribute to understanding the mechanism of both condemnation and justification?
4. Read Psalm 51:1–12. What specific vocabulary does David use to describe his sin? What resources does he appeal to in God’s character? What does verse 4 (“Against You, You only, I have sinned”) reveal about the fundamental orientation of sin, and why does David make this claim in the aftermath of a sin that clearly involved and harmed other people?
5. Read Ephesians 2:1–10. How does Paul describe the condition of the unbeliever in verses 1–3? What are the three sources of the sinner’s bondage? How does the structure of the passage, verses 1–3 followed by the pivotal “But God” in verse 4, model the relationship between Hamartiology and Soteriology? What does “by nature children of wrath” (verse 3) imply about the condemnation belonging to the human condition itself rather than merely to individual acts?
6. Read 1 John 1:5–10. What does John’s statement “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (verse 5) establish as the theological foundation for the necessity of dealing with sin? What are the three false claims John identifies in verses 6, 8, and 10, and what does each claim deny? What does John’s remedy in verse 9 reveal about both the character of God and the ongoing need for confession in the life of the believer?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson identifies the cultural tendency to substitute therapeutic language (brokenness, dysfunction, mistakes) for the biblical vocabulary of sin (guilt, transgression, rebellion). What specific theological claims are implicitly denied when this substitution is made? What is lost, theologically and pastorally, when the church adopts this therapeutic vocabulary? Can the therapeutic framework, at its best, capture any genuine aspects of the human condition that the biblical doctrine of sin also addresses?
8. The lesson argues that without a robust Hamartiology, the cross loses its content and grace loses its amazement. Work this out in detail. What specific aspect of sin corresponds to each of the following benefits of the atonement: propitiation (Romans 3:25), redemption (Ephesians 1:7), justification (Romans 5:1), reconciliation (Romans 5:10), regeneration (Titus 3:5), adoption (Galatians 4:5)? How does each of these benefits become incomprehensible when the aspect of sin it addresses is minimized?
9. The lesson describes the history of theological debate about sin as a conflict between the Augustinian-Reformed tradition (total depravity, original guilt, bondage of the will) and the Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian tradition (natural ability, prevenient grace, libertarian freedom). What are the specific exegetical

arguments for the Reformed position from Romans 5:12–19 and Ephesians 2:1–5? What is the Arminian response, and how does the Reformed tradition evaluate it?

10. The lesson insists that the proper posture toward the study of Hamartiology is personal confrontation rather than academic inquiry. What does this mean practically? Is it possible to study theology in a way that is academically rigorous and personally confrontational at the same time, or do these two postures tend to work against each other? What spiritual habits and disciplines would help to maintain the personal dimension of this study throughout the series?
11. Romans 5:20 says “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” What is the theological structure of this claim? Paul immediately anticipates the misunderstanding in 6:1 (“Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase?”). What is the nature of this misunderstanding, and why does a right understanding of grace actually preclude it rather than encourage it? What does Paul’s response in 6:2 reveal about the relationship between justification and sanctification?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson argues that what a congregation believes about sin determines the health of its entire discipleship. Evaluate your own spiritual life against this claim. In what ways has an inadequate theology of sin, whether through minimization, therapeutic redefinition, or simple neglect, affected the depth of your gratitude for the gospel, the seriousness of your repentance, the quality of your prayer, or your ability to interpret your own struggles and failures?
13. Paul writes in Psalm 51:3, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” This constant awareness of sin is not morbidity; it is the mark of a soul that lives in the light of God’s holiness and its own desperate need for mercy. What would it look like to cultivate this kind of ongoing, sober self-knowledge in your own spiritual life without falling into the paralysis of guilt or the distortion of self-condemnation? How does the gospel function to make this self-knowledge productive rather than destructive?
14. The lesson identifies the practice of corporate confession as one of the ecclesial practices most directly shaped by a congregation’s theology of sin. Does your congregation practice regular corporate confession of sin in its gathered worship? If so, what theological convictions sustain it? If not, what would be gained, theologically and pastorally, by its introduction? What would need to be taught before a congregation would be able to receive and participate in this practice meaningfully?
15. The lesson describes the goal of this series as producing not morbidity but worship, specifically, the worship of a soul that has seen the full depth of its own sin and the full superabundance of the grace that has answered it. Is this the kind of worship you currently experience? What specific understanding of your own sin, and of the grace that has answered it, would need to deepen in order for your worship to become more wonder-filled, more grateful, and more genuinely doxological?
16. This is Lesson 1 of 24 in a series that will examine sin from every angle that Scripture illumines. What specific question, concern, or area of confusion do you bring to this series? Is there an aspect of the doctrine of sin, original sin, total depravity, the bondage of the will, hell, remaining sin in the believer, divine discipline, about which you feel most uncertain, most pastorally perplexed, or most in need of clear biblical instruction? Commit that area to prayer, and plan to revisit your answer when you reach Lesson 24.

Prayer Focus

Open this first lesson of the Hamartiology series with a careful, devotional reading of Psalm 51 in its entirety. Read it not as a scholarly exercise but as the prayer of a man who has seen himself clearly, in the full, unsparing light of God's holiness, and has cast himself, without reservation, upon the mercy of a God whose steadfast love (hesed) is the only ground he has to stand on. This is the prayer with which every lesson on sin should begin: not a theoretical acknowledgment of human imperfection, but a personal, specific, Spirit-illuminated confession of actual guilt before an actually holy God.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration. Begin with the Father, the holy and just God against whom every sin is ultimately committed, whose holiness is the standard that sin violates and whose justice is the wrath that sin incurs, and who is, at the same time, the God who is "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4) and who determined, before the foundation of the world, to save a people from the catastrophe of sin at the cost of His own Son. Move to the Son, who became flesh and dwelt among us not as a remote observer of the human condition but as the One who was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15), and who, being without sin, bore the guilt of our sin, exhausted the wrath of God, and rose from the dead as the firstfruits of a humanity that sin will no longer define. Conclude with the Spirit, who was sent to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), who regenerates the dead sinner and gives him the capacity to see his sin clearly, to grieve over it genuinely, and to flee to Christ with the desperation that genuine self-knowledge produces.

Pray together for this series in three specific directions. First, for honest self-knowledge: that the Spirit who searches the depths of God would also search our hearts (1 Corinthians 2:10–11), illumining what is there with the unsparing light of His Word, so that we see not a flattering self-portrait but the truth, and that seeing the truth, we find ourselves driven not into despair but into grace. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:23–24, NASB 1995). Second, for the church: that the congregations represented in this room would find the courage to preach and teach the full biblical doctrine of sin without apology and without minimization, trusting that the God who has given us this doctrine has given it for our good, our growth, and ultimately our joy. Third, for the lost: that the same Spirit who convicts the church of remaining sin would be at work in the world around us, convicting of sin and righteousness and judgment, preparing hearts to receive the gospel of grace with the desperation that a genuine diagnosis of the human condition produces.

Close with a reading of Romans 8:1 as a prayer of confident assurance rather than theological abstraction: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (NASB 1995). Speak it as those who have heard the full indictment of Romans 3 and the full weight of the law, and who know that the "therefore" of Romans 8:1 stands precisely because the "but God" of Ephesians 2:4 has already done its inexhaustible, irrevocable, grace-abounding work.

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38–39, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 3:10–18, 23; 5:12, 20–21; 6:23; 8:1–2, 38–39; Psalm 51:1–5; Ephesians 2:1–10; 1 John 1:5–10; Jeremiah 17:9; Hebrews 4:12

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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