

Inherited Sins

(by Bob Pulliam)

It is sometimes called "original sin", or "Adamic sin". It is the doctrine which states that all descendants of Adam inherited sin. Every human being to come down the pike was born with the sin of Adam. All except for Jesus, who supposedly escaped this because of His virgin birth.

People have thrown off any semblance of religion because of this pernicious doctrine. Having lost a child and not knowing it's fate was too much for them. But, my friend; God has left us with no indication that babies will ever cry in hell. In fact, we have assurances to the contrary in His word.

Does the Bible Teach It?...

Most false doctrines misuse Bible texts in an attempt to validate themselves. For example, advocates of sprinkling for baptism quote texts on the sprinkling of Christ's blood. Those who teach that Adam's sin is inherited by the human race are no different. They have several passages which are abused and twisted to make their point. Here are the most commonly cited:

Psalm 51:5

Is it the sin of Adam under consideration? Adam is nowhere mentioned in this Psalm. The grammar of this passage also does not associate the sin with David at birth, but instead with his mother. And this is not necessarily an indictment of his mother. It is an indictment of the world, and how David had been surrounded by it's influences, even before his birth. A good companion passage to compare with this is Psalm 58:3-7:

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; They are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear, Which will not heed the voice of charmers, Charming ever so skillfully. Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! Let them flow away as waters which run continually; When he bends his bow, Let his arrows be as if cut in pieces."

This text is also consulted to prove the doctrine of inherited sin, but is much more easily answered. Note that the wicked are estranged from the womb, not in the womb. They go astray as soon as they are born, rather than being astray before birth. David is clearly setting forth the early nature of sin. We are not born with it. We enter into it from a very early age. The text, then, is dealing with sin by a figure of speech called "hyperbole". This is the art of making a point by exaggeration. If David were speaking of babies... note verse six: "Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!..."

Neither passage refers to sins passed to a fetus in the womb.

Jeremiah 13:23

It is evident that the Ethiopian cannot change the color of his skin, or the leopard it's spots. Does this mean that man is so totally depraved that he has no choice but to sin? Note that

the Lord does not say "who are born to do evil". The difficulty in change does not come by an inherited characteristic. It comes in what they had become accustomed to do.

We do know that after the Babylonian captivity they did change. That which they had been accustomed to do (idolatry) was wiped from them, and they returned to their land never to worship idols again. This makes it evident that the Lord is making a point about how bad the people had become, not that they were totally unable to do His will because of a birth defect.

Romans 5:12

Here is the leap of Calvinistic faith. From death passing to all men, the Calvinist will seamlessly shift to sin passing to all men. Such is not in the text. The element of sin is attributed to all men, rather than to Adam. This would make it clear that Paul is not trying to pass Adam's sin to every man after him. Even if that were not the case, it would not be clear that he did not have the physical death of man in mind, since the eventual contrast ends in eternal life.

More important to our text is the analogy that Paul establishes. It is a comparison of the effect of Adam's sin with the effect of Christ's gift. Adam sinned, and Jesus died on the cross. One (Adam) brought about death for all. Did it simply pass to all men because all inherited it? If so, then all have eternal life because it has passed to them from Jesus' gift. Such would be universal salvation, and we know that Paul never taught such a thing. If the "offense" (v18) passed to all men without any action on their part, so also did the "righteous act" (v18) pass to all men for universal salvation.

To eliminate the absurdity of this, one need only banish from one's mind the idea that Adam's sin was inherited by all men. The truth is, all sin by a transgression of the law (I Jn 3:4), for that is precisely what sin is.

The Truth About Infants and Sin...

The Bible gives clear information that indicates infants are safe from the condemnation of sin. The word "safe" is an important word to remember. They are not "saved", for such would indicate that they were at some point in danger, but they never were. When one is saved, he is saved from the condemnation of sin. It is impossible to speak of saving that which needs no saving to begin with. Babies are not saved... They are safe... They have never been in a state of condemnation before God. This is evidenced by Jesus' statement to the disciples when they restrained some from bringing infants to Him. Jesus said:

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." (Lk 18:16f)

When He said, "for of such is the kingdom of God", did He mean that heaven is full of sinners? If these infants are totally depraved, as Calvinism teaches, then heaven is a foul cesspool of repugnant evil. But Calvinism is in error here. Sin has no place in the dwelling place of God, and these children are innocents who have no sin. Not because Jesus blessed it away, for they had not yet brought them to Him (let them come...). They were innocents because they were born that way, and did not sin until they were of an age when their understanding made them accountable to God.

An Interesting Consequence...

In the mind of the Calvinist, salvation comes to those born with the sin of Adam when God irresistibly saves them. With this salvation comes a sign of His saving grace. It may be a feeling, or an amazing event (such as surviving a lightening strike). These events always come in adolescence or adulthood. But what about the infant that dies in the crib?... When the funeral is preached, much is said about God's mercy and grace; but the subject of inherited sins is ignored. Do they believe that child is saved? On what basis? Calvinism surely does not teach it! The truth about the matter is, they have no hope for the salvation of any infant that dies as long as they cleave to the doctrine of Calvinism.

Conclusion...

The Bible does not teach that infants are born with the sin of Adam. Instead, the Bible teaches that they are without sin. Sin is a violation of the law of God, and infants are unable to violate that law. Lunatics, and the mentally handicapped fall into this same category. If you cannot comprehend the law of God, and the concept of right and wrong, you cannot actually violate it. Children are not held accountable to the law of God until they are able to comprehend it and their responsibility to it.

Man is not totally depraved, but is expected to understand and follow the law of God.