

## CHAPTER 7

### MYTH 7: ORIGINAL SIN

#### 7.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The doctrine of original sin originated with the Roman Catholic church. It is totally foreign to the New Testament. While many denominations were created out of their rejection of the tenets of the Roman Catholic church, most of them still have remnants of doctrines and practices whose roots are in the dark ages. Such is the case with the doctrine of original sin. In this chapter we will define the doctrine as it is currently believed by many denominations and discuss those scriptures which are relevant to it.

We define *original sin* as the doctrine that humans at birth inherit the sin of Adam. The logical consequence of this doctrine is the belief that the souls of children are lost at birth. The remedy to this prescribed by the Roman Catholic church was infant baptism -- a mystical sacrament which broke the spell that satan had over the new born. Other terms that it is known by include: *inherited sin*, and *total hereditary depravity*. While some denominationalists reject the formal theory, they will state such things as "man is by nature totally inclined toward sin." The net effect is the same -- it tends to blame our nature, as created by God, as being responsible for our sins.

We recognize that few members of denominations today believe that a child who dies prior to being subjected to baptism (or a christening ritual which is called baptism) is eternally lost. However, in our observation of current denominational beliefs we still hear the common sentiment that man is born "totally depraved." Further, the fact that so many denominations still practice the ritual of christening of infants is indicative of the presence of this lingering superstition.

To show that the doctrine of original sin is totally false and counterproductive, we will demonstrate that the following doctrines are true:

1. At birth children are totally free from sin, and they remain in that state until they reach an age when they can distinguish right from wrong according to God's authority.
2. Once attaining the age of accountability, when the young adult violates God's law, he or she becomes guilty of sin and is then in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ as the only hope for being restored to fellowship with God.

We do not expect these two premises to be accepted without proof. To do this, we will present the scriptures which will demonstrate their validity. After that, we will discuss the scriptures that are sometimes used in an attempt to prove the doctrine of original sin.

In a final section we will discuss the damage that this particular false doctrine causes.

## 7.2 ORIGINAL SINLESSNESS

We can start with the Old Testament, which never held the child responsible for the sins of the parents. Ezekiel 18:20 makes this very clear: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." What could be clearer. If God wanted us to know that children do not bear the responsibility for the sins of their parents, what words could He use that would make it clearer than those given in Ezekiel 18:20?

Now, if God is no respecter of persons, this principle must apply to all men and women for all time. Cain and Abel were not condemned for the sin of Adam. Neither were any of their descendants, including each one of us.

This does not mean that we do not suffer the consequences for their sins. Consider one of the consequences of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:17-19): "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return." There can be no question that we still suffer today from this *consequence* of Adam's sin. But there is a big difference between suffering from the consequences of his sin and *inheriting* his sin.

The difference is as extreme as the difference between the physical and the spiritual. The consequences which we suffer from Adam's sin are strictly physical. If we inherited his sin, the consequences would be spiritual. This inherited sin would cause us from birth to be separated from God and potentially condemned eternally.

Many suffer from the consequences of the sins of others. The alcoholic certainly brings grief to all with whom he comes in contact. If he causes an auto accident and kills someone, the victim suffers the ultimate consequence for his sin. Yet, the victim does not *inherit* the sin of the drunk driver. We should be able to distinguish between being an innocent victim of sin and inheriting sin.

All children are the innocent victims of the sins of their parents, their family and the people in their society. They will be led to commit sin at some point in their lives. Had sin never been brought into this world, they would not be led to become sinners themselves by others. (This is not to say that one of them would not commit the first sin.)

This evil environment that does exist is one of the consequences of Adam's sin. But, it is still not an inheritance of Adam's sin. The bible shouts loudly from every page that we are all free-will agents, and each one of us will have to give an account for what *we* do -- not for the sins of others. We all suffer the *physical* consequences of both our own sins and the sins of others. However, we fall victims to the *spiritual* consequences of other people's sins only when we follow them into sin ourselves.

Matthew 18:1-5 demonstrates that children are not born sinners:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

These children were not Christened or put through any other ritual which would magically remove them from the alleged curse of original sin. Does this sound like Jesus believed these children inherited Adam's sin? Instead, it is very strong evidence that children are not in sin prior to reaching an age where they can understand what sin is -- what we are calling the *age of accountability*. The burden of proof is on those who teach the doctrine of original sin to produce the scriptures which teach it in order to counter such strong evidence against it.

A follow-up verse in Matthew 18 is verse 10: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." This is all we know about the subject of what might be called guardian angels. We will not speculate on this, but we can strongly infer that these angels would certainly intervene if an adult were to "despise one of these little ones." Does this sound like God views them as sinners?

Another incident confirms the one given above; it is recorded for us in Matthew 19:13-15:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put [his] hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid [his] hands on them, and departed thence.

Other versions translate "of such is" as "to such belong." Indeed, the kingdom of heaven is

made up of those who are as innocent as were these children. Those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ to enter into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5) become as little children. We can all see the complication of this logic if little children inherit the sin of Adam.

We can also see that children are innocent of sin by the definition of sin itself. According to 1 John 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Again, consider 1 John 2:16: "For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Does a child have: the lust of the flesh? the lust of the eyes? and the pride of life?

No, instead the bible uses childhood as the figure of purity and holiness (John 3:3): "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now if a man is born in sin, why would he want to be born again? Jesus would not have used this figure if the doctrine of original sin had any validity at all.

Sin is not acquired by inheritance -- it is acquired by transgression of (failing to keep) the law of God. We will discuss at what point this takes place in a young person's life in the next section.

### **7.3 WHEN WE FALL**

The bible clearly states that "... all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Does this mean that children inherit sin? It cannot, for it says "all have sinned." If we look at the context, the comparison is between Jews and Gentiles. Paul starts with the Gentiles in Romans 1, and he goes on to discuss the Jews in Chapter 2. His conclusion in Chapter 3 is that there is no distinction between the nations: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This infers that all who are capable of sin within those nations have sinned.

Now, if a child does not inherit the sin of his or her ancestors, when does the child become a sinner? We cannot give a definitive answer, such as 12 years 6 months and one day. The point at which a child becomes an adult cannot be defined for it varies with each individual. There is a gradual maturing over time. It is fairly obvious that at age 7 or 8 the process is just beginning. It is also obvious that at age 21 the process is completed. However, between these ages there is great variation in the point at which different individuals mature. Determining the point in this maturing process that a young person becomes guilty of his or her first sin is quite problematic.

The bible is silent on this question, reflecting the great wisdom of God in

maintaining the free-will agency of those who are raised by Christian parents. It seems, however, that we can learn much by considering the point in life when a young person could legitimately render obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ in baptism (see Chapter 4). In this regard, we submit the following for your consideration:

1. While a child understands some concept of right and wrong from the age of a few months, this is almost totally self-serving, as God intended for instinctive self-preservation.
2. As the child begins to mature, these selfish response mechanisms begin to develop into the education of the conscience; however, this conscience is educated primarily in relationship to parents and secondarily to the child's peer group.
3. With further maturity the young adult establishes a separate identity and becomes capable of independently rendering obedience toward God.
4. The decision that a young person makes to be baptized must be in obedience to the *commands of Jesus* and absolutely *nothing else*. While this might please this person's parents or peer group, it must not be done to produce a conformity with their will. If so, it is not obedience to God, it is obedience to man.

If it is not done in complete understanding and obedience solely to the will of Christ, then it is not valid baptism, and the principles which are exemplified in Acts 19:1-7 apply. Recall that these individuals who were baptized by John's baptism were baptized again into the name of the Lord Jesus. [Even though their original baptism was consistent with the will of God, it was not according to the authority which was then in effect (Mt. 28:18). How much more, then, when the first "baptism" is not even in response to God's command.]

That same age at which one could legitimately render obedience to the will of Jesus in baptism is the age at which that person becomes guilty of sin. This follows from James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth [it] not, to him it is sin." It follows that this person is also guilty of any other sins that are committed in violation of the will of God. The only way that these sins can be forgiven is by the cleansing power of the blood of Christ which applies when one renders obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We saw in Chapter 4 that this culminates in baptism.

## **7.4 MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES**

There are a few scriptures in the bible which the proponents of the original sin doctrine will attempt to twist to fit their ends. As usual, when only a few scriptures can be produced to justify a doctrine, and when these seem to be contradictory to the vast

majority of sound, clear biblical teachings, something is wrong. The bible does not contradict itself in any way; thus, there must be an explanation which can reconcile the two seemingly contradictory passages. Let us examine some possibilities.

Perhaps a favorite verse is Psalms 51:5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Let us first reason from the meaning of the verse itself: does it say that David, the writer, inherited the sin of Adam? No. The verse itself (out of context) might indicate that David's parents were in sin at the time of his conception. This seems to be the meaning of the verse at face value. There is no inference from the verse itself that David is guilty of sin because of the sin of Adam or the (possible) sins of his mother and father. So, even taken out of context, this verse is not supporting the concept of original sin.

Placed into its proper context, we can see what David is really attempting to communicate. It is clear that this is the point in David's life where the depth and gravity of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12) has been fully recognized, and David is in considerable guilt, sorrow, and repentance. He is expressing this guilt and sorrow with some of the most pathetic words in the bible (Psalms 51:3-5):

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin [is] ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

This last sentence when placed in context shows that the face value interpretation that we originally placed upon it is not what David was trying to communicate. Rather, he is trying to communicate *his* feeling of guilt and total depravity. He totally acknowledged the responsibility for his acts of sin and cover-up. He made absolutely no excuse. He did not blame Adam, or his parents, or God, or anyone else. He took total and full responsibility for his sin. His sin was against God and God alone, for he had broken the commands of God, and those commands were far above any human considerations. True, the consequences fell upon Uriah most directly. Moreover, many, many others suffered because of David's sin -- Bathsheba, their child, David's family, ultimately the entire Kingdom of Israel, and who knows who else? But none of these consequences would have been suffered had David not sinned against God. It was not love and respect for his fellow man which would have averted these things, it was his love and respect for the will of God, which David knew and understood. Thus, as it says speaking of God: "... that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest."

David knew and fully expected the consequences of the sin that he had committed. If we would expect anyone to seek an excuse for this sin, we would expect it of David. But, being a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), David did not take this most common route. Instead, he placed the entirety of the blame upon himself -- and rightfully

so. It is in this context that we find David arguing to the extreme: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Our paraphrase: "It is not that I was living a perfect life before you, oh God, and just committed this one sin. I have been sinful ever since I can remember. I throw myself on your mercy." We believe that David engages in hyperbole to make this point as emphatically as he can, thus going beyond the point of remembrance to the point of his very conception.

This surfaces a very interesting point, which it is convenient to address at this time. The fact that children are inherently selfish is often used as an argument to support the doctrine of original sin. When a child first cries out because of pain or hunger, this is a survival instinct, not an act of selfishness. At that age the concepts of consideration and selfishness have no meaning. Someone would have to have a weird concept of a loving God to believe that He would condemn such a being to eternal Hell for suffering an untimely loss of life at this point. To further believe that some ritual performed by others will save this person is rooted in pagan beliefs -- such is totally foreign to biblical teaching. However, we do need to deal with what David was saying, i.e., despite my efforts to the contrary, there is not a time in my life when I cannot remember being a sinful person.

While we do not inherit our sin from Adam, we do enter a world which has been shaped by not only the sin of Adam but also all of the sins since that time. It is a world so full of sin that the word *worldly* has been synonymous with *sinful*. That every person, with the sole exception of Jesus, has been led to sin by this sinful environment is not the question (Rom. 3:23). But here is where the words might be ambiguous: we might say that we are all totally depraved, but we cannot state that this is because of the inheritance of a sinful nature passed down from Adam. Reason: this lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of God, and makes God a respecter of person -- expecting something different of Adam and Even than He expects of us. Adam and Eve did not blame God for their sins, and neither should we. I am condemned because of *my* sin, not because of Adam's. I am totally depraved because I have *chosen* to follow a pathway of sin, not because Adam so chose. This was David's attitude, and it should be ours today. This is what the bible teaches regarding personal responsibility. The doctrine of original sin flies in the face of this clear teaching.

Another example to attempt to justify the doctrine of original sin is Psalms 58:3: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Finding an inheritance of the sin of Adam requires a leap of faith from this verse, since this is neither stated nor implied. Here, again, David is using hyperbole, and in this regard he is applying the same reasoning that he applied to himself to the wicked in general. We can see that this is not literal, since clearly infants do not "go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." They cannot even speak at this point. We use hyperbole in our speech everyday. We might say: "he ran as fast as a scalded dog." It makes the point most explicitly, but clearly we do not intend it to be taken literally. In verse 10 David contrasts the "wicked" of verse 3 with the righteous. If all of mankind inherited the

sin of Adam, then verse 3 would apply to everyone, and there would be no class of righteous to contrast them with. The point is that David is stating realities with regard to sin and unrighteousness -- he, and the Holy Spirit through him -- were not addressing whether or not we inherit the sin of Adam. Neither should we misapply this verse to draw inferences with regard to the doctrine of original sin, other than to say that these verses do not relate to it.

Let us consider a passage from the New Testament which is often misapplied. The proper understanding of this passage is very important, and it gives us a very definitive understanding of what was delivered by the Holy Spirit with regard to this issue (Romans 5:12-21):

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as [it was] by one that sinned, [so is] the gift: for the judgment [was] by one to condemnation, but the free gift [is] of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore as by the offence of one [judgment came] upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [the free gift came] upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

On the surface, many people read this and believe that it supports the doctrine of original sin. However, we question whether they would think this way if they did not have the doctrine of original sin in their minds already. Reasoning backwards promotes rationalization. Does this passages say that every child born into the world inherits the sin of Adam? If so, we should accept it. But let us examine it more carefully:

1. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men ..." There is no ambiguity here. We agree that if no one had ever sinned, sin would not be in the world. Sin had to enter the world first by one man. (Hypothetically, if it had not been Adam, it could have been one of his descendants.) According to the punishment previously pronounced by God, this is also when death entered the world (Genesis 2:17): "... for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." So death entered into the world on the very day that Adam sinned. The fact that Adam did not die physically on that very day is not relevant, for God did not say that he would die on that very day; only that death would become a reality that he would have to anticipate from that day forward. This consequence of sin (death) then passed to all men because of its introduction into the world at that point, i.e., "death passed upon all men ..."
2. The question is *why*? Why has death passed upon all men. Is it because we inherit the sin of Adam? No such thing is implied. The same verse says: "... and death passed upon all men, *for that all have sinned.*" The implication is that your death is caused by you and my death is caused by me. In the spiritual sense, we know this to be true -- our own personal sins cause spiritual death (separation from God). Literally, when Adam sinned he caused spiritual death (separation) from God in that very day. However, we will admit the likelihood that Paul is speaking of physical death here. We have no record of anyone in the New Testament living a perfect life; however, in the Old Testament there is an example (Genesis 5:24): "... and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Hebrews 11:5 further enlightens us on Enoch: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." While not conclusive proof (we do not know that Enoch never sinned), this single counterexample indicates that the responsibility for our own death cannot be passed off to Adam. I have sinned, so I am worthy of death. The entire issue here is whether we are ready to take responsibility for our own sins.
3. When we sin we demonstrate that, had we been Adam, we would have done exactly what he did in eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, had Adam not brought sin into this world, you and I would have! It is essential that we come to grips with this reality. When we proclaim ourselves to be better than other sinners we are on very perilous ground (remember Luke 13:1-5). The Hebrew writer put it this way (Hebrews 6:6): "If they shall fall away, [it is impossible] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put [him] to an open shame." Thus, when I sin, I am equally guilty as those who yelled and screamed for the crucifixion of Christ. What sin could be more worthy of death than that?
4. The next verses indicate that Adam is "figure of him that was to come" that is, Christ.

However, the figure is one of contrast: "But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift." In explaining this figure, Paul asserts that: "through the offence of one many be dead." Does this mean that we die solely because of Adam's sin? This might be the logical conclusion if we had taken this out of context; but we have already seen that verse 12 teaches otherwise -- we all suffer death because we have all sinned. However, one person had to be the first sinner -- the one who brought death into the world and suffered the consequences promised by the perfect word of God (Genesis 2:17). Once death was brought into the world, it could not be brought in again. Indeed the only remedy was that it be taken out. And that is where the perfect symmetry of this figure holds:

For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. (Romans 5:15)

If, in fact this verse is teaching that we *all* inherit the sin of Adam unconditionally, then it must also teach that we *all* receive the gift of salvation unconditionally. Thus, universal salvation. In reality, both sinfulness and salvation are conditional: sinfulness upon our own sin (not Adam's or anyone else's), and salvation upon our faith in God's word (Matthew 7:21). This verse is thus teaching that Adam was the first sinner, thus bringing the hopelessness of death, while Jesus as the first perfect man brought in the hope of life.

5. Similarly verse 19 repeats this concept: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." If, in fact, Adam's sin forced us to be sinners, then the righteousness of Christ would force us to be righteous. The exact same words are used. We cannot honestly choose to interpret them in one way in the first application but in a completely different way in the second. The word *made* in this verse cannot mean *forced to be*, for this removes the free-will nature of man which is a major central theme of the entire bible. The word *made* can also mean *shaped, formed or constituted*. Indeed, if sin had never entered the world, no man would ever have become a sinner; in this sense they were made (shaped into) sinners by the presence of sin in the world. Similarly, if Jesus had not died on the cross, there would never have been the chance of salvation; thus, in this very same sense his sacrifice made them to be righteous.

Again, the bible is not contradictory. That which proves total depravity also proves universal forced salvation. Who can believe this contradiction? We are compelled to apply terms consistently and not wrest those things which are admittedly easy to misunderstand without some detailed study (2 Peter 3:16).

## 7.5 CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN DOCTRINE

A most vexing problem of the doctrine of original sin is our understanding of who Jesus was and what He did for us. If we believe in original sin, there is no escaping that Jesus himself must have been born in sin. Hebrews 4:15-16 states: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." If Jesus was born separated from original sin, when the rest of us are not, then this statement could not be made. Further, the bible teaches in Philippians 2:6-7 with regard to Jesus: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." It is clear that if all mankind since Adam was born in original sin, then Jesus must have been born in original sin; who can believe it?

Of course, as is true of all false doctrines, this one has its capacity to enslave (Jn. 8:32). The Roman Catholic church teaches that the only way to break the spell of original sin is by applying to infants the holy water which only it can create. This produces a strong obligation to "christen" these children into the church, and later to induct them in without the benefit of obedience to the full will of God (including scriptural baptism). How many have given themselves over to this system?

And yet, few of the denominations have totally rejected these superstitions. By accepting the basic doctrine of original sin, and continuing to practice infant "baptism" as a remedy, many denominations have continued to give credence to this myth which originated with catholicism. Obedience to these superstitions do not show faith in the Lord who sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth.

These are the obvious, direct consequences of the doctrine of original sin. However, the subtle effects cannot be underestimated. If, in fact, we are altogether depraved from birth, then how can a just God blame us as individuals for our propensity toward sin? Note that we do not deny that mankind has a propensity toward sin -- an inclination or disposition toward it. The question is: how did we (as individuals) come to have it? Is it because we have inherited the sin of Adam? Or, is it because we, of our own volition, have had to have our own way separate and apart from God? The former denies our guilt and the responsibility for our sin; thus, who else is to blame but God? How can we accept salvation as a free gift of God? and, how can we appreciate the sacrifice which Jesus made for us? If we blame God in the least bit for our own sins, there is not a chance for us to fully understand the relationship which we must have with God if we are to be saved.