

Section: Doctrine of Sin (Hamartiology)

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q38. What happened to the rest of creation because of sin?**

Creation is cursed and broken because of sin. It does not function in the “good” way in which God created it.

**Genesis 3:17-18** (NIV1984) ... “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

**Romans 8:20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it ...

**Luke 21:11** “There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

**Deuteronomy 11:17** “then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.”

**Job 12:15** “If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.”

**Introduction**

Welcome to midweek, I hope that our current study of hamartiology has been edifying.

One of the things that should make us pause is that virtually every page of scripture says something about sin. This is a massive reality to deal with. In Question 33 we saw that, “Sin is disobeying God; sin is any disobedience in heart or deed to God’s perfect law and commands.” At its root, sin is rebellion and doubt against God.

But, we will not ponder the essence of sin tonight, nor will we focus on its effects on humanity. Tonight, we will discuss the consequences of sin. Specially, we will discuss the consequences of sin on creation.

**Genesis 3:17-18 / The Curse on Creation**

Let’s take a look at our question and answer: Q38 “What happened to the rest of creation because of sin?” *Creation is cursed and broken because of sin. It does not function in the “good” way in which God created it.*

Turn with me to Genesis 3:17-18, “And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

**What is a curse?**

What does God mean by ‘cursed’ here? The 1828 Webster’s dictionary defines curse as “To injure; to subject to evil; to vex, harass or torment with great calamities.” God does indeed subject creation, due to Adam’s sin, to a constantly state of frustration or futility.

It’s important to note that given our framework of how we understand scripture, it’s not as if God cursed the creation apart from the counsel of his will. No, God decreed that the curse would happen and take place. He brought about the curse through secondary causes. For example, He allowed Satan to use the serpent to tempt Eve. God did not tempt Eve directly. He did allow it and ordain that it would happen, but He did so in such a way that He did not sin.

It’s also important to note that God cursed the creation for a reason. All of what God does can be placed into a singular category: God acts for His own namesake/glory. We see this in numerous places in scripture, for instance Isaiah 48:9-11 says, “For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.11 ​For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”

God does curse creation, but does so in order that his glory would be magnified.

But, how is God’s glory magnified by cursing the creation? That is a question that I aim to answer later. For now, let’s move on.

**What does it mean for the creation to be broken?**

Look at the Genesis text again, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Following the transgression of Adam, we immediately see the effects of sin. We see in this passage God place a curse upon the ground. Thorns and thistles are commonplace, there is now a significant difficulty in what Adam and Eve had become accustomed to. God says, “by the sweat of your face you shall eat the bread.” Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve had food provided for them with ease, there was no futile effort involved. God provided everything that they needed, and it was good. But after the fall, due to their sin, an element of disorder was introduced. No longer would the plants grow freely with ease and abundance, rather they would risk being choked out by weeds, thorns and thistles.

The Genesis passage is quite remarkable in that it details what we experience daily – the broken world. Often, I look to the reality of Genesis 3:18 when I’m particularly frustrated with the brokenness of creation. I will say to my Christians brothers ‘thorns and thistles’ when things don’t go as expected.

Dishwasher is spilling water into my kitchen? Thorns and thistles.

Car won’t start?? Thorns and thistles.

Monday morning at work? Thorns and thistles!

But, is it appropriate to say that everything in creation is cursed? Does the Genesis text really teach that? The scope of God’s curse seems to indicate that he is only cursing the ground.

**What is the scope of the curse?**

Our Genesis text says, “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread”

If we look at scripture, we see a few categories emerge. Satan had already fallen when Adam and Eve were living in the garden. We know this because of the serpent, who Satan used to deceive Adam and Eve, was present before God’s curse. For Satan to control such a serpent for his malicious intent implies that he had already fallen. In response to the original sin, God curses the serpent. We see God’s curse upon Eve regarding childbearing and upon Adam in his lack of leadership. And, we see God’s curse upon the ground. This will be our focus tonight.

Because of the curse, the earth would bring forth fruit only after man had worked the land through difficult labor. Plowing, planting, watering, cultivating and reaping. All sorts of animals would become pests and threats. There would no longer be harmony between men, animals, and creation. In order for man to create dwellings, craft tools and make clothing he would be forced to toil among the land for minerals, wood, stone and metal.

The earth would respond with natural processes that remind us of the curse: earthquakes, volcanoes, wildfires, erosion and landslides. Weather would destroy lands by flood or by drought. Hurricanes and tornadoes would devastate the creation. Heat from the sun, or lack thereof, would wreak havoc upon the creation.

The Apostle Paul understood this, we gain a greater understanding of God’s curse by looking to Romans 8:20. I will read verses 18-22 for context.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 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. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Paul here rightly understands that God’s curse is not just limited to the ground, rather it affects all of creation. It affects all of what God created as good, now plunged into futility and blamed on Adam’s lack of righteous leadership.

Imagine the weight of that reality, and now realize that we’re all complicit.

As a famous statement goes, “Sin will always take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”

In verse 18 Paul is juxtaposing present sufferings, of which he had many, with the coming glory that will be revealed to us when we are face to face with Jesus Christ in Heaven.

Notice that Paul is playing off of the specific curse upon Eve of painful childbearing to the broad curse of sin toward all of creation. Genesis 3:16 To the woman he said, ​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; ​​​​​​​in pain you shall bring forth children. ​​​​​​​Your desire shall be for your husband, ​​​​​​​and he shall rule over you.” ​​​

He gives context to the purpose of the curse, he equates the hopeful desire of a pregnant mother who wants nothing more than to hold her newborn infant to his own hopeful desire to behold Christ face to face. However, there is a problem. The mother must endure present sufferings, that is, the pain of childbirth, in order to behold her offspring. The same goes for Paul, he must ‘walk through the valley of the shadow of death’ in order to see Christ. He must suffer for Jesus’ namesake in order to behold him.

Secondly, notice that there is an ‘eager longing’ that the creation has. The appropriate understanding of this passage of scripture is to understand that creation is working, but it’s not working as it is intended to work. I don’t believe that the creation has a conscious longing, rather Paul is employing this language in order to help us understand the point. Creation works, but not as it was intended.

My lawn has recently taken to growing quite well in the summer heat. As long as I water it, it looks great. From a distance, it appears to accomplish what its purpose is. What exactly is the purpose of a lawn? I suppose it’s to make my property look good, but it’s also to be an area where the kids can play or we can relax. But if you were to walk on my lawn barefoot, you would soon realize that it is not fully accomplishing its purpose. It may look inviting, but recently there have been weeds and thistles growing in between the grass. The grass should be uniform and without weeds, but it’s not. When I walk on my lawn barefoot, I get a not-so-pleasant surprise.

Indeed, all of creation is a huge blessing from God, but things do not work as they are intended to work. All creation has been cursed by God and it no longer works in the good way in which God created it. Cars break down. Computers stop running. Earthquakes destroy cities. Tornadoes rip apart cities. Fruit and vegetables rot. Dogs kill cats.

Through the curse, originally commanded by God in Genesis 3, God cursed the entire earth as well as everything on it, including animals.

**God’s common grace & God’s grace in the midst of thorns & thistles.**

In my study, I found that even though God does curse the ground, he bestows on men and women the ability to harness technological advance in order to make our lives better. This is truly a testament to the mercy of God to be long-suffering so that all of the elect would come to repentance.

Genesis 5:28-29 gives us an interesting look into the antediluvian (pre-flood) world. Genesis 5 is a genealogy following Adam’s descendants down through to Noah and his family. There is an interesting commentary in these verses. The text says: 28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”

In what way would Noah be a comfort? It seems that by God’s mercy, he allowed Noah to give technological advance to allow for a semblance of ease on the duty of farming.

John Gil says in this paraphrased quote of this passage, “The earth was cursed for the sin of man immediately after the fall… bringing forth thorns and thistles in great abundance…*These thorns and thistles created much trouble in farming. It was very difficult to root and pluck up plants without digging, planting, and sowing. It was with great difficulty that men worked the land.*

Noah eased them in good measure of their toil and trouble, by inventing instruments of ploughing…which they did not have before. Instead, they broke up the ground with their hands, using spades, or such like things, which was very laborious. But now, they broke up the ground using the plough with their animals to pull it. Their lives were made much easier and more comfortable.

Hence Noah is said to be a…"man of the earth", who brought agriculture to greater perfection, having found out an easier and quicker manner of tilling the earth. He was the first that is said to have planted a vineyard. If he was the inventor of wine, then this was another way in which he was an instrument of giving refreshment and comfort to men, being that wine cheers the hearts of men”

It's worth noting that the eating of flesh was prohibited in the antediluvian world, it was not until after the flood that God permitted the eating of flesh. The antediluvians would have greatly appreciated Noah’s advancements in this regard.

Regardless of whether or not Noah invented wine or the plough, we do know that based on this text, by God’s grace, Noah did bring comfort to the world through some sort of technological advance.

So even when we’re faced with blight that wipes our crops, we are given the tools to deal with these problems. God’s grace is so abundant, it’s a wonder that he continues to give humanity these tools. He is so good. But God’s goodness through Christ pales in comparison to his common grace upon humanity. Even though sin grew exponentially after the fall, so much so that God wiped out nearly all humanity through the flood, God still blessed Noah to be a blessing to humanity. Without Noah, there would be no promised seed. Noah is indeed a type of Christ, a fallen man no doubt, but Noah is to point us to the great redeemer who would give us safe harbor from the tidal waves of God’s wrath. You see, often when we read the text, we are so quick to blaze past our topic that we rarely see the manifold blessings of God in scripture.

And when we ponder the broken creation, we have a great reminder in the thorns and thistles. Every time I step on a thorn and wince at the pain, I can be reminded of the story of man’s rebellion and God’s lavish grace. I see that things are not right…this is not how our world was supposed to be. There is a small testimony in the thorns and thistles, it’s pointing us toward something.

Earlier in the lesson I asked you to be thinking about how God’s curse on creation ought to be a positive reality for God’s people. How is that so? One of the primary aspects that I want to draw out tonight has to do with Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to Hebrews 2:14-18

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

What a remarkable verse! Christ had to be made like his brothers (you and I) in every respect, so that He would become a merciful and faithful high priest. Jesus, at the incarnation, took on flesh. But, He didn’t just *take on* flesh, He (the sovereign Lord of the universe) subjected Himself to the humiliation of taking on flesh and living in a world that is deeply cursed. Jesus experienced what you and I experience when we live in this fallen land. He likely could have stepped on a thorn or thistle when walking through the garden of gethsemane. He would have winced at the pain. He felt the turmoil of losing His good friend, Lazarus. He experienced the effects of the broken creation first hand. But why is that inherently good news for us?

Think about this for a moment: What is the function of a priest? A priest is to be an intercessor between men and God. Jesus, who is our high priest, who is the King of Kings, felt the hunger pangs in his stomach after 30 days in the wilderness, He grew in knowledge and maturity, was mocked and chastised. He, in his humanity, is like us in every respect, yet without sin. There is a relational power in knowing that God, who is immaterial and spirit, sent His son to take on the human form through the incarnation. We relate to Christ because He is like us. After His resurrection, people will be able to touch His scars, and when He returns in the flesh, we can behold Him with our very eyes. God is not some distant deity. No, He is ever present in spirit. And one day, also in flesh. We will *be* with Him.

Beloved, see this truth tonight! He was brought low for His glory and for us. When you step on a thorn, let the pain turn your affections Godward toward the gospel. Let our pain minister to us and testify of him who merited our salvation through His propitiatory suffering.

2 Cor 4:8-12 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

This is the reality of life in the church. We are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. But we do not succumb to being crushed, despairing, being forsaken or destroyed. Why? Because of our Victor, because of Christ.

Paul says that we are carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. We carry His death, by His wounds we are healed, by His death we are given life. Without his death, there is no life in Christ. We who are alive in Christ are *given* *over to death* for Jesus’ sake. Think about that for a minute. We are given over to death for Christ’s sake.

Oh I pray that you see this tonight. The greatest reality in all of the cosmos is to be given over to death for Jesus’ sake because the opposite of this reality is that you will be given over to death for the sake of God’s wrath. Jesus Christ is either securing your life through His death, or you are securing your damnation in sin and will suffer God’s wrath for eternity.

**To the non-believing in the room:**

Romans 1:28 says, And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased (reprobate) mind to do what ought not to be done.

The ‘they’ mentioned here is all people everywhere. There are some who remain in this state and there are some who are saved by God’s unconditional grace.

I pray tonight that as you think through the suffering that you’ve endured, or the hardship you’ve encountered that you would step back for a moment and see clearly. There is no justification by which anyone (apart from the Christian worldview) can stand up here and give you a rational basis for why we (humanity) are here.

What is your alternative worldview if not the Christian worldview? Live and let live? Another religion? Atheism?

To the live and let live crowd, you are embracing a type of moral suicide. No person can whole heartedly adhere to this worldview because at some point you will have to make a declaration of what it is you believe, and you will have to defend it. How is this so? If someone points a gun at your child’s head, will you say that it’s merely a live and let live universe? No, of course not. You would defend your child, you would make a moral decision to save him or her. In that moment you are declaring that your morality is true, and you are acting upon it. That desire to protect your family is innate in us and it is wired in us from God. You know He’s made you unique and you know that we are not simply blank slates who are fed morals by social conditioning.

What about another religion? Is there any religious system in existence that provides you with the basis for reality? No, there is not. No other religion asserts that there is a monotheistic God who is triune in nature, unchanging, sovereign, immaterial, omniscience, and omnipotent. His thoughts are not made of matter, and they apply everywhere, just like the laws of mathematics or logic. The world (and reality for that matter) reflects Him. In order for the laws of logic to work, it presupposes such a God. For instance, the law of contradiction states that I cannot be here and somewhere else at the same time. This is not a law that we can just turn off, we cannot touch it, we cannot taste it, we cannot hear it… but it is an unchanging law of the universe because our God is unchanging and able to uphold such immutable laws.

Another religion, live and let live-ism, atheism, fill in the blank, none of these worldviews are rational or make sense.

However, and this is crucially important, rational worldviews do not create Christians. These people, whether they believe in some god or not, will never bend the knee to Christ as King unless first compelled by Yahweh.

You must see that the main issue at the heart of unsaved men is that you have chosen to believe in anything and everything *apart* from God.

I cannot presume to stand up here and convince you to believe. But I can stand up here and pray and hope that through these words you would see that non-believers everywhere are all just choosing to believe what they see is best in their own mind. They have been ‘given over to a debased mind’. So, friends, if this is you, then I pray that you would see your offense against the omniscient, immaterial, immutable, and sovereign God. In love He created humanity and this world, to fellowship with us, as an outpouring of His inter-trinitarian love. And we’ve all spit in His face, attempted to murder him and curse Him.

In spite of all of these factors, He sent His son into humanity to dawn flesh and be a sacrifice so that He could save His people.

I pray tonight that that God would enlighten your heart, that He would breathe life into you and that you would not be given over in a reprobate mind. My friends, if this is you, if you have not confessed Jesus as Lord and trusted your entire life to Him, then I implore you to turn from your sin, see it for what it is and put your full trust in Christ.

**Conclusion**

Church, we are no longer given over to reprobation, rather we are now given over to be slaved of Christ, to live out our days in this cursed land as elect exiles. To see and behold His glory party now and fully then.

But Jesus warns us in Matthew 10 34-38: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

It may be a sad reminder for us in the church to speak of our multitude of sufferings. Many of you have struggled, continue to struggle, are hated for your faith, are mocked for your faith, etc. Brothers and sisters, we must embrace the reality that you will experience these things. Indeed, the fact that you are experiencing these things is actually a sign that Jesus has claimed you as one of His. That is the paradoxical teaching of scripture.

We should expect division, difficulty and strife. We should understand that this land is broken, that it doesn’t work as it should. But, you must see that in the midst of thorns and thistles – God is still at work.

He is at work in giving mankind common grace through rain, warmth from the sun, winds to carry seed, technological advance, etc. But he is also at work when our lives are falling apart, when things don’t seem right, when we cannot pray, when we’re failing miserably, and when our friends turn against us. Yes, this time on earth is difficult, but He is better. Yes, your trial is hard, but what Christ endured was harder. Yes, Christians in this land may be in for persecuted times soon, but Christ was persecuted unto death.

I want to end tonight by reading Revelation 6:9-11, When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

There exists a number of martyrs who will be killed before Christ’s return. Are you counted among them? Are you strengthened by His word to endure the onslaught of Satan’s armies? Or will you cower when that time comes? Truly, this is a hard question. We will all face trials as Christians. God will ask us through the convicting indwelt Holy Spirit if we truly live for Him or for something else. Live for Christ, no matter what.

Living in a land that is cursed is hard, no doubt.

Gal 3:13a Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

But we are not asked to redeem a remnant of humanity by our works, we could not do that.

He did that for us.

Praise God.

Let’s pray.