

FIGHTING SIN IN A SIN CURSED WORLD



12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

*15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, **much more** have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ **abounded for many**. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, **much more** will those who receive the **abundance** of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

*18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace **abounded all the more**, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

In the 1990's, Minneapolis was called Murderopolis because it's crime rate was higher than New York City's. Some of you know that years ago I was involved in a local group we called a Diversity Dialogue. It was a group of about eight people that was made up a lesbian, an interfaith minister, a Buddhist, an atheist, a few others, and me. It was quite the adventure getting together to talk about all of the hot button issues like homosexuality and abortion. One of the members used to be a news writer for the Minneapolis Star Tribune. The area she wrote about for several years was the crime beat. So it was her job to investigate and wrote about, not just murders, but also rapes, muggings, abuse and neglect and every evil thing that came down the pike.

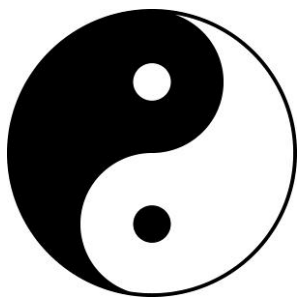
Here's the thing. Despite what her job exposed her to on a daily basis, she refused to believe that people were inherently evil. Some people were lost or had difficult childhoods that made them act out, but all people were basically good. Unlike when Ronald Reagan said the same thing, this woman was not being political. She really meant it. She really believed it.

I want to finish what we began last Sunday. We were reminded that sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin. We read of church's statement of faith which says that we are all sinners by nature and by choice. We just started to uncover the implications of living in a sin-cursed world. We saw the implication to parenting and how even the youngest child continually has a war raging in his soul which compels him to choose evil, to rebel against his mom and dad and follow his own way. But there are many more implications to this doctrine of original sin that we need to bring to uncover and as we do, we will continue to apply the gospel as the solution.

1. Original sin explains all of the evil in the world.

Unlike my friend, most people are willing to admit that there is evil in the world, even if they limit the use of the word "evil" to the worst of the worst like Hitler and Stalin. You may not write about crime in a big city newspaper but we all certainly read or hear about such things through some kind of media. Why are there over one million abortions every year in the US and 50 million every year worldwide? Sin. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does cancer keep taking our loved ones from us? Sin is the cause of all sickness, suffering and death. Every part of the universe has been affected by it. Romans 8 shows the ultimate reaches of Adam's sin. *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (21-22).*

So original sin explains all of the evil in the world. Why is this important? It's important so that we separate the foundation of evil from God himself. What I find is that it is easy for Christians to become closet Buddhists. Buddhism holds to the concept of yin yang, which is a dualism. Dualism is the belief that good and evil have always coexisted. You can see this in the yin yang symbol. The two colors symbolize good and evil which are co-eternal. They have always existed together and one has never existed without the other. Not only do they exist together, but you can see there is a small amount of evil in the good and small amount of good in the evil.



This would mean that God and evil have always coexisted. When explained in this way, we would all reject this belief. I don't think anyone here would outright blame God for evil. But sometimes when we witness evil or participate in suffering we ask, "Why would God allow this to happen?" That's a fair question, isn't it? Most of the time when we ask this question, it's a question that flows out of pain. We are wanting to understand a reason or a purpose for the suffering and evil. But sometimes that deep cry reveals a deeper doubt. Why would God allow this becomes, why would God ever allow evil? If he could stop it, why doesn't

he? Without even being fully aware, we begin to blame God for the evil and suffering. He's all powerful yet he allowed it, so what does that make him?

But Romans 5 and Genesis 1-3 will not allow such a conclusion. God created everything good but man corrupted it all through one act of rebellion. Original sin explains all of the evil in the world. God is not and cannot be the author of evil. Which leads to another implication of this doctrine.

2. Adam and Eve were real, historical people.

Why would this even need to be mentioned as a separate point? Because there is a growing trend in the church to deny the historicity of Adam and Eve. Many claim that the creation story, the Fall in chapter three, Noah and the flood and the Tower of Babel were all ancient myths passed down. They contain truth and we can draw truth from them, but they are not historical realities.

The old way of explaining away a literal creation was with two theories..the day Age Theory and the Gap Theory. Both of these theories were thought up so that billions of years could be inserted into Genesis. Billions of years do not appear to fit into Genesis at all, but if you believe the earth is four billion years old, you have to cram them in there somewhere.

The Day Age Theory and the Gap Theory are largely old school. hardly anyone actively defends them anymore. The latest rage is what is called the Framework Hypothesis. Put in simplest terms, the Framework Hypothesis teaches that at the very least, Genesis chapter one is poetry. Genesis one does not describe actual historical events but rather it is a form of poetry that can be interpreted in many ways. I think you can see the elegant deception inherent in this idea. If Genesis one is poetry, than it is not literal. You can make it way what you want it to say. it's been around for decades but has steadily been gaining in popularity. Chances are, if a person does not believe in a literal six day creation, they hold to the framework/poetry theory. If your college student is in or went to a Christian college or university, there is a 95% chance they were taught this theory.

How was this theory proposed? Did they do an in depth the Hebrew in the early chapters of Genesis? Did they compare the poetic sections of the Bible with the alleged poetry in Genesis? No. Here is a quote from the leading proponent of this theory. 'To rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation "week" propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article.'¹ You see, he didn't even try to hide his agenda. One of his main goals was to explain away the literal, historical understanding of Genesis. Unfortunately, he has been wildly successful in accomplishing this goal. This man has since died but now he has an army of devotees spreading his "theory" to unsuspecting Christians.

This is frustrating since even a liberal scholar like James Barr is on record as stating the following.

" ... probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Gen. 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that

1. creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience

2. the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story."²

So everyone admits that Genesis was intended to be literal history but by attaching the label of "poetry" to it, they can deny its historical foundations. Even our denomination is wishy-washy on the matter. Even though it has been conclusively proven that Genesis is not poetry, an EFCA publication states:

"It lacks the rhythm of Hebrew poetry, but its use of such literary devices as repetition and certain symbolic numbers like 10, 7, and 3 gives it an exalted, semi-poetic style, almost like a hymn. The pattern of six-plus-one is especially significant in that it recurs repeatedly in the Book of Revelation. This view that the seven days of Genesis 1 provides a "framework" for expressing the truth of God's creative work can be traced at least to the time of Augustine."³

So they agree that it is not poetry so they call it "semi-poetic." Let me explain further why this concerns me. I love the Free Church, don't get me wrong, but in this one area, I think they are out to lunch. Let me explain further why it troubles me so, and how this topic relates to Romans 5. The EFCA takes a firm stand on the historicity of Adam and Eve.

"There are legitimate differences of opinion about how one understands the nature of the language used in the early chapters of Genesis to describe the actions of God in the world. However, our Statement affirms that Adam and Eve were historical figures in the following sense: 1) From these two all other human beings are descended (Acts 17:26). 2) These two were the first creatures created in God's image such that they were accountable to God as responsible moral agents. And 3) these two rebelled against God, affecting all their progeny."⁴

They take a firm stance on Romans five because they have to.⁵ The apostle Paul will not let them do otherwise. Paul is crystal clear: *just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* Paul understands Adam and Eve as literal, historical people from whom is traced the original sin of mankind. Good. If they did not, I would flee the denomination as quickly as possible. So here is their conclusion. Genesis 1 is poetry, even though it doesn't contain any poetry, because we can't agree with the timing of creation, even though all Hebrew scholars are in agreement. So Genesis 1 is poetry, but Genesis 2 and 3 are literal history which describes the union and fall of humankind into sin.

Do you see the schizophrenic thinking here? To be fair, this is not their official position but they fully agree that this is best viable option to the six-day creation explanation. As I have mentioned before, I sit on a local ordination board and I asked a guy a question about this once. I asked, "So you are saying that Genesis 1 is non-literal poetry but this other section, which says the exact same thing, is literal?" His simple reply was "yes." It was only a one hour licensing interview and not the 4 hour ordination interview, so I was not able to press the matter further. My frustration comes from the fact that they would never be so schizophrenic anywhere else except in Genesis. They cannot reconcile secular scientific opinion about the age of the earth with Scripture, so they nearly throw the baby out with the bathwater. But they would never do this with the resurrection, for example. What does science tell us about whether or not a person who has been dead for three days can live again? Is that scientifically possible? Is it scientifically for

the Holy Spirit and a virgin teenage girl to conceive a child? Is it scientifically possible to walk on water? To turn water into wine? To instantly calm a raging storm?

We take the Bible at face value when it comes to all of these New Testament miracles. We don't call the resurrection poetry or a semi-poetic statement about something that may or may not have happened. The virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrection are rock solid, non negotiables of our faith that we would never deny just because science gets in the way so why do we so easily jettison some parts of Scripture for the same reasons? I would like to explain away original sin if I could. I would like it not to be true, because it exposes who I am apart from Christ. But what I want to do does not matter. All that matters is what is true.

3. Original sin means that all people in all places at all times desperately need Jesus.

The fact that all people are sinners by nature and by choice drives worldwide evangelism and mission. As a church, we spend \$13,000 a year on local and world missions but if original sin is not true, then this is a waste of money.

Why do people do missions? We have had a lot of missionaries over the years come and share at Grace. Each of you probably knows at least one missionary and perhaps more than one. In all of the years you have heard missionaries share their passion, have you ever heard one that was passionate for the doctrine of original sin? Eric Hesse was with us last summer. Eris and his family, Lord willing, will move to Berlin some time in 2014. Do you recall Eric sharing about original sin? Do you remember if he told us that everyone who lives in Berlin are sinners by nature and by choice? I don't recall any such thing. Missionaries don't talk about original sin. they talk about Jesus. They tell stories of their passion for lost people and their desire to live in faith and live out their faith wherever it is that God has called them to go.

Missionaries don't talk about original sin, per se, but it drives all missions and evangelism, doesn't it? If you believe that people need better food, cleaner water and a place to get medical care, you are not on the same page as the Bible. But if you really understand original sin, then you will believe that that all people in all places at all times desperately need Jesus. You will take Jesus to them because only Jesus can meet their need for eternal life. In fact, if they aren't aware that they need Jesus, then they certainly will never want Jesus.

The last are I want to which I want to apply the doctrine of original sin in marriage. Last week I reminded you how parenting reveals the sin, not only in our children, but in us as parents. This is a painful process, but it is such a wonderful and necessary process. If the sin is not revealed for what it is, if you did not have kids who try your patience and hold a mirror up to your soul, you and I could never properly deal with the sin problem.

The exact same holds true for the marriage relationship. One of my favorite marriage books is called *When Sinners Say I Do*. First of all, the author quotes from a pastor from the 17th century who said, Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.⁶ Like I was saying with missions and evangelism, if a person never sees the bitterness of their sin, Christ cannot possibly be sweet to them

And here is where marriage enters the picture.

Looking first at our own sin as a root cause of the problems in our marriages is not easy, and it certainly doesn't "come naturally." The sin that remains in your heart and mine opposes God and his people. It obstructs our joy and our holiness. It eclipses thriving, healthy marriages which are testimonies to God's goodness and mercy. But as we begin to build our marriages on the Word of God and on the gospel of Christ's victory over the power of sin, as we face the sad, painful, undeniable reality of our own remaining sin . . . as we see it for the bitter, hateful thing it is . . . and as we recognize sin's insidious goals at the core of every relational difficulty we encounter, something wonderful happens. We flee to the gospel as our only remedy.⁷

The title of the book brings this to light. When sinners Say I Do. That is the simplest way to define a marriage-two self-centered sinners entering into a covenant relationship that, according to your wedding vows, is supposed to be all about denial of self and ultimate concern for your spouse.

This is what I said to my bride almost 27 years ago.

In believing marriage to be ordained by God, I take you Karen, to be my wife. I seek to love you with a perfect love. And I accept the responsibility to God for our lives and with God's standards only will I lead our household. My desire is to help you become a complete person.

I promise to remember no wrong, but only to dwell on the honorable, the pure, the lovely, and the excellent and when I wrong you I promise never to forget the words "I am sorry." I will strive to love you unconditionally. When you stumble I will steady you and when you fall I will lift you up.

Karen, God has given me the privilege to love you and the honor to become your husband. Therefore, in the presence of God, family and friends, I promise never to forsake this love.

I really meant that when I said it to Karen 27 years ago and I mean it more now than I did then. But on May 30, 1987, I had absolutely no clue about the utter sinfulness of my heart. We knew that marriage was not always going to be easy, but we were never told how it would reveal our self-centered tendencies. When I said those words, I was a selfish pig.

My new favorite marriage book is the one we are starting in next Sunday marriage class. *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* I want us to stop and ponder the importance of the subtitle. *What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* Please note what it does not say. It does not say that God designed marriage to make you holy *instead* of to make you happy, but more than to make you happy. So God's design for marriage includes happiness, but holiness is the primary goal.

Marriage includes great happiness, intimacy, companionship, just living out the joy of doing life together in God's will. It's all of these things but like parenting, marriage is meant to be a mirror into your soul. But I don't want us to be discouraged when our sin in our quest for holiness. Yes,

we are to hate sin, but the sin needs to come to the surface so it can be dealt with. And what does the end of this chapter say? Where sin increased? Grace abounded all the more. Do you recall from last week the literal meaning. This is super abounding grace. Next Sunday we will see from chapter six that we have actually died to sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us.

Rich Maurer
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¹ Kline, M.G., 1996. Space and time in the Genesis cosmology. *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 48(1):2–15.

² Barr, J., Letter to David C.C. Watson, 23 April 1984.

³ EFCA (2011-03-01). *Evangelical Convictions* (Kindle Locations 1065-1071). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁴ EFCA (2011-03-01). *Evangelical Convictions* (Kindle Locations 1807-1813). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁵ The EFCA adds a little more detail here: "To be sure, Genesis 1 expresses truth about God as Creator and his creation, but because of the uncertainty regarding the meaning and literary form of this text and the lack of Evangelical consensus on this issue, our Statement does not require a particular position on the mechanics of creation. However, to be within the doctrinal parameters of the EFCA, any understanding of the process of creation must affirm:

1. that God is the Creator of all things out of nothing (ex nihilo),
2. that he pronounced his creation "very good,"
3. that God created with order and purpose,
4. that God is the sovereign ruler over all creation which, by his personal and particular providence, he sustains,
5. that God created the first human beings—the historical Adam and Eve—uniquely in his image,
6. and that through their sin all humanity along with this created order is now fallen (as articulated in our Article 3)." (EFCA (2011-03-01). *Evangelical Convictions* (Kindle Locations 762-769). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.)

⁶ Thomas Watson, *Tears of Repentance*

⁷ Harvey, Dave (2010-12-01). *When Sinners Say "I Do"* (Kindle Locations 332-338). Shepherd Press. Kindle Edition.