

The Doctrine Of Original Sin

By Dean Harvey

I. Theological definition of the term "original sin," from different sources.

A. "By this sin they (Adam and Eve) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin."

B. "In order to sustain the Augustinian (or Protestant) doctrine of original sin, therefore, three points are to be established:

That all mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation are born destitute of original righteousness and the subjects of a corruption of nature which is truly and properly sin.

That this original corruption affects the whole man; not the body only to the exclusion of the soul; not the lower faculties of the soul to the exclusion of the higher; and not the heart to the exclusion of the intellectual powers.

That it is of such a nature as that before regeneration fallen men are `utterly indisposed, disabled, and opposed to all good.'"

C. "The effect of the first sin upon unfallen Adam was a degeneration --a conversion downwards. As an immediate result of that first sin, Adam became a different kind of being from that which God had created, and the law of generation obtained, which sees to it that reproduction by any living thing will be "after its kind." Of the Adamic nature which Adam gained by disobedience, John Calvin writes in his Institutes, II. ii. 12; "Since God is the author of nature, how comes it that no blame attaches to God if we are lost by nature? I answer, there is a twofold nature: The one produced by God, and the other is a corruption of it. We are not born such as Adam was at first created" (cited by W. G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, II, 196). Adam's experience was unique beyond all other members of his race--save One. Adam became a sinner by sinning. Every other member of the race--save One--sins because he is a sinner by birth. In Adam's case a

personal sin caused the sin nature; in the case of all other human beings--save One--the sin nature causes personal sins." "...both spiritual death and the sin nature are transmitted mediately from parent to child in all generations." "No more misleading message can be given by sincere men than when the unsaved are told that they are lost because of their personal sins...Man is lost by nature--born a lost soul..."

D. "Christians attribute the cause of personal and social failure to an inner warping of human nature itself, a nature that is alienated from God...Although there are different emphases within our traditions, Christians generally agree about sin. Some of us...take sin as `any and every want of conformity with the moral law of God, whether of excess or defect, whether of omission or commission. Sin is any want of conformity of the moral states or habits as well as actions of the human soul with the law of God' (A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 316). Others of us tend to define sin exclusively. Our moral faculties have been distorted by the Fall, but `nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of the known will of God' (John Wesley)...As Orton Wiley, a contemporary Wesleyan theologian, says, `We believe that original sin, or depravity, is the corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam, by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and is inclined to evil, and that continually' (*Christian Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 121)...(The Greek word) hamartia...affirms that human nature itself has been so warped that we cannot match up to what God must expect...That choice (of Adam and Eve) warped the very nature of Adam and Eve. That warped nature has since been transmitted to every human being born into our world, except Jesus..."

E. "By their first (original) sin, Adam and Eve introduced into the world the reality of sin--of broken relationships with God. In failing to trust and obey God they sinned and put all their descendants into a state at birth in which they had no natural communion with God."

F. "...the point is not merely that all people sin and are therefore sinners, though that is true. The point is that all sin because they are sinners. The original sin of Adam and the guilt of sin in some inevitable way passed upon the entire human race. The biblical view is that God holds the entire race to be guilty because of Adam's transgression."

II. The concept of inherited sin is a philosophical construct applied to theology. It is not found in the Bible. However, if you have already accepted the concept as true, a few passages can be found to "proof-text" it. The power of this doctrine is that it gives everybody a ready-made excuse for sin.

A. Hodge uses three arguments to "prove" original sin. "...the universality of sin...the entire sinfulness of man...the early manifestation of sin." The one on universality of sin is probably the strongest and the most often used. "If everyone doesn't have to sin, why doesn't someone live a life without sinning?" This is one of the strongest arguments used in its favor. However, if you read Hodge's arguments, you will find that he arrays a vast

amount of "evidence" to "prove" his three points. I agree with him, in that I agree with his three points. However, I do not agree, and it is not necessary to agree, that original sin is the explanation for the three points. In fact, in postulating original sin as the cause of the three arguments, Hodge pulls the teeth from his own arguments. How can I be guilty for a "corrupt nature" with which I was born, and over which I had no control, and for which I am not responsible? Hodge himself says: "It is utterly inconsistent with all just ideas of God that He created man with a nature which with absolute uniformity leads him to sin and destruction; or that He placed him in circumstances which inevitably secure his ruin." He then explains: "The present state of human nature cannot therefore be its normal and original condition. We are a fallen race." This simply attempts to transfer the blame from God to Adam, or through the sophistry of the "Federal Headship" of Adam, to all of us as really present "in" Adam when he sinned, and then to find all of us "responsible" and "guilty" for the sin "we" committed "in Adam." I don't think that we have to be philosophers, theologians, or Bible students to see the flaws in this "logic."

B. Let me give my personal testimony. I was saved, educated, and ordained in the Assemblies of God. I was taught that original sin was a fact, but that I was not guilty of Adam's sin. However, I had inherited a nature that was "biased" towards sin, and was the source of all actual and personal sins. Yet I was always convinced that God was just, not the author of sin, and did not connive at sin. I was also always convinced that every man was responsible for his own sins, and would be judged for those sins. I lived with a constant tension and contradiction in my mind for 20 years, while I was trying to bring sinners to a life of peace and victory with the Lord. What a blessing, when in 1973 I was relieved of the necessity to believe in the doctrine of original sin. The tensions and the contradictions were removed from my own mind. Now the tension is between myself and all those who still hold to the doctrine of original sin.

C. In my judgment, it misunderstands what sin really is, a knowing, voluntary transgression of law, either positively or negatively. "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (James 4:17) "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (I John 3:4)

III. There are certain verses, or small sections in the Bible, if taken by themselves, which can be interpreted to teach inherited sin. The most common is Psalm 51:5, and the second most common is Rom. 5:12-19. Now I believe that the Bible is ABSOLUTE TRUTH, inspired by God, and completely without error. It is the main safeguard of truth which we have. As long as we stick to the Bible, most errors will correct themselves.

A. Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (RSV) This is a good translation of the Hebrew, very similar to the LXX, the KJV, and the NASV. This is Hebrew poetic parallelism, with the second line of the verse saying the same thing as the first line in a slightly different way. When grammatically diagrammed, David is the subject of the first clause, with a passive verb, and "in iniquity" describes the condition in which he was brought forth. "Iniquity" is not said to be "in" David. The second clause has an active verb with David's mother as the

subject, and "in sin" as the condition in which he was conceived. "Sin" is not said to be "in" David. Psalm 51:5: "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (NIV) I can find no grammatical warrant for this translation. I believe that it is interpretation. This is a perfect example of interpreting an individual verse in a certain way because of one's (in this case a translation committee's) understanding of the whole. It also goes against my understanding that sin must be moral, or known voluntary transgression against some law of God, either positively or negatively.

B. Rom. 3:23: "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." (RSV) Hemarton, the aorist form of hamartia, is used to teach that the only time when "all" sinned at a punctiliar point in the past would have been when the entire human race was "in" Adam, before he sinned, which is the central focus of the Federal Headship Theory. However, if hemarton is a gnomic aorist, it then simply teaches a universal truth, that all will or do sin when they come into existence, live in this world, and achieve the age of accountability. The second usage fits my understanding of the nature of sin, and the fact that young children and the mentally deficient are never lost, because they cannot sin, since they do not have the required understanding of right and wrong, or the ability to do the right and avoid the wrong.

C. Rom. 5:12: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned--" (RSV) "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--" (NIV) Here the teaching is that sin came into the world through Adam, with which I agree, and (physical) death came to all men because of the sin of Adam (because of the curse, and being expelled from the tree of life). In the second part of the verse, ...so death spread to all men, because all sinned--Here again we have hemarton, once again being interpreted in the Federal Headship sense, and I believe that it can be understood at least as well if treated as a gnomic aorist.

It is also interesting that the Latin translation of Jerome, which was possibly influenced by Augustine, translates eph' ho as "in him" (that is, in Adam). The English translation of the Vulgate reads, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all man, in whom all have sinned." eph' ho should be translated in this verse as "because" or some equivalent, as in all modern translations. Catholic Commentaries concur with this conclusion. The theology of the past 16 centuries has been affected by this mistranslation. Luther escaped the error of the Roman Catholic church in that he saw the importance of justification by faith, but he never saw the calamity which follows Augustine's teaching of original sin, so he perpetuated it in his "Bondage of the Will." Calvin came along soon after and simply restated the theology of Augustine. It is interesting to quote Boettner as one of the chief witnesses for the theology of Moral Government. This quote goes beyond the subject of original sin, but embraces the essence of Calvinism, of which original sin is an integral part.

"It may occasion some surprise to discover that the doctrine of Predestination was not made a matter of special study until near the end of the fourth century. The earlier church

fathers placed chief emphasis on good works such as faith, repentance, almsgiving, prayers, submission to baptism, etc., as the basis of salvation. They of course taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel. Some of their writings contain passages in which the sovereignty of God is recognized; yet along side of those are others which teach the absolute freedom of the human will. Since they could not reconcile the two they would have denied the doctrine of Predestination and perhaps also that of God's absolute Foreknowledge (Emphases added by author). They taught a kind of synergism in which there was a co-operation between grace and free will...This cardinal truth (predestination) of Christianity was first clearly seen by Augustine...(who) thus became the first true interpreter of Paul and was successful in securing the acceptance of his doctrine by the Church."

What incredible pride! Here, out of the mouth of one of Calvinism's chief modern exponents, is a confession of the main thesis for which we argue. For someone to even think that the disciples of the disciples did not understand Paul, and therefore did not understand Christ, what more needs to be said? If the church world could clearly see the implications of Boettner's statement, it should erase all Augustinianism and Calvinism, and return to the Bible to find the truth about God, which is exactly what we are trying to do.

D. Rom. 5:12-19: I am not going to reproduce this lengthy passage here, but I will make the following observations: We normally interpret this passage from Adam to Christ, because Paul seems to do that. It also seems to me that a straightforward reading of the passage shows that Paul is saying that what Christ did is greater than what Adam did. Yet when we interpret it in the light of the Federal Headship Theory or the doctrine of original sin, we have the anomaly of everyone being sinners because Adam sinned, but only believers being saved because of the obedience of Christ. This seems to me to make the work of Adam greater in scope than that of Christ. The other alternative is universalism, which must rightly be rejected because of the greater context of the Bible. If we take verses 18 and 19 and lay them out in a way which shows their direct parallelism, we have the following:

ADAM CHRIST

Then, as one man's trespass one man's act of righteousness

led to condemnation leads to acquittal and life

for all men, so for all men. For as

by one man's disobedience by one man's obedience

many many

were made sinners, so will be made righteous

So, unless we are willing to embrace universalism, I believe that the best way to understand the passage is to interpret it from right to left, or from Christ to Adam, because I believe we understand salvation through Christ better than we understand being made sinners through Adam. In salvation through Christ we understand that we must actively participate in the benefits of Christ's atonement by repentance from sin and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, if the "many" will be made righteous by the one man's obedience, and we understand that "many" to be those of us who are saved by active participation in the benefits of Christ's atonement, then I believe that we must understand the "many" who were made sinners to be those who actively participated in Adam's sin by following him in sin.

E. But if the Bible teaches that we have inherited either (1) the guilt of sin from Adam, or (2) a sinful nature which will cause us to sin, then we will have to accept that as truth, because we believe the Bible to be the inerrant, inspired word of God. But, if we believe that Jesus was fully human, and yet lived in this world for about 33 years without sinning, we have a logical and a theological problem. How do we explain that Jesus never received either the guilt of sin from Adam, or a sinful nature which caused Him to sin? "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." (Heb. 4:15) Most of the Christians I have known believe that:

We who are Christians can't help sinning. I was taught this. Can you think of a better excuse for sin?

Jesus couldn't help not sinning. Here is the problem: if we inherit either sin or a sinful nature from Adam, then Christ couldn't have avoided it. The following chart will show the truth of this statement.

The Chart from Adam to Christ

A. Gen. 5:3 is in the chart because it is sometimes used to try to prove that Seth was born in Adam's image rather than in God's image, and inherited sin is postulated from that. Gen. 9:6 refutes this hypothesis because it is much later chronologically.

B. Psalm 51:5 is in the chart because it is the most common proof text for original sin or an inherited sin nature. Grammatical exegesis from either the Hebrew or the LXX, as shown above, will show that David was conceived in a sinful circumstance, not that sin was in him when he was conceived. [NOTE: It seems strange to me that Psalm 51:5 is

used so often as the proof text for David's inherited and inherent sin, and yet he is not quoted in two other places with the opposite flavor. "From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you." (Psalm 71:6) "Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds." (Psalm 71:17)]

C. It is commonly understood that Matthew's genealogy gives us the ancestry of Joseph, which traces Joseph's genealogy back to David and Abraham. According to Jewish law, Jesus would have gotten his authority to be David's son, therefore the Messiah, from his human father, in this case his foster father, Joseph, who was assumed (by everyone not in the "know") to be his father.

D. In the same way, it is commonly understood that Luke's genealogy gives us the ancestry of Mary, which traces Mary's life back to David and to Adam. This would give his biological descent from David.

E. Given the assumption of the truth of original, inherited sin, there are only four explanations which I have been able to find which purport to explain why Jesus was fully human, descended from Mary, David, and Adam without inheriting this sin or sinful nature.

The virgin birth. This view says that sin or the sinful nature was passed down only on the father's side, and so the virgin birth insured that Jesus did not receive sin or a sinful nature.

The Catholic view solves the problem by the theological convenience of the "immaculate conception." The Council of Trent (1545-1563) conceived the doctrine. Pope Pius IX issued a Papal Encyclical on Dec. 8, 1854 stating, "Mary was freed from original sin by grace in the first instant of conception." This was approved by the First Vatican Council in 1870. Augustine's view. (circa. 400 AD) He stated, "By this fleshly lust-a daughter of sin, as it were, and if complied with in base things, the mother of many sins-the progeny is subjected to original sin, if not regenerated in him whom the virgin conceived without sensual passion; on which account, he alone was born without sin, when he condescended to be born in the flesh." Augustine therefore makes Christ an exception from original sin, because He was conceived by a virgin without this concupiscence, by which he means the passion normally experienced in the sexual act. And for this reason, Christ Himself was also free from original sin. Original sin, then, according to Augustine, propagates itself by concupiscence, or sexual passion. A fitting theory from a man who was enslaved to his passions, and found a theological excuse for them.

The "new creation" view. We now know that "Each individual gets exactly half of his chromosomes and half of his genes from his mother and half from his father. Because of the nature of gene interaction, the offspring may resemble one parent more than the other, but the two parents make equal contributions to its inheritance...Therefore, even though

He (Jesus) was nurtured in Mary's womb for nine months and born without her ever knowing a man, it was also necessary for all this to have been preceded by supernatural intervention, to prevent His receiving any actual genetic inheritance through her. The body growing in Mary's womb must have been specially created in full perfection, and placed there by the Holy Spirit, in order for it to be free of inherent sin damage...His body formed neither of the seed of the man nor the egg of the woman, but grown from a unique Seed planted in the woman's body by God Himself. That is, God directly formed a body for the second Adam just as He had for the first Adam...This was nothing less than a miracle of creation, capable of accomplishment only by the Creator Himself." F. Heb. 2;14 Greek-Epei oun ta paidia kekoinoneken haimatos kai sarkos, kai autos paraplesios meteschen ton auton..."Therefore since the children have participated (fellowshipped, shared) in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner shared in the same things (flesh and blood)." Whatever is the common lot of mankind, Jesus participated in the same things. If we inherit sin or a sinful nature, so did He. If we didn't, He didn't. And He obviously didn't, so we didn't.

G. But the thunderous conclusion is that we are now obviously responsible for our own sins. The "original sin" or "inherited sin" excuse has been stripped away from us. And a large blot has been removed from God's name.

And from Charles Finney, "And yet thousands of men have held the dogma that sin consists in great part in having a sinful nature. Yes, through long ages of past history...it has resounded from pulpits, and...men have seemed to never weary of glorifying this dogma as the surest test of sound orthodoxy! Orthodoxy!! There never was a more infamous libel on Jehovah! It would be hard to name another dogma which more violently outrages common sense. It is nonsense--absurd and utter NONSENSE! I would to God that it were not even worse than nonsense! Think what mischief it has wrought! Think how it has scandalized the law, the government, and the character of God! Think how it has filled the mouths of sinners with excuses from the day of its birth to this hour!"

The problem which "original sin" attempts to solve is to explain the universality of sin. When original sin is offered to solve the problem of the universality of sin, it raises a whole new problem in the area of theodicy.

The problem is that if sin is not a moral violation the individual has made, the necessity of the cross of Christ was really to deal with what Adam did, or what we did in Adam if we accept the Federal Headship theory (or something similar). The theory of original sin attempts to make us all universally lost because of something for which we are not responsible, regardless of the word games which are played to make us responsible. I believe in universal moral depravity, but I believe that it is a developed depravity for which each individual is responsible, not an inherited depravity. This depravity is referred to in Jer. 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good, who are accustomed to doing evil." And in Romans 6:19, "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness,

so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness." So moral depravity is a slavery, but a slavery for which each man is individually responsible.

Dear friends, the theory of original sin is not necessary to explain the universality of sin, it is not Biblical, and it will not suffice as an excuse when we stand alone before our great blameless God. Join with me to rid the world of this terrible excuse before it is too late.

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