

ME OR ADAM?

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GOD'S GREATEST PROBLEM

God's greatest problem is summed up in one little word: S-I-N. Heaven is at battle stations today because sin has invaded the human race and the moral universe. It is high time the Church knew her enemy! Her first enemy is not the devil, it is not death, it is not despair. Her enemy is sin, and unless she learns to understand it, face it and deal with it, God can never grant us a visitation from on high to turn our nations back to Him.

John Wesley said, "Give me one hundred men who fear no one but God and hate nothing but sin and I will move the world." Do we hate sin? Satan has successfully clouded the minds of thousands of church people on this dangerous issue. No man is a real Christian who does not hate the things God hates and love the things that God loves. And in all His holiness God hates sin. Sin cost Him His only begotten Son. Sin cost the Lord Jesus His life. Sin plunged the world into a living Hell. It will yet plunge multitudes into an endless Hell. It is time we paid serious attention to the subject of sin.

Our understanding of its guilt and awfulness will largely determine our view of the love and mercy of God, our presentation of the Gospel to sinners, and our presentation of truth to the Body of Christ. What is sin?

WHAT SIN IS NOT

1) Sin is not NATURAL

A common answer when people are faced with sin is, "Yes, I sin. Nobody is perfect; we're only human!" So, you sin because you are only human? Does human equal sinful? Nothing could be further from the truth. Only by comparing ourselves with the perfect

example of true humanity, the Lord Jesus, can we see just how unnatural sin is. When God became man, He took on a true human body. Jesus was not God disguised as man, but God who became man. Although He was conceived supernaturally, He was born of a perfectly normal human girl. (Lk 1:31) He grew, learned, was hungry and thirsty. (Lk 2:40, 2:52, 4:2; Mt 4:2; Jn 19:8). As the Last Adam, His body (though arguably not subject to death or disease like ours is now) was just as special as when our first parents walked the earth; Scripture does not go out of its way to portray it as utterly unlike any other human body. (Heb 10:5; Jn 2:21; Lk 24:3,23; 1Jn 1:1). He ate, drank, felt weary and rested; (Mk 2:16; Lk 24:39) and declared His body to be flesh and bones (Jn 20:20,27). He was a human soul. (Is 53:11; Ps 16:10; Jn 12:27; Acts 2:27; Mt 26:38) John, Peter, Paul and Isaiah all called Him a man. (Jn 1:30; Acts 2:22; 1Tim 2:5; Is 53:3) He called Himself a man. (Jn 8:40) His favorite name for Himself when He walked this earth was, "the Son of Man," used seventy-one times in Scripture.

Christ, was of course, always God. He was the only man without a beginning, because He was eternal in His origin. He knew that He had come from the Father, and after His earthly mission He would go back to the Father. His essential relationship with the Spirit and the Father was never removed. But while He walked this planet, the Lord Jesus used none of His Godhead powers, in order to show that it was possible to resist temptation and defeat the devil with only the power of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of His Father, and the Word of God. He laid aside His rights and powers as God to tread this world (Phil 2:5-8; Lk 2:52; Heb 5:7-9) although His essential nature as God remained unchanged. To be fully "tempted in all points such as we are", and yet be "without sin," the Lord Jesus had to become fully human. To make Him out to be unfairly more than this during His brief stay on earth is to miss completely the whole purpose of His life; not only to offer His body as a perfect substitute for our sin, but to show us the way a child of God was to live in this world! (Heb 2:14-15; 5:5-9) Understand, the Lord Jesus had nothing available to Him on earth that any child of God does not have available. In fact,

His Father even arranged for Him to have some disadvantages! (Lk 2:7; Jn 1:46; Jn 8:41) The Lord Jesus was our pattern of true human nature, yet He was “without sin” (Heb 4:15) and He “did no sin.” (1Pet 2:22) God made human nature; God did not make sin!

Sin is never natural. It is horribly unnatural. Sin is never “human.” It is horribly inhuman. Sin creates remorse, guilt, and shame; any time we feel these three witnesses in our soul, they tell us sin is not natural. Even a simple lie detector tells us this. The whole body reacts adversely if a man sins. Sin is in fact, a kind of insanity. (Ecc 9:3) The insane treat their dream world as real, and the real world as a dream: so, practically, does the sinner. The insane try to do the naturally impossible; so does the sinner when he tries to squeeze lasting satisfaction from sin. The insane suspect and fear the ones who love them most; watch the sinner as he runs madly from the God who loves him, and rushes on to Hell as if it were Heaven! This is the worst kind of insanity; not of the head, but of the heart.

No-one ever sins because they love sin. Even the worst sinner does not like to be called a sinner; he resents the fact of his selfishness, even when he is selfish! And even the worst of sinners cannot help but admire right in another, whenever that other person is sufficiently far away from him not to convict him of his selfishness. (Is 58:1-2; Ezc 33:32; Rm 7:22). Nobody sins merely for the sake of doing wrong. Sinning men and women hate themselves when they do wrong. A man sins only if he wants something for himself more strongly than he wants to do right. God never planned sin for man. It is the most unnatural thing in the moral universe. To equate humanity with sinfulness is to make God the author of His own worst enemy; to make God responsible for the thing that has brought Him unhappiness. Do not dare say sin is natural!

ARE WE REALLY UNABLE TO OBEY?

(2) Sin is not unavoidable

One of the favorite heresies of the past is rapidly becoming the favorite heresy of the present. It is the lie of antinomianism; that men cannot do what God expressly requires them to do, and therefore they may live how they like and still enter the Kingdom of God. In the midst of the greatest moral landslide the world has ever seen, in the midst of the most flagrant disrespect for law and order and government of any century, it is unblushingly proclaimed as Gospel truth from pulpits across the nation that man cannot keep the law of God! In our wariness of the dangers of legalism, we have forgotten the perils of antinomianism; we have forgotten that “the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” (Gal 3:24) and that “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rm 3:20) Gone is the preaching of moral responsibility that streamed from men like William Booth, George Fox, John Wesley, and Charles Finney, that made men weep with conviction; gone is the heartbreak of the Psalmist for the honor of God when he cried, “Horror has taken hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake Thy law!” (Ps 119:56; Ps 119:136).

Some sincere men say, “God gave us good laws to keep,” but in the next breath say, “but He knew we couldn’t keep them.” If this is really true, then how are God’s laws good? No law is good that asks the impossible of its subjects, If God demands obedience to impossible laws, then God is not just, for even men do not require obedience to impossible laws. If God demands such obedience under penalty of death, then God is not only unfair, but monstrous! What kind of being would pass laws upon his subjects they are actually unable to keep, and then condemn them to death for their failure to obey? This is a blasphemy on God’s character. Which of God’s laws are we actually unable to keep, if we love the Lawgiver? Do we have to relegate God to some other position than King of our lives and put something else in His place? Do we have to take His Name in vain? Must we steal? What man has

ever been born that could not help but murder? Do we have no choice but to be sexually immoral, to lie, to covet, to dishonor parents and refuse to honor God on a special day of rest? God says His commandments are not grievous. Do we say they are not only grievous, but impossible? The Lord Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Do we say His yoke is not only heavy, but completely unbearable for any human being?

The Bible expressly declares that God has given good laws. All the laws of God are based on the one great Law of Love. Love is to govern the actions of all moral beings in God’s universe. Every moral creature should unselfishly choose the highest good of God and His universe according to their real, relative values. As God’s own being is greatest, He must be loved first of all; then all others in the order of their true value under God. The Ten Commandments are just a letter expression of that law, given when men began to ignore the original love law written on their hearts. They define man’s obligations toward God in the first four commandments, then those of his obligations to his fellow men in the last six. The Lord Jesus summed these in His two commandments (Mt 22:36-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28) covering what Moses had already given. (Deu 6:5; Lev 19:18) Paul summed up the Law into the one basic word, love. (Rm 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; 1Tim 1:5; Jas 2:8) This Law, expressed in different ways, is given as the unchangeable condition of happiness and holiness. It defines human obligations and can never be changed or suspended in our present relationships (Gal 3:19; Ps 19:7; Mt 5:17; Rm 7:12; 1Tim 1:8)

No saint in Scripture ever thought they were unable to keep God’s laws. Moses didn’t. (Ex 24:3; Deu 5:1, 6:24-25; 10:12-13) Neither did Joshua, (Jos 22:5) Ezra, (Ezr 7:23-26) David, (Ps 19:7; 40:8) his psalmist friend, (Ps 119:165-168) Daniel, (Dan 9:9-11) or any others! (2Kg 17:13, (vss 7-18)). The Lord Jesus Himself told men to obey His Father’s laws; this was the test of being a true disciple. (Mt 5:17-20; 19:17; Jn 14:15,21,23-24, 15:10). The Apostle John stresses this obedience. (1Jn 2:3-6, 3:18-22) Obeying God’s love law simply means living for Him with no selfish interest; to live up to all the light you have with all the effort of

will, mind, and feeling necessary for the task in hand. For the Christian, obeying God and keeping His commandments are a natural part of his new life. Only a sinner finds it hard to walk in God's ways; when he tries to use law as a means to his own end, the ultimate gratification of his own selfishness. And he will fail.

IS SIN A "SOMETHING?"

3) Sin is not physical

Many think they have explained the fact of sin in the human race by using a phrase we shall call "Doggie Logic." It goes essentially like this: "A dog is not a dog because he barks: he barks because he is a dog. Thus, man is not a sinner because he sins; he sins because he is a sinner." The assumption is, of course, that all sin flows from a preexistent sinful nature, and it is this nature that creates the sinful acts of the sinner. Just as the bark of a dog comes undeniably from the fact that he is a dog, so man's sin will flow inescapably from the fact that he is a sinner, and was born so. It sounds nice; is it true? There are unfortunately two things wrong with this logic. They are serious flaws, because once they are assumed, they actually destroy the basis of the very thing they seek to prove; that all men are guilty of, and responsible to God for their sin. These logic flaws are:

1) A man is not a dog. A dog's actions are right if he barks, because God created a dog to express itself naturally by barking. But God did not create men to sin! A dog's bark is natural; sin is not. The Bible everywhere represents sin as an alien invasion to a moral nature made in the image of God. Assuming that man sins because it is his nature to sin, also assumes that sin is natural. A dog barks because he is a dog. A man can also bark if he chooses to. Does this prove that he is a dog? No, it proves that he has chosen to do a thing he was never created to do. If a man sins, it merely proves that he has chosen to sin, and his sin will certainly be treated as unnatural in the eyes and judgment of God.

2) Do we need a sinful nature to sin? Is it necessary to have an preexistent “implanted sinfulness” to enable man to do wrong? If one sinner can be found in Scripture who sinned without first having a sinful nature, the answer is no, and the case is closed. And of course, there are at least three moral beings who committed sin without sinful natures. Satan was the first. The first man Adam was the second, and then his wife Eve. The angels who were cast out of heaven were apparently first perfect. No moral being needs a sinful nature to sin. If he is given one that makes it really impossible for him not to do right, he is not guilty, but helpless.

Neither does sin reside, as some sincere men have speculated, in the blood. Scriptures associate mortality with blood, but never morality. It is a symbol of human life. As the key electrochemical and circulatory system of the body, it is both the “life of the flesh” and the “circuitry” of the soul. As a statement of out poured life, it is certainly a precious symbol of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. (Is 53:10-12; Heb 9:22-23; Mt 26:28; Acts 20:28; Rm 3:24-26; 5:9-11; Eph 2:13; Heb 10:10-14, 19-20; 1Pet 1:18-19; 1Jn 1:7). But blood in the Bible does not carry good or evil. If we can transmit morals through blood, then a blood transfusion from a saint will make a man more holy, and one from a sinner will make a saint less sanctified. It will follow then, that a prenatal blood transfusion on a blue baby will give it a totally different nature. Now, while it is true that the blood of any creature contains its life essence and the blood of Christ cleanses from sin, no Scripture assigns either sin or love to blood. Blood never holds morals in the Bible.

What is sin if it isn’t a substance? As Christians we speak of sin as a power or a force and know it is something much more than just an isolated wrong decision. Somehow personal sin can keep record in our body, mind, and emotions. All habits, both good and bad, are developed the same way: by repetitive choices, stored as patterns in our memory. Sinful patterns built around a life of supremely serving ourselves can be terrifyingly addictive and far stronger than any wishful intention to do better. We may see and approve what is good, but have no power in our own strength to

escape the bondage.

In Romans 7:7-24 the Apostle Paul personifies sin to show its power over an enlightened, but unconverted mind. He calls it the law of sin and death. Any habit of wanting our own way clashes with the judgment of conscience and God's moral law. Any such developing death style of evil habit (the "law" or "rule of action of sin") conflicts with the changeless reality of the true state of things, the law of God. A sinner may discipline his life to try to break some bad habits, but no one ever escapes unaided the ultimate addiction of serving ourselves. Without the drawing power of the Holy Spirit, no sinner can free himself. Only Christ by the Gospel can truly deliver him. (Rm 7:25; 8:1)

Paul illustrates the battle by speaking as if he is presently in it. That it is only an illustration and not a present personal problem is clear; the passage ends in true freedom. He speaks of the tug of this "law of sin" as if it is at home in his bodily members. "Flesh" is a phrase used to describe the concentration on emotional gratification through our five senses. We feel excited desires sparked into unnatural strength by habits of selfish gratification in our bodies. Jesus comes to break the cycle of death and bring deliverance.

Even here Paul does not really make a case for "physical" sin and certainly is not seeking to prove it as his helpless inheritance. He is not concerned with how a man sins, but the fact of an internal battle raging that cannot be won alone. His point is to show us we have no hope of salvation in ourselves; the law of moral thermodynamics is against us. Who can help him get free? Only Jesus Christ, who faced all the temptations in His own body and did not give in at all; only Jesus, whose perfect character was sealed in death and whose resurrection demonstrates His power to face our worst and ugliest and win.

If sin is physical, in what form does it exist? Is it solid, liquid or gas? If sin is identifiably material, can it be isolated in a test tube? Can it be injected into a saint to make him wrong? May we see

the phenomena of a vial of sin concentrate? This is, of course, absurd. All efforts to trace actual sin to some biologic or materially organic connection with parents have failed of genetic, medical, or physiological evidence. Attempts to trace actual wrong to some gene or chemical deficiency is the humanist's last shot at explaining morality, and still fails to deal with the universality of sin. At the most, all inherited traits from parents simply contribute influences for later selfish choices.

How then, can we account for the fact that all have sinned? It is customary to trace this universal sinfulness to some kind of organic connection with Adam. Out of the mass of historical theological opinion, we may reduce all views to two basically opposite ideas.

Augustine, began with the premise that souls, like bodies were transmitted to children. Thus man was unable to help sin, since he inherited a sinful soul. The logical conclusion of a premise like this is that man is not to blame for his sinful nature, and cannot properly be urged to repent of it, since true repentance involves self-condemnation by the sinner. It follows then, that man can do nothing in salvation; God makes all the choices, and man becomes a mere puppet in His hands. In such a system, man can be sub-Scripturally devalued; being human is equated with sinfulness. Doctrines of infant damnation, physical baptismal regeneration, unconditional eternal security, annihilation, or universalism, and forms of fatalism may logically follow. On the other hand, the Bible holds man fully responsible for sin; though he is indeed damaged, hurt, and unable to save himself, he is not pictured as irresponsibly helpless. He himself can choose to respond to God's Spirit drawing him to repent, believe Jesus and obey His Word.

Pelagius, held that a man was born innocent, free of contamination; if left to his own way, he would naturally choose God. Logically then, a man might actually save himself from sin by consistent right choices; he does not need a Savior at all! If this was true, why should God need to intervene in our lives? Given the right teaching and environment, we can carve out our own holi-

ness and happiness without Christ! This leads to the unscriptural deification of man and the dangerous errors of humanistic and rationalistic thought which may lead on to religious atheism and the abandonment of God altogether. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that man is incapable of saving himself; that his plight cannot be corrected by education or environment, but only by the sovereign drawing power of God the Holy Spirit, who alone can lead a man into a “grace-by-faith” salvation not based on man’s works. We all need God, even the holy angels who never sinned at all.

All other positions on human depravity place somewhere between these two extremes. Our own understanding of this subject will modify every facet of practical theology! This is no mere theoretical issue, but is essential to our picture of the Gospel. If we excuse sin, we shall do so at the expense of God’s love, and at the peril of our souls. If we contradict Scripture by calling temptations, influences, and involuntary actions sin, we will be bound and falsely condemned by the Enemy of our souls. We’ll be too busy fighting our own failures to turn the world upside down, while all Heaven mourns. We have seen what sin is not; to resolve these difficulties, let us see what sin is.

What Sin Is

(1) Sin is universal

Nothing is clearer in Scripture or in daily life. World history is a chronicle of wickedness. Every man prior to conversion is a slave to his own selfishness. Every unsaved man knows that he is selfish. The Bible teaches the unsaved possess one common wicked heart or character: (Gen 6:5; 1Kg 11:9-11, 15:3; 2Chr 12:14; Ps 28:3, 66:18, 78:37, 95:10; Jer 17:9-10; Ezk 14:2-3, 18:30-32; Ecc 9:3; Mt 5:27-30, 9:4, 13:15; Mk 3:5; 7:18-23, 8:17; Lk 21:34; Acts 8:21(vss 18-24); Rm 2:4-6; Rm 8:7; Heb 3:7-15) All men without God are totally selfish at heart. It is exceedingly hum-

bling to admit that all of a man's pre-conversion actions are not in the least virtuous when examined in Eternity's light. Man has nothing to commend him to God, when he comes asking for forgiveness. He can never pass the final test at the bar of justice.

The Bible further reveals that from the beginning of our moral accountability, (recognizing spiritual responsibility to God and our fellow men), we have made a choice to live supremely for self. True virtue consists in right relationship to God. Without this surrender and trust, everything is tainted by self-seeking. No exceptions of true goodness, no pauses for really virtuous behavior, no alternating weeks of true holiness with sinning. Many factors influence the forms of this selfishness; there are many good, clean-living, outwardly moral sinners, as well as those who are humanly despicable and degraded. Sinners choose the particular forms of selfishness that bring them the greatest pleasure, and this includes deeds and actions usually considered good by society, including prayer, religious activity, Bible study and preaching! But all sinners, from those who have done "many wonderful works" to those God has had to "give up to vile affections," have one uniform morality, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." This universal persistency in sin is also shown in the many Scriptures. (Gen 8:21; Ps 10:4, 14:3, 28:3; 53:1,3; Ecc 1:14; Is 55:7-9, 64:6; Jer 13:23, 17:9-10; Mt 7:21-23, 12:34-35; Rm 1:21, 3:10-12, 3:23, 6:16, 6:20; Eph 2:1,3; 5:8; Titus 1:15, 3:3; 1Pet 2:25)

YOU AND YOUR ORIGINAL SIN

(2) Sin is original

There is nothing clearer in the Bible; man is very original in his sin! Sin is not transmitted; it is re-created by any being misusing the elements of true morality; emotion, reason, choice, moral light, and spiritual perception of God's law. [See "Man and The Origin of Evil" for a full discussion and documentation on this subject.] To see why man is accountable for his own "original

sin” we must study the fall of our first parents.

At the dawn of Creation, God made His most wonderful work; out of the basic elements of the earth, a being “made in His image,” beautiful and perfect in every respect. There was no sickness, pain, or death. Man was not made sinful. He was placed in an earthly Paradise, in the best possible circumstances. He was given the elements of morality, (made like God as a person) and subjected to a test of his obedience. Since “right” and “wrong” cannot be created in a being, morality is the result of any being’s own response to that which they perceive as most valuable. If Adam were designed so he could not have sinned, he would not have been “good;” a man unable either to do good or bad cannot be considered moral or responsible. For Adam, a tree was the test: provided he choose to draw his life and truth first from his loving Creator, he was righteous.

Adam’s body and soul were perfect and unblemished. He served God, but without any real test of obedience, as nothing had yet entered Eden to tempt him to disobey. He was more innocent than holy, having no real pressures of temptation to test his faithfulness. No command of God crossed any of his natural inclinations; he was allowed to have his own way within the Garden God had given him. Finally, the great test came. The serpent suggested something that appealed to Adam and Eve’s love of conscious freedom in opposition to the direct command of God. Tree of life or tree of knowledge; and they chose terribly. Tragedy struck; Eve, then Adam, surrendered to the desire to have their own way, and broke the clear command of God. In unspeakable sadness, God was forced to clamp down His Divinely appointed penalties. These penalties were of a twofold nature.

Physical - Man began to physically die. His body felt the sting of the results of sin, and began to feel the curse of sickness, weakness, and decay. This curse was essential, as a man who was allowed to continue forever in sin would become a second devil, with every unrepentant year of his existence reinforcing his evil and increasing his wickedness. It spread to his family, society and

his world.

Moral - Adam and Eve were cut off from God, in spiritual death. Their sin now separated them from their brokenhearted Creator, Who came saying, "Adam, where are you?" Other terrible consequences followed. With sin also came guilt, remorse, and shame. They were expelled from the Garden, losing their sense of place and belonging lest they become immortal in sin by taking of the Tree of Life. The ground itself, even the whole creation around them was cursed, so men would have to labor to live, having less time for self-pleasing and resultant deeper sin. Eve was placed under protective subjection to her husband, because she had been first deceived. Their first child murdered their second and became a fugitive.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ADAM?

It is vitally important to notice here how Adam fell, and the consequences of his fall. To understand present human depravity, we must first define the word "depravity". From the Latin *de*, very, and *pravus* crooked, depravity means the failure to meet an existing standard, a fall from a place of original perfection. Adam became depraved in two ways; his heart and soul first failed to obey God, then his body began to fail. The first depravity was thus moral, followed by the second, which was physical, caused by Adam's selfish choice in spite of the clear warning of the penalty of God. These two depravities caused two kinds of death; physical and spiritual. Although these are linked, they are not the same thing. Both deaths are states of separation: spiritual death being a state of separation from God (essentially, to live sinfully is to be spiritually dead, (1Tim 5:6)) and physical death being finally a separation from the material world of earth. And as a careful study of Romans 5 shows, it is physical death, not moral, that is transmitted to his race.

Every time in this difficult and disputed passage, (with the possi-

ble exception of v.17), where “death” is mentioned is manifestly temporal, or physical, and not spiritual death. This passage has nothing to do with proving that sin “descended from Adam.” This interpretation was not found in the early church fathers; it was never given to the passage until the fourth century; was never adopted by the Greek church at all; and is wholly at variance with the design and scope of Paul’s whole argument and presentation. Romans 5:12-14 shows that “death” was the penalty of disobeying God’s law, but men died from Adam to Moses when there was no law. Thus, the transmitted death that all die is not spiritual, but physical. Because Adam sinned, all men die; they inherit not sin, but death. In verse 17, Paul catches on points of correspondence between Adam and Christ. (cf. 1Cor 15:45-49) Here the work of Christ equals and even surpasses Adam’s own failure; while Adam brought temporal death to his race, the Lord Jesus brought to man the gift of eternal life. Nothing is said, as would be expected in verse 20, about Adam’s fall extending to his race. Paul knew the word for “impute” (logazomai) meaning to count, reckon, and used it for righteousness (Rm 4:22) but a different word is used in Romans 5:13 (ellogeo - to bring into account). Verse 20 shows instead that the law came in as the occasion of universal sinfulness, implying that men sin now just as Adam did then; by intelligent transgression of known law of God.

Romans 5:19 is an exact parallelism. A key is the phrase translated “were made.” What does it mean? Does it mean made so without choice or chance? If it should be translated “constituted” as some have said, then all men are or will be saved, (no choice or chance) because of what Christ did! This is obvious universalism. However, this phrase occurs 21 Times in the New Testament and in all other places where Paul uses it, it means “to ordain, appoint, put in place of.” It is used of the ordination of elders, bishops, priests or judges, and properly means “to put, place, lay down” or “put in a position.” To be put in a position is not genetic. Deacons and elders have conditions to meet for their place; they can also lose it. With this qualification, the passage is clear. Adam’s sin put all men in the place of choosing sin. He fell first, damaged us all and set us up to follow his lead. But Jesus did not sin. His victory

over sin and death put all men in the place of choosing righteously if they will respond to Him! As Adam's sin is the occasion (not cause) of a race's ruin, so Christ's obedience is the occasion, not cause of its redemption.

What then, did Adam pass on to his race? It is easier to sin than do right. People that sin keep sinning more. All, indeed, "have sinned." What happened in Adam that brings us now into a world with two strikes against us? The effects of sin are as profound as God's creation connections in our beings. Because of his organic link to us, Adam fathered physical depravity, reinforced by our ancestral parents' selfish choices to recur right down through history. This is the true "original sin," an inherited, accumulated damage that hurts us with a bias, or tendency towards self-gratification. Notice, it is not sin that is passed down, but degraded emotional patterns, a weakened or defiled physical body and over-hyped propensities that give sin its power and make all of us open to the tug of temptation. A parental addiction or greed may result in a child's inherited unnaturally strong appetite. While this is not in itself sin, the results of their sin are still transmitted, becoming in turn the occasions of further wrongdoing in future generations. Thus, a parent's sin is "visited on their children" although all such awakened desires or weakened bodies are the child's misfortune, not his crime. Such hereditary effects may last three or four generations, even when the child does not follow his parents' or grandparents' example. Apart from God's transforming work in salvation through Christ, the world's sin once begun can only multiply with each generation. (Ex 20:5; Num 14:18; Deu 5:9)

The Bible testifies to our physical depravity by birth and circumstances. This makes it easier for the will to choose self-gratification, while not the cause of our wrong action. It is obvious that man is in a weakened and unbalanced condition. (Ps 103:15-16; Mt 26:41; Rm 6:19; Rm 8:3,23; 2Cor 4:11; 5:2-4; 12:7; Gal 4:13-14; Phil 3:21; Jas 4:14) This gives him a bias towards selfish action, the key among many influences for sin.

WHY DO CHILDREN SIN?

How, then does a child sin? You do not have to teach a child to do wrong. An explanation becomes clear as we carefully consider human development. A baby enters the world as the object of its parents' fondness, unceasing care, and concession by those who guard it. In these circumstances its natural, inherited appetites are first developed, and that child's natural desire for conscious freedom also begins to express itself. Feelings develop long before reason, and both are deeply entrenched before the spirit begins to awaken to the claims of God. Much depends at this point on the parents. If they are faithful in their duty to God, they must train their child to yield up its own way when that self-willed way will interfere with the happiness of others. The child will, at first, learn obedience to its parents only in a love/discipline relationship; it is here that the habit of response to authority must be ingrained in a child's soul, so that later, when God opens up their spiritual understanding, that child will surrender to Him. (1Sam 15:22; Pr 6:20-23; Pr 10:17; Pr 13:18; Pr 15:5,31-32; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20)

Since the feelings develop before the reason and conscience, the will begins to form the habit of obeying desire, which deepens every day. The obvious consequence is that self-indulgence becomes the master principle in the soul of the child long before it can understand that this self-indulgence will interfere with the rights or happiness of others. This repeated bias, while not sin in itself, grows stronger each day, before knowledge of right or duty can possibly enter the mind. Finally, a moment of true moral responsibility arrives. The child is now old enough to understand wrong. (This will probably be earlier in a Christian home than in a non-Christian one.) Does the child approach this test in a perfectly neutral state? If Adam, in the maturity of his reason, with full consciousness of the morality of his actions, could give in to such temptation, how small is the hope that an unaided child will not? The Bible's sad record is, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The moment that child chooses selfishly, it sins. Paul put it like this: "I was alive without the law once; but then

sin revived (sprang into life), and I died.” Paul was Jewish. He grew up in a home surrounded by the law. How could he be alive without the law? It had to be as a child. The only time he was “without law” was when he didn’t see or understand it. Spiritual death begins the day you first see, understand, and disobey a known law of God. From this point on (and apparently not before) God holds the child responsible for his own actions and destiny. It is significant that all words of the Lord to sinners begin from their youth, and not from birth, as some have supposed.

It may be objected, “Does not the Bible teach that man is born sinful?” Many who follow Augustine’s assumptions think so. A number of verses are at times urged to support this idea, but they do not fairly stand up to alternative scholarship, and have only been used if no better explanation of the universal sinfulness of man is forwarded. We have to explain the universalness of sin somehow, and the inability of man to save himself. Yet to blame sin on another and to claim helplessness for our own evil is in itself an obvious evil. God is very plain; He does not hold the child in any kind of responsibility for its parents’ sins. “What do you mean, you who use this proverb, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live... you shall not have occasion to use this proverb in Israel. All souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezk 18:1-3,20, (see also the whole chapter); Jer 31:30; Deu 24:16; 2Chr. 25:4; Ps 94:23)

In speaking of the coming judgment, we are expressly told in the Bible that God shall judge every moral being for his own sins, no mention being made of the imputation of Adam’s guilt. (Ps 9:7-8, 96:13; Ecc 11:9, 12:14; Is 3:10-11; Jer 31:30, 32:17-19; Mt 12:36-37, 16:27; Lk 12:47-48, 20:46-47; Jn 5:27-29, 12:48; Acts 17:30-31; Rm 2:2-11,12,16, 14:10-12; Gal 6:7-8; 1Cor 4:5; 2Cor 5:10; 1Tim 5:24-25; Heb 9:27; 1Pet 1:17; Jude 14-15; Rev 2:23) God has specifically stated He would not judge man for another’s sin. Yet, all sin in Scripture without exception is under the judgment of God. Man cannot, therefore, inherit sin from his parents or Adam.

Some Scriptures used to try to support this “inherited sin” idea have been pressed right out of context. In examining these, it will be important to adhere to some universally accepted principles of Biblical interpretation. They are:

- Interpret each verse or passage in the light of all other revealed Scripture;
- Examine each verse in the context where it is placed, taking into account the design, purpose, authority, and author of each passage;
- Texts used to prove either of two theories prove neither;
- Passages must be interpreted in a way (if they can be) by which they will not contradict each other.

It is with these principles in mind that we shall examine the so-called Scriptural objections:

(1) Ps 51:5

“I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Isn’t it saying here we are born sinful? Here David speaks; he speaks from personal experience, and not for the whole world; and who is the subject of this sentence? Not David, but his mother! Pressed literally, this verse says that during his time of gestation and conception, his mother was a sinner; David is the object. There is a world of difference between being shapen in iniquity and iniquity shapen in him, just as there is a great difference between being born in New Zealand and New Zealand being born in me! So does this mean (as Augustine once believed) that any act of sexual procreation because of sexual feelings even in marriage is itself sinful? Surely not. God made sex. It is His idea. What He calls clean ought not to be called unclean. What then, does this passage teach? There are three different interpretations, none of which teach the dogma of transmitted or inherited sin.

- 1) That David's conception was considered illegitimate, as some Jews have always believed; not from his father's side (a bastard could not enter the temple of the Lord) but on his mother's. David's mother's name is not mentioned. David is not shown with the sons of Jesse when Samuel came to anoint them. David's brothers seem embarrassed and angry in his presence. David apparently has a different mother than his brothers, Jesse's sons. His sister's dad is Nahash, not Jesse! (cf. 1Chr 2:13-16; 2Sam 17:25 and Ps 27:10) If so, it explains many things about his life, his personal battles, and abandonment to God, but nothing about Adam.

- 2) That David came from a lineage in which there had been family immorality, and remembered his "lineage" mother in comparison to his own sexual sin; David's mother calls herself a "handmaid" (concubine) who belongs to the Lord.

- 3) That David was simply deeply cut to the heart by his sin, and broke out in the extravagant language of poetry (cf. Ps27;3,4,7-8). Thinking back along his life, he broke out affirming that from the earliest moments of light he had been a sinner, and came from parents who were sinners, without in any way implying that this sin had been transmitted down to him by his mother. In no way does this passage teach "inherited" sin, no matter which way it is interpreted literally or figuratively.

(2) Ps 58:3, Job 14:4, 15:4, and Jn 3:3

This first verse in Psalms 58:3 has been pressed into service along the same lines. Note that it is the wicked who are spoken of and that even they "go astray." If the text is forced to literal interpretation, it means that infants talk as well as lie from birth!

Job 14:4 and 15:4 have been stretched to fit into this dogma. Both

these two verses simply imply the universality of human sin and bodily frailty, without any reference to the means by which man sins. Both may be used to support the idea that man is physically deprived, and by these influences will certainly (not necessarily fixed) sin.

Jn 3:3 can only at the limit state that that which is born of fleshly desire will tend to sin (when the will yields to its control) while that which results from the Holy Spirit's agency (in the sense that the will yields to Him) is holy. Nothing here about inherited sinfulness.

(3) Eph 2:3

“[B]y nature, the children of wrath” must be compared with Eph 2:1 which plainly states man is dead through his own trespasses and sins. Man's wicked nature has come as the result of his wicked walk in the way of this world. As previously stated, the word “nature” does not mean the way we were born. God shows that a sinner goes against his nature in his sin. (Rm 1:31; 2Tim 3:3; Jas 3:6) His “nature of wrath” is the result of his sinful actions, forming in his life a character that makes God angry with him.

THE FINAL CONCLUSION

WHAT SIN REALLY MUST BE

(3) Sin is always moral

All gathered evidence points finally and irrevocably to this fact. Moreover, an extensive study of the root words for sin in the Bible show overwhelmingly that each man is held responsible for his own sin; none of these words give any hint of a physical or moral cause back of the will that produces sinful choices. All

Bible words for sin overwhelmingly show its voluntary viciousness; all describe a deliberate choice.

1) Words with a root meaning to miss, err from the mark, or wander from the path of right prescribed by a loving Creator. The idea of a bad aim of an archer (Jdg 20:16) or those who stumble or make a false step out of haste on their way to a goal. (Pr 19:2)

a) To sin (khaw-taw) Gen 20:6,9; 39:9; Ex 20:20; Num 15:27(vss 27-31); Deu 20:18(16-18) (see 9:3-5); 1Sam 2:25; Pr 8:36 (vss 32-36); Ezk 18:4,20,24

b) Sin (khat-tawth) Gen 18:20-21; 50:17; Ex 32:30-34; Ps 32:5; Pr 14:34; Is 6:7; Ps 32:5; Pr 14:34; Is 6:7; Ezk 18:24; 33:14-16; Dan. 9:20-21; Zech 13:1

2) Words with a root meaning to bend, curve, twist, distort or make crooked.

a) To act perversely (aw-vaw) Act contrary, do wickedly or wrong: Ester 1:16; Dan 9:5

b) Perversion (aw-vone) Crookedness, depravity, iniquity, perversion of Divine law; guilt contracted by sinning (Gen 15:16) It is the character of the action that is emphasized: (Ps 32:5) Gen 4:13; 44:16; Ex 34:7,9; 1Chr 21:8; Is 6:7; 53:6; Jer 31:30,34; Ezk 3:18-20; 18:17-20; 18:30; Hos 4:8; Mic 7:18

3) Words meaning break away from just authority, revolt, rebel (2Kg 1:1, 3:5-7; 8:20,22)

a) Transgress (paw-shah) Is 1:2-4; 46:8; 66:24; Jer 2:29; 3:13(12-15); Ezk 2:3; 18:31; 20:38 (35-38); Hos 7:13 A breach with God, aspotacy - design and set purpose are always involved.

b) Transgression (peh-shah) Revolt, rebellion (conscious

breach of duty, desertion-while 1(b) (khat-tawth) involves sins of negligence and weakness, 3(b) (peh-shah) always implies design, set purpose. Job 34:37 is a key; “he adds to his sin rebellion” Gen 31:36; 50:17; Lev 16:15-16, 16:21; Ps 32:1;51:1,3; Is 43:25, 44:22, 53:8, 58:1; Ezk. 18:28,30-31 Involves trespass and apostasy.

4) To be wicked (raw-shah) properly means to make a noise, or tumult. It denotes a state of impiety, making disturbance, confusion, trouble, with the idea of strong excitement. (Cf. Job 3:17, Is 57:20) If evil becomes the habitual feature of the disposition or action, it is raw-shah. 1Kg 8:47(47-50); Job 3:17; Ps 18:21; Is 57:20; Daniel 9:15 Other words come from this.

5) Words with a root meaning covering up or over; treachery, falsehood or faithlessness:

a) To act treacherously (maw-al') Deu 32:51 (of Moses, 6(a) (maw-raw') used in Num 27:14) Josh 7:1; 1Chr 5:25; 10:13; 2Chr 12:2(1-3); Neh 1:8.

b) Treachery (mah'-al) Job 21:24

6) Words with a primitive root meaning to be or make bitter; stroke or stripe; lash with a whip, strike, contend with both hands, repulse anyone; to strike anyone's mouth, i.e. refuse to hear his words, treat him with contempt; thus to be grievously perverse in resisting authority.

a) To be rebellious (maw-raw') Num 20:23-24 (Aaron's rebellion), 27:12-14 (of Moses; he uses the same word of Israel. Num 20:10), Deu 21:18-21; 1Sam 15:23; Ps 5:10, 78:8

b) Rebellion (mer-ee') Num 17: 10; Deu. 3 1 :27; 1Sam 15:23; Neh. 9:17; Pr 17:11; Is 30:9; Ezk 2:3,5

7) Words from a primitive root meaning to rebel, be rebellious,

thus stubbornly disobedient:

- a) To rebel (maw-rad') Josh 22:15-16; 2Kg 18:7(1,3,5-7); Job 24:13; Ezk 2:3; Dan. 9:9
 - b) Rebellion (mer-ad') Ezk 4:19
 - c) (meh-red) Josh 22:22
 - d) Rebellious (maw-rawd) Ezr 4:12,15
- 8) Iniquity or wickedness (vanity-aw'ven) From a root meaning to pant, thus exert oneself in vain, come to nothingness. This emptiness idea is applied to:
- Vanity, hence falsehood, wickedness;
 - Lightness, ease;
 - Living at ease, riches, wealth;
 - Ability to do;
 - Exhaustion.
- a) Emptiness or vanity (characterizing sin and false worship) Is 41:29; Zech 10:2; 1Sam 15:23 (of the vanity of idols) Is 66:3 (of idols themselves) Hosea 4:15; 10:5
 - b) Vanity of words, falsehood, fraud; Ps 36:4; Pr 17:4
 - c) Wickedness, or iniquity: Num 23:21; Job 34:8; Pr 11:7; Is 1:13

9) Words with root meaning to spoil, with idea of break in pieces, or crushing with a loud noise or crash (Job 34:24; Is 24:19) Thus to make good for nothing, bad in any way.

- a) To be evil, to have an evil disposition (raw-ah') Ex 5:23; Num 20:15; 1Sam 12:25; 1Chr 21:17; Ps 22:16, 37:1,8-9; Pr 24:19; Is 1:16; 41:23; Jer 13:23
- b) Evil, bad, wicked (rah) of manner of thinking or acting: Gen 2:9,17, 6:5, 8:21, 39:9; Deu 17:2 (vss 2-5); 1Sam 12:17 (vss 16-19), 20 (vss 20-21); Ps 7:9; Jer 4:14,18, 7:24 8:6; Ezk

NOT WEAKNESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Who can look over these penetrating descriptions of sin in the Old Testament and say that sin is merely some kind of weakness, committed through inability of will? The New Testament goes on in the gallery of the portraits of selfishness.

1) Words with root meaning to miss the mark, the road, to fail to do what one intended to do, to err, do or go wrong, miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, thus to sin: (To “miss the mark” does not imply a target is too hard but the aim is too low.)

a) To sin (hamartano) Lk 15:18-19, 15:21, 17:3-4; Rm 2:12, 3:23, 5:12, 6:14-15; 1Cor 15:34; Heb 10:26; 1Jn 1:10, 2:1, 3:6,9, 5:18

b) A sin (hamartema) An evil deed, an error, an offense: Mk 3:28; Rm 3:25.

c) Sin (hamartia) A failing to hit the mark, error, mistake, failing to accomplish what was intended, or what was good and useful, misdirection of our faculties: Mt 1:21; Lk 24:46-47; Jn 1:29, 8:21,24,34,36,46, 16:8-9; Acts 13:38-39; Rm 3:9, 6:1,2,6, 6:11,20; 1Tim 5:24; Heb 3:13, 11:25, 12:1,4; Jas 1:15, 4:17, 5:20; 1Jn 1:7-9, 2:2, 3:4-5, 5:17

d) A sinner (hamartolos) Devoted to sin: Mt 9:13; 11:19; Lk 18:13; Rm 5:8; 1Tim 1:15; James 5:20; 1Pet 4:18

2) Words carrying the idea of falling away, fall beside or near, stumbling, false step, a blunder (derived from para, beside, and pipto, to fall, fall down)

a) To fall away (parapipto) To deviate from the right path, turn

aside (climactic action) Heb 6:6

- b) A trespass (paraptoma) A falling away from right, truth, duty, lapse or deviation from truth and uprightness, an error, sin, misdeed or fault arising from ignorance or inadvertence: Mt 6:14-15; Rm 4:25; Gal 6:1; Eph 1:7, 2:1; Col 2:13; James 5:16
- 3) Words conveying the more serious idea of stepping beside, going past without touching; from para, beside, and basino, to step out, walk, go. The words are all active and positive:
- a) To transgress (parabaino) To morally violate, overstep: Mt. 15:2-3; Acts 1:25; 2Jn 9
 - b) Transgression (parabasis) Deviation, extravagance, digression; hence violation of God's law, deliberate departure from truth: Rm 2:23-25, 4:15, 5:14; Gal 3:19; 1Tim 2:14; Heb 2:2 (vss 1-4)
 - c) A transgressor (parabates) A breaker or violator of the law: Rm 2:25-27; James 2:9,11
- 4) Words involving law with a prefixed negative; thus the condition of one without law (either ignorant of it, or violating it)
- a) Lawlessness (anomos) Destitute of law (1Cor 9:21) Generally used in the sense of departing from the law, a violation of the law, lawless, wicked; Lk 22:37; Acts 2:23; 2Th 2:8; 2Pet 2:8
 - b) Lawlessness (anomia) Want of conformity to the law, contempt, violation of it, iniquity and wickedness; Mt 7:23(vss21-23), 13:41(vss 37-42), 23:28(vss 27-28), 24:12; Rm 4:7, 6:19; 2Cor 6:14; 2Th 2:7; Titus 2:14; Heb 1:9, 8:12 (vss 10-12), 10:17 (vss 16-17); 1Jn 3:4
- 5) Words involving the word just or righteous with a negative; refusal to do what is right.
- a) To do wrong (adekeo) To be just unrighteous, to wrong

someone, to hurt, act unjustly or wickedly; Mt 20:13; Acts 7:24-27; Col 3:25; Rev 22:11

- b) Unjust (adikos) Unrighteous, one who violates justice or has violated it; Mt 5:45; Lk 16:10-11; Acts 24:15; 1Cor 6:9; 1Pet 3:18; 2Pet 2:9
 - c) Unrighteous (adikia) Injustice, wrong; Lk 13:27(24-27); Jn 7:18; Acts 1:18, 8:23 (vss 20-24); Rm 1:18, 29, 2:8 2)vss 6-11) 6:13; 1Cor 13:6; 2Th 2:10-12; 2Tim 2:19; 1Jn 1:9, 5:17
- 6) Words involving godly, pious, worship with a negative; to be irreverent:
- a) To be ungodly (asebeo) To act impiously, to be destitute of reverential awe towards God: 2Pet 2:6(4-9); Jude 15 (vss 14-15)
Ungodly (asebees) Impious, despising God. Rm 4:5; 5:6; 1Tim 1:9; 1Pet 4:18; 2Pet 2:5, 3:7; Jude 4, 15
 - b) Ungodliness (asebia) Want of reverence. Rm 1:18, 11:26; 2Tim 2:16; Titus 2:12; Jude 15,18
- 7) Words denoting evil, bad, of a bad nature or condition.
- a) Evil (poneros) Bad, wicked in an ethical sense; also used of labors, hardships, peril, toil:
 - 1) Evil in general: Mt 5:11, 7:17-18, 9:4, 15:19; Mk 7:22-23, Jn 3:19, 7:7; Rm 12:9; Col 1:21; 1Th 5:22; Heb 3:12, 10:22; 2Jn 11
 - 2) Evil persons: Mt 5:45; 12:34-35,39,45, 13:49;25:26; Lk 6:35; Gal 1:4; 2Th 3:2; 2Tim 3:13
 - 3) Satan and the evil angels: Mt 13:19,38; Lk 7:21; Eph 6:16; 1Jn 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19
 - b) Wickedness (poneria) Depravity, iniquity, badness, evil disposition of mind: Mt 22:18; Mk 7:22; Lk 11:39; Rm 1:29; 1Cor 5:8; Eph 6:12

A Final Word

From the study of Bible words describing sin, we look in vain for evidence that sin is anything else than ultimately a wrong choice. There is always the idea of movement, voluntary action, never a static or inactive something behind the will, received by heredity, that causes the will to act in sin. The Word of God protects itself from theological speculation like this; sin is a selfish, lawbreaking choice.

Without God, man does have a sinful nature, but this nature is not physical. He inherits no absolute causation from his parents or anyone else. Man is held responsible for his own actions. His sinful nature consists in the habit patterns of a life lived for self instead of God. They flow from a wrong heart, or ultimate choice in life. They need not be all premeditated to be sin. A man who has unyielded rights and resentment in his heart that has been allowed to build for some time does not have to coldly calculate to fly into a rage. A man says an unkind thing. He tries to cover it by saying, "Oh, I didn't mean that!" Scripture flatly contradicts him by stating, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." He may not have meant it to be revealed in all its ugliness. But it was in his heart, and the unconscious action followed. Nature does not mean natural, as compared to ordinary, but that which is common, that which man does as a rule. If we say man has a sinful nature, we are not talking about some solid "thing" causing sin, but that as a rule of life, as a habit of actions the sinner always behaves sinfully. His own heart is set on pleasing himself; out of this primary choice or idolatrous preference flows all his thoughts, actions and lesser choices.

Scripture reveals that no sinner seeks God. His selfishness has made him run from the call of God just like Adam did long ago. (Gen 6:5; 2Chr. 12:14; Ps 10:4, 53:2, 119:115; Ecc 8:11; Is 9:13, 31:1, 64:7, 65:1; Mt 23:37; Jn 5:40; 6:26; Rm 2:4, 3:11) For this reason, he cannot be saved unless God invests great efforts in him to turn him back to righteousness. Man is able to repent when faced with the love of God and the enormity of his sin, and must

do so as a first condition of God's restoration to His family. This is directly asserted in both the Old and New Testaments. (Is 1:16-18, 55:6-7; Hos 10:12; Mt 3:2; Lk 13:3,5; Acts 17:30-31) Because repentance involves a facing of, and turning from sin, sin is ultimately a moral act.

It is precisely this emphasis that needs to be restored to the Church today! The dogma that men are made to sin and are blamed for sin primarily because of Adam is taught neither by revelation, reason, or the record of the Early Church for the first three hundred glorious years of its ministry. It is unbiblical, inadequate, and unreasonable; a hindrance to the deep and powerful convicting work of the Spirit of God, and has been the foundation of more subtle heresies and misrepresentations of the Gospel than almost any other falsehood. It detracts terribly from the loving, just character of the great Godhead. Its misuse and misapplication in practical living turns the actual idea of God's grace into an ugly travesty of justice, makes repentance unreasonable and holiness unattainable. It has historically been the chief foundation of universalism and the key reason for the rational rejection of the truth of future punishment. Through its mesh "the goodness of God" which "leads men to repentance" loses much of its meaning. No wonder some churches practically do not give themselves to missions and evangelism while theoretically believing it, and little wonder that sinner's hearts are not broken by much of our preaching today! All through history, when God has found men and women who dared preach personal responsibility for sin and the necessity and practicality of a holy life through faith in Jesus, lasting revivals resulted. Let us then throw away all excuses for our failure to obey the Lord of Hosts; let us admit it is not just the fault of Adam or our ancestors, but we who are to blame; and let us repent deeply, that God may grant us true conversions and revival!

Notes:

