

§ 10. Doctrine of Man
Lecture 22
Original Sin

Thank you for joining us in Defenders class this morning.

Today we want to turn to the subject of original sin, a subject to which we have alluded several times in our previous sessions. We want to begin by looking at some of the biblical data concerning the doctrine of original sin.

You will not find the doctrine of original sin, as you might expect, in the story of the Fall in the book of Genesis. There is nothing in the curses pronounced upon Adam and Eve as a result of their Fall about their sin being imputed to all of their descendants or about their Fall's corrupting human nature.

Neither do we find the doctrine in Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Sometimes those overzealous to find proof texts for the doctrine of original sin appeal to this verse. But I think that that is a mistake hermeneutically. The psalms are poetry. They often employ hyperbolic language, here as a way of saying how sinful David feels. The verse is not a theological reflection upon how the sin of Adam was imputed to David. Rather, it is just a poetic and hyperbolic way of affirming his intense sinfulness or feeling of sinfulness before the Lord.

Rather the doctrine of original sin is based upon New Testament evidence, particularly Romans 5:12-21. There Paul writes,

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned— sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass;

but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here we see Paul's typology of Adam and Christ. Just as sin came into the world through Adam and led to condemnation for many, so Christ's one act of righteousness – that is, his atoning death on the cross – brings acquittal and life to many. The only other apparently relevant passage is 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Paul writes, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." There again we see a typological parallel drawn between Adam and Christ. But we've already seen in previous lessons that in 1 Corinthians 15, the parallel is different than in Romans. In Romans Paul is comparing the spiritual consequences of Adam's sin and Christ's death. But in 1 Corinthians 15 the comparison concerns the difference between Adam's *creation* and Christ's *resurrection*. So the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is not relevant after all to the doctrine of original sin. Thus, the doctrine of original sin is based virtually entirely upon this single Pauline passage in Romans 5.

Now we want to turn to various attempts to systematize these biblical data.

The first figure that we want to look at is perhaps the greatest and most influential of the church fathers, namely, Augustine (whose dates are AD 354 to 430). Augustine was a North African bishop of the church in the city of Hippo. Augustine is the church father who is most significant in formulating the classic doctrine of original sin. In his analysis of sin Augustine held that all human beings sinned in Adam. In Adam's sin, we all fell, and so we share the guilt of Adam's sin as well as a corrupted human nature which was inherited from Adam. So all persons are comprised in the sin of Adam. You and I bear the guilt and the responsibility for Adam's sin, as well as the proclivity to sin that we have inherited from Adam.

Augustine stressed both the universality and the totality of sin. Sin is truly universal because it is endemic to human nature as a result of our fall in Adam. Also, sin affects every part of the human personality. We are not fallen simply in one aspect of our character or person; rather all aspects of the human person are affected by sin. So as a result of Adam's fall, sin is universal and affects us totally.

As we saw before, Augustine also stressed our "*non-posse-non-peccare*" in our state of fallenness before God. We are not able to avoid sin. Sin is inevitable for us because we carry it in our very being. Therefore, in this state of fallenness, it is impossible for anyone to live a sinless life. We are born with the stain and the guilt of Adam's sin and therefore we are not able to not sin. Sin is inevitable among fallen humanity.

Augustine, therefore, stressed man's inability to earn God's grace or approval. That God should extend forgiveness and reconciliation is something that can come only from God's side. We are fallen and guilty before him and therefore worthy only of condemnation.

Finally, Augustine emphasized that the redemption that was wrought by Christ consisted mainly in laying aside the guilt of sin. There is a strong moral character to Augustine's view of Christ's atonement. Christ lays aside both the guilt of original sin that we inherit from Adam as well as the guilt of the individual sins that each of us commits in our lifetimes. These features of Augustine's doctrine are now part and parcel of the classic doctrine of original sin.

In addition to these points, however, it must be admitted that there are other aspects of Augustine's doctrine of original sin that are less helpful. For example, Augustine held that the transmission of original sin is a matter of biology. He thought that original sin was something that we literally pass on physically from parents to child, much like a genetic disease. So theoretically, at least, one might think that through genetic engineering, we could perhaps engineer sinless people. If original sin really is a physically transmitted trait, then it seems that science ought to be able to get rid of it. In fact, Augustine connected original sin very closely with sexual desire, and he made sexual intercourse the means by which original sin was passed on. So original sin is like a sexually transmitted disease. You can imagine the negative attitude that this view would encourage toward human sexuality, even in the context of marriage, and how this might promote monasticism and celibacy as a way of trying to avoid passing on original sin.

Augustine's concept of original sin also tended to dim the understanding of sin as disobedience to God. We really can't help sinning. It plays down the degree to which we are individually responsible for rebelling against and disobeying God.

Finally, Augustine connected the doctrine of original sin to the doctrine of infant baptism. The baptism of infants was justified as the way by which Adam's sin was cleansed from these infants, so that children who die in infancy, before they can reach the age of accountability, can be saved if they've been baptized. For then they have been cleansed of Adam's sin and therefore are no longer culpable for Adam's sin. So the rite of baptism was interpreted not simply sacramentally as a means of grace by which God bestows redeeming grace upon a person, but it was extended to infants in view of original sin and the need to deal with original sin. This, of course, tends to eclipse the need for personal conversion and repentance. It is all too easy to say, "I was baptized as an infant and therefore I am a Christian. I received God's redeeming grace as an infant when I was baptized." This tends to play down your own personal need for repentance and faith as an adult. Those are some of the characteristics of Augustine's doctrine of original sin which are less helpful.

Let's turn secondly to another church father, whom Augustine opposed. This is Pelagius (whose dates are AD 354 to 418). Pelagius held that man is perfectly free to do good or evil. We are not prisoners inevitably condemned to sin. When we sin, we do so of our own free will, and therefore we are responsible when we sin. We are free to do what is right, to choose good, instead. Pelagius recognized the universality of sin. The world is suffused with sin, and we all fall into it eventually. So no one is sinless, and all are in need of Christ's atoning death for salvation. The corruption of sin comes however through imitation, not through inheritance. It is not as though we inherit original sin from Adam, and therefore this works itself out as sinning. It is rather that we are born into a corrupted, fallen world, and we then, by imitation, take on the pattern of sinning as well. So sin is not a matter of inheritance. We aren't born sinners; rather sin is a matter of imitation through the corrupted world into which we are born.

Pelagius recognized as well that man can do good only through the grace of God. He is not saying that without God's grace you can avoid sin. Of course, you need God's grace in order to resist sin. But he would say that, in creating man, God has already given to man all of the grace that he needs in order to resist sin. There is a sort of natural gifting given to man when God creates him. If man would draw upon those resources, then he could resist sin. The fact that he doesn't and that he falls into sin is therefore his own fault. He can't blame Adam, he can't blame God; it is his own fault. He, as a human being, has the inherent gifts of God's grace that are sufficient for leading a sinless life. But people don't do so. They all eventually fall into sin, and therefore they now need God's forgiveness and redemption.

Next time we'll look at an attempt to synthesis the views of Augustine and Pelagius. Until then, have a great week!¹

¹ ?Total Running Time: 17:35 (Copyright © 2020 William Lane Craig)