

ORIGINAL SIN

“in Adam, all sinned”

Key question

What is the Biblical basis and significance of original sin?

Key text

Romans 5:12-14

“Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all 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 until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

Key Definition

Original sin

Original sin is the dimension of sin with which we begin life, or the effect which the sin of Adam has upon us as a precondition of our lives.

Key Definition

Total depravity

Total depravity refers to the fact that every area of human life has been tainted by sin and left mankind incapable of reconciling self to God.

Introduction

1. Are all people equally guilty before God? In what sense are they guilty?
2. What is the meaning of total depravity?
3. Are all sins individual (personal) or are there corporate sins? Are there systemic sins?

“The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”
Reinhold Niebuhr

A. **We are guilty before God on three counts.**

1. **Individual sin** - Personal sin is the form of sin which includes everything in the daily life of an individual person which is against or fails to conform to the character of God. **Rom.3:23** “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

NOTE: Sins mentioned by Jesus:

Sacrilege - Mk.11:15-18; Hypocrisy - Matt.23:1-36; Covetousness - Lk.12:15; Blasphemy - Matt.12:22-37; Transgressing the Law - Matt.15:3-6; Pride - Matt.20:20-28; Lk.7:14; Being a stumbling block - Matt.18:6; Disloyalty - Matt.8:19-22; Immorality - Matt.5:27-32; Fruitlessness - Jn.15:16; Anger - Matt.5:22; Sins of speech - Matt.5:33, 12:36; Showing off - Matt.6:1-18; Lack of faith - Matt.6:25; Irresponsible stewardship - Matt.25:14-30, Lk.19:11-27; Prayerlessness - Lk.18:1-8

2. **Inherited sin** (the sin nature, original sin). **Rom.5:19** “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners”, **Eph.2:3** “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature** children of wrath, even as the rest.”
3. **Imputed sin** - Sin is also presented in Scripture as reckoned to our account. **Rom.5:12-18** .
 - a. There are three great imputations in the Christian faith.
 1. The imputation of Adam’s sin to all people.
 2. The imputation of our sin to Christ on the cross.
 3. The imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer by faith.
 - b. Verse 12 “Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
 1. This verse suggests that Adam’s sin is reckoned through sin, which God sees that we will actually commit.
 2. In II Cor.5:19 we read “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them,” Here we have an example of sins committed that are not reckoned.
 - c. Verse 13-14 “for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”
 1. This reckoned sin can also be sin that was committed by Adam (not actually by us).
 2. Paul illustrates this in Phile.1:18 “But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account;”
 - d. The resulting judicial state of sin puts the entire human race “under sin.” Rom.3:9, 11:32; Gal.3:22.

Aspect	Scripture	Transmission	Consequence	Remedy
Individual sin	I Jn.1:9		Loss of a sense of fellowship with God	Forgiveness
Inherited sin	Eph.2:3	Generation to generation	Spiritual death	Redemption and the gift of the Spirit
Imputed sin	Rom.5:12	Direct from Adam to me	Physical death	Imputed righteousness

B. **The significance of Adam’s sin is a point of debate among believers.**

1. **“Original sin” (imputed sin)** - Rom.5:19 “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners,---” (Rom.5:12-19) There are two views.

1.

The Example View

Adam’s sin was a minor act of disobedience that affected only himself. Romans 5:12d refers to the actual personal sins of individuals who followed Adam’s example, committed sins, and are thus guilty before God.

2.

The Solidarity View (orthodox)

A solidarity exists between Adam and his race such that Paul can say that one sinned (cf. 5:13-19) and at the same time say that all sinned (cf 5:12). Both statements refer to the Fall.

There are two different expressions of this view.

Seminalism	Federalism
The union between Adam and his posterity is biological and genetic such that Adam embodied all human beings in a single collective entity and thus all people are co-sinners with Adam.	The union between Adam and his posterity is due to the fact that God appointed him as the representative head of the human race. What Adam did is charged to his posterity.
<p style="text-align: center;">Mediate (Indirect) Imputation</p> People have a corrupt nature imputed to them—the effect of Adam’s sin. Thus hereditary depravity is imputed. All sinned because all have inherited natural corruption from Adam.	<p style="text-align: center;">Immediate (Direct) Imputation</p> Adam’s first sin was imputed to every person. All people were tried in Adam our representative and declared guilty.

2. The relationship between the Fall of Adam, natural evil, and moral evil in the world.

a. Four views.

1. **Traditional view.** All death originated at the point in time of Adam’s sin.

- a. One version (**initiation of both natural and moral evil**) - the laws of physics were changed at the Fall. i.e.. natural evil (the second law of thermodynamics) was activated.
- b. A second version (**loss of immortality for all animal life**) - natural evil (cosmic calamities) predate the Fall. Only biological death is initiated at the Fall.
- c. A third version (**loss of immortality for humans only**) - the Fall only effected Adam and Eve.
- d. A fourth version (**awareness of mortality**) -The scope of the curse was essentially spiritual and psychological, therefore awareness of the curse rather than the fact of death is the issue.

2. **Two falls view.** Natural evil originated with Satan’s fall while moral evil originated with Adam’s Fall.

3. **Foreknowledge view.** God in his infinite foreknowledge foresaw man’s rebellion when he created the world. The result of human sin is natural evil but the result preceded the act of sin itself.

4. **Evolutionary view.** The rebellion to God grows as the knowledge of good and evil grows. The curse develops in proportion to the rebellion.

5. **Allegorical view.** Natural evil is an inherent part of creation itself. Natural evil is then not a result of moral sin but a precondition for sin.

b. Other implications of “original sin”.

- 1. Just as we are “positionally” guilty in Adam so we are “positionally” righteous in Christ. (See notes on positional truth. #706)
- 2. This is truth that we know by teaching and faith not by experience or feeling.

3. Physical death is a sign of the reality of original sin just as the resurrection of Christ is a sign of the reality of eternal life.

2. A description of different views of the imputation of Adam’s sin to all people.

Viewpoint	Argument
Pelagianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man’s soul is created by God (each individual near or at birth). • Man’s soul is created without corruption. • The influence of Adam’s sin is that of an example. • Man has free volition. • God’s grace is universal since all men have free will; adults may obtain forgiveness through baptism. • Thus, Adam’s sin does not directly affect others, there is no such thing as original sin. • Since man is not born in sin, it is possible for him to be preserved and to never need salvation.
Arminianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man receives from Adam a corrupted nature but does not receive Adam’s guilt. • This nature is corrupted physically and intellectually, but not volitionally. • General grace enables man to believe. • Thus, man is not totally depraved, but still retains the volition to seek God.
Calvinism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each individual is related to Adam. There are two primary views: • Federal Headship (creationist view of origin of the soul). • The individual receives the physical nature from parents. • God creates each soul. • Adam was our representative, as ordained by God. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This representation parallels man’s being in Christ unto righteousness. • Natural Headship (traducianist view of origin of soul-Augustine). • The individual receives the physical nature and the soul from the parents. • Thus, all people were present in Adam in germinal or seminal form. • Each individual participates in the sin of Adam. • Thus, each individual inherits Adam’s sin.

*Pelagianism and Arminianism subscribe in differing measure to the view that people sin by following the example of Adam.

Viewpoint	What is a person’s condition in relation to God at birth?	What are the effects of Adam’s sin on his posterity?	How did all sin?	What is imputed (charged to one’s account)?
Pelagianism	He is innocent and able to obey God.	It had no effect. Adam’s sin affected only himself.	All chose to sin by following Adam’s example.	Only an individual’s personal sins.
Arminianism	He has a sinful nature but is still able to cooperate with the Spirit by general grace.	It corrupted them physically and intellectually, but the guilt of Adam’s sin was not imputed to them.	All consciously ratify Adam’s deed by personal sins. Mediate cause: All sin because they possess a corrupt nature inherited from Adam.	Only an individual’s personal sins.
Realism	His entire nature is polluted by sin; he is under condemnation and unable to merit saving favor with God.	It brought personal guilt, corruption, and death to all.	All participate in the sin of Adam, who is the natural head of the race.	Adam’s sin, guilt, a corrupt nature, and one’s own sins (Realism and Federalism differ only in the manner of imputation.)
Federalism	His entire nature is polluted by sin; he is under condemnation and unable to merit saving favor with God.	It brought condemnation and pollution by sin to the entire nature of all.	Mediate cause: All sin because they possess a corrupt nature inherited from Adam. Immediate cause: All sin	Mediate imputation: A corrupt nature and one’s own sins. Immediate imputation: Adam’s sin guilt, a

			because all are constituted sinners on account of Adam's sin.	corrupt nature, and one's own sins.
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3. An evaluation of different views of Rom.5:12.

Viewpoint	Translation of "death spread to all men because all sinned" in Romans 5:12	Critique
The Example View	"that is why"	The Greek aorist tense of "sinned" suggests all sinned in or with Adam, not subsequent to Adam. In 5:15-19 it is stated five times that only one sin caused the death of all. The example view ignores the analogy between Adam and Christ.
Seminalism	"in whom" (i.e., in Adam)	Hebrews 7:9-10 provides an example of one man (Abraham) including another (Levi). Seminalism weakens the analogy between Adam and Christ, and begs certain absurd questions (e.g. Can someone act before he "exists"? Why are we not responsible for Adam's later sins?).
Mediate Imputation View	"because"	The Greek term used here means "because" in 2 Corinthians 5:4 (cf. Phil. 3:12; 4:10). Mediate imputation faces certain contextual difficulties in Rom. 5: (1) "sinned" does not mean "to have a corrupt nature"; (2) both Adam and his posterity die from Adam's one trespass (vv. 12, 18-19) and no intermediate condition is cited; (3) "For" (5:13-14) introduces an explanation that is not consistent with the argument of 5:12 if this view is adopted.
Immediate Federalism	"because"	Immediate Federalism faces the problem of explaining how the sin of one man, Adam, can be counted against the entire human race. Deuteronomy 24:16 says that "each is to die for his own sin," which appears contradictory to the Federalist view. Moreover, alien guilt (being charged with another's guilt) appears to be unfair.

The above charts are modified from Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine by H.Wayne House, Zondervan Publishing House, 1992

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- What is the key text that speaks of imputed sin?
- What texts of Scripture speak of total depravity?
- What are three categories of sin?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- What is the meaning of "total depravity"?
- What is the difference between the Pelagian, Arminian (Methodist) and Calvinistic (Presbyterian) view of original sin?
- What are the practical implications of one's view of original sin?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- What is the nature of imputed sin?
- How does total depravity influence the evangelization process?