

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 2

Sin in the History of Doctrine

From the Garden to the Modern Denial — How the Church Has Understood Sin

The Church's Theological Memory Is the Student's Greatest Asset

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" — and in theology, the past that is most dangerous to forget is the history of error

Key Texts: Romans 5:12–21; Ephesians 2:1–3; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Romans 5:12, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

The church does not begin its doctrinal conversations in a vacuum. Every theological question that the contemporary church faces has been faced before, in some form, by the saints who preceded us. The doctrine of sin is no exception. The history of Hamartiology is not an academic luxury for those with the leisure to pursue it; it is a theological survival skill for the pastor, teacher, and informed layperson who wishes to understand not merely what the church believes but why, and what formidable alternatives have been offered and examined and found wanting in the long centuries of the church's doctrinal life. To know this history is to be equipped against the errors of the present, most of which are not original but ancient, not novel but recycled.

This second lesson of our Hamartiology series is devoted to the history of the doctrine, from the earliest patristic reflections, through the defining controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century, through the medieval synthesis of Aquinas, through the explosive Reformation recovery of radical Augustinian anthropology in Luther and Calvin, through the Arminian challenge and the Synod of Dort, and finally through the progressive modern erosion of the doctrine under the acids of Enlightenment rationalism and therapeutic culture. This survey is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive; the history of Hamartiology could fill many volumes. But the landmarks it traces are the ones that every serious student of the doctrine must know.

The governing thesis of this lesson is simple but important: the church's understanding of sin has been forged in controversy. Every major advance in the precision of the doctrine has come in response to a major error that pressed the church to think more carefully, more biblically, and more exactly about what Scripture actually teaches. The Pelagian controversy forced Augustine to articulate the full implications of original sin and the bondage of the will with a precision that no previous theologian had achieved. The Reformation controversy forced Luther and Calvin to recover those implications from centuries of gradual erosion under the weight of medieval synergism. Each crisis was, in the providence of God, an occasion for the church to return to the text of Scripture with fresh urgency and to receive afresh what the Spirit had always been saying about the depth of human ruin and the sovereign sufficiency of divine grace.

The student who enters this history will find it simultaneously humbling and encouraging. Humbling, because the history of error regarding sin is the history of the human heart's persistent refusal to accept the full severity of the biblical diagnosis, a refusal that has manifested itself in every generation of the church, in sophisticated theological systems and in the informal practical assumptions of ordinary Christian life alike. Encouraging, because the history of the church's doctrinal development is also the history of the Spirit's faithfulness in preserving, clarifying, and transmitting the truth about sin and grace through every challenge, ensuring that in every era, the full-orbed biblical doctrine has found its champions and its confessors.

I. The Patristic Period

Early Reflections on Sin and the Divergence of East and West

A. *The Eastern Tradition: Mortality, Corruption, and the Image of God*

The earliest Christian theology of sin developed in the context of the church's engagement with Greco-Roman philosophy and with the practical demands of Christian moral formation. The apologists of the second century, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, were primarily concerned to demonstrate the moral superiority of Christianity over pagan religion, and their treatment of sin focused largely on the contrast between Christian virtue and pagan vice. It was not until the third and fourth centuries, particularly in the great theological centers of Alexandria and Cappadocia, that a more systematic theology of sin began to emerge.

The Eastern theological tradition, represented by Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa), and later by John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, developed a distinctive emphasis in its doctrine of the fall. For the Eastern theologians, the primary consequence of Adam's sin was mortality, the subjection of human nature to death and corruption, rather than inherited guilt in the strict juridical sense that would characterize the Western tradition. Sin entered the world through Adam, but what spread to all human beings was the condition of mortality and the disordered desires (*epithumia*) that accompany it. Because all human beings share in Adam's mortality, all are subject to the passions and temptations that lead to actual sin; and because all actually sin, all stand under divine judgment.

This Eastern emphasis produced a theology of salvation focused on the restoration of the divine image and the transformation of human nature through union with Christ. The incarnation was understood primarily as the recapitulation of human nature in the eternal Son: what had become mortal and corrupted in Adam was taken up into the incorruptible divine life in Christ, so that through union with Him, the human race might be restored to its original dignity and ultimately deified (*theosis*), not in the pantheistic sense but in the sense of participation in the divine life and character. The forensic categories of guilt, imputation, and propitiation that would come to the fore in the Western tradition were present but not central in the Eastern theological economy.

The pastoral significance of this Eastern emphasis should not be missed. The Greek fathers were not soft on sin; they preached with great urgency about the devastation of the fall and the absolute necessity of Christ for human restoration. But their framework for understanding what sin had done and what grace must repair was oriented more toward ontology, what sin had done to human nature, than toward forensics, what sin had incurred before the divine tribunal. Both dimensions are genuinely biblical, and a complete Hamartiology requires both. The Western tradition's strength was its precision on the forensic dimension; the Eastern tradition's contribution was its richness on the ontological dimension. The full biblical doctrine of sin requires both the courtroom and the hospital.

B. *The Western Tradition Before Augustine: Tertullian and Ambrose*

The Western theological tradition, shaped from its earliest days by the Latin language and the legal categories pervasive in Roman culture, developed a more forensic and juridical account of sin. Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155–220), the first major Latin theologian, introduced the concept of the "*tradux peccati*" (transmission of sin), the idea that sin is transmitted from parent to child through natural generation, so that every human being inherits both the corruption and the guilt of Adam's transgression. This was a more legally precise formulation than the Eastern emphasis on transmitted mortality, and it laid the groundwork for the Western tradition's characteristic insistence on inherited guilt as well as inherited corruption.

Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397), Augustine's own bishop and the man whose preaching was the human instrument of his conversion, carried this Western tradition forward with particular precision. Ambrose explicitly taught that all human beings sinned in Adam, that this sin is transmitted through the act of generation, and that baptism is necessary for its remission, a position that reflected the growing Western consensus that original sin involves not merely corruption but a legally incurred guilt that requires a sacramental act of divine forgiveness. It was from this Western tradition, refracted through Ambrose's influence, that the young Augustine received his earliest

theological formation, and it was this tradition that he would develop into the most powerful and comprehensive doctrine of original sin in the history of Christian thought.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Psalm 51:5, NASB 1995

II. The Pelagian Controversy

Augustine, Pelagius, and the Battle for the Soul of Christian Anthropology

A. Pelagius and the Denial of Original Sin

The crisis that would define Western Hamartiology for the next fifteen centuries arrived in Rome around 410 in the person of a British monk named Pelagius. Pelagius was a man of impressive moral seriousness and considerable intellectual ability, and his initial concerns were pastoral rather than theological: he was disturbed by what he perceived as the moral laxity of Roman Christians who used the doctrine of human weakness as an excuse for spiritual complacency. His proposed remedy, however, was not a deeper appreciation of divine grace but a more vigorous insistence on human moral capability. Pelagius maintained that God would never command what human beings are incapable of performing; therefore, since God commands obedience, human beings must be capable of obedience. Sin is a matter of bad habit and poor imitation, not of corrupted nature.

The theological implications of this pastoral proposal were far-reaching and devastating. If sin is habit rather than nature, then Adam’s sin injured only Adam, it did not corrupt the human nature that all his descendants would inherit. Every human being is born in the same moral condition as Adam before the fall: capable of obedience, morally neutral, without inherited guilt or inherited corruption. Grace is helpful but not strictly necessary; it facilitates obedience by providing the forgiveness of past sins (in baptism), the moral example of Christ, and the instruction of Scripture, but it does not transform the will, because the will does not need transformation. The decisive factor in salvation is the free choice of the human will, exercised in response to the external stimulus of grace.

Pelagius’ disciple Caelestius pressed these implications with particular sharpness, explicitly denying that Adam’s sin was transmitted to his posterity, that infants are born in any state of sin, and that death is a consequence of Adam’s transgression rather than a natural feature of human existence. It was Caelestius’ teaching in Carthage that first brought the controversy to a head and prompted the African church councils that would condemn Pelagianism and set Augustine on the path to his most important theological work. The Pelagian system, once its implications were made explicit, represented a complete alternative to the Augustinian-Reformed gospel, not merely a different anthropology but a different soteriology, a different Christology, and ultimately a different understanding of what God is doing in the world through the redemptive work of His Son.

B. Augustine’s Response: *The Full Implications of Romans 5*

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) is, after the Apostle Paul, the single most important figure in the history of Christian thought about sin. His personal biography, the passionate, sensual, brilliantly restless young man who could not free himself from the chains of his own disordered desires until the sovereign grace of God broke them in the garden of Milan in 386, was the experiential substructure of his theology. Augustine did not theorize about the bondage of the will from a comfortable distance; he had lived it. His *Confessions*, the most intimate and self-revealing document in the history of patristic literature, is a sustained meditation on the inability of the human will to choose God apart from sovereign grace: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You”, and the restlessness, Augustine knew from bitter experience, could not be resolved by an act of unaided human will.

In his anti-Pelagian writings, *On Nature and Grace* (415), *On the Grace of Christ* and *On Original Sin* (418), *On the Soul and Its Origin* (419), *On Grace and Free Will* (426), *On Rebuke and Grace* (426), *On the Predestination of the*

Saints (428–429), and The Gift of Perseverance (428–429), Augustine articulated the full biblical doctrine of sin with a precision and comprehensiveness that no previous theologian had achieved. His exegesis of Romans 5:12, particularly the phrase “in whom all sinned” (in the Latin: *in quo omnes peccaverunt*), led him to the doctrine of the federal and seminal headship of Adam: all human beings sinned in Adam because all were, in some sense, present in Adam and therefore participate in his guilt. Original sin is not merely imitated or transmitted by bad example; it is inherited as both guilt and corruption, infecting every faculty of the human soul.

The consequence, for Augustine, was total: the image of God in humanity has been deeply wounded though not wholly obliterated; the intellect is darkened, unable to know God rightly; the will is enslaved, unable to choose the good without divine assistance; the affections are disordered, loving what should not be loved and failing to love what should be loved supremely. This is what Augustine called the *massa damnata*, the condemned mass of humanity, all of whom deserve nothing from God but wrath, and from whose depths God in sovereign mercy draws His elect and brings them, by irresistible grace, to saving faith and final glorification. The Pelagian view that human beings are capable of choosing God apart from sovereign grace was, for Augustine, not merely theologically incorrect but experientially impossible: he had tried it for years and had found, to his own despair, that he could not.

The Augustinian doctrine was affirmed by the Council of Carthage in 418 and consolidated in its essential features at the Second Council of Orange in 529. The orange condemnations are particularly significant because they represent the only ecumenically recognized conciliar condemnation of Semi-Pelagianism, the position that the first movement toward God comes from the human will rather than from divine grace. The council explicitly affirmed that faith itself, even in its beginning, is a gift of grace rather than a human achievement, establishing the Augustinian principle that has governed orthodox Western theology ever since. To affirm that the first movement toward God is human rather than divine is, as Orange recognized, to commit the same fundamental error as Pelagius, however much the Semi-Pelagian may insist on the necessity of subsequent grace.

“For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

Romans 5:19, NASB 1995

III. The Medieval Development

From Augustine to Aquinas, Synthesis, Modification, and the Seeds of Controversy

A. The Medieval Synthesis: Thomas Aquinas and Scholastic Hamartiology

The medieval period did not abandon the Augustinian framework, but it did modify it in ways that would prove consequential for the Reformation debate. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the greatest of the medieval scholastic theologians, gave the most systematic and comprehensive treatment of sin in the medieval tradition in the *Summa Theologiae*, and his account is remarkable for both its sophistication and the points at which it subtly departs from Augustinian strictness.

Aquinas defined original sin as the privation of original righteousness, the absence of the supernatural gift (*donum superadditum*) that God had added to human nature over and above its natural capacities at creation. On this view, the fall did not fundamentally damage human nature itself but stripped it of its supernatural supplement, leaving the natural powers of reason and will intact but without the elevated orientation toward God that the *donum superadditum* had provided. The consequence of this anthropological framework was significant: fallen humanity, in Aquinas’ account, retains considerable natural capacity for moral reasoning and even for natural virtue. The problem of sin is less that human nature is constitutively corrupted and more that it has been deprived of the supernatural grace that would orient it toward its supernatural end. The remedy, accordingly, involves not merely the regeneration and transformation of a corrupted nature but the infusion of supernatural grace that restores the capacity for merit and the possibility of beatitude.

This Thomistic framework, however elegant in its philosophical construction, represented a softening of the Augustinian insistence on total depravity. If human nature retains its natural capacities intact after the fall, and if sin is primarily the privation of a supernatural gift added above nature rather than the corruption of nature itself, then the radicality of human inability is significantly qualified. The Reformers would argue, with considerable exegetical force, that the biblical picture, particularly in Paul's letter to the Romans and in Ephesians 2, does not describe fallen humanity as merely lacking a supernatural supplement but as constitutively corrupt, spiritually dead, and morally enslaved. The Thomistic framework, however carefully developed, did not do full justice to the Pauline account of the extent and depth of sin's damage to human nature.

B. *The Distinction Between Mortal and Venial Sin*

The medieval period also developed the distinction between mortal and venial sin with a precision and pastoral application that the Reformers would sharply contest. The distinction itself has some patristic precedent, but it was the medieval canonists and scholastics who systematized it into the elaborate moral theology that governed the practice of confession and penance in the medieval church. Mortal sin, grave matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent, destroys sanctifying grace in the soul and forfeits eternal life unless remitted through the sacrament of penance. Venial sin, lesser matter, or grave matter without full knowledge or consent, weakens but does not destroy the principle of the spiritual life and may be remitted through lesser penitential acts.

The Reformers' critique of this distinction was not that they denied degrees of seriousness in sin, the Reformed tradition explicitly affirms that some sins are more heinous than others in their aggravated circumstances (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 150–151). Their critique was threefold. First, the distinction as defined by the medieval tradition lacked adequate biblical warrant; the categories of "mortal" and "venial" are not straightforwardly biblical categories, and their precise application in the casuistic tradition was more the product of ecclesiastical convention than of careful exegesis. Second, the distinction created a dangerous pastoral dynamic: it provided a framework within which grave sin could be managed and atoned for through sacramental mechanisms, potentially obscuring the radical grace of divine forgiveness through Christ and replacing it with a system of human moral performance. Third, the distinction, by creating a category of sin that does not destroy grace, implicitly undermined the Augustinian-Pauline principle that every sin, however small, renders the sinner deserving of death and in need of the cross.

IV. The Reformation Recovery

Luther, Calvin, and the Reassertion of Augustinian Anthropology

A. *Luther and The Bondage of the Will*

Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 1525) is, by Luther's own assessment, his most important theological work. Written in direct response to Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Diatribes on Free Will* (1524), it represents the most sustained and powerful argument for the Augustinian doctrine of the will's enslavement to sin ever produced in the history of Protestant theology. Erasmus had argued, with characteristic Renaissance moderation, that the human will retains some capacity to choose good and to cooperate with divine grace in achieving salvation. Luther's response was uncompromising: Erasmus had not merely made a theological error but had assaulted the very foundation of the gospel.

Luther's central argument was that the will, apart from grace, is not merely weakened but enslaved, enslaved not by external compulsion (no one forces the sinner to sin) but by the internal necessity of a nature that is constitutively turned away from God and toward self. The sinner sins freely, in the sense that no external force compels him; but he cannot choose otherwise, because his nature is such that his freedom always expresses itself in sinful choices. Luther's famous image is unforgettable: the will is like a horse standing between two riders. When God rides, the will goes where God directs; when the devil rides, the will goes where the devil directs. But the will itself has no capacity to choose its rider. This is not fatalism; it is the biblical doctrine of total inability expressed in vivid metaphor.

The pastoral and soteriological stakes of this doctrine were, for Luther, of the highest possible order. If the will is not in bondage, then salvation is at least partly a human achievement, and the sinner can take some credit for his conversion. But if the will is in bondage, then salvation is entirely a gift, from first to last, from the awakening of the sinner's dead heart to the perseverance of the saint through to final glorification, the entire work is God's. *Sola gratia*, grace alone, is not merely a slogan; it is the logical consequence of the bondage of the will. Remove the bondage of the will, and you remove the foundation of *sola gratia*. This is why Luther told Erasmus: "You and you alone have gone to the heart of the matter." The question of free will was not a peripheral dispute about the mechanics of decision-making; it was the question of whether the glory of salvation belongs entirely to God or is shared, even partially, with the creature.

B. Calvin and the Total Corruption of Human Nature

John Calvin's treatment of sin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (II.1–5) is, alongside Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings and Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, one of the three most important treatments of human sinfulness in the history of Western Christianity. Calvin built explicitly on Augustine while clarifying and extending his insights with characteristic exegetical precision. His doctrine of original sin affirms both original guilt (the imputation of Adam's transgression to all his posterity) and original corruption (the total perversion of human nature that renders every faculty, mind, will, affections, conscience, body, incapable of genuine spiritual good apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit).

Calvin's particular contribution to the doctrine was his insistence on the thoroughness of this corruption. Total depravity, for Calvin, does not mean that every person is as wicked as they could possibly be, he explicitly acknowledges the reality of common grace and the possibility of civil virtue in the unregenerate. What it means is that no part of the human person has escaped sin's corruption, and that no action of the unregenerate person is genuinely pleasing to God or meritorious in His sight, however admirable it may appear in the horizontal dimension of human social life. The unregenerate can build roads and write poetry and love their families; what they cannot do is please God, seek Him with a genuinely spiritual desire, or contribute anything to their own salvation. The corruption is total in its extension, it reaches every part, even if it is not absolute in its intensity in every individual case.

Calvin also gave particular attention to the noetic effects of sin, the damage that sin has done to the human capacity for true knowledge, particularly knowledge of God. The mind is darkened (Ephesians 4:17–18); the conscience is seared; the natural knowledge of God (Romans 1:18–21) that all human beings possess is suppressed rather than acted upon. This Calvinian emphasis on the noetic effects of sin has enormous apologetic significance: it means that the unbeliever's rejection of the gospel is not primarily an intellectual problem requiring a better argument but a moral and spiritual problem requiring the regenerating work of the Spirit who alone can open blind eyes and unstop deaf ears. Apologetics has its place, but it cannot do the Spirit's work, and no amount of rational demonstration can produce saving faith in a heart that the Spirit has not first made alive.

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Jeremiah 17:9, NASB 1995

V. The Arminian Challenge and the Synod of Dort

The Seventeenth-Century Controversy and Its Enduring Significance

A. Arminius and the Remonstrant Position

James Arminius (1560–1609), a Dutch Reformed minister who had studied under Calvin's successor Theodore Beza in Geneva, developed in his later career a position that he believed corrected certain excesses in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination while remaining within the broad framework of Reformed theology. His followers, the Remonstrants, articulated their theological convictions in the Five Articles of Remonstrance (1610), presented to the States of Holland after Arminius' death. The Remonstrant position on sin and grace is the one that has most

profoundly shaped popular evangelical Protestantism in the centuries since, and it represents the primary alternative to Reformed anthropology in the doctrinal landscape of contemporary evangelical Christianity.

The Remonstrant position on sin began with an affirmation that the Reformed tradition could endorse: the fall has genuinely corrupted human nature, and fallen human beings are unable to save themselves by their natural powers. But the Remonstrants added a decisive qualification: God has given to all human beings a universal prevenient grace that partially restores the freedom of the will, making it possible for all people to respond to the gospel if they choose to do so. This prevenient grace is not efficacious, it does not produce faith; it merely makes faith possible. The decisive factor in whether a given person comes to faith is the person's own free response to the prevenient grace that has been equally distributed to all. Election is therefore grounded in God's foreknowledge of who will freely choose to believe.

The Reformed critique of this position focused on two central points. First, the Remonstrant doctrine of prevenient grace lacks clear biblical support. The Scriptures do not teach a universal, non-efficacious enabling grace that restores free will to all human beings; what the Scriptures teach is a sovereign, efficacious, particularizing grace that raises the dead, opens blind eyes, and produces faith in those whom God has chosen (John 6:37–44; Ephesians 2:4–5; Acts 13:48). Second, the Remonstrant position effectively reinstates a form of Semi-Pelagianism under a different label. If prevenient grace is non-efficacious and equally distributed, and if the decisive factor in salvation is the human will's free response, then salvation is ultimately grounded in something the sinner does rather than something God does, and the glory of salvation is shared between the creature and the Creator. This is precisely the error that Augustine identified and refuted seventeen centuries ago, and that the Council of Orange condemned in 529.

B. *The Synod of Dort and the Five Points of Calvinism*

The Synod of Dort (Dordrecht, 1618–1619) was one of the most significant gatherings in the history of Reformed theology. Convened by the Dutch Reformed Church with representatives from Reformed churches across Europe, the Synod examined the Five Articles of Remonstrance point by point and returned a comprehensive theological verdict. The five Canons of Dort, Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints, represent the most careful and comprehensive conciliar affirmation of the Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin and grace in Protestant history.

The First Canon of Dort, on Total Depravity, is directly relevant to Hamartiology. The Synod affirmed that man does not have saving faith of himself nor by the power of his own free will, since in the state of apostasy and sin he can neither of himself think, will, nor do anything that is truly good. It affirmed that all people are conceived in sin and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of any saving good, prone to evil, dead in sins, and the slaves of sin. It affirmed that regenerating grace is absolutely necessary for conversion, and that this grace is the sovereign work of God applied to whom He wills, not a response to foreseen human decision. The First Canon of Dort is, in effect, the Reformation's most precise and comprehensive confessional statement of the full Augustinian doctrine of sin, and it remains the theological standard against which Reformed doctrinal claims about human nature must be measured.

The practical significance of the Synod of Dort for the contemporary church is not merely historical. The five-point controversy has never been resolved; it continues to divide evangelical Protestantism, and the terms of the debate, total depravity, the freedom of the will, the role of grace, are precisely the terms of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy of the fifth century and the Reformation controversy of the sixteenth. The student of Hamartiology who understands the Dort controversy understands not merely a piece of seventeenth-century ecclesiastical history but the enduring fault line in Protestant anthropology, and is therefore equipped to engage the contemporary versions of the debate with clarity, precision, and the full weight of the church's doctrinal tradition behind her.

VI. The Modern Erosion

The Enlightenment, the Liberal Tradition, and the Therapeutic Displacement of Sin

A. *The Enlightenment Attack on Original Sin*

The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries launched the most systematic and philosophically sustained assault on the Christian doctrine of sin in the history of Western thought. The Enlightenment project, in all its varied forms, was united by a confidence in human reason as the supreme arbiter of truth and a commitment to the progressive moral improvement of humanity through education, science, and rational social organization. Both of these commitments were structurally incompatible with the Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin.

John Locke (1632–1704) challenged the concept of innate ideas, including the innate moral knowledge that the Reformed tradition had associated with the image of God, and relocated the source of all knowledge in sensory experience. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) inverted the Christian doctrine of original sin with almost deliberate precision: human beings are naturally good, and it is society and civilization that corrupt them. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the most formidable philosophical mind of the era, argued that morality must be grounded in autonomous human reason rather than in divine command, and that human beings are capable of moral self-legislation without the assistance of divine grace. The combined effect of these Enlightenment trajectories was to render the doctrine of original sin not merely doubtful but philosophically embarrassing, a relic of a pre-modern worldview incompatible with the emerging understanding of human dignity and moral capability.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the “father of modern theology,” attempted to reconstruct Christian doctrine on Enlightenment foundations, reinterpreting sin not as guilt before a holy God but as the consciousness of the “lower self” (sensuous self-consciousness) overpowering the “higher self” (God-consciousness). On this account, sin is not moral transgression against a divine lawgiver but the retardation of the development of the feeling of absolute dependence that constitutes genuine piety. The remedy is correspondingly reconceived: not forensic justification for the guilty but the gradual elevation of consciousness through participation in the redemptive life of Christ. Schleiermacher’s reinterpretation effectively dismantled the entire structure of Augustinian Hamartiology while preserving much of its vocabulary, producing a Christianity that sounded familiar but had been drained of its doctrinal substance.

B. *The Reformed Recovery and the Ongoing Necessity of Doctrinal Vigilance*

The twentieth century witnessed a significant partial recovery of the doctrine of sin, most notably in the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth and in the Reformed confessionalist tradition represented by theologians such as Herman Bavinck, B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, and their successors. Barth’s doctrine of sin, while profoundly different from the classical Reformed account in its christological grounding and its universalist tendencies, at least recovered the seriousness of sin as a theological category against the optimistic anthropology of nineteenth-century liberalism. Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* remains the finest single treatment of sin in the classical Reformed tradition, combining exhaustive historical and exegetical learning with a rigorous doctrinal precision that has not been surpassed.

But the twentieth century also produced new threats to the doctrine of sin, arguably more insidious than the open intellectual challenges of the Enlightenment because they came dressed in the vocabulary of pastoral care and spiritual formation. The rapid assimilation of Freudian and post-Freudian psychology into evangelical pastoral theology from the mid-twentieth century onward introduced a framework for understanding human problems that was, in its foundational assumptions, structurally incompatible with the biblical doctrine of sin. Where Scripture speaks of sin as moral transgression requiring forgiveness, the therapeutic framework speaks of dysfunction requiring healing. Where Scripture calls for repentance before a holy God, the therapeutic framework calls for self-understanding and the resolution of psychological conflict. The two frameworks are not merely different in emphasis; they are oriented by different anthropologies, toward different diagnoses, and toward different remedies, and the church that uncritically adopts the therapeutic framework will, over time, find itself unable to preach the cross with its full forensic and moral content.

The lesson of this historical survey, then, is not merely academic but pastoral and prophetic. The doctrine of sin has been challenged in every century of the church's life, in forms both philosophically sophisticated and pastorally subtle. The church that does not know this history is condemned to be surprised by its repetition. The church that does know it has an enormous advantage: it knows that the errors it faces are not novel but ancient, that they have been examined and found wanting, and that the full Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin, grounded in the plain text of Scripture, forged in the fires of controversy, affirmed by the great conciliar gatherings of the Western church, is not merely the tradition of men but the faithful transmission of the Word of God. To hold that doctrine with informed conviction and to pass it on to the next generation intact is one of the highest callings of the teaching ministry.

"We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 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."

Ephesians 2:3–5, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Patristic Theology	From the Latin patres (fathers). The body of theological thought produced by the leading teachers and bishops of the early church, roughly from the close of the apostolic age (c. AD 100) through the Council of Chalcedon (451) and, in some treatments, extending to Gregory the Great (d. 604). The patristic period was foundational for the church's doctrinal development across every major locus, including the doctrine of sin. The Eastern and Western patristic traditions developed significantly different emphases in Hamartiology, the East focusing on mortality and corruption, the West on guilt and the bondage of the will, though both affirmed the universality of sin's effects on the human race.
Pelagianism	The theological system of the British monk Pelagius (c. 360–418), which taught that Adam's sin injured only himself and did not corrupt or disable human nature; that all human beings are born in the same moral condition as Adam before the fall; that the human will retains full capacity to choose good without supernatural grace; and that grace consists primarily in external aids such as the example of Christ and the forgiveness of past sins rather than in an internal transformation of the will. Condemned at the Councils of Carthage (418) and Ephesus (431). Pelagianism is the most persistent heresy in the history of Hamartiology, recurring in new forms in every generation of the church.
Semi-Pelagianism	A mediating position between Pelagianism and Augustinianism, associated with monks of southern Gaul in the fifth century (especially John Cassian and Vincent of Lérins), which taught that while grace is necessary for salvation, the first movement toward God, the <i>initium fidei</i> (beginning of faith), arises from the human will rather than from sovereign divine grace. Semi-Pelagianism was condemned at the Second Council of Orange (529), which affirmed that even the beginning of faith is a work of divine grace. The position persistently revives in the history of doctrine under various labels, including much of what passes for Arminianism in popular evangelical Christianity.
Augustinianism	The theological tradition stemming from Augustine of Hippo (354–430), characterized by its insistence on: the total corruption of human nature through the fall of Adam; the universal imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity; the complete bondage of the will in unregenerate humanity; the absolute necessity of sovereign, prevenient (preceding) grace for any movement toward God; and the divine election of particular sinners for salvation apart from any foreseen merit. Augustinianism became the foundation of Reformed and Lutheran anthropology at the Reformation and remains the theological substructure of all five points of Calvinism.
Concupiscence	From the Latin <i>concupiscentia</i> (strong desire). In Augustinian theology, the disordered desire or inclination toward sin that remains in the human person as a consequence of the fall. Augustine distinguished between concupiscence as the root condition of fallen human nature (present even in the regenerate) and the actual sinful acts to which it gives rise. Medieval scholasticism, particularly in Aquinas, tended to define concupiscence more narrowly as sensual or bodily appetite requiring the subjugation of reason. The Reformers recovered the Augustinian breadth, insisting that concupiscence, disordered desire in all its forms, is itself sin, not merely the occasion for sin, a position affirmed in Article IX of the Thirty-Nine Articles.
Original Sin	In the technical sense developed through the patristic and medieval periods and refined at the Reformation, original sin refers both to the first sin itself (<i>peccatum originale originans</i> , the originating original sin, Adam's transgression) and to the condition transmitted to all his posterity as its consequence (<i>peccatum originale originatum</i> , the originated original sin, the inherited guilt and corruption). The Westminster Confession of Faith (VI.2–3) captures the Reformed formulation: by Adam's first transgression, the entire human race fell with him,

Term	Definition
	becoming guilty and corrupt, their understanding darkened, their will enslaved, and their affections turned from God toward sin.
The Council of Orange (529)	The Second Council of Orange (Arausicanum II), held in 529 in southern Gaul under the presidency of Caesarius of Arles, condemned Semi-Pelagianism and affirmed key Augustinian doctrines including: the transmission of both sin and death from Adam to all humanity; the necessity of grace for the very beginning of faith; the inability of fallen human beings to think, will, or do anything spiritually good without divine grace; and the priority of grace over human free choice in salvation. Although the council stopped short of affirming double predestination, its conclusions represented a decisive magisterial endorsement of Augustinian anthropology and a repudiation of the view that the human will takes the first salvific step.
Prevenient Grace	From the Latin <i>praevenire</i> (to come before). Grace that precedes and enables the human response of faith. In Augustinian and Reformed theology, prevenient grace refers to the sovereign, effectual, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that raises the spiritually dead sinner to new life and produces the very faith by which salvation is received, grace that is not merely offered but applied. In Arminian theology, the term is used differently to refer to a universal, non-effectual grace that restores sufficient freedom of will to all people to respond to the gospel, without itself determining who will do so. The Reformed critique of the Arminian usage is that it turns prevenient grace into a form of Semi-Pelagianism, making the decisive factor in salvation the human will rather than the sovereign grace of God.
The Bondage of the Will	The Augustinian-Reformed doctrine that the unregenerate human will is not merely weakened or disordered by sin but enslaved, bound to choose according to its sinful nature and incapable of genuinely choosing God, righteousness, or spiritual good apart from the sovereign, transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine was given its most powerful Protestant formulation in Martin Luther's <i>De Servo Arbitrio</i> (The Bondage of the Will, 1525), written in direct response to Erasmus' defense of free will. Luther regarded this work as his most important theological writing. The bondage of the will does not eliminate human responsibility, since the will acts according to its own inclinations; it eliminates human ability, since those inclinations are universally and invariably directed away from God apart from grace.
Mortal and Venial Sin	A distinction developed in medieval Roman Catholic theology, particularly systematized by Thomas Aquinas, between sins that destroy the principle of the spiritual life in the soul (mortal sin, requiring sacramental absolution for forgiveness) and sins that weaken but do not destroy that principle (venial sin, remissible through acts of penance and prayer). The Reformers rejected this distinction as lacking clear biblical warrant and as obscuring the radical seriousness of all sin. The Reformed tradition insists that every sin, however small, is an infinite offense against an infinitely holy God and deserves death (Romans 6:23), while acknowledging that some sins are more heinous than others in their aggravated circumstances (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 151).

Practical Application

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

We must believe that the history of Christian thought about sin is not an optional supplement to our doctrinal formation but an essential component of it. The church's theological tradition is the collective wisdom of the Spirit's work through centuries of biblical exegesis, doctrinal controversy, and confessional refinement. To ignore it is not to be free from tradition; it is to be unconsciously captive to the most recent and least tested tradition of all, the unexamined assumptions of our own cultural moment. The student who knows Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and the Canons of Dort brings to the contemporary debate about sin a depth of theological resource that the student who knows only the last fifty years of evangelical literature simply does not possess.

We must also believe that the errors of the past are not merely historical curiosities but living temptations. Pelagianism has never died; it resurfaces in every generation in new dress, whether as the therapeutic self-help Christianity of the popular evangelical market, the moralistic therapeutic deism that sociologists have identified as the dominant functional religion of American young people, or the prosperity gospel that essentially inverts the Augustinian order by placing human decision-making at the center of the salvation transaction. Semi-Pelagianism is even more pervasive: the assumption that God does His part and humans do their part, that grace makes salvation possible and free will makes it actual, is the default anthropology of the majority of contemporary evangelical preaching. To believe rightly about the history of Hamartiology is to be equipped to identify these errors when they appear and to name them with the precision that the church's doctrinal tradition provides.

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

The history of the doctrine of sin should produce in the student a deep and grateful humility, humility before the sovereign God who has preserved the truth of His Word through every assault, and gratitude for the men and women who paid a heavy price to transmit that truth to us. Augustine spent the last fifteen years of his life in unceasing theological combat, producing an enormous body of anti-Pelagian literature that was disputed, misunderstood, and selectively quoted even in his lifetime. Luther's insistence on the bondage of the will earned him the contempt of the humanist intelligentsia of his day and the fierce opposition of the most respected scholar in Europe. The Reformed confessionalists of the twentieth century who refused to accommodate the doctrine of sin to the therapeutic culture faced professional marginalization and ecclesiastical conflict. The truth about sin has always been expensive to maintain.

Desire, above all, the courage of conviction that the history of this doctrine models. It is not comfortable to preach total depravity to a culture that worships human potential, or to insist on the bondage of the will in a therapeutic environment that makes human choice the sovereign center of spiritual life. But the alternative, the soft, accommodating, culturally palatable version of Christianity that minimizes sin in order to maximize appeal, is not the Christianity that produced Augustine's Confessions or Luther's Bondage of the Will or Calvin's Institutes. It is the Christianity of Pelagius. And however impressive Pelagius may have appeared to his contemporaries, history has rendered its verdict on his system: it cannot produce the gospel, and it cannot sustain the church.

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

- Read Augustine's Confessions (Books I–IX at minimum) as a devotional exercise, not merely as a historical document. Read it as the testimony of a man who discovered, through the most painful personal experience, that the human will cannot choose God apart from sovereign grace. Pay particular attention to Books VII and VIII, where Augustine describes the repeated failure of his own will to accomplish what his mind knew to be right, and the moment in the garden of Milan when the grace of God finally broke the chains that his own effort had been unable to break. Ask yourself: does my own experience of spiritual struggle confirm or challenge the Augustinian doctrine of the will's bondage?
- Read Luther's The Bondage of the Will, at least the introductory and concluding sections, to encounter the Reformation's most powerful statement of the stakes of the doctrine. Pay particular attention to Luther's account of why the bondage of the will is not a peripheral theological question but the very foundation of

the gospel. If Luther is right that sola gratia stands or falls with the bondage of the will, what are the implications for the majority of contemporary evangelical soteriology, which tends toward an Arminian or Semi-Pelagian account of conversion?

- Read the Canons of Dort (the First Head of Doctrine, on Total Depravity) in their entirety. Note both the positive affirmations and the explicit rejections. The rejections are particularly illuminating: by stating explicitly what the Synod denied, they reveal the specific Arminian errors against which the Reformed doctrine was being defined. Ask yourself honestly: which of the positions the Synod rejected sound like positions you might encounter, or might even instinctively hold, in your own theological and pastoral context?
- Identify the form that Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism takes in your own ministry context. It may be in the altar-call theology that makes the act of coming forward the decisive salvific event. It may be in the counseling framework that addresses human problems primarily through psychological rather than theological categories. It may be in the evangelistic approach that presents the gospel primarily as God's offer and the human decision as the decisive factor. Once you have identified it, consider how the full Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin, clearly stated and carefully explained, would address and correct it.
- Pray with historical awareness. The saints who fought for the doctrine of sin across the centuries are your brothers and sisters in Christ, separated from you only by time. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and the delegates to the Synod of Dort prayed over the same Scriptures you are studying, wrestled with the same human resistance to the doctrine of total depravity, and clung to the same sovereign grace that is your only hope of salvation. Pray for the same courage they displayed, the same commitment to the full counsel of God, and the same confidence that the truth about sin, however uncomfortable, is the only foundation on which the full glory of the gospel can be built.

Key Texts: *Romans 5:12–21; Ephesians 2:1–3; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; John 6:44; 8:34–36; 2 Timothy 2:25–26*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying the history of this doctrine, how much of the theological landscape surveyed in this lesson were you already familiar with? Did you know the names of Pelagius, Arminius, and the Synod of Dort before entering this series? What was your prior understanding of how the doctrine of sin had developed and been contested in church history, and what surprised you most in this lesson?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Romans 5:12–21 carefully, paying particular attention to the structure of Paul’s argument. What is the mechanism Paul identifies for the spread of sin and death from Adam to the entire human race? How does the phrase “through one man” (verses 12, 17, 19) function structurally in Paul’s argument? What is the parallel Paul draws between Adam and Christ, and how does this parallel illuminate the logic of both condemnation and justification?
3. Read Ephesians 2:1–3. What three phrases does Paul use in verse 1 and verse 5 to describe the spiritual condition of unregenerate humanity? What does the phrase “by nature children of wrath” (verse 3) imply about the moral condition into which human beings are born? How does the phrase “even as the rest” establish the universality of this condition? What does the structure of the passage, culminating in “but God” in verse 4, reveal about the relationship between the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of grace?
4. Read Psalm 51:5 alongside Psalm 58:3 and Job 14:4. What is the common theological claim that unites these three texts? How far back does the psalmist and Job trace the origin of human sinfulness? What do these texts imply about whether sin is a condition that develops through experience and bad choices, or a condition that is present from the beginning of human existence? How do these texts support the doctrine of original sin against Pelagian alternatives?
5. Read John 6:37–44 and 6:65. How does Jesus describe the relationship between the Father’s drawing and the sinner’s coming to faith? What does “no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (verse 44) imply about the spiritual condition of those who have not been drawn? What is the significance of the word “can” (ou dunatai) in verse 44, does it describe an external constraint or an internal inability? How do these verses function as biblical evidence for total inability?
6. Read 2 Timothy 2:24–26. Paul tells Timothy to gently correct those who are in opposition, in the hope that God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. What does the phrase “God may grant them repentance” reveal about the source of repentance? If repentance is a divine grant rather than a human achievement, what does this imply about the condition of those who have not yet repented? How does this text relate to the Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sovereign, efficacious grace?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson describes the Eastern and Western patristic traditions as developing different emphases in Hamartiology: the East focusing on mortality and corruption, the West on guilt and legal condemnation. Are these two emphases complementary or competing? What would a fully biblical Hamartiology look like that incorporates both the ontological (what sin has done to human nature) and the forensic (what sin has incurred before the divine tribunal) dimensions? Can you identify specific New Testament texts that support each emphasis?
8. Augustine’s personal biography, the man who could not free himself from disordered desire until sovereign grace intervened, was the experiential foundation of his theology of the will’s bondage. Is this a legitimate basis for theological argument, or does personal experience carry undue weight in the formation of doctrinal conviction? How should personal spiritual experience relate to biblical exegesis and doctrinal tradition in the formation of a robust Hamartiology? Can the Augustinian doctrine of total inability be established on exegetical grounds alone, independent of the biographical argument?

9. The lesson argues that the Remonstrant (Arminian) doctrine of prevenient grace effectively reinstates Semi-Pelagianism under a different label. Evaluate this argument. What specifically does the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace claim? What does the Reformed critique claim about it? Is the Reformed characterization of Arminianism as Semi-Pelagian fair, or is there a substantive difference between the two positions that the critique overlooks? What are the exegetical stakes of this debate?
10. The lesson identifies the therapeutic displacement of sin, the substitution of psychological categories for theological ones in the diagnosis and treatment of human problems, as the most insidious modern challenge to the biblical doctrine of sin. Assess this claim. Is it possible to use psychological insights in pastoral ministry while maintaining the full integrity of the biblical doctrine of sin? Where specifically does the therapeutic framework become incompatible with biblical anthropology? How would a pastor trained in the full Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin engage with a congregation member who is simultaneously receiving secular therapy?
11. The lesson identifies a recurring pattern in the history of Hamartiology: every generation of the church faces some form of the Pelagian error, dressed in new cultural clothing. Identify the specific form that this error takes in the dominant evangelical culture of your region or denominational context. What theological vocabulary does it use? What specific biblical texts does it appeal to? What is the most effective exegetical and pastoral response to it, drawing on the resources of the doctrinal tradition surveyed in this lesson?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson argues that the church's theological memory is the student's greatest asset in navigating the contemporary doctrinal landscape. How well does your own theological formation reflect this? In which periods and figures of the history of Hamartiology do you feel most equipped, and in which do you feel most deficient? What specific steps could you take in the next six months to deepen your knowledge of the patristic, Reformation, or post-Reformation treatment of sin?
13. Luther wrote that the bondage of the will is the hinge on which the entire Reformation turned, that sola gratia stands or falls with this doctrine. Do you agree? If human beings have genuine libertarian freedom of will with respect to the offer of the gospel, what specifically happens to each of the five solas? Work through the logic carefully: if the will is free in the Arminian sense, what happens to sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, sola Scriptura, and soli Deo gloria? Is Luther's claim an exaggeration, or does the doctrinal logic bear it out?
14. The Synod of Dort produced not only positive affirmations but explicit rejections of error. This confessional practice of stating what the church denies, not merely what it affirms, has become less common in contemporary evangelical ecclesiology. What is lost when the church's public theology consists only of positive affirmations without explicit rejections of specific errors? What would it look like to recover this confessional practice in your own ministry context, and what resistance would you expect to encounter?
15. The lesson traces a direct line of theological descent from the Enlightenment attack on original sin to the therapeutic displacement of sin in contemporary evangelical pastoral ministry. This means that the therapeutic framework is not merely a different methodology but a philosophically loaded position with specific theological commitments that are in tension with the biblical doctrine of sin. Does this historical genealogy change how you evaluate the use of therapeutic categories in your own pastoral practice? If so, how? If not, why not?
16. Consider a specific person in your pastoral care who is struggling with a persistent pattern of sin, not a hypothetical but a real situation you are currently navigating. How does the full Augustinian-Reformed doctrine of sin, total depravity, original corruption, the bondage of the will, the necessity of sovereign grace, shape the pastoral counsel you would offer? How does it differ from the counsel that would emerge from a therapeutic framework? And how does the gospel, forensic justification, union with Christ, the indwelling Spirit, the means of grace, become the specific content of that pastoral engagement?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a slow, grateful reading of Ephesians 2:1–10. Read verses 1–3 first, the full, stark, unsparing description of what we were before grace: dead, enslaved, under wrath, following the prince of the power of the air and the desires of the flesh and mind, by nature children of wrath. Do not rush past these verses. Let the full weight of the diagnosis settle. Then read the “But God” of verse 4 with the relief and wonder it deserves: two words that contain within them the entire movement of redemptive history, the entire logic of the gospel, the entire reason that the history of Hamartiology is not a history of despair but a history of grace triumphant over sin. Then read verses 8–10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” This is the Augustinian doctrine. This is the Reformation cry. This is the text that Orange and Dort were defending. Receive it with full, grateful, humbled faith.

Spend time in Trinitarian prayer, organized around the history you have studied. Begin with the Father, who before the foundation of the world, in the counsel of the eternal Trinity, determined to redeem a fallen race, not because human beings would make themselves worthy of grace but because He is “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4) and His sovereign love requires no external motivation. Thank the Father for the history of His faithfulness in preserving the truth about sin and grace through centuries of assault, raising up Augustine against Pelagius, Luther against Erasmus, the delegates at Dort against the Remonstrants, and Bavinck and Machen against the liberal erosion, the same faithful God, the same sovereign grace, defending the same precious truth across the generations. Move to the Son, who became the Second Adam, everything the first Adam was not: obedient where Adam disobeyed, righteous where Adam transgressed, the covenant Head of a new humanity as Adam was the covenant head of the fallen race. The parallelism of Romans 5:12–21 is not merely a doctrinal formulation; it is the structure of redemptive history itself. Conclude with the Spirit, who produces in the elect the very faith that the Arminian system attributes to the human will, opening blind eyes, raising the dead, drawing the reluctant heart, and sustaining to the end the work that He alone has begun.

Pray together in three directions. First, for theological clarity and courage in your own ministry: that God would give you the willingness to preach the full biblical doctrine of sin without apology or accommodation, trusting that the Spirit who convicted the world of sin in the first century is still doing His appointed work today, and that the truth about human depravity is not an obstacle to the gospel but its indispensable foundation. Second, for those in your congregation or sphere of influence who have received a Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian account of salvation and do not know it, who believe, functionally, that their conversion was ultimately their own achievement rather than God's sovereign gift. Pray that the Spirit would open their eyes to the full glory of a salvation that is from first to last a work of grace, so that their assurance might be grounded not in their own decision but in the electing love of a God who chose them before the foundation of the world. Third, for the global church: that in a century when liberal theology has stripped the doctrine of sin from the mainline Protestant tradition, and therapeutic culture has quietly eroded it from much of evangelical Christianity, God would raise up preachers and teachers who will hold the line, transmit the tradition, and pass on to the next generation the full-orbed, scripturally grounded, historically tested doctrine of original sin and sovereign grace that the blood of the martyrs and the labor of the confessors has preserved for us.

Close with the series verse from Romans 5:12, read slowly and meditatively: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (NASB 1995). And then, do not stop there. Read on through verses 20–21: “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.” The first verse is Hamartiology. The last verse is Soteriology. The history of doctrine is the church's long, hard, Spirit-sustained labor to understand the relationship between them, to see clearly enough what sin has done that the full sufficiency of what grace has answered might be received with appropriate wonder, gratitude, and worship.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

Romans 1:16–17, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 5:12–21; 1:16–17; Ephesians 2:1–10; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; John 6:37–44; 8:34–36; 2 Timothy 2:24–26

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com