

CHAPTER 5

ORIGINAL SIN

The doctrine of 'original sin' refers to the concept that each human being is born in a condition of sin. We are from birth, spiritually separated from God. By this doctrine, even from birth one is not able to obtain God's free gift of eternal life. Proponents of this doctrine find it necessary to baptize infants. They feel this is essential in order to provide for the forgiveness of their inherent sins.

What follows is the result of cumulative discussions I've had with teachers of the 'original sin' doctrine. As usual we'll first look at the scriptures used by the proponents to validate their claims for this doctrine. That will help us to find the basis for their misunderstanding of the scriptures involved. After that, our study of the Bible will reveal why 'original sin' is an unscriptural practice..... and hence, a groundless doctrine.

VISITOR:

Perhaps this group of verses will authenticate the doctrine of original sin;

Rom. 5:12 (NIV)

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..

Both sin and death came to the earth through the actions of Adam. These scriptures show that death goes on from generation to generation. It's therefore essential for the infants to be freed of these sins through baptism, to avoid the predicament in which they could through death, unknowingly lose their salvation.

ME:

Is this verse talking about physical, or spiritual death? Even the most respected scholars, appear to disagree on this point. Thayer and other Greek scholars (Reference-12; #2288) reveal the disparity within their own ranks, about this issue. Concerning 'death' mentioned in Rom. 5:12, Thayer writes;

"..... death comprises all the miseries arising from sin, as well as physical death....."

".....Others, understand physical death....."

The issue of whether physical or spiritual death is meant here, is important. The issue as it pertains to original sin, however, is not a difficult one to resolve. If physical death is meant in Rom. 5:12, then baptizing infants will not fix that which comes to all of us. In that case, baptism would become unnecessary and ineffectual. If on the other hand, spiritual death is meant (see Chapter-6; On Death) then baptizing infants is also ineffectual. To see why, let's start with the very next verse after the one you quoted;

Rom. 5:13 (NIV)

*..... for before the law was given, sin was in the world.
But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.*

So children, including infants, hold a special status in the eyes of God. Since they have no understanding of the law (in fact, they do not even know of its existence), their innocence demands that no sin is held to their account. Fully consistent with Rom. 5:13 is this verse;

I John 3:4 (NIV)

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

Sin here, is defined as lawlessness. Thayer (Reference-12; #458) helps us understand the meaning of 'lawlessness' as it applies to this verse;

"contempt and violation of law, iniquity, wickedness."

What makes infant baptism (to cleanse original sin) ineffectual then, is the fact that infants' actions and thoughts do not fit the scriptural definition of lawlessness or sin. No infant has contempt or wickedness. Infants don't deliberately violate laws they don't even know exist. That is why Jesus said;

Matt. 19:14 (NIV)

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Matt. 18:3 (NIV)

And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus recognizes the innocence of children and already has a place for them in His kingdom. Those denominations thinking baptism will make infants eligible for heaven, must (by the same logic) also figure out a way for these infants to repent from their unknown sins. After all, scripture exists, relating repentance and baptism to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). The absurdity of requiring infant repentance substantiates the idea that infant baptism for original sin, is ineffectual.

VISITOR:

But our inherent nature even at birth is one of sin. I can show you scriptures that verify the inherent sin even of children;

Eph. 2:3 (NIV)

..... Among whom also we all had our conversation in

times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

By this verse then, our inherent nature is a sinful one. Within our innermost being, we are sinful. As infants, we have no control over that innate, evil nature.

ME:

The commonly used translations do, indeed, exhibit the wording that by our 'nature' we are 'children of wrath.' Even the Interlinear (transliteration) uses those words;

Eph. 2:3 (Interlinear)

..... among whom also we all conducted ourselves then in the lusts of the flesh of us, doing the wishes of the flesh and of the understandings, and were children by nature of wrath as also the rest;

But we need to study what the original language means by this translated phrase. Thayer (Reference-12; #5449) defines 'nature' as used in Eph. 2:3 in this way;

"a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature."

This verse is therefore not referring to our substantive inner selves..... but is instead speaking of our *habitual fulfilling of lustful desires*. Being born into evil is a far cry from habitually developing evil practices. There is no reference in Eph. 2:3 to sin that is inherently within us when we were born. Here's another verse that could have been misinterpreted in the way you just did;

Rom. 2:14 (NIV)

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.

In this case, the phrase 'by nature' is much more closely allied to Thayer's definition just discussed. But additionally, Thayer attests that in this verse, 'by nature' carries the concept of 'common sense.' That is, Thayer's definition of 'by nature' as used in Rom. 2:3 refers to;

*"natural sense, natural conviction, or knowledge...
guided by their natural sense of what is right
and proper"*

This verse then, gives additional support to the concept that 'by nature' does not refer to the inner essence of a sinful being in need of baptism to cleanse 'original sin.'

ORIGINAL SIN & EZEKIEL CHAPTER 18

There's an especially important passage in the Old Testament that has bearing on the subject of original sin. It's a good portion of Chapter-18 in the book of Ezekiel. Before considering it though it's important to be clear about the information contained in the Old Testament. The Old Testament does more than provide for the Law of the Covenant (the first covenant). In some passages, the very nature and character of God are brought out. Ezekiel Chapter-18 contains just such an example. In that chapter God reveals to us that He does not hold the sins of the father (parent) to the account of the son (child). Given that as truth, then 'original sin' is nonexistent. Because of the non-accountability of sin, there can be no inherent sin passed down from generation to generation through birth or any other way. The following quote from Ezekiel's revelation assures us that no

newborn children have held to their account any sin passed from their previous generation;

Ezek. 18:1-20 (NIV; my underlining)

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?"

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son- both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife or lie with a woman during her period. He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things (though the father has done none of them): He eats at the mountain shrines. He defiles his neighbor's wife. He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols. He does detestable things. He lends at usury and takes excessive interest. Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be on his own head.

But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his

father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things: he does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife. He does not oppress anyone or require a pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He withholds his hand from sin and takes no usury or excessive interest. He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. But his father will die for his own sin, because he practices extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people.

Yet you ask, "Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?" Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

This passage of scripture leaves no doubt that the doctrine of 'original sin' is a false one. Through Ezekiel, God teaches that a newborn is not liable for the sins of the father or mother. Those who accept the false doctrine of original sin have misinterpreted the meaning of key words in the quoted verses. They also appear to disregard the thorough discourse given by Ezekiel. Since God doesn't adhere to such a notion as 'original sin,' it's clear that He doesn't expect us to, either.