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# Original Blessing: Putting Sin In Its Rightful Place



## Synopsis

Of the world's three major religions, only Christianity holds to a doctrine of original sin. Ideas are powerful, and they shape who we are and who we become. The fact that many Christians believe there is something in human nature that is, and will always be, contrary to God, is not just a problem but a tragedy. So why do the doctrine's assumptions of human nature so infiltrate our pulpits, sermons, and theological bookshelves? How is it so misconstrued in times of grief, pastoral care, and personal shame? How did we fall so far from God's original blessing in the garden to this pervasive belief in humanity's innate inability to do good? In this book, Danielle Shroyer takes readers through an overview of the historical development of the doctrine, pointing out important missteps and overcalculations, and providing alternative ways to approach often-used Scriptures. Throughout, she brings the primary claims of original sin to their untenable (and unbiblical) conclusions. In *Original Blessing*, she shows not only how we got this doctrine wrong, but how we can put sin back in its rightful place: in a broader context of redemption and the blessing of humanity's creation in the image of God.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Thought provoking, accessible, beautifully written.

Found about the book through a radio show on npr radio. Found the content of the book both refreshing and perplexing. I'm planning on rereading the book again, so that I may glean a better understanding. It was the main premise that was the most interesting. And that was beginning with blessing, or more specifically that God has blessed humanity from the beginning and continues to stick with us. The book itself has warm undertones. It feels therapeutic in its aim, to endear the reader to the warmth and goodness of God. Sharing how God has offered provision, protection, and a never ending supply of goodwill. She makes good distinctions as she parses language and shows different angles of thought. As I began reading the book, it was reassuring to hear that God is sticking with humanity because His nature is to bless. As far as being perplexed on the book, I felt myself asking the whole time about covenant. With everything that was shared, I felt that the concept of being in a covenant was a pressing question that wasn't addressed. I understand that we are all human beings who share his image, and have been endowed with blessing, however in Scripture the idea of entering into covenant with both God and others seems like a primary principle... just my thoughts... hope this helps anyone who may be needing some feedback.

A challenging book in more ways than one. It is packed full with ideas that don't make for casual reading. I could imagine that many people might have trouble with some of her theology. Personally, I liked it a lot, because it came at the right time for me.

The "About the Author" page on says: "Danielle Shroyer is a sought-after speaker, respected pastor, and a founding member of the emerging church movement. She holds a BA from Baylor University and an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary, and is the author of *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in its Rightful Place, Where Jesus Prayed*, and *The Boundary-Breaking God*." "Original Blessing: Putting Sin In Its Rightful Place" challenges the Christian concept of original sin and instead defends a concept of original blessing (a term coined by Matthew Fox, as Shroyer acknowledges). Original sin states that the guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve was passed on to their descendants, along with a sinful human nature, a propensity to sin. By "original blessing," Shroyer seems to mean God's unconditional love for and faithfulness towards human beings. Here are some thoughts: A. Shroyer does not argue that human beings are morally flawless. She likens human beings to Adam and Eve in the Garden: they were

not weighed down by a sinful human nature, but they were still capable of making mistakes. She also draws from the rabbinic contrast between the good and evil inclinations: the evil inclination is not *evil*, *per se*, but is egoistic and must be controlled. Genesis 4:7, in which God tells Cain that he must master sin, features in her discussion.

B. Shroyer's treatment of Genesis 3 was well-informed, as she explored scholarly interpretations of the chapter, including the identity of the serpent. Her conclusion was rather nebulous. On the one hand, she seems to maintain that Adam and Eve were wrong to disobey God. On the other hand, she holds that their disobedience was an essential aspect of their maturation. Shroyer also makes the interesting observation that the Garden of Eden did not go away after Adam and Eve's act of disobedience. She disagrees with the narrative that Adam and Eve ruined everything through their sin. Shroyer also observes God's faithfulness to Adam and Eve after their sin, which coincides with her view of original blessing.

C. Shroyer contends that Cain should have rested in God's love for him rather than becoming upset after God had rejected his sacrifice. She states that God rejected Cain's sacrifice, not Cain himself. She does not interact with Genesis 4:5's statement that God was not pleased with both Cain and Cain's sacrifice, however. Yet, her observation that God was faithful to Cain after Cain's act of murder is a good argument for original blessing.

D. The book wrestled with some Scriptures that have been associated with original sin but not others. She does attempt to address Romans 5:12-21, which has been prominent in discussions of original sin. She did not, however, address Paul's depiction of the flesh as corrupt and sinful, which is a glaring challenge to her arguments against original sin.

E. The description of the book on states: "In this book, Danielle Shroyer takes readers through an overview of the historical development of the doctrine, pointing out important missteps and overcalculations, and providing alternative ways to approach often-used Scriptures." In my opinion, the book was rather thin in describing the historical development of the doctrine. History did feature in her discussion, on such topics as the dearth of the concept of original sin in early Christian writings, the negative attitude towards sexuality within ancient Christianity that resulted from the doctrine of original sin, the contrast between Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity on the problem Jesus came to solve (death or sin, respectively), and the eighteenth century debate about infant damnation between Jonathan Edwards and Jeremy Taylor. But, as far as I can recall, she did not really discuss how and why the doctrine of original sin developed.

F. Shroyer addresses a question that a priest asked her: If original sin is untrue, then why did Jesus come? She does well to argue that there are valuable things that Jesus said and did, apart from addressing the Fall. I would add that there are few explicit references

to the Fall throughout the Bible, which is odd, considering the emphasis on it within Christianity. While one could conceivably tie everything that Jesus said and did to the Fall and its effects (e.g., Jesus healed people, which ameliorates disease, a consequence of the Fall), perhaps we should not be reductionistic, since the biblical authors may not have emphasized the Fall to the extent that later Christians did. G. Shroyer also did well to discuss the effects of sin-focused conceptions of the Gospel. She said that many Christians hear the Gospel and say "Awwhew!" because they have been delivered from God's wrath, rather than "Wow!" at what God has done. One can respond that Christians can do both: that they can rejoice that God has delivered them from wrath and hell while also being awed by God's acts of new creation. They would have a point. At the same time, speaking for myself personally, sin-focused Gospels often draw from me the "Awwhew!" reaction. H. While Shroyer rejects original sin, she still seems to believe that Jesus came to solve some problem, some brokenness. She also states that humans can resist sin with God's help. In a few places, however, she appears to suggest that Jesus came to improve what is already within humans, to add to the goodness or the potential that is already in God's creation. I. This book is not exactly a rigorous Scriptural refutation of original sin. It is more informal and anecdotal, though Shroyer does seem to know what she is talking about when she draws from church history. While this book was not entirely what I expected, I am still giving it five stars because it did have good insights. For example, Shroyer says that, instead of telling people that they are gifted at something, we should commend them for doing the right thing: for studying, for working to improve, etc. That makes sense. The book's winsome quality also enhanced it and made what Shroyer said relatable. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher through Edelweiss. My review is honest!

Danielle Shroyer's new book is a revelation of grace. Funny and sharp--thoughtful and profound--it is a rare can't-put-down theological statement: God created you and the world in love; God remains steadfast when we stray; God (always!) wants us back. Reading Genesis 3 through Shroyer's eyes will probably change the way you view yourself in Divine history. Plus, don't miss the snake! Must read!

The doctrine of original sin didn't exist until the 4th century. The concept of original sin isn't held by any of the world religions other than post-4th century Christianity. This is not to say we are sinless but that we are made in the image of God. We are a blessed people sent out of Eden, not a cursed people kicked out. When all Adam and Eve could come up with were itchy fig leaves, God in His

grace actually made garments for them. There is so much wonderful material in this book that can help us uncover the loving God of the Bible and help us to break free chains of bad theology that bind us.

I heard the author speak at the Faith Forward conference in 2016 about this book and I could not wait for it to be released! I was not disappointed. Shroyer makes a difficult concept easily accessible without watering down the important theological concepts. She leads the reader through careful study of scripture and gently guides the reader to new interpretations that feel fresh and relevant. Her images of pathways, relationships, and connectedness are helpful ways to explore the concepts that she presents. After I finished the book I turned right back to the first page to start reading again. Her conclusions are a breath of fresh air and I felt encouraged in my personal spiritual growth and empowered to share this with my congregation.

I found the content quite accessible and appreciated the concrete examples. This book would lend itself to be read in small groups also, to surface insights, resistance and questions. I plan to suggest the work to appropriate individuals in my Spiritual Direction practice.

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