

We Believe: Foundations of the Christian Faith

Session 8: Original Sin

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The Articles of Religion

Article VII

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk) but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered in the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

The Articles of Religion

Article VIII - Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

The Confession of Faith

Article VII - Sin and Free Will

We believe man is fallen from righteousness and, apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. In his own strength, without divine grace, man cannot do good works pleasing and acceptable to God. We believe, however, man influenced and empowered by the Holy Spirit is responsible in freedom to exercise his will for good.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 18: Wherein consists the sinfulness of the estate whereinto man fell?

The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actually transgressions which proceed from it.

The Myth of Human Progress

Pushing back on the Enlightenment

- 18th century - Enlightenment held an inordinate optimism about human progress in history which is still present today
- Belief that people are naturally good and far from being prone to sin (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism)
- David Hume and others blamed God for sin more than human will. God created the problem in the first place
- Others plead psychological reasons for sin - lack of understanding, environment, victimization of circumstance
- Still others blame corrupt human systems and not the individual
- And there are some who would put the blame at Satan's feet (something Satan himself never claims!)

Original Sin in Scripture

Shattering the myth of progress and pointing out the reality

- “By one man’s disobedience all men were constituted sinners” (Romans 5:19)
- “In Adam all die” (1 Corinthians 15:22)
- We were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1)
- “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)

What is Sin?

- Hebrew = *chet* (among other words)
- Greek = hamartia (missing the mark)
- “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 14)
- Sin is a “willful transgression against a known law of God” (John Wesley)
- “Allow that humanity is wholly fallen and you are so far a Christian. Deny it and you are but a heathen still.” (John Wesley)
- “We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.”

The Origins of Sin

Genesis 3

- Humanity after Genesis 2
 - Harmony with God
 - Harmony with each other
 - Harmony with creation
- Genesis 3
 - Temptation, freedom, Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - Choice: Live by God's word OR choose to live by self-directed word

The Satan

The Serpent in Genesis 3?

- Accuser - prosecuting attorney (Job)
- Tempter (Matthew 4:1-11)
- Personification of evil
- But the devil is not the origin of sin (“The devil made me do it”)
- Rather, the devil reminded Adam and Eve of an alternative to God’s will (“Did God really say...?”)

Genesis 3:1-6

The Self-Directed Way of Sin

- Doubt (v. 1-3)
 - Divine Source
 - Fairness
- Unbelief (v. 4-5)
- Imagining life in disobedience to God's word (v. 6)
- Willful disobedience (v. 6)

The Nature of Sin

Humanity turned inward

- Autonomy - making oneself the source of right/wrong, good/bad, true/false
- Covenant rebellion - refusing allegiance to the Creator and the rightful King
- Inward vs. outward worldview
- No longer “fully human” but “less than human”
- Sin as idolatry
 - Romans 1:18-32
 - Exodus 20:1-7

The Consequences of Sin

The Curse in Genesis 3

- Alienation from God (3:8, 23)
- Damaged relationships with one another (3:12, 16)
- Death (3:19)
- Non-human creation cursed (3:17)
- Creational task burdened (3:16, 19)

All spheres of life—marriage and family, work and worship, school and state, our play and art—bear the wounds of our rebellion. Sin is present everywhere—in pride of race, in arrogance of nations, in abuse of the weak and helpless, in disregard for water, air, and soil, in destruction of living creatures, in slavery, deceit, terror, and war, in worship of false gods, and frantic escape from reality. We have become victims of our own sin.

Eugene Peterson

Sin Damages All of Creation

Distorting the “good”

- Creation is “good”
- God’s mission of redemption is not merely spiritual, but is for the whole creation (Romans 8:18-25)
- Renewal, not destruction
- Renewal of humanity in the image of God and the renewal of all creation
- Revelation 21 - the new heavens and the new earth

The Noah Story

Genesis 6-10

- “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5)
- The Noah Story - a foreshadowing of the Gospel
 - Creation
 - Sin
 - Judgment
 - Redemption
 - New Creation

Reversing the Curse

The Story of Israel

- God does not abandon creation
- Clothes Adam and Eve and gives them a promise (Genesis 3:15)
- Begins with a new human family (Noah, Abraham)
- Makes a covenant - “I will bless you and make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Reversing the Curse

The Story of Jesus

- God in the flesh (John 1:1-18)
- The new Adam (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22)
- Takes human sin on himself and its result—death
- Sin is defeated when death is defeated

Keep to the plain, old faith 'once delivered to the saints' and delivered by the Spirit of God to our hearts. Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: Therefore, 'ye must be born again,' born of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted. By grace ye shall be wholly renewed. In the second Adam, in Christ, ye all are made alive.

John Wesley

Some Concluding Thoughts

- This is the key choice: To which view of human nature do you ascribe?
- The world makes very little of Original Sin because it disrupts the prideful optimism of secular humanism.
- Original Sin changes our view of ourselves and others—we all have the same disease and need the same cure!
- The doctrine of Original Sin is essential—without it, the rest of the Christian worldview makes no sense.

Questions?