

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 18

GOD'S SIDE IN THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God";
for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone...
Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of lights,
with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
James 1.13, 17*

What is the relationship between God and sin? This question must be answered with the double affirmation: sin is not from God, and sin is under him.

The scripture cited above points to the first truth of the doctrine of sin. God cannot be the source of sin. 1John 1.5 states this in terms of God's nature: "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." James points out that with the Father of lights there is no variation or shifting shadow. In him there is only light without variation and no created being can cast a shadow on him and so cause him to be darkened. Darkness can neither come out of God nor enter him. He does not tempt to sin nor can he be tempted to sin. For the origin of sin, we have to look outside of God.

When we look outside of God, all that we can see is his creation. It is an important truth of the biblical doctrine of creation that the creation is not a part of God and is not divine in its nature. But, equally important is the truth that all that exists outside of God was created by him so that nothing exists independently of him. Is this true of actions as well? Sin is not a thing that was created. It is an action of the creature. Can the action that arises in the creature and opposes God occur in isolation from God or does it take place in dependence on God?

If we look at our experience, we only see sin happening in a state of separation from God. We were born outside of the Garden of Eden in a state of alienation from God. Our sin arises from a state removed from God. But, this was not the case with the original sin which was committed within creation as it came from the hand of God. To see the connection between sin and God, we have to take a close look at the sin committed in the Garden.

The relationship between God's work as creator and the human act of sin is woven into the very fabric of the opening chapters of the Bible. The account of creation is the story of God. It tells of God's work in setting up our world. The story of the first sin is set within this story of God, and all aspects of this sin run along lines set by God in creation. We will examine this to see how sin is tied into creation and how it is related to the creator.

A. THE CONTEXT SET BY GOD

God was not personally present at the scene of temptation and sin. The whole process was initiated by the tempter who moved Eve to act on her own in disregard of the divine command. But, here we have to be careful not to focus too narrowly on the act of sinning. We have to see the human action in the larger story in which it took place.

1. The cosmic context (Gen 1.1-2.3)

The first creation account gives us a cosmic view of creation. By this we mean that it presents the creation of the whole universe. God is seen above the world, creating by decree. All moves toward the creation of mankind, the crowning creation. Mankind is placed above all other creatures by being created in God's image to represent God within creation, and he is given the mandate to rule over the earth. After the completion of the creation of the universe, God rests. But, this does not close the story. The blessing that mankind be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and the decree that they reign opens up the way for the continuation of the story. God's work is finished, and mankind's role begins.

Through the decree that mankind reign, creation opens up history. History is the course that mankind takes to realize its rule over the earth.

2. The historical setting (Gen 2.4ff.)

The theme of history pointed to in Genesis 1, is taken up in the second creation narrative. The first creation account tells us how the stage was set up for historical action. The second one tells us how the action on the stage began.

This account is introduced with the statement, literally translated in the *KJV*, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth" (Gen 2.4). The statement, "These are the generations of..." is found ten times in Genesis, and after the first occurrence in Gen 2.4 it always introduces the record of the generations that came out of a family head followed by the history of the offspring. We must understand Gen 2.4ff. in light of this. Here we do not have the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth (which we have in Gen 1.1-2.3) but the record of what issued forth from the cosmos. In this account, only those things that God formed or caused to grow out of the ground are in view, and the narrative continues on with the history that follows. In other words, Gen 2.4 introduces the history that moved out from creation. This history begins in creation and moves beyond the work of the creator to the action of the creature.

Genesis does not give us two creation accounts as two versions of the same story. Genesis 2.4 points out the relationship between the two narratives. The mention of "the heavens and the earth" refers back to the first account that is given in terms of the heavens and the earth (which is the Hebrew idiom for the universe). The connection made is important. We must read the second account in light of the first creation account. The clause, "these are the generations," points forward to the new theme being taken up: the history that issued out of the creation. In this beginning of history, all history was set up.

God's relation to the world is different in the two accounts. In Genesis 1 God is above all creating by decree, though in the Spirit his presence is operative within creation (Gen 1.2). In Genesis 2 God is seen in a personal relationship with man. In this relationship, God is within the world and works within time. God makes history in the process of establishing his relationship with mankind.

3. God's agenda for history

The first creation account is goal oriented. The goal of the work of creation is mankind, and the goal set for mankind is to reign. This remains the goal or end of history throughout the Bible. The second creation account is process oriented. Here we see God not working toward but through the creation of man. Through the creation of man, God enters a personal relationship within the world and in this relationship begins the process of development—he plants a Garden (which is a civilizing work), assigns work to man and gives the first law, engages man in naming the animals and finally forms the first unit of human society, i.e., marriage. God is setting up man in his relationships, and within this web of relationships man must act as an historical agent and make history. Through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God gives man the one step that he must take that will move things forward. In this step, history moves out of the womb of creation, i.e., God's activity. Man must step forth with a decisive role in shaping history.

The reader of the sacred text has the first account in mind as he reads the second. He has the goal decreed before him. Genesis 2 focuses attention on the step that man must take in his course toward that goal. God's relationship with man is personal and involves the decision and action of both parties. God had set man in a relationship with himself by the way he created man. Now man has to do his part in affirming that relationship.

The point that Genesis 2 presses in light of Genesis 1 is important for the whole Bible. Mankind must move toward the goal of the kingdom by being established in a right relationship with God. Jesus captured this point in the prayer he taught his disciples. The first petition is: Hallowed be your name. This means that our first concern must be that the Father, in the way he is made known to us and called upon by us, be regarded and related to as holy, i.e., in the way he is set apart from mankind and the world. We will see that this is the concern of the first law given in Genesis 2. The second petition is: "Your kingdom come." This takes up the goal of history set in Genesis 1. Jesus confirmed this order in his own work. By dying for our sins, he made atonement, and this is about purification and establishing the holiness of God in our relationship with him. The result was his resurrection and enthronement at the Father's right side. This is about kingdom.

God set the agenda for mankind. He set the goal and the means of attaining it according to his purpose. This agenda opened up the space for mankind to sin, and the sin took place within this agenda.

B. THE CREATED CONDITIONS OF SIN

Not only did sin take place within the context provided by God, it worked through the conditions created by God. Every aspect of the first sin worked through the order and nature of God's creation.

1. The created relationships

In Genesis 2, man was created in four relationships: with God, with the ground, with animals and with the woman. In Genesis 3 we see sin working through these relationships and twisting each.

a. The relationship with God

The tempter pointed to the human relationship with God as the key issue. He pointed out that eating of the forbidden fruit would make human beings like God and that God wanted to withhold this god-status from them (Gen 3.5). It was also the central issue for God. He passed the death sentence on Adam and Eve because they became like God (3.22f.).

The concern with being like God resonates with the idea that God created man in his image and according to his likeness (Gen 1.26) and with the fact that God breathed the spirit of life directly into man (Gen 2.7). Sin worked in this divine-human relationship and inverted it. God made man in his image, but through sin man makes himself like God. The impartation of spirit was God's act, and by this God raised man to a kinship with him. In the act of sin, the human being reached up to take what God withheld from mankind.

b. The relationship with the ground

Man was created out of the dust, and this gave him a relationship with the ground. This relationship gave to man his work. As master of the ground he was to serve and keep the Garden that consisted of trees that grew out of the ground (Gen 2.9 and 15). From these trees he was to freely eat and sustain his strength (v 16).

It is interesting that the forbidden item was the fruit of a tree that grew out of the ground (v 9). The thing that God withheld from man and wanted him not to take for himself did not come from the ground. The knowledge of good and evil belonged to God and was in God. The ground was below Adam, and that

which grew from the ground was for his free use, as he chose to use it. This was the sphere of his mastery or ownership of the Garden. In the language of Gen 1.26-28, it was the sphere of his reign. The fact that God identified that which he denied man with what grew out of the ground makes an important point. Man was not to use his power over that which is below him to make himself like God and put himself into the divine position of determining what is good and evil.

Sin inverted man's relationship with God and the ground. The movement of life was from above to below. But, in sin man took what came from the ground to raise himself up to becoming like God.

c. The relationship with animals

The creator placed all animals under man's rule (Gen 1.26-28). This relationship was established in Adam's experience when God brought the animals to him that he might name them (Gen 2.19). By naming them, Adam was established as owning the animals. In view of this, it is significant that Eve and after her, Adam, submitted to an animal.

From later scripture we learn that Satan was the tempter through the serpent. It is significant that he did not appear in the Garden as a spirit being but as an animal. The fact that the tempter spoke as an animal put Eve in the position of ruling the serpent. It also had the result that in sin the ruler was ruled by the subject.

d. The relationship between man and woman

God created Adam first and then Eve out of him. God gave his word in this order. He gave the command to Adam who passed it on to Eve. All that the woman had, she received through the man. Sin worked through this created relationship and inverted the order. The tempter spoke to the woman who gave to the man.

Sin did not bring about an order of relationships. It only worked through the relationships God created, took them over and inverted them.

2. The creature's nature

The relationships in which God created man provided the transmissions lines along which sin moved. But, each party involved had to sin on its own. Here we see sin working through the creature's nature.

a. The woman

There are two levels to Eve's fall into sin. The tempter did his work on Eve's mind. Then he had to step back and let her act. At both level's, sin worked through her created nature.

i. The higher nature

God created man within an intimate relationship with himself by breathing the breath (spirit) of life directly into his body of dust (Gen 2.7) and so giving him a kinship with God. As a result, Adam and Eve lived in a personal relationship with God and had the capacity to understand what set God apart from them. For God this was not simply a matter of intellectual understanding but a relational issue, and man had to decide to take his place in the relationship. God pressed this issue on man by putting before him the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and forbidding him to eat of it.

Without being made in the image of God and having spirit directly from God, mankind would not have the capacity to sin. Satan worked on the God given capacity. He activated the faculty of understanding the name of the tree and opened up to the human mind the prospect of equality with God. In the language of James 1.17, this created kinship with God and capacity to understand God in terms of how he differs from

us, which is an awareness of our created limitations, is a good and perfect gift from above. This gift gives us our spiritual capacity. Sin worked through this highest of gifts.

ii. Working from the physical through the visual

After the serpent had done his work in engaging the woman with a reinterpretation of God's word, he had to step back and let her act. The sin had to be hers. He could not sin for her. In Gen 3.6 we see the woman act from within herself.

What moved the woman first was that she saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes. We have to understand this in light of Gen 2.9 which says that every tree God caused to grow in the Garden was pleasing to the sight and good for food. God planted this Garden to meet man's needs. The appeal of the trees answers to human nature as created by God. Human nature was designed to enjoy beauty and the good. God wanted human beings to partake of creation out of a sense of pleasure and goodness. This nature was activated in the woman in Gen 3.6.

Notice how Gen 3.6 begins: "When the woman saw that the tree was..." The suggestion is that she had not noticed before that this tree had the same appeal that all the other trees had. Her response to the serpent points to the reason (vv 2-3). She regarded this tree with dread and so never looked at it the way she looked at the other trees. She had seen it through the divine prohibition and the threat of death and so never saw it as good for food or as a delight to the eyes. But, now that the God's word was removed from her mind, she looked at the tree and saw that it had the same appeal as the other trees. Her God-given nature with its natural attraction to what is good and beautiful was engaged.

Sin worked through Eve's full human nature and realigned it. God engaged Adam and Eve with the tree of knowledge at the level of man's relationship with God, and in our study of the doctrine of man we saw that the human spirit deals with his dimension of our being. As long as Eve was governed at this level, the tree was not seen from the point of view of the desires of the body. Satan targeted her grasp of the word and removed its hold over her decision making. The next thing we see is that Eve makes her decisions from the lowest level: the human relationship with the ground and the need for food that grows from the ground to meet the needs of the body that came from the ground. From the desire for food, she moves to the desire of the eyes. We should notice the inverted order of the appeal. In Gen 2.9, i.e., in the created order, the trees are said first of all to be pleasing to the sight and then to be good for food. When Eve looked at the tree from the point of view of a desire for the forbidden, the appetite for food came first. The desire of the body takes the lead. From here she rose to the desire of the eyes and ascended to contemplate the development of her spirit life or mind.

b. Adam

The account of Adam's fall is given in a matter of fact manner: "...and she gave also to her husband and he ate" (Gen 3.6). On Adam's part there seemed to have been no reasoning or process of discovery as was the case with his wife. Eve's confession was that the serpent deceived her, and this involves a process (Gen 3.13). Adam simply said that the woman God gave him gave the fruit to him and he ate (v 12). His excuse may point to what moved him. Through the exercise of naming the animals, Adam discovered that he was alone. In the woman he found the God-given companion and helper he needed. He received her as one with his own being. In his case, sin worked through his oneness with Eve, and this was a God-given oneness. But, again we must point out that the direction of that union was reversed. God's order for the union was from the man to the woman whereas sin worked the other way around.

c. The serpent

The role of the serpent shows up a feature of human nature. Human nature could not originate sin. This agrees with the point pressed by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge was not native to flesh. Angels are spirits and they would at least have a direct awareness of the knowledge that belongs to

divine nature. Mankind is flesh and has no direct perception of the divine nature. We see this lack of natural perception in Eve. In her dialogue with the serpent, she shows that she had not idea of what the name of the forbidden tree referred to or meant. She was completely naïve. Since she received her information from Adam, we can safely conclude that he too was naïve.

Eve had no idea as to the meaning of the name of the tree and of her own she never inquired into it. What she grasped was the command not to eat. This shows that human nature was not created clever. It was created with the capacity to learn but not with the ability to figure out divine things for itself. Further, we see from the divine command that human beings have to learn through acting in relation to God. The naivety of Adam and Eve provided a basis for the tempter to work. Here again we see how sin worked through the condition set up by the creator.

The narrative of the fall begins by placing the serpent within God's creation (Gen 3.1). The point is important for the doctrine of sin. Sin had its origin in a creature that God made. The introduction of the tempter also points to the distinctive characteristic of the serpent. The serpent was more crafty than any other animal which the LORD God made. In this the serpent reflected Satan. He was created by God and endowed with extraordinary intelligence.

While the act of sin does not have its origin in God, sin works wholly within the conditions set by and controlled by God.

C. DEFINING SIN AND MAKING IT POSSIBLE

So far we have seen how sin functions within God's created design for human life. This is very important for the biblical understanding of sin. Creation belongs to God and is ever in his hands. Since sin works within creation, sin is totally within the sphere of God's rule. All the workings of sin are in God's hands. But, creation itself could not give the occasion of sin or even define what sin is. In the first creation account, each part is good and the whole is very good. This is confirmed in the second creation narrative by the fact that the created nature of Adam was good and innocent to such a degree that it could not even come up with the concept of sin. Adam and Eve had to be presented with the idea of sin through the tree of knowledge, and even then the tempter had to open up the understanding of the issue and introduce the suggestion to sin. Here we have to be careful in how we understand the situation. The serpent did not attack the tree but God's word. The occasion for sin was not so much the tree but the law God gave. The tree only served as a reference point for the law. We need to explore this.

1. The middle of the Garden

In the middle of the Garden, God caused two trees to grow that set before Adam and Eve the two critical issues of the divine-human relationship. The creation account says that the tree of life was in the midst of the Garden and then mentions the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2.9). Here, the tree of life is seen at the centre of the Garden, and the impression is made that the other tree stood alongside of it. This is confirmed by Eve's words in Gen 3.2. She referred to the forbidden tree as the one in the middle of the Garden. This involves an interesting shift in perspective. God placed the tree of life at the centre of the Garden. From God's point of view, the divine-human relationship was about life. Eve, governed by the dread of death, saw the other tree at the centre. However, the two trees stood together to present the issues involved in the human relationship with God, and this is the central concern of scripture.

2. The tree of life

Eating of this tree did not give mankind life. Man was given life in the act of creation. The life-spirit came directly from God. The tree only provided for the maintenance of human life in the flesh so that man would not die.

The tree of life set before man a fact about his nature. Man is flesh, and flesh is weak and mortal. Adam was not created immortal. Even before sin entered, his life had to be sustained by the provision made by the creator. The human need for life to be continuously maintained points to one difference between God and mankind. God is immortal whereas flesh is not.

The fact that man was created with a nature that could die points to the fact that his nature can sin. This connection between death and sin is made later in scripture. Sin is the cause of death. The tree of life points to the possibility of death, and the other tree presents the possibility of sin as the cause of death.

3. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil

In the first law, given in Gen 2.17, God presents a sequence: eating of the tree will be followed by death. This sequence does not specify what the cause of death is. Is it in the fruit of the tree? This seems to have been Eve's impression, as her dialogue with the serpent suggests. The serpent pointed out that this was not the case. The name of the tree did not suggest that death but rather the knowledge of good and evil would come from eating the fruit (3.4-5), and God verified this (3.22). The forbidden fruit did not kill Adam and Eve. The death sentence was passed by God when he barred the way to the tree of life (3.22-24).

If the fruit did not kill, what did the first law point to as the cause of death? Not the fruit but the act of eating caused the death, and this act was deadly because it was an act of disobedience. This is confirmed by the way God passed the death sentence over Adam. The indictment was that he broke God's commandment (v 17), and the ultimate consequence for this was death (v 19). The tree was only a reference point for the divine command.

The divine law presented man with the decision between obedience and knowledge. Knowledge in the OT is not passive but active. It is not a matter of having information. In the OT to know is to be active in relation to what is known. The knowledge of good and evil is not about knowing what is right or wrong. Rather, it is to be active in determining what is good and evil. The concept appears again in the OT as the competence of deciding between right and wrong (Deut 1.39; 1Kgs 3.9; Ish 7.15-16). Eve understood this in 3.6 when she saw that the tree was desirable to make one wise or intelligent. The wisdom in question here is the capacity to know, to evaluate and to decide what is good and bad.

In gaining this knowledge of good and evil, Eve and Adam took upon themselves the role of deciding what is right and wrong on the basis of their nature and perception. By taking this for themselves, they became like God (3.22); they took his position and function, and in doing this they abandoned the human position of obedience in relation to God.

The first law defined sin and made sin possible. There was nothing inherently evil or defective in creation. Not even the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had the power to kill. It had no hidden evil in it. If God had not given the law, the fruit of that one tree would not have been forbidden. Sin would have been impossible for mankind. The law not only makes sin possible but puts sin under God. Sin had to be committed in terms of God's definition of the relationship between him and mankind. Yes, Satan caused the human race to fall, but the race fell in God's direction and the fall pointed to the divine-human relationship as defined by God.

The two trees engaged man in an active and ongoing relationship with God. The tree of life set before him the fact that he cannot take his life for granted as something inherent in him. He needed a continuous access to the tree of life provided by God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil presented to man the key issue in his personal relationship with God. The name of the tree set before him the awareness of what God has that sets God apart from him. The command set before him his active role in this. He was to deny himself God's place. He was to let God be God.

D. GOD OVER ALL

The first truth of the Bible is stated in the opening line of the sacred book: “In the beginning God...” (Gen 1.1). No story of any happening can be fully and truly told that does not begin with this phrase. We can easily appreciate this for all that is good, but it is true of the story of sin as well.

In the last book of the Bible, God is seen on the throne of heaven being worshipped as “He who was and who is and who is to come” (Rev 4.8). This is true of God at any point in time. Wherever we might look in time, before that moment God was, and he was there not just existing apart by himself. He was there prior to the moment and determining it. In whatever the creature does, God’s action is ever prior giving the present moment for the creature to act directly under him, whether he acts for or against God. We can see the same reality from the point of view of our present existence and movement. The apostle Paul said that in God we live and move and exist (Ac 17.28). He is speaking to Gentiles who were lost in idolatry. Even when we sin and our hearts are far from God, we sin and stray in the palm of God’s hand. Our life and every faculty we use to oppose God are given and sustained by God. The very ground we tread to run from him is upheld by him. God’s hold is even more profound. When we fall, we have to fall in the direction he set for our nature. In fact, we have to fall in the direction of his destiny for mankind. None can escape his working and his purpose. The present moment, no matter how bright or dark, always has this future—God is to come. God will yet reveal himself more fully and all that happens will one way or another function within his purpose and move toward his goal of coming into his creation until the union between God and creation is complete.

The human mind rises in challenge against God. In the language of Romans 9, it asks, “It there not injustice with God?” (v 14), and, “Why does he still find fault? For who resists his will?” (v 19). This challenge must be referred to the very issue raised through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God alone can determine right and wrong or good and evil. He is self-determining. Man is not in a position to determine good and evil on the basis of his nature or position. Yet, as a result of the original sin, the human mind is burdened with the compulsion to evaluate God’s ways.

God ever remains true to himself. He will ever act as the only one who can determine right and wrong. He will never appear in a court set up to try him. He will not accept the position claimed by man to be is equal or even his superior in understanding and so to sit in judgment over him. God simply proceeds with his self-determining ways to reveal his attributes and show his glory. In the course of this revealing action, he sets aside human wisdom and establishes his own. His ways will more than justify him. They show the riches of his glory. To study God’s side in the doctrine of sin, we have to do what Eve and Adam did not do. We have to defer to God and let him show by his ways what is right and wrong. So, we will only trace his ways to know him.

1. The God of creation and history

Sin involves the presumption of autonomy and independence from God. This independence consists only in the mind of the sinner. Under the light of revelation, the reality looks very different. Sin can only be committed by a creature of God within God’s creation. The sin must work along the lines set by God and work through the design of human nature given in creation. Sin must operate under God’s definition of the act, and can only function as God makes it possible. Finally, sin can only work within the overall direction that God set for the human race.

Sin cannot get out from under God. This fact of the biblical doctrine removes any idea of dualism. By dualism we mean the philosophical notion that evil exists independently of God so that there is a reality in the universe that is outside of the sphere of God’s creation and rule. Dualism conceives of evil as having an existence, that it is a kind of being. This is a misconception. Sin is not a being that could be created. It is an action. Actually, it is a quality of action in relation to God. All the actors are creatures of God. While the creature can turn his will against God, he acts under God. God is over all, and even evil must be under him for it can only work through his creation.

The fact that sin can only work through what God has created gives God the right to judge and to take over and determine all outcomes of sin. We see God exercising this right in Genesis 3. After Adam and Eve had committed their sin, God appears on the scene and takes over. He directs the future course, and in a later study we will see that he does this according to his purposes and design in creation.

God integrated the whole creation in mankind. All aspects of creation are united in God's design for mankind. We see this integration in the workings of sin. Sin worked through all of mankind's relationships, and this meant that sin took in the whole universe. Sin has cosmic proportions. The full scope of this is seen in the work of redemption in Christ. God created the whole universe through Christ (Col 1.16-17), and it is his purpose to reconcile all things in heaven on earth to him through Christ (v 20).

The one God established a unity of purpose and design in creation that centers on his relationship with mankind. This unity in design drew the whole creation into the fall of mankind. God never reverses his ways, and he pursues his one purpose for creation to its completion. The God of creation is the LORD God of history, and sin will not in the least way compromise his purpose, design or ways.

2. The God of personal relationship

In creating man, God built into the human being a kinship with God. But, he did not leave his relationship with us as a mere fact of our being. By presenting man with the issue of sin, God pressed for an active and personal relationship that was to be upheld on the human side. This reveals God as the God of relationship and shows that he set up creation to be the platform on which the personal relationship must be worked out.

The two trees press the question as to the precise nature of the relationship between God and man. The tree of life represented the fact that flesh is not divine in that it is not immortal. The tree of knowledge pressed the fact that the human mind is not to assume a divine role. Satan turned this around. He used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to make mankind reach for the divine role.

When the implications of the idea that mankind is like God are followed through, human nature is thought of as being one with the divine nature. This development of thought actually took place in paganism in which the creature was deified. Philosophical speculation took this all the way to monism and pantheism. In this philosophical view, all reality is one and everything is seen as being in the divine being.

The fact that man was created with the ability to sin and that God cut sinful man off from life precludes any idea that God and creation are one in being or nature. The unity between God and man is not a unity of being but a personal union within a relationship. In this relationship, God and man have different positions and roles, and man is to unite with God not in being the same as God or acting as God but in obedience to him. When man stands back from God's sphere and lets God be God in his life, then he can enjoy his life from God and rule and represent God in creation.

The focus set on the personal relationship between God and mankind is carried throughout the scriptures. God establishes his relationship with his people by making covenants, and he fulfills the covenants through Jesus Christ. In Christ God is revealed as existing in personal relationship from eternity. The relational nature of God is rooted in his eternal being.

c. God as source of law

Through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God revealed himself as the source of law, and this is a role that he holds throughout the scriptures.

The tree of knowledge presses the point that the definition of good and evil rests with God alone. There is no natural law of good and evil inherent in creation. Good and evil are not defined by some law of cause and effect in which certain actions by their very nature bring about ill effects and so are evil while others have good effects and so are good. The doctrine of karma presents this kind of a view of good and evil, but

this doctrine comes from Hinduism and is as foreign to the biblical idea of good and evil as the Hindu ideas of the divine are contrary to the biblical revelation of God. We should add that sin has its consequences, and Genesis 3 makes that clear. But, the consequences are not governed by some law of cause and effect built into the universe. The consequences are imposed by the creator who acts as judge. He imposes consequences that match the sin and touch the very relationships through which sin works, but this is not the effect of sin itself but the consequences imposed by God in the way he governs the universe.

The tree of knowledge also makes clear that creation provides no basis for a humanistic definition of good and evil. In fact, this tree explicitly rules out any humanistic approach to law. Human nature is not the measure of right and wrong. Good and evil is solely determined by God, and sin is only possible through the divine law.

For those who accept the revealed will of God in the scriptures, the point that good and evil is determined by God is an accepted fact. But, the matter may not seem so clear cut in the case of the Gentiles who do not have the revealed word of God. Yet even here the reference point for good and evil is the knowledge of God that has been given. Paul works this out in Rom 1.18-2.16. For people, right and wrong is always defined by the light given by God. All will be judged by how their life is aligned to God according to the light given to them (Rom 2.6-16).

The first law pinpoints the precise function and concern of all God-given law. This law was not given to give mankind life. Life was given by the creator, and man had no role in taking it for himself. The law had only a negative role. The law did not bring life or even maintain life. It gave the definition of sin and introduced the sentence of death. This is the function of the law that the apostle Paul presses in his exposition of the gospel. Eternal life is given by God freely through Jesus Christ.

The first law also pinpoints the core issue in law. The Law of God given through Moses was given in a sinful world. This law regulates behaviour and spells out the many wrong ways people act. The first law does not work on this level. It is different from moral law. Moral law states what behaviours are always wrong. In contrast, the first law deals with an act that in all cases was good and necessary—eating—except in the one case, and it was only wrong in this case because it was forbidden. The focus was not on the type of action in this world but on the alignment to God through the act. This is the issue behind all biblical law. The Law of Moses was not just a legal code regulating behaviour to enable society to function well. It did this, but that is not what it principally was. The Law was a covenant that bound Israel to God, and the concern for this relationship rings throughout the OT. The apostle Paul took up this feature of the Law in his exposition of the gospel. The Law presses the need in mankind's relationship with God that God met through Christ.

The first part of the doctrine of sin is the doctrine of God. This should not surprise us. The first truth about any truth is the truth of God. Sin by its very nature turns attention away from God to the sinning self. Sin will define all, including itself, from itself. But, sin must be seen in God's light. In the end, sin will be judged by God for he alone defines sin and all sin is at bottom against him. The gospel has this fact built into it. It calls people to repentance toward God (Ac 20.21). This goes against the tendency of the sinner who wants to adjust his conscience, his life and even the ideas of God to himself. But, the light of God turns our attention away from the direction of sin to see the ways of God, and this shows the path out of the confusion and bondage of sin to God's salvation.