There are many perspectives on the view of man, particularly as it relates to the depravity of man. The abundance of theories on how and why people commit crimes can easily be found in any criminological theories book. However, no single theory explains every act of social deviance. That is, all theories explain some crime but not all theories explain all crime. Opposing viewpoints from early criminological theory illustrate the shaky foundations of the criminological discipline. The classical school of criminology viewpoint is based on the free will of the offender, while the positivist school of criminology viewpoint is based on deterministic characteristics of the offender. As with most problems that theorists attempt to solve using opposite ends of a spectrum, neither can be completely accurate which means there must be some middle ground or alternative perspective that addresses the problem more fully.

Though there is no “modern theory” – a theory posited within the last 500 years – that addresses the existence of criminality fully, there is a perspective that, when adopted, seems to address the root of criminal behavior. Prior to the establishment of the classical and positivist schools of criminology, a practical application of the supernatural theory of crime was the foundation for society. This supernatural perspective will be addressed later but it is the modern outgrowth of the Scriptural view of crime as specified within the pages of the Holy Bible. Over time, the Scriptural view of crime gave way to the supernatural theory because the supernatural theory made it easier to punish individuals who engaged in criminal activity.

This article will discuss the Biblical support for the total depravity of man – also known as the sin nature and original sin – as the root cause of criminal conduct. Herein, the two terms, total depravity of man and sin nature, will be used interchangeably to refer to the state of mankind as defined by God. The term original sin will be used to refer to the fall of man as described in Genesis 3. It should also be noted at the outset that the discussion of the sin nature will be from God’s perspective not from man’s perspective. There are plenty of other theories that deal with the depravity of man from man’s perspective.

Defining Human Nature: Imago Dei
Humanity was created by God and for God. God created man from the dust of earth and created woman from man on the sixth day of creation. This was the only time, during the creation account, that God is recorded as identifying the whole of His work as “very good” (Genesis 1:31, ESV). When Moses records the creation account and provides God’s discussion with Himself about the creation of man, he does so using some specific terms: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26, ESV). The meaning of image and likeness has casually come to represent a physical likeness to God. However, the real meaning is a bit less obvious.

The use of “our image” and “likeness” in Genesis indicates a deeper meaning than physical likeness, especially since “God is spirit” (John 4:24, ESV). It seems much more likely that being made in the image of God relates more to our moral, intellectual, and spiritual nature (Munyon, 1994). The image of God is more about who we are and less about something we have or something we do (Munyon, 1994).

Another scholar describes the image of God as both a “natural and moral image” (Menzies & Horton, 1993, p. 84). The natural image encompasses the intellectual aspects of the person, but elaborates to include elements of personality, sensibility, and rationality. In contrast, the moral image houses our will, our freedom to make decisions. “Moral image in mankind is also the quality of our personality that relates to the rightness or wrongness of the use of our powers” (Menzies & Horton, 1993, p. 85). It is this sense of right and wrong that allow us to relate to God.

These two perfectly formed first humans – Adam and Eve – came to reside in the Garden of Eden. They enjoyed fellowship with God, walking with Him in the cool of the day. They enjoyed the fruit of the garden and were allowed to eat of any of it except that from one tree. They enjoyed perfect communion and communication with God in that place. There, they were perfect image bearers of God – they were as perfect as they, or we, would ever be. All of this was shattered after the temptation – not as a result of the temptation, but rather a result of yielding to the temptation – of Adam and Eve at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2-3, ESV).

Defining Human Nature: Sin Nature

In order to begin to define the concept of the sin nature, original sin must first be established. While the term “original sin” is found nowhere in the 66 books that make up the canon of Scripture – the Holy Bible – original sin, as a concept, is well established by the Apostle Paul. The concept of original sin is one that begins in the beginning. Original sin, as described in Genesis 3, portrays the first man, Adam, and his female counterpart, Eve the suitable helper, as having stepped outside the confines of God’s command. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit hanging from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It made no difference to a Holy God that Adam and Eve were coerced or entrapped in this temptation to consume the fruit by the serpent. While the serpent reaped its own consequences by presenting the temptation, the act of disobedience against the Divine was committed freely by Adam and Eve.

One result of the original sin, Adam and Eve were forced to leave the paradise where God had originally placed them to live out their days. The original sin not only had geographic consequences, but it also had physiological and psychological consequences. The physiological consequences came in the form of hard manual labor, pain in childbirth, and death – thought not immediate physical death. The psychological consequences came in the form of subjugation to one’s husband and the realization that one would eventually die. Original sin, while limited to the Garden of Eden, has lasting consequences for all of humanity.

The original sin is only the starting
point for the conversation about the sin nature. Just as with original sin, the terms sin nature or the total depravity of man are not found in the Scriptures. However, just like original sin, the framework for understanding the sin nature is abundantly clear. The concepts of sin nature and total depravity can be expressed in positive and negative terms. “Negatively, it means that man, as a result of the fall, has lost his original righteousness and love for God. Positively, it means that man’s moral nature has become corrupted, and that he has an irresistible bias toward evil” (Barabas, 1967, p. 213).

The notion of the sin nature is most clearly expressed by the Apostle Paul in his writings. First, Romans 5 provides the clearest picture of the sin nature within man. A deeper analysis of New Testament passages will be assessed later but Romans chapter five gives an excellent description of the transmission of the sin nature. “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12, NIV). The Apostle Paul’s point is expounded in five additional passages in Romans 5:

- “the many died by the trespass of the one man” (Romans 5:15, NIV)
- “the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation [to all]” (Romans 5:16, NIV)
- “by the trespass of the one man, death reigned [from the time of Adam to the time of Moses; verse 14] through that one man” (Romans 5:17, NIV)
- “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18, NIV)
- “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (Romans 5:19, NIV)

The flow and purpose of these passages clearly indicate the divine conceptualization of the sin nature. Sin and the sin nature entered the human race through Adam “in an abuse of the freedom given to created beings equipped with a will” (Menzies & Horton, 1993, p. 87) and has been transmitted to every other human, making the entire human race sinners and worthy of the consequences for that sin: death (Romans 6:23). The exact mode of transmission for the sin nature is a mystery. Genetic transmission and evolutionary development transmission are two posited modes of transmission. Scripture gives no clear answer to the question about how the sin nature is propagated within the human race. What is known is that sin is an all-pervasive tendency which must be dealt with if the human race is to live as God intended.

Human Nature in the Old Testament

The Old Testament discusses the characteristics of human nature. The account begins in Genesis 2 after the creation of all things, to be discussed in greater detail later. The major theme relating to the sin nature in the Old Testament is that, since the original sin of Adam – known simply as “the fall” – , the human race was and is sinful from before we were born. Psalm 51:1-5 states “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (ESV).

The Psalms continue a few chapters later to discuss the beginning of the human sinful condition. Psalm 58:1-3 states “Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly? No, in
your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies” (ESV). The theme of post-fall sinfulness from birth is clearly delineated. However, Isaiah provides a bit of good news as it relates to our condition. Isaiah 48:8-9 states “You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel. ‘For my name’s sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off’” (ESV). Isaiah’s words illustrate that God is not pleased with our natural state, but He also does not desire to completely wipe us out as He did to humanity with the flood – except Noah and his family.

So, the sin of Adam and Eve lead to their banishment from the Garden of Eden and to the transmission of a broken nature to the rest of humanity. However, Deuteronomy 24:16 explains: “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin” (ESV) and “In those days they shall no longer say: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.” But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge” (Jeremiah 31:29-30, ESV). Additionally, Ezekiel 18:20 states “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (ESV). These three passages clearly explain the state of the human condition. Somehow the original sin committed in Eden led to the sinfulness of Adam and Eve, and it led to the inclination to commit sinful acts by their descendants.

The last concept to discuss before moving to the New Testament passages can be found in Job 14:4 which states “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one” (ESV). While some of the earlier passages provide a bit of hope when it comes to remedying the human condition, the passage seems to indicate that there is no turning back from one’s sinfulness, or uncleanness. As the sin nature is examined through an Old Testament lens, there seems to be no permanent cure for the sin nature.

**Human Nature in the New Testament**

The Old Testament was the written Word of God prior to the incarnation of Christ which required a specific theme for discussing the sin nature. As the New Testament passages are assessed, it is clear that a different theme can be, and must be, expressed by God. The major theme as it relates to sin nature in the New Testament is that there is a contrast between the sinful nature and the spirit that must be explored. The Apostle Paul clearly delineates this theme when he says: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:17, ESV). Just as in the Old Testament, the term sin nature does not exist in the pages of the New Testament. However, the concept is certainly carried over from the Old Testament framework.

The New Testament does not spend time debating the merit or existence of a sinful nature. Rather, the writers of the New Testament assume – work from the premise – that the sinful nature is a reality in the life of all humanity. Jesus makes that point very clear in a discourse with a young rich ruler: “And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:17-18, ESV, emphasis added). Christ was making a point to the young man that goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but nonetheless, Jesus is expressing
the state of human nature: our nature is totally corrupt, sinful. This utterly sinful nature to which Jesus refers is completely contrary to his wholly holy nature. His nature – the result of His divinity as evidenced by His conception by the Holy Spirit and virgin birth – is one that is completely without blemish or spot which is what made Him the perfect contrast to the sinful nature.

As has already been stated, the consequences of that original sin have lasting effects on all of us. Some of the ways in which all humans living today are affected by that first sin include:

- that all humans are bound to Adam in some way (See Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22),
- that all humans are completely unable to impress God with our ability to do good (See Romans 3:23), and
- that all humans have been affected by and have contributed to the universality of sin in that an adult with a corrupt nature will produce offspring with a corrupt nature (See Job 14:4; Matthew 7:17-18; Luke 6:43) (Marino, 1994).

The existence of the sin nature is not refuted in the pages of the New Testament. However, the writers of the New Testament do focus on contrasting the two natures: the sinful nature and the spirit-lead nature. Romans 7:18-20 states “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (ESV). Second, the flesh does what is evil (See Romans 7:5; Galatians 5:17-21) and nothing good dwells there (Romans 7:18). Third, the Apostle Paul recognizes that a battle is raging within his being; a battle for control of the body and actions.

The Apostle Paul continues in the next chapter. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8, ESV). The Apostle Paul is still using sarx to describe the flesh here, but is using phroneo for mind. The Apostle Paul is actually using a word that means to think after or be of a certain mind (Vine, 1996).

The Apostle Paul's usage in the New Testament correlates closely with the Old Testament usage of lev or levav which refers to heart, mind, and understanding. Taken together, the Old and New Testament terms for mind/heart connote a place that can be corrupted (See Genesis 6:5; Deuteronomy 15:9; Isaiah 29:13) but is not the seat of corruption within the human being (Marino, 1994). The prophet Jeremiah warns of the capabilities of the heart – the levav – in a thematically appropriate verse for a theory of crime from a Scriptural standpoint: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick [or wicked]; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV).

The Two “Adams”

Fortunately for the whole of humanity, God did not leave us to flounder in a state of total depravity. He made a way for us to rejoin Him and His family.
And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1-5, ESV)

This passage contrasts the two natures, but it also hints at a contrast between what has commonly been referred to as the “two Adams”. “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:45-47, ESV). It can be understood from this passage that the first Adam is the Adam of Genesis who was created in God’s own image yet partook of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil condemning all of humanity to isolation from God. By contrast, the second Adam, the last Adam as 1 Corinthians explains, is none other than Jesus Christ who came into this world to reconcile all of humanity back to God and heal our broken relationship with Him.

While many could recite the account of the creation from memory, it can often be described as the gist of the story rather than a presentation of the details of that account found within the pages of Scripture. Far too often, the details and precise order of events gets lost in our memory of the account. Understanding the comparison of the two Adams begins with a proper understanding of the timeline found with the second and third chapters of Genesis. Within the pages of Scripture, a chronological account is not always given. However, almost always within a chapter or even a book of the Bible is the account provided chronologically. The details found in chapters two and three of Genesis are no different – they may be presented out of chronological order but there is no way to discern that based on the information provided. Therefore, the best course of action is to take Scripture literally as it details the account of the fall of man.

Timeline of Genesis 2 and 3

Genesis 2 begins with a review of the rest that God enjoyed after creating the whole of the universe. In verse 7, we begin to see a more detailed account of the creation of man and the events that followed. The account found in chapter 2, in order, are as follows:

- God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into his nostrils causing the man to become a living soul.
- God planted a garden eastward in Eden and place the man within it.
  - Within the garden, all manner of trees and plants could be found.
- God gave a decree to the man.
  - The man could eat freely of any tree within the garden.
  - The man was required to avoid eating from one specific tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
  - If man ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die that day.
- God recognized that Adam needed someone to help him – it is not good for man to be alone.
- God formed every manner of beast and fowl. He brought them before
the man who named each one, but none were found to be suitable as a helper.

- God caused the man to enter a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and formed woman from that rib.

At this point, things seem to be going really well. Adam has named all the beast of the field and all the fowl of the air. Adam has even been provided a wife, a helper, whom he can enjoy. Both Adam and Eve are naked and are not ashamed of being so. They were innocent and without blemish at that time. They enjoyed all that the garden in Eden had to offer. However, chapter 3 of Genesis begins with a description of the antagonist of the account. While the details found in chapter 2 are all initiated by and focused around God, the details of chapter 3 are focused around the activities of man: there is a lesson in that. The main details, in order, of chapter 3 are as follows:

- The serpent, who was more subtle than all other beasts, speaks to the woman saying “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

- The woman then corrects the serpent identifying that they may eat of any tree in the garden except one. However, the woman does not quite quote God correctly either: “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”

- The serpent then tells the woman that she will not die, but that her eyes will be opened and she will be like God.

- Seeing that the fruit of the tree was good for food, the woman decided to eat of the fruit.

- The woman offered the fruit to the man who decided to eat it.

- The eyes of the man and woman were opened, they recognized their nakedness, and they hid.

- The man and the woman made clothes out of fig leaves in an attempt to cover their nakedness.

- God, in the cool of the day, comes calling in the garden for the man and the woman.

- The man explains that he hid from God because he was afraid because he was naked.

- God inquires who told them that they were naked.
  - Part of that inquiry is God’s asking if the man and woman ate of the forbidden tree’s fruit.

- The man speaks up first placing the blame on the woman, and indirectly God, who gave him the fruit to eat.

- God turns to the woman who places the blame on the serpent who deceived her.

Consequences are placed on each of the three parties. The man gets his punishment, the woman gets her punishment, and the serpent gets his punishment. Despite passing blame onto someone else, everyone is responsible for his or her own actions in this account.

**Contrasting Characteristics of the Two Adams**

The first Adam, the one found in Genesis tending the garden, and the second Adam, the one foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ, have some similarities. Both Adams were flesh and blood in the image of God. Both Adams bore the consequences of sin and were sentenced to death. Both Adams were representatives for their respective natures: bringing life or death. Both Adams engaged in one defining act that
altered the course of humanity. While these similarities exist, the differences between the two Adams are much more important in the discussion about the sin nature.

The differences that exist between the two Adams are not just slight differences. They seem to be diametrically opposed to one another; these differences are complete opposites as they concern the whole of humanity. The differences are outline as follows:

- The first Adam was form out of the dust of the earth, while the second Adam was sent from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47).
- The first Adam was made a living being, while the second Adam was a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).
- The first Adam was characterized with disobedience, while the second Adam was characterized by obedience (Romans 5:19).
- The first Adam transgressed (Hosea 6:7), while the second Adam was tempted in every way as we are but was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).
- The first Adam was faithless (Hosea 6:7), while the second Adam was faithful (Hebrews 3:1-2).
- The first Adam ushered sin into humanity (Romans 5:12), while the second Adam ushered the no-strings-attached gift of justification into humanity (Romans 5:15-16).
- The first Adam’s actions resulted in death, while the second Adam’s actions resulted in resurrection (Romans 5:17-18).
- The first Adam brought death to all humanity, while the second Adam brought life to all humanity (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Through the first Adam, the perfect imago dei was broken. The whole of humanity still resembles God’s image in some ways but does not perfectly resemble God’s image. The point the second Adam, Christ, was to reconcile humans back to God. We still do not perfectly resemble God, but, after the point of salvation, God no longer sees the shortcomings of the individual when He looks at him or her. Christ’s single act on the cross of Calvary allowed for all of Adam’s disobedience to be undone. That is the hope of the Gospel: men no longer need to remain separated from God but rather can be separated to God!

Significance to Criminological Theory

While the discourse of Scripture provides a great deal of hope for the believer regarding the sin nature, there is still a nature that pulls individuals toward sin or lawlessness. This pull is described by the Apostle Paul in Romans: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do
the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:14-15, ESV). The Apostle Paul recognized that even having a transformed life, accepting the gift of Christ which is eternal life, is not sufficient to negate or obliterate the sinful nature swirling within each person. Perhaps, then, the question that should be asked is not “how is it that some engage in criminal activity”, but rather it should be asked: “how is it that some do not engage in criminal activity?”.

Given the facts of Scripture, it would seem significantly more likely that one would engage in lawless, criminal, sinful acts rather than actively avoid that kind of behavior. It must be true that it is easier for humans to choose the sinful, lawless action as the Apostle Paul describes. However, God has established various institutions to help curb or manage the urge to engage in criminal behavior. Some of those institutions are: the family, the community, and the government.

God has established these spheres of influence that people might be able to better live with one another. The smallest sphere is that of the family environment. The family has a very clear chain of command in Scripture. First, the father is the head of the household, answerable to God for the spiritual direction of the family (Ephesians 6:4). Second, the wife is answerable to God but also to her husband. She is to support her husband in his pursuit to establish a godly home and family (Ephesians 5:22-24). Third, children are to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). The task of leadership over the children rests with the father and mother. It is their job to ensure that children are directed and disciplined toward the right things. Scripture teaches: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, ESV). This first sphere, the family, can go a long way toward curbing lawless, sinful acts in individuals.

The second sphere is that of community. This community might also be referred to as the local fellowship, the congregation. Therein, a specific progression is appropriate as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20. First, when a brother in Christ commits a wrong against an individual, the individual is to go and speak to the brother. If that is effective, the chain of correction ends. However, when that is not effective in correcting the behavior, a small group of two or three go to speak with the brother in an attempt to correct the behavior. If that is effective, the chain of correction ends. However, when that is not effective, the group grows to the entire congregation. The whole of the local fellowship gets involved in the correction. The goal is not to shame the brother into submission, but rather the goal is to help the brother recognize the err of his ways and reconcile him back to the local fellowship and to God.

The third sphere endowed with authority by God is the government. In the Old Testament, judges were used as governing bodies for the people of Israel. However, the Israelites demanded a king like other nations (1 Samuel 8:5-6). God granted that request and in so doing gave authority to the king over the people. Israel, and all other nations, have had godly, benevolent rulers, and they have all had ungodly, malevolent rulers. The type of ruler really makes little difference in his or her ability to exercise authority over the people. “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (Romans 13:1-2, ESV). Those who fail to obey the laws established by the governing authorities will feel the wrath of that governing authority: “for he, [the governing authority], is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid for the does not bear the sword in vain” (Romans 13:4, ESV, emphasis added). The sword has often been used as an illustration for capital punishment; however, it is at least a tool for discipline and correction, the point of which is to encourage people to act rightly –
that is, in accordance with God’s law.

When these spheres of influence fail, individuals cave to the sinful nature within them and criminal, lawless behavior can result. Various theoretical perspectives have merit when it comes to understanding why individuals commit crime. However, none of those theories even come close to an overarching, all-encompassing reason why crime exists. The acceptance that sinfulness is within everyone is the only explanation for all types and variations of criminal or deviant activity. The real choice is whether to take God at His Word.

References


