

## ORIGINAL SIN

By James Railey

The topic of “original sin”, which is also expressed in multiple other ways, is intended to assert that the entirety of the human race is fallen and in need of the grace of God if they are to know relationship with Him. There are an almost unlimited number of ways in which this doctrinal assertion is explained, some of them very difficult for the Pentecostal to accept. This brief paper will not argue for a specific expression of the belief, but will argue in general for the necessity of holding to the position that the entirety of the race is fallen, that sinners then do commit sins, and that the work of Christ on Calvary is the only answer to this dilemma.

In a succinct fashion the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, in number four, “The Fall of Man,” asserts that “Man was created good and upright; for God said, >Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:17; 3:6; Romans 5:12-19).” In Statement number 5, “The Salvation of Man,” the Assemblies of God affirms that “Man=s only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God.” These two parts of the Assemblies of God belief structure are very important when considering the topic of “original sin.”

The creation of human beings by God is the story of absolute success. He purposed to create “in our image, in our likeness” (Gen. 1:26), and the record is that that is what He did: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he

created them” (Gen. 1:27).<sup>1</sup> After completing all of His creative activities, including human beings, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Sin was introduced into this perfect creation by the Tempter, Satan (Gen. 3:1-24). The human pair, choosing to reject the guidance of God upon their lives and abandoning His will for their own, removed themselves from the relationship and fellowship with God that they had known. The ruling of the Holy Spirit over their lives which enabled them to know fellowship with God was spurned and they were banished from God’s Garden.<sup>2</sup>

Though created good, the entire human race is now fallen and desperately in need of the salvation which was provided for them in the work of Jesus Christ. The testimony of the Scriptures is clear B the effect of sin is universal. After the destruction of the flood, which occurred because of the sinfulness of humanity, God declared, “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood” (Gen. 8:21). The Psalmist charged that humans “are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good . . . All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is not one who

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, will be from the New International Version.

<sup>2</sup>The nature of sin can be explained in several ways; here it is being seen as deviation from the will of God. For further study on the nature of sin see Bruce Marino, “The Origin, Nature, and Consequences of Sin,” in Systematic Theology, Rev. Ed., ed. Stanley M. Horton (Logion Press: Springfield, MO, 1995), 255-290; Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, Second edition (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 579-598; Stanley J. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN, 1994), 236-245; Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), 490-492.

does good, not even one” (Psa. 14:1, 3; 53:1, 3). As Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple, he asserted that “there is no one who does not sin” (1 Kgs. 8:46). The argument of Paul in Romans 3, summed up in verses 10-18, is that all have sinned, that none is righteous, and that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Ro. 3:23). The evidence for this important theological assertion, that all humans are sinners, is overwhelming.

Not only is sin universal, it has rendered that human race incapable of saving themselves; humans are not even able to improve their standing before God. One of the reasons this is true is that sin impacts the inner attitudes and dispositions of humans, not merely the actions that spring from within. Jeremiah accurately noted that “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer. 17:9), and David admits that he was plagued with sinfulness from birth, a plague which debilitated him completely, rendering him dependant upon the mercy of God for restoration (Psa. 51:1-19).<sup>3</sup> Jesus asserted that sin begins before the act as He reminded His audience of the inward nature of murder, adultery, divorce, oath taking, retaliation, and the treatment of enemies (Matt. 5:21-48).

The biblical material is very clear: Adam and Eve fell and humans are fallen and cannot, apart from the grace of God, alter their destructive path. The difficult question, which is often the crux of the “original sin” debate, is how the sin of Adam impacted the whole of the human race.

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<sup>3</sup>The argument that David in Psalm 51 is referring to a sinful relationship which his mother had with his father fails to note that the context of the Psalm is David=s repentance for his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. He is not trying to detail a sin of his parents but is confessing his complete sinfulness before God, now evidenced in a sinful act.

Paul, in Romans 5, is very clear is asserting that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (5:12).<sup>4</sup> As he extends his argument through the remainder of this chapter it is clear: human sinfulness is traceable back to the sin of Adam; human righteousness is traceable back to the sacrificial death of Christ.

Several theories exist attempting to explain how the sin of Adam impacts the entirety of the race, the most prominent of which will be mentioned here.<sup>5</sup> Some feel that the entire race was present, at least potentially, in Adam, and sinned with him. Others assert that the sin of Adam altered the genetic makeup of humanity and thus sin is transmitted throughout the race through the biological process of procreation. Still others argue that Adam stood in a representative fashion for the entire race and made a choice for the race that binds the race to sin. The point to be made here is not so much to argue for one of the theories of transmission as to stand firm on the assertion that the whole race was rendered sinful because of the sin of Adam, and that is the assertion Paul makes in Romans 5.

The issue of the justice of God is often raised in this regard. How could a just God allow

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<sup>4</sup>It is true that Augustine, using a poor Latin translation of this passage, taught that all humans were present, at least potentially, in Adam when he sinned and that infant baptism dealt with that sinfulness. That does not, however, detract from Paul=s argument that human sinfulness is to be laid at the feet of the first man, Adam, and that, as a result, all humans are sinners.

<sup>5</sup>For further explanation of these, and other theories of the transmission of sin, see Grudem, 494-498; Erickson, 637-656; Marino, 261-270; Grenz, 245-267.

the entire human race to be sinners because of the actions of the first humans, Adam and Eve? A better question might be, on what basis do we humans determine whether the actions of God are to be considered just or not? Do we have the capacity of judge the Almighty, to call Him into our court of rationality and demand that He prove Himself to us? Or, shouldn't we allow the revelation of the Bible to tell us what God=s justice really is? The biblical evidence is abundant: God is not chargeable for human sin B He created perfectly; humans chose their will over that of God; all humans are sinners who sin; and, God has provided a way of salvation for all.

That God provided His Son as the offering for human sin is also a powerful testimony to the sinfulness of the race. Instead of sending another prophet to prophesy to people who were merely astray and needed a revelation of the path, instead of sending another teacher to guide people who needed the instruction in the righteous direction, instead of sending another example to show humans how to live in harmony with God=s expectations, God sent His Son to be the Savior, to die bearing the penalty of the sins of the race. The message of the Gospel is that the only way in which fallen humans can know fellowship with God is through belief in the work of the Christ on Calvary on their behalf. Peter=s sermon on Pentecost affirmed that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21), and he argued that Jesus was the one whom the Lord sent to be the Savior for all people. Later, after being arrested for the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Peter declared “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul noted that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith B and this not from

yourselves, it is the gift of God B not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

What are the dangers of not holding to the biblical position of the fallenness of the human race? There are several questions that must be dealt with in this regard.

1. If one denies the concept of the sinfulness of the entire human race, how does that differ from the ancient, and condemned, position of Pelagianism?<sup>6</sup> Pelagianism, among other assertions, claimed that each human was born without sin and became a sinner upon committing an act of sin. It was based upon the understanding that whatever God expected of humans they were able to do.

2. If one denies the concept of the sinfulness of the entire human race, how can the atoning death of Christ be understood? If humans are born with the potential to sin or not to sin, it is at least possible that they could choose to not sin. In that case the death of Christ becomes superfluous. Why would God have sent His Son to die for humans who could save themselves by choosing not to sin?

3. If one denies the concept of the sinfulness of the entire human race, how does one understand the strong biblical teaching of the universality of sin? In this case, some of the race would not be sinful until they actually sinned; yet the biblical material asserts that sin is endemic to the race because of the fall of Adam.

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<sup>6</sup>For further explanation of Pelagianism, and the conflict between Pelagius and Augustine see Bernhard Lohse, A Short History of Christian Doctrine (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1966), 106-131; J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, Second edition (Harper & Row: New York, NY, 1960), 357-374; David L. Smith, With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin (Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1994), 32-41.

4. If one denies the concept of the sinfulness of the entire human race, how is the presence of evil in the world explained? Is it merely the result of individual human choices? The biblical position indicates that sinfulness among humans, the result yielding to the temptation of Satan in the Garden, results in multiple and increasing evil in the world.

5. If one denies the concept of the sinfulness of the entire human race, how is the role of the Holy Spirit to be understood? If individual human choice alone is the concern, is there a need for the convicting and drawing power of the Holy Spirit to deal with the sinner? Further, if sin were merely the choice of the individual, would the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification and the realization of holiness in the life of the believer be needed?

In summary, humans were created good and upright, but they fell in Adam because of their choice to disregard and disobey the will of God. As a result the entire race is fallen and cannot save themselves. God, in Christ Jesus, has provided a means of escape for the race through faith in the grace bestowed at Calvary.