**3The Effects of Sin**

**Four Views and What the Bible Says**

Rom. 5:12, 15, 18

Introduction:

1. How has the sin of Adam affected his offspring? This passage indicates that there is an effect and it indicates that whatever that effect is Jesus Christ has reversed it.

2. Previously in our study . . .

a. We have observed that the consequences of sin are not arbitrarily and unnaturally

imposed by God, but are the natural result of our sin.

b. We observed that Adam’s sin had far reaching effects in that all the human race is

affected.

c. We learned that Adam’s sin introduced death—physical, spiritual and eternal into the

creation.

3. It is almost universally recognized, by those who believe in God and scripture, that Adam’s sin has resulted in all of his descendants being subject to physical death.

a. Separation from the tree of life as described in Gen. 3 and the repeated phrase in Gen.

5, “and he died,” provide the evidence.

b. But did Adam’s sin make us spiritually dead? Are Adam’s descendants judged guilty

and separated from God even though they have not personally sinned?

c. Is a child born guilty as a result of Adam’s sin?

d. Is he depraved or sinful in any sense because of what Adam did?

4. In order to define the issue before us I want us to look at some quotations from Norman L. Geisler. Second, we will look at the issue from a historical perspective, and then thirdly give consideration to what the Bible actually says.

Discussion:

I. The view held by Norman L. Geisler.

A. Who is Geisler and why consider his views?

1. Norman L. Geisler is first a renowned apologist for the Christian faith. He is a

famous theologian, author and founder of two evangelical seminaries. He holds

two Bachelors degrees, two Masters degrees and a PhD from Loyola University.

His website lists over 100 books authored, co-authored or edited by him.

2. But this is not why we consider his views. His views are similar to those

held by many of the conservative religious organizations in our community and

therefore the ones you are most likely to be familiar with.

3. He is a respected scholar and one whose views deserve our attention.

B. Geisler says, (Systematic Theology, p. 770):

1. “All humans are already spiritually dead when physically born.”

2. “All of us stand guilty before God because of what Adam did on our behalf; his sin

on behalf of the race was imputed to the race. Clearly, the all (or many) were not

made sinners *actually*, since they did not actually exist at the time. However,

they were *potentially* and *legally* present in Adam, and as such, received the

imputation of the consequences of his sin.”

3. “Everyone who is naturally generated from Adam—every human—inherits a sinful

nature from him. This is sometimes called the doctrine of ‘original sin’ (or

‘inherited sin’.”

4. Note that the “doctrine of original sin” is not that Adam was the original sinner, but

that all his descendants are considered legally guilty and are therefore spiritually

dead. Geisler quotes Eph. 2:1: “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

He makes it clear that he does not mean that you were dead because of your

personal sins. He says, “We are sinners not only because we sin but also because

we were born sinners” (p. 771).

C. There are two key features of this view.

1. That we are guilty because of Adam’s sin.

2. That we have inherited a “sinful nature from Adam.”

II. Around A.D. 400 there was a controversy over the effects of Adam’s sin that ultimately identified four separate views.

A. Pelagius (c. A.D. 360-418) was a British Catholic monk who moved to Rome around

380. He became concerned about the moral laxity of society and began to teach

against the doctrine of grace preached by Augustine.

1. Pelagius saw statements like: “It is hard;” “It is difficult;” “We are not able;” “We are

mere men;” as excuses for moral laxity.

2. He stressed that man is able to do right. He is capable of not sinning. He is able to

keep the commandments of God.

3. His perception was that Adam’s sin had no hereditary spiritual effects upon the

human race.

4. In this view every baby is born in a state of spiritual purity, without any depravity or

corruption and with free will intact, bears no guilt for the sin of Adam, although born

into a sin-filled environment that influences him to imitate Adam’s sin.

5. Two key factors: not guilty and able.

6. Moses Lard (taught at College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky) said, “I deny that

Adam’s sin ever touched or in any way affected the spirit of one of his posterity.”

He believed that Adam’s sin affected us physically, but not spiritually. He said, “The

spirit is as free from its influence as though the sin had never been committed”

(Commentary on Romans, pp. 177-178).

B. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was a Catholic Bishop of Hippo in North Africa.

1. Augustine taught that Adam’s sin so wounded his will and mind that man is unable

and unwilling to do right.

2. He taught that Adam’s sin was transmitted to his descendants so that they inherited

his guilt whereby an infant was eternally damned at birth.

3. This view holds that every baby born is born in a state of total depravity or bondage

of the will. He is so corrupted that his free will is gone and he grows up with a total

inability to come to faith and repentance and answer the call of the gospel.

4. Two key factors: guilty and unable.

5. This was the view held by both Luther and Calvin of Protestant Reformation fame.

6. Today Lutherans, Presbyterians, Reformed churches, some Baptists hold this view.

C. A third view is known as semi-Pelagianism.

1. This view holds that the only hereditary spiritual effect of Adam’s sin is a state of

partial depravity.

2. Every baby is born partially depraved, that is, having a soul that is corrupted with

spiritual sickness or weakness meaning that he is prone to sin, but not totally

depraved so that his free will is lost.

3. Thus, a child is born innocent, free from guilt and condemnation.

4. Apparently this was the predominate view from Irenaeus to Augustine.

5. John Wesley held this view.

6. Alexander Campbell wrote, “Our nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam before it

was transmitted to us; and hence that hereditary imbecility to do good, and that

proneness to do evil, so universally apparent in all human beings.” Man with all his

hereditary imbecility, is not under invincible necessity to sin. Greatly prone to evil,

easily seduced into transgression, he may or may not yield to passion and

seduction” (The Christian System, pp. 15-16).

D. A fourth view is held by the Roman Catholic Church.

1. Man is partially depraved but has free will.

2. Inherits guilt and condemnation from Adam, thus infant baptism.

3. An infant dying in this state is excluded from heaven, but is not consigned to hell,

but to limbo, conscious of neither pain nor bliss.

4. In The Telegraph dated 23 April 2007 there was an article reporting that after 800

years the Pope was doing away with the doctrine of limbo and now supports the

idea that babies dying before baptism may go to heaven.

III. What does the Bible say?

A. When you look around you and see sin on every side . . . when you observe a child

who looks at you with angry eyes . . . when you look inside yourself and see, not only

your own temptations, but also your sins, you might conclude that the theory of

“original sin” must be true. Evil seems to permeate our existence for sure, but we

cannot base our understanding on mere human experiences. The real question is,

what does the Bible say?

B. There are three major texts that those who hold to the “original sin” theory use to

support their position. (We will examine two of them here and then identify some texts

that seem to contradict “original sin.” In a separate lesson we will address the third

major text.)

1. In Geisler’s (p. 788) discussion of “human nature” he sites Psa. 51:5 saying, “Having

a fallen nature means that we are born this way.”

a. Does this mean that David was sinful as soon as he was conceived and guilty

when he was born?

b. He does not actually say, “I was sinful.” The language might mean that his

mother was sinful, but I doubt that that is what he is trying to convey.

c. Maybe what he is saying is that sin is pervasive in the world into which I was

born. Similar language seems to be used in Psa. 58:3: “The wicked are

estranged from the womb; those who speak lies go astray from birth.” The idea

is that sin is so pervasive that one born into the world picks it up early on.

d. Psa. 51 addresses David’s personal sin with Bathsheba (10-17). It is not

addressing guilt inherited from Adam. Adam’s sin is never mentioned in the text,

only David’s personal sin.

2. The second major passage is Eph. 2:1: “You were dead in your trespasses and

sins.”

a. Geisler quotes this text and says, “We are sinners not only because we sin but

also because we were born sinners.”

b. He adds, “Each new soul is not created sinless; it is sinful from its conception.”

“A sinful soul is transmitted from sinful parents by the natural process of

conception.”

c. But this passage does not say that.

1) It refers to the way they walked (not the way Adam walked; Adam’s sin is not

mentioned) according to the course of the world.

2) They were children of wrath because they “indulged the desires of the flesh

and of the mind,” not because they were descended from Adam.

3) The text says, “You were dead in **your** trespasses and sins.” It does not say,

“You were dead in Adam’s trespass and sin.” Note the plural!

C. Three questions.

1. Ezek. 18:4 says, “The soul who sins will die.” Verse 20 adds, “The person who

sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor the

father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the

righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon

himself.” **How is this consistent with the theory of “original sin”?**

2. Lk. 8 and the Parable of the Sower describes 4 different soils representing

people’s hearts: soil beside the road, rocky soil, soil in the thorns and good soil.

The gospel seed was taken from the heart, it was received by the rocky soil,

choked among the thorns and thrived among the good and honest hearts. **Were**

**these unable to respond to the gospel call?** It would seem, the whole point of

the parable is that hearts have a personal choice.

3. **How did Adam sin in the first place?** He was not totally depraved. This was

before “original sin.” **Is it not possible that we may sin motivated by similar**

**temptations rather than being totally depraved?** James 1:14-15 says, “Each

one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when

sin has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings

forth death.”

Conclusion:

1. Do you believe that you are guilty, separated from God, and spiritually dead because of Adam’s sin or because of your own?

2. Do you believe that you are able to respond to the message of God by accepting His gift in Jesus Christ?

3. When people asked Peter what they should do he told them to “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and that they would receive remission of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

4. Will you do that?