

## It's Origins

The doctrine of 'Total Hereditary Depravity' or as most today know it 'original sin' and 'sinful nature,' goes back to the fourth century and the thoughts of Augustine. This man was largely influenced by a Gnostic sect which believed in two eternal principles (spiritual and physical or light and darkness), which according to their view of things the physical body is inherently evil and sinful.

Others over the centuries have played with this view of things, but none was as successful in gaining world-wide acceptance as John Calvin. Born in 1509, he later studied theology, law and the humanities. As one of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, Calvin published a book entitled *"Institutes of the Christian Religion"* in 1536. While most of this work dealt with the sovereignty of God, Calvin did manage to weave through it the doctrines of predestination and the total depravity of mankind.

As the founder of the Presbyterian Church, John Calvin and his ideas were readily accepted among reformers and most all denominations added his teachings to their creeds. Commonly known in the Acrostic as 'Calvin's TULIP,' each letter of the word tulip representing one aspect of the doctrine we find the commonly held belief of (1) Total hereditary depravity, (2) Unconditional election, (3) Limited atonement, (4) Irresistible grace, and (5) Perseverance of the saints.

Our focus in this tract will be on 'Total hereditary depravity' or the sinful nature as most call it today due to the New International Version of the Bible. We will begin with the basic doctrine itself as purposed by Calvin, give the results of this doctrine and then conclude with what the Bible truly teaches about man's nature. As with any study it is our desire simply to present the issue that is at odds with the Word of God, and give book, chapter and verse as to why it was never in the mind of God, but rather a doctrine invented by men. We pray that you study this issue with an open mind.

## The Basic Doctrine

The basic theory of original sin is that God created Adam and Eve as totally innocent creatures, free from any sin whatsoever. But when Adam followed the example of his wife and sinned against God, he lost that innocent nature and became totally depraved. It is believed that because all humanity flows from Adam that this sinful nature has been ingrained into the human psyche. Like a pumpkin that is in the pumpkin seed, so the human race and its nature is literally in Adam.

Calvin contended that as a consequence of Adam's sin, the entire human race has not been deprived of its will, but of possessing a 'healthy' will, therefore man's reason and will are contaminated by sin. Because of this view of the human will and the consequences of Adam's sin, it is taught that man is so depraved that he is dead, blind, deaf and un-teachable in the things of God, being totally ruled by Satan, his heart and soul are corrupt and perverse. Calvin says that since man is so corrupt, he is in fact neither willing nor able to return to God or seek righteousness, and is incapable of saving himself.

The translators of the New International Bible perverted many passages of Scripture in God's Word in order to legitimize this doctrine. Passages such as Psalm 51:5; 58:3; John 3:6; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 5:12-21) are used to defend this doctrine as though it had approval from God. Space will not allow us to look into these Scriptures in detail, but an honest study will show that although the sins of men are discussed (to which we agree there is sin in the world); they do not prove inherited sin. In most cases, it is taught that sin had become the 'nature' of individuals or groups of individuals because they had made the choice to live that way. In other words it became a habit that they didn't want to break – not because they were born that way. Or as in the case of David (Psalm 51:5), he uses 'hyperbole' (figure of speech that exaggerates a position), to show his godly sorrow toward the sin he had committed against God, Bathsheba and Uriah; but he is not saying that he was born a sinner.

## Results of this Doctrine

It is impossible to stop at one false doctrine, because others must be invented to cover up the previous ones, and such is the case with inherited sin. Because it is believed that all of humanity has inherited the sin of Adam, and is now born so sinful that we cannot not know or desire anything good, godly, or righteous, the results of this doctrine are staggering. Take for instance the baptism of infants. It is believed that every baby is born tainted with the disobedience of Adam, hence should that baby die, he/she will be condemned to hell for all eternity; therefore, the need to baptize, affirm, dedicate and/or consecrate infants. Those advocating this practice contend that you must baptize babies first and foremost to wash away original sin; then when they are old enough to understand they can be taught, believe, repent and confess.

The next result of inherited sin is the notion that because man possesses a sinful nature, he can not seek God on his own, thus God must completely do the saving. Therefore the false doctrine of 'faith only' was contrived to complement the assumption of inherited sin. God therefore must in a miraculous way send the Holy Spirit into the mind of the individual that God in eternity chose to be saved; and tweak his will to believe and be saved. It is contended that this is a 'work' of God, in other words, a work that God performs on the individual so that that person, after being saved can repent and confess Christ.

Another aspect of Calvin's doctrine makes God a respecter of persons which God says He is not (Acts 10:34; Deuteronomy 10:17; Romans 2:11; etc.). Because it is believed man is totally sinful and cannot seek God, then God had to pre-select men and women to be saved and the rest will be condemned. If that's not being partial to one group of people, then I don't know what is.

Finally, Calvinism destroys the free agency of mankind, given to us by a loving Creator. You can't say we have a will, and then say it is so unhealthy we can't choose to use it. That is circular reasoning.

## What the Bible Really Teaches

We have just laid out the basics of the doctrine as well as a few of the doctrines that have resulted from the doctrine of 'original sin,' now let's see what the Bible has to say about it.

Let us consider for a moment the premise of Calvin's doctrine, that all of humanity has inherited the sin of Adam and is so depraved that we cannot on our own seek good, righteousness or God's will. There is no controversy on the fact that Adam and Eve were created pure and good; and that their choice to break God's law not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is what caused their separation from God (Genesis 3; 1 John 3:4). The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin was separation from God (spiritual death), physical death and condemnation (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 5:12, 18). This is what all humanity faces living in this world, **NOT** inherited total depravity, but living with the consequences of Adam's sin.

Truly, when Paul said, *"In Adam all die"* (1 Corinthians 15:22), he was not referring to 'original sin,' but the fact that we all suffer from the consequences of his sin – in other words, Paul was saying, *"as a consequence of Adam's sin we all die."* The guilt of sin attaches only to those who willingly commit sin (make the choice to sin). The Holy Spirit reminds us, *"The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son:..."* (Ezekiel 18:20). Again we are told, *"So then EVERY ONE of us will give account of HIMSELF to God"* (Romans 14:12). Or, *"For we must ALL appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In this last passage of Scripture Paul shows us that each of us will give account for what we have personally done in this life, not for what others have done before us – including Adam! He also points out that we will answer to God for what we have done whether it was something good or something bad. Now stop and think about that for a moment – Paul says that we are able to do

something good? Calvin says that is impossible, since we are born totally depraved and unable to do any good. Which are we going to believe – John Calvin or God (Acts 5:29)?

All religious peoples must learn to discriminate between inherited guilt and consequences. Surely we can understand this when it comes to secular associations. Take for example a mother who is hooked on illegal drugs and finds out she is pregnant. She continues to take the drugs and the baby is born dependent upon the drugs as well. Clearly we understand that the baby does not inherit the sin of drug taking, but suffers from the consequences of its mother's habit. The same is true of Adam and the entire human race! If all have inherited the sin of Adam and can do nothing good, then why was it that Adam's son Able offered sacrifice to God that was good (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4)? Webster's Dictionary defines the word 'consequence' as: "*something produced by a cause or necessarily following from a set of conditions,*" basically this is the law of cause and effect. Adam and Eve were given a set of conditions for them remaining in God's fellowship, which those chose to violate, therefore, the effect was their and the entire human races separation from God. As a result (effect) of their sin (cause), humanity has been separated from its Creator to live in a world ruled by Satan (possessing the knowledge of good and evil). Remember, the fruit that Adam ate, gave him that knowledge – so would it not reasonably be assumed that that knowledge passed on to the rest of us? That we are able to know both good and evil?

One of the reasons this doctrine is so illogical is because it tends to put the proverbial cart before the horse. Baptizing, dedicating and affirming babies finds a reversal of God's order of things, not to mention the fact that there is NO Bible authority for such a practice! Where do you find infants in the Great Commission? Only those 'taught' were fit subjects for baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). Only those who can understand what they hear and develop saving faith are fit subjects of baptism (Romans 10:17; Luke 8:18; Mark 4:24). Therefore, babies and young child are NOT fit

subjects for baptism! God's order in the salvation plan is for ALL men and women to first hear the gospel, then develop faith which then must motivate a person to repent, confess Jesus as the Son of God before others and finally to be baptized (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Matthew 10:32-33; 1 Peter 3:21).

The Word of God teaches that every one of us is born innocent, and pure in the sight of God. There are a multitude of passages that prove this out. Solomon wrote, "*Lo, this only have I found, that God has made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions*" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). This not only applies to Adam and Eve in the beginning but applies to every human being who has been born since then. Notice if you will what David said about the innocence of the young; "*Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood*" (Psalm 106:37-38). There is no doubt what David is saying here in regard to the ungodly sacrificing of children by the Israelites (Jeremiah 32:35). They were offering their children to the Canaanite god Molech; children who were pure, innocent, free from the guilt of sin.

The prophet Ezekiel clearly portrays the same idea of being without sin when he writes of the king of Tyre; "*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*" (Ezekiel 28:15). The New American Standard says that he was 'blameless' until unrighteousness was found in him. In other words the king of Tyre was created (conceived) innocent, free from the guilt of sin and he remained in that state UNTIL he reached an age in which he became accountable to the law of God and sin was charged to his account. Knowing that babies are born innocent of sin can also be understood by such passages as Solomon's admonition to: "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6), or what Paul exhorts parents to, "*Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). What would be the point of

disciplining children if we know there is nothing they can do to help themselves (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15)?

Some would quickly run to Romans 3:10-18 to defend their position of original sin, but an honest assessment of these verses would prove that Paul is not discussing inherited sin. Rather he is pointing out individuals who made the conscience choice on their own to involve themselves in wicked works, and to maintain a corrupt mind. This is a quote of David from Psalm 14. Even David is not saying that men are born corrupt, for he states in verse 1 – "They have DONE abominable works." It was by their own wickedness that these people of whom David speaks deny God, and do no good.

In closing, let us consider Exodus 32:33 where the Lord says unto Moses, "*WHOSOEVER has sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book.*" This is a universal warning, to anyone who chooses to sin against God. Every one of us is responsible to God for the things we choose to do or not do (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12; Romans 14:12). Like Adam who blamed God for the sin he committed, so too, the doctrine of original sin takes the blame off our choices and points back to Adam. It has always been God's plan to save every one: "*Who will have ALL men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4).

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