

“Ready to Give a Defense”

Answering Our Friends’ Religious Questions

Lesson Three - Original Sin

Introduction. (Genesis 3:1-7). The account of the sin which led Adam and Eve to be cast out of the garden of Eden is the first great tragedy recorded in Scripture. Yet, much of the religious world has taken the real tragedy of this event and suggested that its effect on the descendants of the first couple are much different than what the Bible teaches. This misrepresentation significantly affects how one views sin, its consequences and the remedy which God offers for it.

I. What Does The Bible Say About Adam’s Sin?

A. The Account in Genesis.

1. God told the first couple not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16,17). The Serpent tempted Eve and she ate of the tree and gave to Adam also (Genesis 3:1-6). When this happened they received a consciousness of their own nakedness and tried to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7). The Lord confronts them and assigns punishments; to the Serpent (crawling upon its belly - Genesis 3:8-15); the Woman (pain in childbirth - Genesis 3:16) and to the Man (work in order to live - Genesis 3:17-19). The punishments imposed upon the man and the woman are passed down to all of their posterity as a consequence of this sin.
2. Because of Adam’s sin they were cast out of the garden, thus depriving them of access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24). Since all of Adam’s descendants must also live outside of Eden, we are likewise deprived of access to the Tree of Life.

B. Adam in the Epistles of Paul. Paul in two texts makes reference to Adam and the effect of his sin.

1. “Through one man entered the world” (Romans 5:12-21). In the context of demonstrating the sinfulness of mankind and our need for redemption through the gospel of Christ, Paul compares what Jesus did and its effects, with what Adam did. Paul declares plainly that “death spread to all because all sinned” (vs. 12). Adam set the example. Adam made sin possible just as Jesus made salvation possible. In Paul’s illustration, Adam’s sin did not automatically condemn all, anymore than Jesus’ righteous act automatically saved all. Both involve choice.
2. “As in Adam all die” (I Corinthians 15:20-26). Here, Paul is focusing on the resurrection and physical death. Adam’s sin resulted in all of his descendants being subject to death because they were cut off from the tree of life. Jesus resurrection resulted in the fact that one day all will be resurrected.

II. Can Sin Be Inherited?

A. The Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 24:16). The Law taught that fathers could not be put to death for the sins of their children nor children for the sins of their fathers. This was followed during the history of the Israelites (II Kings 14:6; II Chronicles 25:4).

B. The Prophet Ezekiel.

1. During the time of the Babylonian exile, many Jews felt as if they were being held accountable for their ancestors’ sins (Ezekiel 18:1-4). The Lord rebukes the Israelites for using this proverb and goes on to explain the fact that each individual bears his (or her) own sin.
2. “The son shall not bear the guilt of the father” (Ezekiel 18:20). The Lord’s rebuke of the Jews through Ezekiel makes it clear that the guilt of sin cannot be passed on to one’s descendants.

Lesson Two - Original Sin

C. The Nature of Christ.

1. The Bible teaches that Jesus was a descendant of Adam (Luke 3:23-38) and that He shared the fleshly nature common to mankind (Hebrews 2:14-18).
2. The Bible also teaches that Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). If Jesus was a descendant of Adam and yet was free of sin, it is clear that Adam's sin is not inherited by his posterity.

III. False Doctrines.

A. Original Sin.

1. Many in the religious world teach that all human beings are born guilty of Adam's sin and stand condemned before God because of this inheritance. As a result of this false teaching, other false teachings have been adopted, such as infant "baptism" which claims to wash away "original sin."
2. Jesus taught that children possess the nature and character of citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:13-14). This could hardly be the case if children come into the world guilty of sin.

B. "Sinful Nature."

1. Some, expanding upon the false doctrine of original sin have taught that Adam's sin has given man a "sinful nature" which can only sin unless forced to do otherwise by the Holy Spirit. The popular translation called the New International Version reflects a bias towards this false doctrine in frequently translating the word meaning simply "flesh" > "sinful nature" (see Romans 8:1-8).
2. The Bible teaches that our fleshly nature can choose either good or evil (Ezekiel 18:30-32). The flesh may be said to be weak (Matthew 26:41) but it cannot be considered sinful (Acts 2:30).

Conclusion. Mankind has not inherited the sins of Adam. All souls come into this world free of sin. Each of us has the choice to do right or wrong. In spite of the fact that all accountable souls at some point do choose to sin -- the example of Jesus shows us that man does not have to sin nor does he possess a "sinful nature."