

SIN IN LUKE-ACTS

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Introduction

Very few studies have been done on Luke's doctrine of sin. This stems in part from a lack of interest in hamartiology in general in recent decades, in part from a tendency to focus on Luke's primary purpose in writing to the exclusion of other aims of his work, and in part from a failure to see how integral Luke's doctrine of sin is to his main purposes in writing. The recent lack of interest in hamartiology is clear from a quick glance at New Testament theologies. Whereas up until about 50 years ago, New Testament theologies almost without exception had a chapter devoted to sin,¹ recent New Testament theologies are far less likely to devote a chapter or even a section to the topic of sin.² Similarly, none of the theologies specific to the Gospel of Luke or to Luke-Acts

¹ For example, see Willibald Beyschlag, *New Testament Theology* (trans. Neil Buchanan; 2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896); Ernest William Parsons, *The Religion of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939); W. T. Conner, *The Faith of the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1940); George Barker Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941); Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (trans. John Marsh; London: SCM, 1963 [original German version published in 1941]); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 [original German version published in 1948]); Jules Lebreton, *The Spiritual Teaching of the New Testament* (trans. James E. Whalen; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960 [original French version published in 1948]); Frederick C. Grant, *An Introduction to New Testament Thought* (New York: Abingdon, 1950); Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman, 1962). It is difficult to find an exception to this trend before 1958.

² For example, see Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1971); George Eldon Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981); Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986). The exceptions to this are G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (completed and ed. L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994 [from Caird's uncompleted work ca. 1982]) and Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Leonhard Goppelt also devotes about 7 pages (1% of the work) to sin in his *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. John E. Alsup; ed. Jürgen Roloff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [original German version published in 1975]). Other New Testament theologies, such as I. Howard Marshall's *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) devote a chapter to each New Testament book or group of books and therefore do not have an exhaustive

contain an analysis of sin in the work.³ This stems in large part from a failure to recognize how critical Luke's hamartiology is to his work as a whole. While debates continue about the purpose of Luke-Acts and the nature of salvation in Luke-Acts, it cannot be denied that salvation is central and that it involves the forgiveness of sins. Therefore a study on the doctrine of sin according to Luke-Acts is greatly needed. This work is the fruit of an exhaustive survey of Luke-Acts, presented in systematic fashion beginning with discussions of the fallen human condition and the cause of sin, then surveying specific sins that are addressed in Luke-Acts, and closing with a discussion of the effects of sin and the remedy for sin. A summary of the findings will be presented in the conclusion.

The Fallen Human Condition

While Luke does not explicitly address the fall of Adam or the various issues related to original sin, he clearly portrays a fallen humanity. The world is not as it should be. A righteous and blameless couple can suffer the reproach of being childless (Luke 1:6, 18). God's servants have a humble estate and are hungry while the proud are rich and are sitting on thrones (1:48, 52-53). God's people suffer at the hand of their enemies, preventing them from "serv[ing] him without fear, in holiness and righteousness" (1:74-75), and they "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (1:79). People are in bondage to sin (Acts 8:23) and to Satan (Luke 13:16), waiting for the

treatment of sin. Marshall's chapter on Luke devotes less than a page to the section, "A people in need of salvation," and does not adequately treat the issue of sin.

³ See, for example, Francois Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950-2005)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006); Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (enlarged ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989); and Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25) and the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).

Wickedness is rewarded (Acts 1:18) and the innocent suffer (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22, 41, 47; Acts 13:28). Jesus refers to those who listen to him as “evil” (Luke 11:13) and as a “faithless and twisted generation” (Luke 9:41), and John refers to the crowds who come to be baptized by him as a “brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7).⁴

The world is so depraved that it rejects its very redemption. Whatever God is doing, the people of God do the very opposite⁵ and kill the Son of God and heir to his throne. The depravity of God’s people is so great that Jesus speaks of it using a parable of a man who does not even consider the idea that his tenants would murder his son (Luke 20:9-18). As Thomas Schreiner has observed, Luke’s condemnation of the Jews is not anti-Semitism but the use of the sinfulness of God’s people to demonstrate that “if the leaders of God’s people, who knew the OT promises of salvation from reading the Scriptures, executed Jesus, then there is no people group anywhere at any time that would have done otherwise.”⁶ It is not only the Jewish leaders but all the people who cry out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas” (Luke 23:18). According to Luke, we live in a world that glorifies the sinner and slaughters the saint (Acts 3:14).

It is this situation that the gospel is intended to address. Repeatedly in Luke-Acts, salvation is equated with forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18), which comes through repentance (Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31) and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; cf. Luke 3:3). The people

⁴ Thomas Schreiner observes that this makes them the seed of the serpent rather than the seed of Abraham (*New Testament Theology*, 512).

⁵ Repeatedly in the speeches of Acts God is contrasted to his people: though Jesus was attested by God, the Jews crucified and killed him (Acts 2:23); God “made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom [they] crucified” (2:36); etc. (see, e.g., Acts 3:13; 4:10, 19; 5:30-31, 39; 10:39-40; 13:27-31).

⁶ Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 515. See Acts 13:27.

are repeatedly urged to repent (Luke 3:8; 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20) and to save themselves “from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). On one occasion Peter says, “Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:19-21). Peter goes on to refer to the promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth and to speak of the blessing of turning people from their wickedness (3:25-26). Here we see that the world is in need of restoration, that this restoration has been promised by all the prophets (see 3:24), that this need for restoration is related to sins, which need to be blotted out, and that repentance and the coming of Jesus are the means to realize this restoration. Therefore it can be said that the gospel itself is an announcement of a reversal of the condition that has been brought about by sin.

Likely this is why Jesus’ genealogy in Luke 3 goes all the way back to Adam. Jesus is the second Adam come to solve the problem of sin introduced by the first Adam. He does what Israel could not do, resisting the three main temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13),⁷ and he announces the coming of the kingdom of God through the casting out of demons and the overcoming of Satan (Luke 11:20-22). He frees believers “from everything from which [they] could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). Sin is thus portrayed as something that has reigned from Adam to Christ

⁷ Pao and Schnabel note that there is a longstanding Jewish tradition, which can be seen in Psalm 106 among other places, that lists the three sins of Israel in the wilderness as being “wanton craving”/gluttony, idolatry, and testing. These are the three temptations Jesus resists in the temptation narrative of Luke 4 (David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 286).

and is now defeated by “the Holy and Righteous One” (Acts 3:14), who is “the Author of life” (3:15).

The Cause of Sin

Just as Luke does not go into detail about the fall of man or about original sin he does not go into detail about the cause of sin, but a few key statements should be noted. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus uses the analogy of a tree and its fruit to teach that “the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Here we see that having an evil heart produces sin. This is not to suggest that some people have never had an evil heart and can therefore produce good fruit, for Jesus has just expressed the need of his listeners to be forgiven (6:37) and to remove the log from their eye before they begin to deal with the specks in others’ eyes (6:42). Contextually, it is only when a disciple is “fully trained” that he becomes like his teacher (6:40) and can thus be the good tree that bears the good fruit.

Similarly, in the Parable of the Soils (Luke 8:4-15), Jesus describes four types of soil and how they receive the seed that is God’s word. It is only the good soil that does not allow the devil to take the word away, that allows the seed to take root, and that will not let the seed be “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life” that bears fruit. Here again the purpose is not to say, “Either you are the good soil or the bad soil. If you are good, congratulations, but if you are bad, that’s too bad for you.” Rather Jesus is exhorting his disciples to not let Satan take away the seed, to work on establishing roots, and to not be concerned with the cares and riches and pleasures of life.

This is why Jesus closes his teaching with the words, “Take care then how you hear” (8:18).

So there is a heart issue. When the heart is good it produces good fruit, and when it is evil it produces bad fruit. What exactly is this condition of the heart that causes sin? In the Parable of the Soils we see that it can be related to a concern for the cares and riches and pleasures of life or to a failure to take root. In both the parable and the Sermon on the Plain it is related to how one hears the word of Jesus. (Note that the sermon ends with an exhortation to put Jesus’ words into practice.) There is a corruption of the heart that is fed by anxiety or covetousness or unbelief or pride. These are vices that produce sinful actions. Because a person is vicious within, their external actions conform to what is within. This lines up with how vice and sin have been understood historically in the church (see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.1.71.3). So in Luke 11:39, when Jesus says, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness,” he is speaking of vices rather than sins. Their greed and wickedness lead them to neglect justice and the love of God. Every time they do so they commit a sin.

So how does one rid himself of the cause of sin, namely a bad heart that produces bad fruit? Jesus instructs the Pharisees: “But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you” (11:41). While the exact meaning of this is unclear, it is certain that Jesus is instructing the Pharisees to do good deeds that will cleanse their hearts so that their hearts no longer incite them to do bad deeds. In other words he is instructing them to be like the man who builds his house on a foundation by putting Jesus’ words into practice. Throughout the Gospel of Luke we see this teaching

that righteous deeds are a combatant against a wicked heart. In the previous pericope Jesus gave the people of Nineveh as an example – though they were evil, they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and so they “will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it” (11:32). Jesus goes on to say, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket” (11:33). The idea here is that people should fully embrace Jesus’ teaching so that their eye may be “healthy” and their “whole body . . . full of light” rather than darkness (11:34). In order to change their wicked hearts, the Pharisees must resist the temptation to sin that comes from their corrupt hearts and begin loving as Jesus loves. This is the same thing John the Baptist taught: “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance” (3:8) – give to the one in need (3:11), do not take advantage of people (3:13-14), and be content with what you have (3:14). It is also what Jesus teaches on the two occasions when someone asks what he must do to inherit eternal life: do as the Good Samaritan does (10:28, 37) and sell everything and distribute to the poor (18:22).

Luke’s emphasis on repentance and good deeds could lead one to the conclusion that Luke teaches a righteousness of works, but this is not the case. John’s baptism of repentance looks forward to Jesus’ baptism with the Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 2:38; 8:16; 11:16; 19:3-5) and those who receive John’s baptism also receive Jesus (Luke 7:29-30). The Parable of the Good Samaritan follows upon Jesus’ teaching of the importance of not rejecting him (Luke 10:16) and of the need for the Son to reveal the Father to individuals (10:22), and it is followed by the story of Mary and Martha, which makes it clear that sitting at Jesus’ feet is more important than good works (10:38-42). Jesus then teaches the disciples to pray, asking persistently for God to give the Holy Spirit (11:1-13). Shortly after urging the Pharisees to repent Jesus says, “Everyone who

acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God” (12:8). Similarly Jesus’ word to the rich ruler follows Jesus’ teaching that the one who humbles himself and confesses his sin will be justified and exalted (18:9-14) and Jesus’ teaching that one must receive the kingdom of God like a child (18:15-17). Not surprisingly, Jesus’ instruction about how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God elicits the question, “Then who can be saved?” (18:26), to which Jesus responds in a way that makes it clear that salvation is “impossible with men [but] possible with God” (18:27). The later emphasis on Jesus as the Passover lamb (22:7) and Jesus’ blood as that which establishes the new covenant (22:21) confirms the need for Jesus’ grace to cover the sins of those who would want to obtain eternal life.

In this way we can see that “good deeds” is not a simple solution for a corrupt heart. Indeed, the Pharisees and lawyers thought they were doing exceedingly well in the good deeds department, but they were neglecting justice and the love of God (Luke 11:42). The people who thought they were contributing the most to the offering were falling short of the poor widow who put in two small copper coins (21:1-4). Saul, who thought he was being zealous for God by persecuting the Way, turned out to be persecuting the Lord (Acts 22:3-8) and thereby committing one of the greatest sins of all. In Luke 16:15 Jesus tells the Pharisees not to justify themselves because “what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Therefore Jesus teaches the importance of humbling oneself rather than thanking God for the righteousness he has given (Luke 18:9-14). Humility and reception of Jesus are keys to destroying the power of darkness within. Similarly in Acts 8 when Peter rebukes Simon the magician for being “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (even though Simon had believed

and been baptized), Peter says, “Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22), so prayer is alongside repentance, humility, and reception of Jesus in combating the wickedness within (see also Luke 22:40, 46).

It should also be noted that Luke also speaks of ignorance as the cause of sin in Acts 3:17. As Thomas Aquinas has argued, there can be multiple internal causes of sin: ignorance, passion, and malice (*Summa theologica* 2.1.76-78).

A Lukan Catalog of Sins

Sin #1: Unbelief

One of the two sins that is most often highlighted in Luke-Acts is unbelief. While one could argue that this may be due to Luke’s focus on the proclamation of the message and its reception rather than to unbelief being a worse sin than others, it must be conceded that unbelief is a major sin that Luke wants to address. This focus begins in Luke 1, where Zechariah is struck mute for his unbelief (1:18-20), whereas Mary is blessed because she “believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (1:45). Unbelief is also the third temptation that Satan uses against Jesus, trying to incite Jesus to test God by throwing himself down from the temple (which Darrell Bock astutely refers to as “unbelief masquerading as faith”⁸) or to begin to doubt him when he chooses not to throw himself down. Likely Satan’s words, “If you are the Son of God” (4:3, 9), are intended to make Jesus question what God has just spoken to him from heaven (cf. Luke 3:22).⁹ Jesus responds in 4:12 with a quotation from

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols; BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994, 1996), 1:381.

⁹ *Pace* Bock, *Luke*, 1:372.

Deuteronomy 6:16, where Moses instructs Israel to not continue as they had been: testing God. Similarly in the Parable of the Soils, Jesus says Satan works to take the word from people's hearts "so that they may not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Some of Jesus' harshest criticisms of the disciples are in relation to their lack of faith (Luke 8:25; 9:41; 12:28; 18:8; and esp. 24:25), while others are healed because of their faith (Luke 5:20; 7:9, 50; 8:48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; Acts 3:16; 14:9; 15:9). Jesus criticizes Israel for not having as much faith as the centurion in Luke 7:9, and he prays for Peter that his faith may not fail in order that he could strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32). Faith is key to salvation in Luke-Acts (Acts 10:43; 13:39; 16:31; etc.). Therefore it is not surprising that unbelief is one of the greatest sins.

This is not to suggest that unbelief is negative merely because it prevents people from attaining the blessings that God has for them. In other words, unbelief is not a new sin that arises when the gospel is given for people to believe. Rather it is an age-old sin that causes people to reject and even kill the messiah just as they have done with the prophets of old that they have not believed (Luke 11:47-51). This sin is so heinous that when the disciples are rejected through unbelief, they shake the dust from their feet as a testimony against the unbelieving (Luke 9:5; 10:10-11). "The one who denies [Christ] before men will be denied before the angels of God" (Luke 12:9), and the one who rejects Christ's messenger thereby rejects Christ, which is ultimately a rejection of God (Luke 10:16).

Closely related to the issue of unbelief is anxiety. Jesus teaches his disciples to not be anxious about what they will eat or drink or wear but rather to have faith in God that he will provide what is needed in this life (Luke 12:22-34). They are

also not to be anxious about those who might kill them but instead to have faith that God is watching over them (12:4-7), and they are not to be anxious about what to say when on trial but trust that the Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak (12:11-12). In all of this Jesus is the example as he was obedient when he could have been anxious about food (Luke 4:2-4) or about obtaining the kingdoms of the world, which were promised to the Son of God (Luke 4:5-8; cf. Ps 2), or about God's protection of him (Luke 4:9-12).

Sin #2: Rejection of the Truth

Closely related to unbelief but significant enough in Luke-Acts to warrant its own section is rejection of the truth. This can take on many forms. For some it is rooted in apathy. They do not bother to enter through the narrow door until "the master of the house has risen and shut the door." These will be sent away with the words, "Depart from me, all you workers of evil!" (Luke 13:24-30). Often this is because they have become concerned with the things of this life (14:18-20; 21:34). It is important, therefore, that a person love God more than father, mother, wife, children, siblings, and his own life (14:26), for if one does not renounce all he has (14:33) and take up his cross (14:27) or if he tries to preserve his life (9:24; 17:33) he cannot be Christ's disciple. Regardless of the cause there is a special focus on the sin of rejecting the truth. Whoever denies Jesus (12:9) or is ashamed of Jesus and his words (9:26) will be denied before angels and be ashamed of by the Son of Man, and whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven (12:10). Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected, which has become the capstone. "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (20:17-18). Therefore God will destroy those who have killed the prophets and eventually killed the Son as well (20:9-16). The Jewish

leaders cannot make the sins of their fathers right by building tombs for the prophets (11:47-48), especially since they are committing the same sin against Jesus (11:49-54). The people who do not receive Christ's disciples are testified against by the shaking of dust from the disciples' feet (9:5; 10:10-11), because rejecting Christ's messenger is rejecting Christ, which is rejecting God (10:16). Similarly, Saul's "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1f) is persecution of Jesus (9:4f) that leads to him being struck blind (9:8). Ananias describes it as "evil" (9:13), but through Jesus Saul can regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17) in order to be Jesus' chosen instrument (9:15). Ironically the Jews then want to kill Saul (9:23, 29). Anyone who fails to be "with" Jesus is therefore "against" him, and failure to gather is scattering (Luke 11:23). All these are expressions of the sin of rejecting the truth.

Sin #3: Idolatry

Idolatry is another key sin in Luke-Acts. We see it in the temptation narrative when Satan urges Jesus to worship him (Luke 4:5-8). Jesus responds with quotations of Deut 6:13 and 1 Sam 7:3, where idolatry is forbidden. In Acts the issue of idolatry becomes even more prominent, likely due to the influence of Isaianic new exodus motif on Acts in general.¹⁰ Herod Agrippa I dies for not giving glory to God when the people idolize him (Acts 10:22-23). Paul's spirit is "provoked within him" when he sees that Athens is "full of idols" (Acts 17:16). He later speaks these words to the men of the Areopagus: "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people

¹⁰ David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 181-216.

everywhere to repent” (17:29-30). In Ephesus those who had practiced magic arts burn their books and many turn away from worship of Artemus (Acts 19:19, 26). Demetrius appeals to the idolatry of the Ephesians to move people to riot and threaten Paul’s travelling companions (Acts 19:23-41). Idolatry is also taught against when Peter (Acts 10:25-26) and Paul (Acts 14:8-18) refuse to be worshiped. Paul’s response is to tell the people to “turn away from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15).

Sin #4: Pride

Already we have seen that humility is one of the greatest combatants against sin. This is partly because in Luke-Acts, pride is highlighted as a major sin. The Pharisee who thanks God that he is not like the sinners does not go home justified, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (Luke 18:14). Mary teaches that God scatters “the proud in the thoughts of their hearts” (Luke 1:51). When the disciples argue about which is the greatest Jesus teaches that it is whoever is least among them who is great (9:48). Simon the magician is described as a prideful man (“saying that he himself was somebody great,” Acts 8:9) before he falls into the sin of simony. The pride of Herod Agrippa I is behind his being struck down by God in Acts 12:23. There also seems to be an implicit comment on the pride of the Athenians when Luke says, “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

Related to the issue of pride is hypocrisy. Jesus says hypocrisy is “the leaven of the Pharisees” (Luke 12:1). They “clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside [they] are full of greed and wickedness” (11:39). Therefore they “are like

unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it” (11:44). Similarly, the scribes walk around in long robes and seek the places of honor, but they “devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers.” For this reason “they will receive the greater condemnation” (20:46-47). The lawyers also “load people with burdens hard to bear, [but they themselves] do not touch the burdens,” and they pretend to honor the prophets that their fathers killed, while they themselves kill the messiah (11:45-52). Similarly the Jewish leaders care for their oxen and donkeys on the Sabbath but condemn the one who cares for “a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years” (13:10-17). The people in general are also hypocrites: they know how to interpret times and do so when it affects this life but do not care to do so when it really matters (12:54-56). They also think they can remove the speck from their brothers’ eyes without paying attention to the logs in their own eyes (6:41-42).

Sin #5: Covetousness

The sin of covetousness is emphasized in Luke-Acts as much as that of unbelief. Covetousness can include love of money and love of status. Jesus has a lot to say about money and possessions in Luke. To the one who is concerned about his inheritance Jesus says, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). Jesus then tells the Parable of the Rich Fool, condemning “the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (12:21). Later Jesus makes it clear that wealth makes it very difficult to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:24-25) because as soon as people try to serve money they despise God (16:13) and their seed is “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life [so that] their fruit does not mature” (8:14). Therefore Jesus speaks

blessings over the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are spoken poorly of, and woes over the rich, the full, the laughing, and those spoken well of (6:20-26).

Along the way Luke gives us many examples of those who miss the kingdom because they love money. One of the problems that leads the Pharisees astray is their love of money (Luke 11:39; 16:14). This leads them to only invite to their banquets those who will pay them back, thus receiving in this life their full reward (14:11-14). Those selling in the temple make it a den of robbers rather than a house of prayer (19:45-46). Judas decides to betray Jesus for money (23:5). Ananias and Sapphira's love of money leads them to "lie to the Holy Spirit," bringing about their fatal judgment (Acts 5:1-11). Simon the magician's love for money leads him to think he can buy the gift of God with money, presumably in order to profit from it (Acts 8:20, 23). The Gerasenes reject Jesus' ministry because of fear of their pig industry suffering (Luke 8:26-39). The owners of a slave girl with a spirit of divination have Paul and Silas thrown into prison because of their love of money. Those who profit from idols in Ephesus start a riot when their industry suffers due to the success of the gospel (Acts 19:23-41). The rich ruler who wants eternal life walks away sad because he cannot bring himself to sell everything, distribute to the poor, and have treasure in heaven (Luke 18:18-30). The rich man in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man receives his good things during his earthly life and then spends eternity in anguish (Luke 16:25).

By contrast Jesus' disciples leave everything to follow him (Luke 5:11, 28; 18:28), and Jesus assures them that "there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" (18:29-30). Jesus also

commends the poor widow who put into the offering “all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4). Jesus teaches, “Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (12:33; cf. 18:22). And elsewhere he gives the Parable of the Shrewd Manager to teach his disciples to “make friends for [themselves] by means of unrighteous wealth, so when it fails [they may be received] into eternal dwelling places” (16:9).

Luke also condemns those who love “the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces” (Luke 11:43; cf. 20:46), and being spoken well of is a cause for woe (6:26). In the Parable of the Wedding Feast (14:7-11) Jesus teaches people to “not sit down in a place of honor, . . . for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Like love of money, love of status is a sin with fatal consequences. Therefore the disciples should expect to be mistreated and should even “rejoice . . . and leap for joy” when people hate them, exclude them, revile them, and spurn their name as evil on account of the Son of Man (6:22-23). Jesus also cautions them to be like him, the one who serves, rather than like “the kings of the Gentiles [who] exercise lordship over them [and] are called benefactors” (Luke 22:25-27).

Sin #6: Lack of Compassion

Closely related to this is the lack of compassion for others. Jesus teaches his disciples to do for others as they would have done for them (Luke 6:31). This includes loving enemies, blessing those who curse, praying for those who abuse, not withholding from anyone, and not judging or condemning, but giving and forgiving

(6:27-34). In this way they “will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil” (6:35). Otherwise they are no better than sinners (6:32-34). In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, a priest and a Levite are the negative examples, whereas a Samaritan fulfills the love commandment by having compassion on the man stripped and beaten, who was likely his enemy (Luke 10:25-37). On one occasion James and John are rebuked for desiring to call fire down upon a Samaritan village rather than having mercy upon them (Luke 9:54-55). In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the tax collector treats others with contempt because he trusts in his own righteousness (18:9). Similarly the scribes are not able to have compassion on others because their love for honor leads them to “devour widows’ houses” (Luke 20:47). Alternatively the disciples should not lord it over those they lead (Luke 22:25-26) or invite only those who will repay them (14:12-14). When people are overlooked in the daily distribution of food, the apostles appoint the most qualified men to make sure the issue is resolved (Acts 6:1). Stephen’s speech also highlights in the life of Moses a desire to “save” his people from being wronged, whether at the hand of an Egyptian or at the hand of one another (Acts 7:23-29). Failure to show compassion is a sin of omission and a source of the fallen condition Jesus has come to reverse. This is why compassion is repeatedly emphasized as a requirement for the one who wants to inherit eternal life (10:25-37; 18:18-30).

Lack of compassion actually feeds into the people’s rejection of the messiah. The first time in Luke’s narrative that Jesus is opposed by humans (who attempt to kill him!) is when Jesus reminds the people of Nazareth that Elijah and Elisha were sent to Gentiles even though Israelites were in need of healing (Luke 4:16-30). In

the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son is unable to join in his father's celebration because he is jealous of his father's acceptance of the younger son (Luke 15:25-32). Jesus tells this parable in response to the Pharisees and scribes grumbling over Jesus' acceptance of sinners and tax collectors (Luke 15:1-2). In Acts we find the Jews becoming jealous of Paul's ability to draw a crowd, and their self-centered attitude causes them to oppose Paul, at which point Paul decides to go to the Gentiles instead of the Jews (Acts 13:45). Even Peter needs to be rid of his Judeocentrism, being taught that he "should not call any person common or unclean" (Acts 10:28) because God does not show favoritism (10:34).

Related to lack of compassion is the failure to lead others into the truth. Jesus condemns the lawyers for taking away the key of knowledge (Luke 11:52), and it is worse to lead one into sin than to have a millstone hung around one's neck and be cast into the sea (17:1-2). Similarly it would be wrong for the apostles to fail to declare the gospel (Acts 4:19-20; 6:2), and Paul declares that he is innocent of people's blood when he does not shrink from proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Acts 18:6; 20:26-27). On the contrary, Elymas the magician is a "son of the devil" and an enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy" who makes "crooked the straight paths of the Lord," because he opposes the apostles and "seek[s] to turn the proconsul away from the faith." For this sin he is struck blind (Acts 13:8-11).

Summary

Luke highlights a number of sins in his two-volume work: unbelief, anxiety, rejection of the truth, idolatry, pride, hypocrisy, covetousness of money, covetousness of status, lack of compassion, and failure to lead others into the truth. To

be sure, some of these are rightly categorized as vices whereas some are sinful acts. Luke does not seem to make this distinction in many of these passages, but such a distinction fits well with his depiction of people as being “full of greed and wickedness” on the inside (Luke 11:39-44), bad trees that bear bad fruit (6:46-49), and soil that determines what will come of the seed that is the word of God (8:4-8). Traditionally the church has identified seven deadly vices: lust, gluttony, greed, laziness, wrath, envy, and pride. Our analysis of Luke-Acts has shown a special focus on greed and pride, though many of the other five elements are present. Gluttony is condemned when Jesus pronounces a woe to those who are full now (6:25). Laziness (Luke 13:24-30), wrath (Luke 4:28; 6:11; 15:28; Acts 26:11), and envy (Acts 5:17; 7:9; 13:45; 17:5) are repeatedly behind rejection of the truth. Surprisingly Luke does not address lust, with the exception of mentioning that John had reproved Herod Antipas for marrying his brother’s wife (Luke 3:19), but there is no reason to assume that Luke does not consider lust a serious vice. What is clear is that greed and pride merit a special focus in Luke-Acts. Notably these are the two vices that Aquinas highlights – greed, or covetousness, being “the root of all sins” (*Summa theologiae* 2.1.84.1) and pride being “the beginning of every sin” (2.1.84.2). Aquinas follows Luke well when he says, “Every sin grows out of the love of temporal things” (2.1.84.1). Perhaps this explains Luke’s emphasis on these two deadly vices.

We have also seen unbelief play a special role in Luke-Acts. Again, Aquinas follows Luke well when he teaches that unbelief is the greatest of sins (*Summa theologiae* 2.2.10.3). Finally, lack of compassion and rejection of God are highlighted throughout Luke-Acts as great sins of omission. These tie to what sums up the law in

Jesus' theology: love of God and love of neighbor (Luke 10:27; 11:42). To fail in either of these areas is sin.

The Effects of Sin

We have already seen that the cause of sin in Luke-Acts is a corrupt heart. This is also an effect of sin, which is why repentance is necessary for people to be able to see clearly: "Your eye is the lamp of your body. . . . Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness" (Luke 11:34-35). Jesus (like John the Baptist) commands people to stop sinning and start doing good so that they will have treasure in heaven, enabling their heart to be there rather than on earth (12:33-34; 18:22). Sinners are compared to the sick, who need a physician who will call them to repentance (5:29-32). They are also described as being "blind" (6:39), sitting "in darkness and in the shadow of death" (1:79). Because of their sin, people are unable to see the things that make for peace or to know the time of their visitation (19:41-44). They do not hear or understand Moses and the Prophets, and they cannot be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead (Luke 16:31; 24:25-27; Acts 13:27). They love "the power of darkness" (Luke 22:52-53), and they do not understand when God is giving them salvation (Acts 7:25). They are "foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25) and they cannot understand unless someone opens their eyes to see what is in scripture (Luke 24:27, 45; Acts 8:31).

Another effect of sin is judgment. The future judgment is a consistent theme of Luke-Acts. John the Baptist announces that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, saying, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable

fire” (Luke 3:16-17). It is this “unquenchable fire” that “every tree . . . that does not bear good fruit” will be thrown into (Luke 3:9), and therefore repentance is demanded. Luke, then, is like Paul in his conviction that the penalty of sin is death. So in Luke 12-13, which focuses on the theme of judgment, Luke tells of when people mention “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (13:1). Jesus’ responds,

Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. [Luke 13:2-5]

In other words, violent death is the end of everyone who does not repent. The penalty of sin is death. Sin has brought death into the world and with it eternal judgment, and the only way to escape is through repentance. Jesus continues with a parable about a fig tree that has not borne fruit for three years and the vinedresser decides to give it one more year before cutting it down. The reader is again encouraged to repent because otherwise a certain death is coming. This idea is repeated in Acts when Barnabas and Paul say, “In past generations [God] allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). In other words, soon sin will be tolerated no more. Therefore the reader is urged to settle with the accuser before judgment happens (Luke 12:57).¹¹

Negative consequences of sin are also experienced in this life. The criminal on the cross recognizes that he is “receiving the due reward for [his] deeds” (Luke 23:41). Ananias and Sapphira both die because of the sin they commit against the Holy Spirit and the Church (Acts 5:1-11). Simon the sorcerer and his silver are going to

¹¹ Luke 12:57-59 is similar to Matthew 5:25-26, but here Jesus is clearly making a different point. Whereas in Matthew Jesus’ point is that we should settle with human accusers taking us to a human judge, in Luke the point is that we should settle matters before we go to the final judgment.

perish because of his greed (Acts 8:20). Herod Agrippa I dies for failure to give God the glory when people worship him (Acts 12:23). The sense throughout Luke-Acts is that these are the norm; all else is grace. While in the past God overlooked sin, “now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed” (Acts 17:30-31). This is why those who have escaped judgment thus far “will all likewise perish” if they fail to repent (Luke 13:3). This is why people should not weep over Jesus’ passion, because a worse judgment is coming (Luke 23:27-31). This is why when people reject the gospel Paul says their blood is on their heads (Acts 18:6). Salt that loses its taste “is of no use either for the soil or the manure pile. It is thrown away” (Luke 14:35).

The Remedy for Sin

In light of this the refrain of Luke is “repent.” John the Baptist urges the people to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8), and Jesus tells the one who wants to inherit eternal life to love God and his neighbor (10:25-37). From the beginning of his narrative Luke emphasizes the righteousness of the people God uses (Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke 1:6; Simeon in 2:25; Anna in 2:36-38). The centurion whose servant was ill is said to be worthy to have Jesus heal his servant (Luke 7:3). Joseph of Arimathea is “a good and righteous man, who had not consented to [the] decision and action” of the council (Luke 23:50-51). Cornelius is “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God,” and so his prayers and alms ascend as a memorial before God (Acts 10:3-5). He sends “a devout soldier” with two servants to Joppa to retrieve Peter (Acts 10:7-8). And of course the innocence of Jesus is repeatedly highlighted in Luke’s narrative (Luke 2:51-52; 23:4,

14-15, 22, 41, 47; Acts 13:28). Similarly Jesus teaches that it is the “good soil” that has “an honest and good heart,” which will cause the word to bear fruit (Luke 8:15), and he therefore warns the listener to take care how he hears, “for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away” (8:18). In Acts 5:32 Peter says that it is to “those who obey” God that he gives the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere Jesus speaks of “those who are considered worthy to attain to [the next] age and to the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:35). Read alone these verses might lead one to believe that Luke envisions the gospel going to the most devout people, but there are a number of places where Luke seemingly teaches the opposite.

Though Elizabeth’s righteousness is highlighted, she feels unworthy to have a visit from the mother of her Lord (Luke 1:43). Likewise John the Baptist is not worthy to untie the strap of Jesus’ sandals (Luke 3:16). When Peter first recognizes the greatness of Jesus he declares himself to be “a sinful man” and asks Jesus to “go away” (Luke 5:8). The centurion who is said to be worthy and to have greater faith than anyone in Israel argues that he is not worthy to have Jesus come to his house (Luke 7:6-7). Elsewhere Luke quotes Jesus as saying, “No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19), and teaching that when we have done all that God has commanded we should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty” (Luke 17:10). Furthermore there is an emphasis on “sinners” coming to Jesus while the “righteous” fail to come and be justified (Luke 5:30; 7:34, 36-50; 15:1-32; 18:9-14; 19:7). Therefore Jesus says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

Here we see a tension between the need for holiness to be incorporated into God's plan and the unholiness of the ones God chooses. One does not need to be righteous to find salvation in Jesus but repentant. This is why in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector the tax collector "went down to his house justified," while the Pharisee did not. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). The remedy for sin is humbling oneself (fighting pride), placing faith in Jesus (fighting unbelief, rejection of the truth, and idolatry), and turning from sin (fighting covetousness and lack of compassion). This is repentance, and when coupled with baptism it brings salvation (Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31), which is repeatedly described as "forgiveness of sins" (Luke 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).

Conclusion

Luke sees the world as depraved and in need of salvation. So great is the depravity of the world that it rejects the salvation that is offered to it. Sin has given people wicked hearts that are in need of salvation. Therefore in Jesus God draws people to himself and enables them to repent by putting off their pride and covetousness, their unbelief and their lack of compassion, and putting on love of God and love of neighbor. This brings light to the whole body and enables the believer to escape sin and its consequences (though earthly troubles will persist). To the modern reader of Luke the promise is still held out, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:38-39).

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