

# *Presumptions of Germinal Transformation: Original Sin, Depravity & Regeneration*

## **Does Original Sin Damn?**

**This study is designed to answer the question that serves as its title! However, several definitions are in order, and will help in preventing misunderstanding:**

(1) **Original sin:** Refers to the transgression of Adam and Eve, our first parents, in the Garden of Eden, at the behest of Satan. God had stipulated that the "tree which is in the midst of the garden," was not to be touched, or its fruit eaten, "lest you die" (Gen. 3:3).

(2) **Death:** This word has one basic meaning, but it has two fundamental applications. The one basic meaning is separation. The two fundamental applications are physical death and spiritual death. Spiritual death is man's separation from God, due to man's transgressions. Physical death is the separation of the fleshly body and the, soul or spirit of man. When the spirit departs, the fleshly body is said to be dead, or to have died.

(3) In Genesis 3:3, the death spoken of by God, was both physical and spiritual! If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they could have continued to live eternally in the Garden of Eden. But, by sinning, they separated themselves from God, spiritually, and God's penalty was physical death which they brought upon themselves, and which was the consequence to the descendants of Adam and Eve. Satan's definition of the word death, in Genesis 3:4: "you will not surely die," was the physical application. Adam and Eve did not die physically that day, when they sinned.

However, later on in Genesis 3, the penalties are listed that would be visited upon mankind and womankind as well as a penalty upon serpents, for Satan's having used the serpent's body in accomplishing his evil scheme.

### **Some Scriptures Which Illustrate Sin (Death)**

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezek. 18:20).

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

The foregoing Scriptures establish that an individual is answerable for his own sins. That we "have gone astray," indicates that prior to "our going astray" we were upright. As infants, before developing to a state of accountability, we were created by God, righteous! "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

### **Physical Death Is Inherited From Adam And Eve Spiritual Death Is The Result Of One's Own Sins**

I suggest that the numerous false doctrines concerning original sin, are the direct result of failing to note the difference between physical death and spiritual death. This is well illustrated in 1 Timothy 5:6 - "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives," meaning that the person who gives himself over to carnality and sensual living, though yet alive, is spiritually dead. This misunderstanding and misapplication of spiritual versus fleshly death has a long history in the doctrines of men.

## **Pelagianism In The Early Fifth Century**

Two men in the year 411 A.D., spread some teachings that caused controversy in the Greek and Latin churches. Pelagius and Caelestius held to six points: (1) Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died. (2) Adam's sin harmed only himself, not the human race. (3) Children just born are in the same state as Adam before his fall. (4) The whole human race neither dies through Adam's sin or death, nor rises again through the resurrection of Christ. (5) The (Mosaic) Law is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel. And (6) Even before the advent of Christ there were men who were without sin. The Latins emphasized the guilt rather than its punishment, as the chief characteristic of original sin. The Greeks on the other hand, stressed the punishment, rather than the guilt. I suggest that only (3) above, is scriptural in content. All the rest of the six points are unscriptural or anti-scriptural.

## **Calvinism In The 16th Century**

John Calvin (1509-1564) introduced and defined the doctrine that bears his name. This false teaching holds: That God predestines some to everlasting life, while others are consigned to damnation. Nor does their destination depend upon their foreseen virtue or wickedness. As a result of Adam's sin (original sin), the entire nature of fallen man is totally corrupt. Any righteousness is imputed wholly from outside or exterior forces. Coupled closely with this doctrine of being "consigned to heaven or hell," and one is helpless in changing one's destiny, is the "eternal perseverance of the saints" or "once saved, always saved" (the inability of "falling from God's grace"). Yet there is scarcely a single book of the New Testament but what teaches just the opposite of "once saved, always saved."

## **Arminianism: A Reaction To Calvinism**

Jacobus Arminius, was born in Holland in 1560. He was a professor at the University of Leyden. After his death, his followers now known as "the Remonstrants" published the following five points:

They opposed (1) Predestination in its defined form; as if God by an eternal and irrevocable decision had destined men, some to eternal bliss, others to eternal damnation, without any other law than His own pleasure. On the contrary, they thought that God by the same resolution wished to make all believers in Christ who persisted in their belief to the end blessed in Christ, and for His sake would only condemn the unconverted and unbelieving. They opposed (2) The doctrine of election according to which the chosen were counted as necessarily and unavoidably blessed and the outcasts necessarily and unavoidably lost. They urged the milder doctrine that Christ died for all men. They opposed (3) The doctrine that Christ died for the elect alone to make them blessed and no one else, ordained as mediator; on the contrary, they urged the possibility of salvation for others not elect. They opposed (4) The doctrine that the grace of God affects the elect only, while the reprobates cannot participate in this through their conversion, but only through their own strength. And, they opposed (5) The doctrine that he who had once attained true saving grace can never lose it and be wholly debased. They held, on the contrary, that whoever had received Christ's quickening spirit had thereby a strong weapon against Satan, sin, the world, and his own flesh.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the followers of Arminius, reacted toward Calvinism with substantial truth from Scripture.

## Summation From Holy Scripture

- (1) All of God's creation was upright and good (Gen. 1:31). Man subsequently chose to practice sin.
- (2) Little children are blessed of God, and adults need to become like little children (Matt. 18:1-5).
- (3) The son does not inherit the guilt of his father (Ezek. 18:20). A given individual answers for his or her own sin (Ibid.).
- (4) Mankind went astray; departed from their former upright status (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 53:6).
- (5) The first recorded sin in the church at Jerusalem involved a husband and wife who were Christians, but who then sinned, and died (Acts 5:1-11).
- (6) Simon, a Christian, but formerly a sorcerer, sinned after becoming a child of God. He was said to be: "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:9-25).
- (7) The Apostle Paul was aware that he could so sin as to be eternally lost (1 Cor. 9:27).
- (8) The Apostle Paul warned the Galatian Christians concerning the danger of falling from grace (Gal. 5:4).
- (9) The Apostle Peter warned Christians about turning from the holy word and being overcome (2 Pet. 2:20-22).
- (10) The church in Ephesus had left its first love and was told to "Remember therefore from where you have fallen." (Rev. 2:5).

## Conclusion

Thus, to answer the question: "Does original sin damn?" Adam's and Eve's sin damned Adam and Eve. Their sin did not damn their posterity! Their sin did bring physical death upon the earth and to their descendants. – *Luther Martin*

## What Does Man Inherit From Adam?

Weldon E. Warnock

"That the sin of Adam injured not himself only but also all descending from him by ordinary generation, is part of the faith of the whole Christian world. The nature and extent of the evil this entailed upon this race, and the ground or reason of the descendants of Adam having involved in the evil consequences of his transgression, have ever been matter of diversity and discussion."[\(1\)](#)

Theologians speak of Adam's sin as "original sin" and they usually define it to mean "that man has gone very far from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil." Consequently, they say that all men, as the descendants of Adam, have this original depravity, derived from continual descent from father to son. There are four (4) principal hypotheses, to one or the other of which all the various explanations offered on this subject may probably be reduced.

### Theories

(1) The first theory is that the whole human race was literally in Adam as the oak is in the acorn, and thus participated in his transgression.[\(2\)](#) Augustine taught that "human nature in its totality was present seminally in the first man; not personally but a common act of mankind in their collective or undistributed form of existence."

(2) The second theory is that Adam was the representative of the race; that as a king, or as an ambassador, or a congress represents the nation, and the entire nation is held responsible for the act of its representative, so Adam represented the human race, was chosen as the type to stand for humanity, and by his trial the whole race was tried, thus sinning in his sin and falling in his fall. Acting thus as representative for the race, his sin was imputed, i.e. charged, to the whole race.

Berkhof wrote: "When he (Adam) sinned in this representative capacity, the guilt of his sin was naturally imputed to all those whom he represented; and as the result of this they are all born in a corrupt state."[\(3\)](#) This theory explains (in the proponents' minds) why the descendants of Adam are only responsible for the one sin which he committed as head of the human race, and why Christ, who was not a human being, does not share in the guilt.

(3) The third theory holds that Adam fell, and in falling became a sinner. The universal law of nature is that like begets like. So all his descendants have inherited from him a nature like his own, a nature depraved and prone to sin. Those who maintain this theory add, usually, that man is not responsible for this depraved nature, and that he is not in any strict sense guilty before God for it. . . . In other words, this school distinguishes between sin and depravity, holding all sin to consist in voluntary action, and depravity to be simply that disordered state of the soul which renders it prone to commit sin. . . . According to this view, mankind are overwhelmed in ruin, which Adam brought upon the race, but are not guilty except as they become so by personal conduct.[\(4\)](#)

Tertullian thought the soul consists of human substance and it comes into existence with the body in and through generation as a transmission from the seed of Adam. This is "Truducianism," a philosophy which means that the soul as well as the body is begotten by reproduction from the substance of the parents. It is the opposite of "Creationism," which is the doctrine that God creates a new human soul for every human being that is born.

The Bible teaches that God "formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1) and that He is "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 16:22; 27:16). Hebrews 12:9 states, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

J. Barmby stated: "Our earthly parents transmit to us our carnal existence; our spiritual part, in whatever mysterious way derived or inspired, is due to our Divine parentage; and it is in respect of this that we are God's children and accountable to him" (Pulpit Commentary). Though Hebrews 12:9 does not teach Creationism, as opposed to Truducianism, it does teach, as Barmby said, our Divine parentage. Hence, we do not inherit a depraved and evil nature since God is the Father of our spirits and we are His offspring (Acts 17:29).

(4) The fourth theory, known in theological language . . . as Pelagianism, denies that there is any connection between Adam and his posterity, or that the race is in any sense held responsible for, or on account of, Adam's sin . . . Each soul, for itself, chooses its own destiny by its voluntary choice of good or evil, right or wrong.(5)

Obviously, and very succinctly, the Bible teaches what is stated in #4. Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven is as little children or infants (Matt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17). Certainly, Jesus was not saying the kingdom was like little depraved sinners! Man has free will to come to the Lord (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17). Space does not allow an extensive study on this matter. Compare other articles in this special series.

### **Post-Apostolic Teachings**

The views about "original sin" and "inherited depravity" arose after the days of the apostles. Tertullian (145-220) was the first to use the expression vitium originis to describe the stain or blemish or defect from which man's nature suffered since the Fall; so that while his true nature is good, evil has become a second nature to him. But this "original sin" he did not regard as involving guilt.(6) The moral powers might be enfeebled by the Fall, but with one voice, up to the time of Augustine, the teachers of the church declared they were not lost.(7) Athanasius (293-373), father of orthodoxy, maintained in the strongest terms that man has the ability of choosing good as well as evil, and even allowed exceptions to original sin, alleging that several individuals, who lived prior to the appearance of Christ, were free of it.(8)



Cyril of Jerusalem (died 386) assumed that life of man begins in a state of innocence, and that sin enters only with the use of free will. It is said that Chrysostom (345-407) passed a sincere censure upon those who endeavored to excuse their own defects by ascribing the origin of sin to the fall of Adam. Others, such as Hilary (died 367) and Ambrose of Milan (340-379) taught the defilement of sin by birth. However, neither excluded the liberty of man from the work of moral corruption.[\(9\)](#)

### **Inheritance from Adam**

Interestingly, the Rabbis taught, as recorded by Edersheim, that Adam lost six things by his sin. They are: the shining splendour of his person, even his heels being like sun; his gigantic size, from east to west, from earth to heaven; the spontaneous splendid products of the ground, and of all fruit trees; an infinitely greater measure of light on the part of the heavenly bodies; and finally, endless duration of life. But even these are to be restored by the Messiah.[\(10\)](#) What we inherit from Adam or what consequences we suffer as a result of his sin are set forth in Genesis 3 and other places. The modernists contend that the Genesis 3 account of the Fall and the consequences thereof, are nothing more than allegory or fable. But Horne wrote, "It has been the fashion with minute philosophers and philosophising divines to endeavor to explain away the reality of the fall, and to resolve it all into allegory, apologue, or moral fable; but the whole scheme of redemption by Christ is founded upon it, and must stand or fall with it; a figurative fall requiring only a figurative redemption."[\(11\)](#)

Genesis 3 is a historical account of man's fall and we observe the following things man inherits or receives as a consequence of Adam's sin.

(1) The penalty of physical death. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (v. 19). God had said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

We see this sentence pronounced on Adam after he had eaten the forbidden fruit and fallen in 3:19. Indeed, dying, he died.

Paul wrote, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

(2) The continuous struggle between descendants of woman and serpent. The hostility commenced between the woman and her destroyer was to be continued by their descendants. . . . the seed of the serpent being those of Eve's posterity who should imbibe the devil's spirit and obey the devil's rule. . . . and the seed of the woman signifying those whose character and life should be of an opposite description, and in particular the Lord Jesus Christ, who is styled by preeminence "the Seed" (Gal. 3:16-17), and who came to "destroy the works of the devil."[\(12\)](#)

Thus Genesis 3:15 has been rightly called the "maternal promise," the "protevangelium," meaning the first proclamation of the gospel. We would not want to claim that this "maternal promise," in its deeper application, refers exclusively to the Christ. It is obvious that in the first part of the verse the terms "the seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent" are collective nouns and they indicate an ongoing spiritual conflict between the seed of the woman will gain the ultimate victory, a victory not won by the collective seed of the woman, but by that one unique seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him alone.[\(13\)](#) However, through Him we can be conquerors (cf. Jn. 12:31; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 17:14).

(3) Pregnancy and childbirth attended by pain. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (v. 16). For woman the bearing of children is to be a difficulty. Too, she will be dependent on her husband and he will rule over her.[\(14\)](#)

(4) Physical hardship, painful toil, disappointing vexations and hard struggle. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the bread of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. . . " (vv. 17-19). So serious was man's transgression that on account of him the ground is cursed. How is it possible for a curse to be placed upon the ground since it is inanimate and not responsible? What is meant is that the curse upon the ground is with respect to man, so that the one who will feel the effects of the curse is not the ground but man himself.

Instead of a friendly earth, a curse now spreads out over the ground and man stands as it were upon enemy soil. Adam is to eat of the ground. It will not deny him its produce, but his eating will be in sorrow. All labor will be difficult. Man will have to engage in severe struggle for his own existence. He will till the soil, but it will send forth thorns and thistles.[\(15\)](#)

(5) Environmental influences and conditions for temptations. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Paul does not say how these were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam, nor how they are to be made righteous by the obedience of Christ. It is pure assumption to argue that the disobedience of Adam is imputed to his offspring, or that the obedience of Christ is imputed to anybody. Neither guilt nor personal righteousness can be transferred from one person to another, but the consequences of either may, to some extent, fall upon others.

By his sin Adam brought about conditions that make every person subject to temptation. In this way he made sinners.[\(16\)](#) "It was through the conditions brought about by Adam's sin that the temptations and environmental influences tended to cause man to sin, that by his disobedience many were made sinners.

Actually, they were made sinners by their own sins, and not his."[\(17\)](#) In the midst of this earthly life we toil, struggle and die. There is nothing we can do to earn the right to partake of the tree of life. There is only One, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who makes it possible for us to obtain eternal life and gain access to the tree of life in the heavenly paradise of God. In this second Adam there is life, hope and peace. Only in Him who was dead and liveth for evermore, do we have life.

### **\*\*ENDNOTES\*\***

1. *Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 192.*
2. *McClintock and Strong, Vol. 9, p. 765.*
3. (NOTE: No corresponding number found in original document) *Ibid.*
3. *L. Berkhof, Manual of Christian Doctrine, p. 144.*
4. *McClintock and Strong, op. cit.*
5. *Ibid., p. 766.*
6. *J.F. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine, p. 307.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *K.R. Hagenbach, History of Doctrines, Vol. 1, p. 293.*
9. *Ibid., pp. 293-295.*
10. *Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, Vol. 1, p. 166.*
11. *Thomas Horne, Introduction to the Scriptures, Vol. 1, pp. 143-144.*
12. *Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 1.*
13. *G. Charles Alders, Genesis, Vol. 1, p. 101*

## Calvinism And Adam: A Parallel

**Calvinism tells us three things. (1) Man is born in sin. This is the doctrine of total, hereditary depravity. Total means all, whole or complete. Hereditary means one receives it from his parents, which in this case means from Adam, hence, adamic, original sin. Depravity means bad, wicked, evil. Thus, every person born into this world is, at birth, thoroughly, utterly sinful. (2) The Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner directly. Man can do nothing to effect his deliverance from his unhappy state of depravity. Man is wholly passive in his redemption. The "enabling power" of the Spirit must regenerate the totally wicked sinner before he can respond to the call of the gospel. This "direct operation of the Holy Spirit" is performed without the subject's will or choice. Since one is totally dead, he must be given life before he can act. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, without means or agency, regenerates, gives life, to the soul. (3) Those regenerated cannot die. Once the Spirit infuses life, that life cannot be lost - "once saved, always saved." As man cannot undo his fleshly birth, so he cannot surrender his spiritual birth, says Calvinism. Once born of the flesh, one cannot be unborn; so, once born of the Spirit, once cannot be unborn - "once in grace, always in grace." The above analysis and description is a fair representation of the creeds and beliefs of denominationalism. Our line of attack in this article shall be focused on the events in the garden of Eden from whence this theology allegedly, initially sprang. Because of Adam's sin, we are all born in sin, utterly disposed to all evil, totally foreign to all good ' and in need of the generation of the Spirit in our dead heart to give us life which cannot be forfeited. So, we shall go to the root of it all, to Adam, Eve and the bowers of their paradise.**

**The creeds explain to us our sin, but they do not tell us why or how the first pair was led to sin. Let us look at it from a parallel perspective.**

**First, "Total Hereditary Righteousness". Adam was created, body, soul and spirit, by Jehovah Himself. He did not experience a human or animal birth. He came directly from God. We may safely assume, therefore, that he was totally, hereditarily righteous. His parent, his Creator, had no sin, and he was sinless at his birth. Later, we learn that he sinned, but how did he come to sin? If we are born totally, hereditarily depraved, and, consequently, can do no good, how could Adam, born totally, hereditarily righteous, do any evil? That question must be addressed by the Calvinist. When he answers it, he will answer himself and dissolve his position, but answer it he must.**

**Second, "The Direct Operation of the Devil". Did the devil's unholy spirit perform a direct operation on the heart of Adam, this totally, hereditarily righteous man, to give him death and enable him to sin? That is what we should expect. If a totally depraved man requires a direct working of the Spirit on his heart to give him life and empower him to obey God, why would not a totally righteous man require a direct work of the devil on his heart to give him death and empower him to obey the devil?**

**The sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), and as a dead man cannot act until he is given life, so the sinner cannot respond to God until the Spirit gives him life, Calvinism says. Keep the parallel in mind - Adam was just as "dead to sins" (cf. Rom. 6:2; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:24) as the sinner is said to be "dead in sins." Now, did it take a direct work of the devil on Adam's heart to enable or to empower him to sin? If one dead in sins is unable to effect righteousness until the Spirit gives him spiritual life, is one who is dead to sin unable to effect unrighteousness until the devil gives him spiritual death? Adam was "dead to sin," yet he was able to sin without a miraculous act of the devil's unholy spirit on his heart. So, one who is "dead in sins" is able to obey God without a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit on his heart. If not, why not? Adam was led to sin by the spoken word of the devil. By means of lying, through incentive, inducement, enticement, Adam was led to sin (Gen. 3:1-6; Jas. 1:13-15).**

**The word of the devil allured this totally righteous man, this man who was dead to sins, to commit sin and die. The word of God can allure, therefore, totally depraved man, the man dead in sins, to obey God and live (Jn. 5:25), or else the word of the devil is more powerful than the word of God (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12). From this conclusion there is no escape.**

**Third, "Once Lost, Always Lost". Once Adam sinned, he should have been lost, irretrievably lost, if the parallel holds true. He should have been unable to hear the word of God and respond to it after he died spiritually, but is that what we find? Notice that Calvinism says that when the totally depraved sinner receives life, he is impervious to the call of the devil; he cannot be led by the devil to eternal ruin. What was the state of Adam? He could hear and obey God after his sin (Gen. 3:7f), but we are told that the regenerated child of God cannot hear and obey the devil after his regeneration. But since Adam could hear, reason, and follow God after his fall, then, the saved one can hear, reason and follow the devil after his salvation (2 Pet. 3:17; Heb. 3:12).**

**To summarize, observe some chart comparisons:**

Calvinism:	Adam:
Total Hereditary Depravity (Cannot Obey God)	Total Hereditary Righteousness (Cannot Obey Devil)
Direct Operation of Holy Spirit Required	Direct Operation of Devil Required
Once Saved, Always Saved	Once Lost, Always Lost
The Facts Are:	
(1) Man sins when drawn by lust and enticed (Jas. 1:13-15; 2 Pet. 1:4)	(1) Adam sinned when drawn away by lust and enticed (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:3)
(2) The devil appeals by word, offering motive (2 Pet. 3:17; 2 Tim. 2:26)	(2) The devil enticed Adam by word, offering motive (Gen 3; 2 Cor. 11:3)
(3) Sin produces death (Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:15)	(3) Sin produced death in Eden (Gen. 3; Rom. 6:23)
(4) Dead sinners, "dead in sin," can "hear the voice of the Son of God" and "live" (Jn. 5:25)	(4) Adam, "dead to sin," could hear the voice of the devil and die (Gen. 3)
(5) After receiving life, saved may hear and obey devil (2 Tim. 4:2-4; Psa. 106:12, 24; 2 Pet. 3:17)	(5) After receiving death, Adam could hear and obey God (Gen. 3:7f)

## Calvinism And Ezekiel 18

For many years, those of mainstream Calvinism have taught that the son bears the guilt of his father's sin. Reaching back to the original sin of Adam, these same teachers have condemned all under the guilt of Adam's transgression. This article seeks to find the biblical teachings concerning such guilt.

The Bible student is aware that such a doctrine of inherited sin or total depravity is discussed in two Old Testament passages by prophets dealing with a rebellious and fallen Judah. Jeremiah (31:29-30) and Ezekiel (chapter 18) both deal with the false proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." In both cases, with Ezekiel being the longer explanation of the concept of individual responsibility, the proverb is condemned as being contrary to the will of God. From Ezekiel's writing, we can learn three important lessons.

First, God, in explaining His judgment to the people of bondage, states the falseness of the proverb. "As I live, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel." But why should they wish for such a proverb to be true? Obviously, it allows one to shift the blame for sin. If one could merely proclaim one's status before God to be a result of Adam, or one's father, etc., then the feeling of guilt is removed. People are fond of doing so even in today's world. "The devil made me do it," or "it's all their fault that I am the way I am," are attempts to cast off responsibility for one's actions. Judah would like to have thought God unfair for punishing them continually in Babylon for their fathers' sins. This they would do before acknowledging their own failure.

But so did their fathers. Adam would rather blame God for giving him Eve and then Eve for tempting him, as the cause of his sin, than to admit in the very presence of God his own failure to obey God's will (Gen. 3:12). Saul found it more honorable to blame the people for his failure to kill King Agag and the animals as God had said than to just admit his failure to lead responsibly before the all-seeing God (1 Sam. 15:13-15). Their attempts failed and so will ours. One should understand that while God is just at this point laying bare the false concept of inherited sin, the concept had never been true.



God has always held man responsible for just the sins he individually commits. And God further gives reasons as to why he so judges. "All souls are mine," He says. God has no respect of one man over another. AD are accountable to Him. God rules, therefore, with equity (cf. Col. 3:25; Acts 10:34; 1 Pet. 1: 17). That means that everyone starts at the same point with God and will finish his course based upon his own record and not another's. Therefore, God concludes, "The soul that sinneth, It shall die." Personal responsibility to God is again taught in Romans 5:12, "for all have sinned." As if to reinforce His statement, God repeats this message to Judah in verse 20 of our text. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. . . " is plain enough that any Calvinist should be able to understand. Secondly, God illustrates His point and further expounds that man does not bear the guilt or righteousness of another! (This point is critical in view of the theology of some who have gone out from among us relative to imputed righteousness.) A series of questions is presented. What happens to a righteous man who continues so (vv. 5-9)? This righteous man is then described as one who has not worshiped idols (v. 6) and has treated others fairly (v. 7). This one has done faithfully those things commanded of the law (v. 9). The pronouncement: "He is just, he shall surely live."

Then what happens to his son who becomes unrighteous? The son is described as being immoral (vv. 10-11) and an idolater (v. 11). "Shall he then live? ... he shall surely die; his blood be upon him" (vv. 13,18). The righteousness of his father has not spared nor excused his iniquity. Nor has he been condemned for the sin of Adam but for his own transgressions. (This also surely condemns the idea of universal salvation.)

But this second man has a son (the first's grandson) who repudiates the sin of his father (w. 14-17). He is as righteous as his grandfather. If Calvinism is true, he should be counted as estranged from God due to the iniquity of his father. "He shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live" (v. 17). Surely he would be condemned for his father's sin before being condemned for Adam's. But neither were the case. He stood just before God because he was obedient to the God of heaven.

Finally, God reminds the nation of Judah, so torn from God because of disobedience, that a man can change (vv. 21,24). God says that a wicked man can serve Him by turning from sin (v. 21). In the New Testament, this is referred to as repentance.

**The righteousness of the man, God says, is remembered; his wickedness, forgotten (v. 22; cf. Isa. 1: 18). The responsibility is upon man to turn from sins (Acts 2:40; 2 Pet. 3:9). God would have one also to realize the need for faithful obedience to His will (v. 21; cf. Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9). Thus, if a man is lost, only he is responsible for such. He cannot blame Adam nor his parents nor society.**

**But dear ones, the righteous man can also change (vv. 24-26). One can leave righteousness and follow the pathway of the wicked (v. 24). God asks, "Shall he live?" (cf. Rev. 21:8) Could God ignore his unfaithfulness? Adam and Saul are perfect examples of this failure, and they show the consequences of one turning from God. The Scripture in verse 24 of our text says that his wickedness shall be remembered and his righteousness forgotten (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).**

**This final point shows two tenets (at least) of Calvinism to be wrong. Man is responsible to God to respond to God's loving grace so as to cause God to count his faith as righteousness. And once a person has started toward heaven, it is possible for that one to so live as to die and be lost. If these verses do not show this plainly, then this scribe has missed the point. One is responsible to live before God righteously; all wickedness is abhorred. May we, therefore, so live as to so die that we might live forever with Him who is perfect in all His judgments.**

*- Keith Pruitt*

# Can Sin Be Inherited?

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## Introduction:

Hereditary total depravity is the foundation-stone of all forms of Calvinism. From this premise, the whole Calvinistic theological system is fabricated. The classic statement of this doctrine is found in the Confession of Faith of the ultra-Calvinistic Presbyterian Church:

*By this sin (eating of the forbidden fruit) they (our first parents) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby they are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.*

## Calvinism And History

Though the above is the classic statement of hereditary total depravity, the concept did not originate with John Calvin (born 1509). This doctrine had already been explicated by the Fifth Century monk known popularly as Augustine. But the doctrine had even been promulgated before Augustine, by the Third Century "Church Father" named Tertullian. Calvinism was the theological undergirding of main-line Protestant Denominationalism that arose shortly after the Middle Ages.

Today, various forms of Calvinism have seeped into the church of the Lord through the efforts of misguided and misinformed young preachers, many of whom have been nourished at the feet of Calvinistic teachers in denominational seminaries, and have imbibed the contents of commentaries and sermons compiled by Calvinistic writers.

In fact, many of these preachers' libraries are filled with virtually nothing but the books of Calvinistic writers. This partially is attributable to the fact that Calvinism has often virtually been equated with Fundamentalism. But the damage has been done none the less. When I was just in my teens, the beloved Luther Blackmon took me aside one Lord's Day evening and advised me: "When you go off to college, be careful that you do not learn too many things that are not so! " What a timely warning that was. This precisely is what has happened to too many of our contemporary young preachers: They have learned too many things that are not so and even worse, they now are teaching these denominational heresies to unsuspecting brethren. These misguided young instructors are precisely the reason why a series of articles such as are contained in this issue of Guardian of Truth are so timely and needed.

## **Ashdodic Language**

It was said of the early Christians that their vocabulary, teachings, and practices were indicative of their having "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Peter's speech even betrayed him on one occasion; it evidenced that he had "been with Jesus." During the Old Testament days of Nehemiah, it was said that some of God's people spoke "half in the speech of Ashdod" (Neh. 13:24). In like manner, the vocabulary of many modern young preachers evidences that they have been drinking deeply at denominational fountains. One would never conclude from their doctrinal speech that they "had been with Jesus." They speak "half in the speech of Ashdod." While these educated young men use the nomenclature of Calvinism, teach the doctrines of Calvinism, make the arguments of Calvinism, and even cite the "prooftexts" of Calvinism, they seem astounded when someone attaches the label of "Calvinism" to them! The fact is, many of them have not even explored Calvinism deeply enough to recognize that what they are so widely spouting is nothing more or less than the classic doctrines of deterministic Calvinism.

## Imputed Righteousness

Be assured, brethren, the modern doctrine of "imputed righteousness" is nothing more than the flip-side of the Calvinistic doctrine of hereditary sin. One springs from the other. Calvinists teach that the sin of Adam is imputed to all mankind, but that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to that portion of mankind whom they denominate as the "elect."

**Can sin, or righteousness, be transferred from one person to another?** This is the question we seek to answer in this article. The transferral of sin, or imputed righteousness, precisely is what must happen if hereditary sin, or imputed righteousness, is to be accepted. One is as illogical and unscriptural as the other. The principle reason why we must now re-examine hereditary sin, as in this issue of Guardian of Truth, is because so many brethren are now teaching its flip-side: the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ.

**Can one who has the perfect life of Christ credited to his account possibly be lost?** The implication of this question is the reason why so many confused young preachers (and some others old enough to know better) sound so much like they are inching toward acceptance of the impossibility of apostasy doctrine. Calvinism is a doctrine that proceeds logically from its premises. That is why it is so difficult to imbibe just a little of Calvinism. Logic requires the acceptance of all of Calvinism, or none of it. Accept this doctrine of transferring sin, or righteousness, from one person to another, and one logically then must accept the doctrine of election and reprobation. If Adamic sin is transferred to one, then his salvation is dependent upon the imputation of the perfect life of Jesus, according to Calvinism. If sin is inheritable, why is not righteousness also inheritable? The doctrines of election and of the final perseverance of the saints are logical concomitants inextricably connected to this concept of transferring sin or righteousness from one person's account to the account of another.

Albert Barnes, himself an ardent Calvinist, exposed the fallacy of this imputation doctrine very succinctly.

He said: "I have examined all the passages (the so-called "proof-texts" - CW). . . . There is not one in which the word (Greek logidzomai - impute - CW) is used in the sense of reckoning or imputing to a man that which does not strictly belong to him, or of charging on him that which ought not to be charged on him as a matter of personal right. . . . No doctrine of transferring, or setting over to a man what does not properly belong to him, be it sin or holiness, can be derived, therefore from this word" (Commentary on Romans, p. 102). Do not ever forget this very true statement from Barnes. It says all that needs to be said about either inherited sin, or imputed righteousness.

## **Definition of Sin**

The fact is those who talk about imputing sin, or righteousness, really do not understand the definition of sin and/or righteousness, or else they deliberately misuse the terms in their preaching and writing. Sin is not an object, like a bag of potatoes, that can be transferred from one person to another, nor is righteousness a transferrable object.

Sin by definition is an act! Consult any number of word study books or religious encyclopedias on the Bible, and you will find sin again and again referred to as an act. Note a few of the Bible words used to describe or define sin. Hebrew Words. asham (guilt); hattah (missing); pesha (transgression); awon (perversion); ra (evil in disposition); chata (err, miss the mark); chet (error, failure); avon (iniquity); resha (impiety). Now note these Greek Words. harmartia (missing the mark); parabasis (transgression); adika (unrighteousness); asebeia (impiety); anomia (contempt and violation of law); poneria (depravity); epithumia (lust); paraptoma (offense, trespass). A careful study of the hundreds of passages where these terms are used to describe and define sin will evidence it is always something an individual does.

Note in this connection the sins of Satan (Jn. 8:44). He is said to be a "murderer," "standeth not in the truth," and "speaketh a lie." Sin is not some ethereal object that floats around in the air and lights upon this one or that one, and is therefore transferrable from one being to another. Note also that the angels who sinned "kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation" (Jude 6). These angels did something which was wrong.

Merrell Tenny defined sin in these words: "an act of the free will in which the creature deliberately, responsibly and with adequate understanding of the issues, chose to corrupt the holy, godly character with which God originally endowed His creation" (Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 796). Tenny also said of the sins of Satan, angels, and men: "Their sin was an act of a group of individuals as individuals and does not involve the 'federal' or representative principle . . . their sin was . . . a deliberate act."

The Westminster Shorter Catechism correctly defined sin in these words: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God" (cf. Lev. 19:2; Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4:7,8). Tenny also said sin is the "violation of the expression of God's holy character. . . . Sin may be defined ultimately as anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator." W.E. Vine uses these terms in discussing sin: "concrete wrong doing," "a course of sin characterized by continuous acts" (1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Jn. 5:16); "a sinful deed, an act of sin," "an act of disobedience to Divine law."

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible defines sin in these words: "Sin is an essentially historical phenomenon. It has an event-character. To become real, it must happen . . . sin . . . is historical: . . . a happening or event." Now can one transfer an historical event from one person to another? Even the thought of it is preposterous. As previously said, sin is not like a bag of potatoes which can be shifted from one person to another. Instead, it is an event, an action of one individual, and cannot be transferred to another individual. It is true, however, that the sin of one person (such as Adolph Hitler's) may affect other people. Other individuals may suffer as a consequence of another's sinful act, but they do not bear the guilt of that person's sin.

## **Hereditary Sin and God's Nature**

The Bible teaches that God is a Being of infinite justice and righteousness (Psa. 18:30; Tit, 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Rom. 3:3,4). Scores of passages teach that judgment will be on an individual basis, in which each person shall answer for his own sins only, and for the sins of no others (see 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Mt. 12:36; Gal. 6:7-9; Col. 3:23-25; Rev. 3:4; 14:13; 20:12; Rom. 2:9, and a host of other passages which substantiate this same point).

## Conclusion

The very concept of transferral of sin, or righteousness, directly contradicts God's Word. The clearest and most explicit passage on this subject, at least in my estimation, is that of Ezekiel 18:14-20. Among Ezekiel's statements is his affirmation that the person who "hath executed mine ordinances, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. As for his father, because he cruelly opposed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, behold, he shall die in his iniquity. Yet ye say, Wherefore doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. " If God's Word is to be accepted, this passage forever shows the fallacy of hereditary sin, or transferrable righteousness.

**The very concept of transferrable sin is physically, logically, philosophically, biblically, and therefore, actually impossible. The concept of hereditary sin is therefore totally absurd.**



## Four Facts Fatal to Original Sin

*By Larry Ray Hafley*

The doctrine of original or Adamic sin states that every person is born in sin. Because of Adam's sin, all men are corrupt and guilty of sin at birth. Note the testimony of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*.

By this sin (eating of the forbidden fruit-LRH) they (Adam and Eve-LRH) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions (Chapter 6).

### **Contrary to New Testament Concepts**

This doctrine is contrary to at least four New Testament concepts; namely, sin, forgiveness, the death of Christ, and the judgment.

(1) **The Concept of Sin.** John said that "sin is the transgression of the law." When one commits sin, he transgresses (goes against, crosses) the law (1 Jn. 3:4). "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 Jn. 5:17). Anything that violates God's righteousness is sin. One who works apart from or against God's will and word is guilty of sin. He performs iniquity; he acts without divine authority (Mt. 7:21-23). Sin is the child of lust (Jas. 1:15). When one is drawn away of his own lust and enticed, lust conceives her offspring, sin, and gives it birth. We are separated and alienated from God "by wicked works" (Col. 1:21). It is our sins which are produced by the fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13). This is the New Testament's concept of how one becomes guilty of sin. There is no Scripture which teaches that sin is inherited.

(2) **The Concept of Forgiveness.** The word of God does not describe the forgiveness of inherited sin. It does not mention forgiveness of the "guilt" of original sin. The New Testament speaks of "your sins" and of "thy sins" (Acts 3:19; 22:16). One is forgiven of his own acts of transgression, iniquity and disobedience. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

"The body of the sins of the flesh" are put off, cut away, when God forgives (Col. 2:11-13). As the sins are those one commits, the forgiveness applies to those sins. If as the doctrine of original sin avers, all men are born guilty of Adam's sin, why is the Bible devoid of any reference to the forgiveness of it?

(3) **The Concept of the Death of Christ.** Christ "was delivered for our offences" (Rom. 4:25). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body" (1 Pet. 2:24). It was "in the body of his flesh through death" that Jesus reconciled us to God (Col. 1:21,22). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Each individual can consider that Christ died "for me" (Gal. 2:20). Why is that? Because our sins, our guilt, is of our own doing; because forgiveness is of our sins and iniquities (Heb. 8:12; Isa. 59:1,2); the death of Christ was for my sin, my guilt, my salvation; hence, "for me." The death of Christ and the shedding of His blood is never said to be for the purpose of removing inherited, original sin. However, if original, Adamic sin is universally pervasive, as the creeds of men allow and allege, should we not expect to find a reference that decrees and declares that the death of Christ removes that sin?

(4) **The Concept of Judgment.** New Testament judgment scenes vary in many respects, but in this one item they are all constant and consistent-man is judged by how he has lived, by what he has done. Contemplate and consider the judgment pictures of Matthew (chapters 5-7, 13 and 25). See the awe and dread of Revelation 20:10-15. Hear the admonition and warning of Galatians 6:7-9, Matthew 16:27 and Revelation 3:23. What is the single fact of all these passages? Individuals are judged by their own works. They are rewarded "according to their works."

Is there a judgment view of one being condemned on account of what Adam did? Is anyone ever renounced for not ridding himself of the depravity he is supposed to have inherited from Adam? No, but if original sin exists to the extent that men claim, is it not strange that not a single, solitary judgment scene features some creatures lost because of it?

## **Conclusion of These Concepts**

The doctrine of original sin, if true, would be an innate, inherent part of the nature of sin, forgiveness, Christ's death and the judgment. Yet, the Bible, in discussing these four themes, never once links it to them. There absolutely could not be such an omission if the doctrine of original, Adamic sin were true. Therefore, these four fundamental facts are fatal to the theory.

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# Hereditary Total Depravity and New Testament Proof Texts

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This study will limit itself to four New Testament texts commonly cited by Calvinists as proof of their doctrine of hereditary total depravity: Romans 7:18; 8:5-7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; and Ephesians 2:1-3. In examining these passages, I shall endeavor to illustrate the shortcomings of Calvinistic exegesis and the inconsistency of their claims. Throughout this study, I shall always try to keep in mind the following two guidelines of Whiteside when he cautions, "We must not arrive at conclusions that contradict other plain statements of the Scriptures, or give the sinner any excuse for continuing in sin" (Doctrinal Discourses, p. 108).

## **Romans 7:18**

Calvinists like to use this passage to prove that since "no good thing" dwells in man, he must be totally in bondage to sin. The problem is that Calvinists, generally, apply Romans 7:14 (15)-25 to the regenerated who have had the total power of sin over them broken by the Spirit. Their dilemma is obvious: they cannot exegete the power of sin over the sinner out of the passage and then later find it there to prove his total depravity.

In other words, since the regenerated have been redeemed from the power of original sin, they are no longer totally depraved, regardless of how great their depravity was before they were regenerated. The extent of this depravity would still have to be assumed, for the degree of the sinfulness of one's former self is nowhere in Romans 7:18 either stated or necessarily implied. This proof text on the sinner's total depravity is no proof text at all!

However, if any Calvinist wishes to apply this passage to the unregenerated sinner, the language of the text is decidedly against the idea of total sinfulness. The passage, as well as its context (7:14-25), recognizes goodness in the soul of man, for Paul says, "For to will is present with me (i.e. to do the good of the law, ALW); but how to perform that which is good I find not" (7:18). Weakness, no doubt; total wickedness, hardly!

### **Romans 8:5-7**

In this passage, Calvinists see the utter corruption of the sinner because "the carnal mind" of the sinner, to them, seems to be wholly at "enmity against God" and thus not able to be "subject to the law of God," and, because the minding of the flesh seems to be a total minding of the flesh. (For example, see Calvin on Rom. 7:5-7.) In making their case here, they assume two things essential to their doctrine, and then, read these into (eisegete) the text.

First, they have not dealt evenhandedly with the two clauses of 8:5. They do not believe that the minding of the Spirit is absolute whereas, at the same time, they assume that the minding of the flesh is absolute.

Calvin, while asking in 8:5, "who in this world can be found adorned with so much angelic purity so as to be wholly freed from the flesh?" insists that the carnal are "those who wholly devote themselves to the world." Now, my question is: If the language about minding the Spirit does not necessarily have to be taken in a total or absolute sense, why does the language about minding the flesh have to be taken in a total or absolute sense? Let the Calvinists answer themselves on this point. What would they say to an advocate of perfectionism who argued that "to mind the Spirit" means to do so perfectly? Would they not accuse such a one of both adding to this specific Scripture and of making it contradict other Scriptures expressing the sinfulness of Paul and other good Christians? Indeed, there is no more proof in this "proof text,, for Calvinistic total depravity than for Wesleyan perfectionism.

Second, they assume that no one having either of these minds can change his mind and adopt the opposite mind. (For a reply, see Moses Stuart's comments on 8:7 in his commentary on Romans [3rd ed., p. 351], to the effect that this is reading into the text what the text does not say.) The Scriptures teach, however, that a voluntary conversion is possible. In Ezekiel 18 God insists that both the righteous and the wicked can turn from their respective pasts. And in Romans 6, Paul argues individual responsibility for any change anyone might ever make. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' I (v. 16) Again, the proof text proves what no one denies, namely: that, when men mind the flesh, they are sinners.

## 1 Corinthians 2:14

From this passage, the Calvinists get utter impotency not only of the sinner to believe the gospel but also of the gospel to impart faith to the sinner. For example, Calvin emphasizes "how great is this weakness of the human understanding of the sinner, that is not only "not willing to be wise" but also not "able" to be so. "Hence," concludes he, "faith is not in one's own power, but is divinely conferred," and "the gospel," thus he denies, "is offered to mankind in common in such a way that all indiscriminately are free to embrace salvation by faith."

The issue, here, is: Can the natural man's attitude about the things of God be changed from the presumption of "foolishness" to the conclusion that these things are, in fact, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1:24)? Since this verse speaks only of the continuing attitude of the worldly man, what are the facts regarding the possibility of him changing his mind and becoming a believer without God's directly enabling him to do this? What is the nature of the "can not" of the natural man? Is it an inborn ability or an inability born simply of his present antagonistic mindset? (For a perceptive analysis of the natural man's inability due to his antagonistic mindset, see William Barclay's *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 32.)

The proof that the natural man's problem is an antagonistic mindset is found in Paul's solution for the natural man. To change the natural man's mind, Paul relied on two things: (1) the Spirit's wisdom, i.e. the simple, non-philosophical preaching of Christ; and, (2) the Spirit's power, i.e. the miracles or signs of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Such reliance was in order "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (2:5).

And what were the results? See Acts 18:8 where "many" obeyed the gospel. Undoubtedly, some of them had the mindset which had pronounced as foolish the message of the Gospel; namely that an executed Jewish "criminal" was the Savior of the world. (To see how Paul handled the worldly mind of Christians, carefully study his argument in 1 Cor. 3.) In conclusion, Paul's natural man is simply the sinner who does not obey the gospel until he changes his views and becomes willing to do so.

### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

Calvinists try to exploit the terms "dead" (v. 1), "nature" and "children of wrath" (v. 3c) to construct their doctrine of hereditary total depravity. They argue that the sinner by his innate nature is born dead in Adam's sin and thus from birth is under the wrath of God.

Their first problem is that the terms they focus on are ambiguous in meaning, and that their clausal relationship of thought to the statement of 1-3b is, also, ambiguous. The questions, in the first case, are: Is "nature" inborn or acquired, and if inborn, is it necessitarian nature or permissive nature? Is "wrath" God's wrath or man's wrath? And does children of wrath mean characterized by wrath on man's part or liable to wrath from God's side? In the second case: Does 3c give the cause for man's actual sins (i.e. inherited sin) or the consequence of sinful deeds (i.e. "And so were by nature the children of wrath")? Clearly, this passage cannot be used to prove anything until these ambiguities are cleared up.



Their second problem is that the context of Ephesians is against them regarding the nature of death and the reason for God's wrath coming upon man.

The Calvinists are wrong both on the cause of death and its extent. Paul does not attribute death to original sin but to actual sins when he remembers that the Ephesians "were dead in (i.e. through, ASV) trespasses and sins" (2:1). Calvin himself confirms this when he states, "He (i.e. Paul, ALW) says that they were dead,- and states, at the same time, the cause of the death trespasses and sins. " Here, Calvin's exegesis is right; his theology is wrong. Further, Calvin answers himself on the necessity of the totality of death via his inconsistency on the totality of life, which is its opposite. On the one hand, he overstates theologically the extent of the fact of death, "Out of Christ we are altogether dead, because sin, the cause of death, reigns in us," but, on the other hand, he admits that "regeneration only begins in this life; the relics of the flesh which remain, always follow their own corrupt propensities, and thus carry on a contest against the Spirit" (Rom. 7:14). In short, if the life is not total, why should the death, which is its opposite, be total?

The Calvinists are also wrong on the cause for God's wrath coming on man and the time when it does so. In Ephesians, Paul has God's wrath coming on man as the result of his actual sins and at the time when he sins (see 5:6). The issue is: Does it come upon sinners because (and thus after) they sin, or is it already upon man, even as a baby, because of inherited sin? If it does not come upon the person in 5:6, an unambiguous statement, until they are sinners, how could Paul say in 2:3c, an ambiguous statement, that it had already come upon them at birth because of original sin?

## Conclusion

Due to limitations of space, I have not been able to show what each of these passages does teach; I have only been able to show that they do not teach what the Calvinists say they teach. Throughout this study, I believe it has been shown that Calvinists cannot prove their doctrine from the Scriptures. They try hard indeed, but their efforts are doomed to failure because they have to assume that the Scriptures teach that which they need to prove from the Scriptures. And if we were to grant, for argument's sake, their assumptions, what would the result of their doctrine mean for man?

It would be very discouraging indeed, for as Whiteside says:

People who reach the stage of depravity are utterly beyond the hope of redemption. Such were the people before the flood, and such were the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. To be totally depraved means to be totally lost now and in the world to come (Romans, p. 162).

## Consequences of Hereditary Total Depravity

When one accepts a proposition, there are logical consequences which follow. That's true when one accepts the proposition "There is no god" or "Man is the product of evolutionary development." There are certain logical consequences which result from such an affirmation. Similarly, if one accepts the doctrine of inherited total depravity, or some watered-down version of it, there are certain logical and doctrinal consequences which follow. Not everyone who accepts inherited total depravity is consistent in reasoning; hence, many who accept the premises will reject the conclusions (without giving logical reasons to reject them). We do not charge that everyone who believes man has an inherited corrupt nature teaches these consequences; but rather, they are the necessary logical consequences drawn from the premise.

### Logical Consequences of Inherited Total Depravity

1. **It makes man totally unable to will or do good.** The Philadelphia Confession of Faith describes man's condition after the fall:

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions . . . . Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation ... The man who is born into the world cannot will or do any good.

2. **It makes man without free will.** Many who accept hereditary total depravity will deny that this conclusion follows from the premise. Aylett Raines summarized their teaching well when he wrote,

We know that the advocates for the confession tell us man has a free will. They proceed on the presumption that man has a free will and acts freely, because, although he can do nothing but sin, and can will to do nothing else, yet he is free to do as he wills (A Refutation of Hereditary Total Depravity, p. 13). Denial of free will stands in conflict with these passages which teach that man has the ability to choose between good and evil: John 5:40; 7:17; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 22:3; 23:37; Luke 7:30; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 119:130; Proverbs 1:29; Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Hosea 5:15; Genesis 4:7.

3. **It releases man from moral responsibility.** Each of us would admit that man is not responsible for doing what he cannot avoid doing (e.g., man is not morally reprehensible because he gets hungry or thirsty). According to hereditary total depravity, man cannot avoid sinning because of his corrupted nature. Man sins of necessity. How can man be held responsible for doing that which he could not avoid?

The doctrine of inherited total depravity provides for sinful man exactly what he wishes - an excuse for sinning. Why does man sin? Not because he willfully chooses to rebel against God, but because he cannot prevent sin in his life since he has inherited a sinful nature. Sinners like to hear that their sins are a result of a natural incapacity, rather than of any fault or neglect of their own. Then they can sin without remorse.

**4. It makes God responsible for sin.** According to the doctrine of inherited total depravity, God willed that Adam's corrupted nature would be passed down to his descendants. Inheriting this corrupt nature, man can only will to do evil; from this corrupted nature all sins proceed. Hence, man sins because of God's decree. Even Calvin was dismayed as he contemplated this decree of God. He wrote, Again, I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many people, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God? Here their tongues, otherwise so loquacious, must become mute. The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess (Institutes, Book III, Chap. XXIII). Those who teach that man has a sinful nature shift the blame for what he does from the sinner to the author of his nature! Thus, we see that this theory brings man into the world wholly defiled in all the faculties of soul and body, opposed to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, not even able to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation, until God converts and translates him into the state of grace, so as to free him from his natural bondage, and enable him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good, then, if God never converts him and he is finally lost, who is to blame for it? Surely, not man, for he could not even will or desire his own salvation, or prepare himself thereunto. Why did Christ command that the Gospel be preached among all nations, and to every creature, promising salvation to those who would believe and obey it, when He must have known, if this theory be true, that they could neither believe nor obey it? - nay, they could not even so much as will or desire their salvation, or any thing good connected therewith, to say nothing of doing anything to secure it. And why did He threaten them with damnation if they did not believe it, when, according to the theory, they would have no more power to believe it than they have to make a world? (The Gospel Plan of Salvation, p. 140)

**6. It indicts the goodness of God.** The theory teaches that God willed to pass a corrupted nature to Adam's posterity with the result that man has no ability to obey the will of God; he can only will to do evil. Then, it teaches that God punishes man because he disobeys. The injustice in this would be comparable to a person punishing a newborn infant because he could not feed himself.

**7. It makes the invitation to the gospel ridiculous, if not altogether ugly.**

The gospel invitation is extended to every man (Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20; 22:17). The doctrine of inherited depravity states that man has wholly lost any ability to do any spiritual good; he has no ability to respond to the invitation until God sends His Spirit to enable Him to do so. Hence, preaching the gospel of Christ to a man who has an inherited sinful nature is merely tantalizing that man, like holding a cool cup of water in front of a man who is dying of thirst and who has no ability to obtain the water. We are cruelly deluded by the Lord. The offer of grace is plain mockery of man.

**8. It makes exhortations to righteous living and rebukes of sin meaningless.**

Why exhort a man to do what he cannot do - live righteously? Why condemn him for doing what he cannot avoid doing - sinning? Either God is mocking us when He enjoins holiness, piety, obedience, chastity, love, and gentleness and forbids uncleanness, idolatry, immodesty, anger, robbery, pride and the like or He requires only what is within our power to do. Inherited depravity would require us to believe that God is merely mocking us.

## **Doctrinal Consequences Of Inherited Depravity**

Several false doctrines have derived from the doctrine that man is born totally depraved. We need to be reminded that these false doctrines are connected to inherited depravity.

*1. The doctrine of unconditional election & unconditional reprobation. Jack Cottrell:*

*Why does the Calvinist continue to insist on unconditional predestination, even when sovereignty and grace are not at stake? What is the imperative which necessitates it? The answer is the doctrine of total depravity, which in its essence means that all persons as the result of Adam's sin are from birth unable to respond in any positive way to the gospel call. There is a total inability to come to the decision to put one's trust in Christ. This point is truly the keystone in the Calvinistic system. This is what makes unconditional election logically and doctrinally necessary ("Conditional Election," Grace Unlimited, Clark H. Pinnock, editor, p. 68).*

Hence, the doctrine that God, from all eternity, predestined who would be saved and who would be lost is the doctrinal and logical consequence of inherited total depravity. The doctrines of unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints are logical sequences in the system.

*2. Infant baptism. The modern practice of infant baptism is derived from inherited total depravity. John F. Rowe said,*

*Augustine is the originator of the doctrine of "original sin," or "total hereditary depravity." He flourished in the fourth century. His postulates from his reasoning process are these: The whole human family is totally depraved, by virtue of the first transgression. Infants are totally depraved because they are constituent parts of the human family. But, inasmuch as they can neither think, nor reason, nor believe, nor exercise any sort of freedom of will, something must be done to wipe out the stain of original sin. The act of baptism is the regenerating act, in his speculative theology, that removes from the soul of the infant the stain of original sin! (History of Reformatory Movements, p. 442)*

*3. Illumination. Those who believe that man has inherited a totally depraved nature also teach that the Holy Spirit must illumine the Scriptures in order for man to understand them. The Westminster Confession of Faith says,*

*Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word. (Article I, No. 6).*

4. *Personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* Those denominations which teach that man has inherited a totally depraved (sinful) nature from Adam are compelled to teach that the Holy Spirit must indwell the Christian in order for him to overcome his sinful nature. According to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, this indwelling Spirit enables man to understand the Scriptures (Article 1, No. 6), to make him willing and able to believe (Article VII, Nos. 2-3), to strengthen him that he might resist sin's temptation (Article XIII, Nos. 2-3), to make him conscious of his sin (Article XV, #3), and to enable him to do good works (Article XVI, No. 3). Without the assistance of the indwelling Spirit, man is unable to overcome his sinful nature.

5. *Immaculate Conception.* This doctrine teaches "the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin." The added doctrine was invented to prevent the conclusion that Jesus was born with the stain of original sin.

## **Practical Consequences of Inherited Total Depravity**

Even as there are logical and doctrinal consequences of this false doctrine, there are also practical consequences. Here are a few:

1. *A feeling of spiritual insecurity.* If one holds the position that he has a sinful nature, he will have the concept that sin engulfs him like a cloud. Regardless of how devoted he is to God and to His service, he will always feel that there are sins in his life. If you were to ask such a person, "What sins have you committed?" he might not enumerate any. Nevertheless, he has a feeling of spiritual insecurity because he believes that he has a sinful nature. Denominations which teach that man has inherited a sinful nature from Adam also teach a system whereby this defect in nature is overcome. The Calvinists teach that the perfect righteousness of Jesus is imputed to the believer so God sees Jesus' perfect obedience instead of the believer's imperfections. The Wesleyans, teach that a second work of grace occurs whereby the believer is sanctified. Those who accept that man has a sinful nature will continually be searching for a means to find security, whether it be in imputed righteousness, continuous cleansing, or some other means.

2. *Passivity in obedience.* Those who believe man has a sinful nature sometimes reach the conclusion that man is passive in his salvation and sanctification (strict Calvinists take this position). After teaching such a person the way of salvation, he may reply, "I just do not feel like obeying the gospel yet." He will await some mysterious working of the Holy Spirit before obeying the gospel. Until and unless he receives this miraculous operation of the Spirit, he will not obey the gospel. His condition is helpless and hopeless until the Spirit effects his salvation.

## Conclusion

Some among us refer to their "sinfulness" in such a manner that the concept is practically equivalent to "sinful nature." They don't mean by "sinfulness" a list of sins of which they're guilty. Rather, they mean their "tendency to sin." I do not charge those who use this expression with believing the consequences enumerated here.

However, if by "sinfulness" they mean "an innate sinful nature," they have accepted the basic tenets of inherited total depravity, regardless of how watered-down and inconsistent their concept of it might be. As one considers the consequences resulting from this false doctrine, he should understand why even the slightest indications men believe in inherited depravity must be opposed. The doctrine of inherited total depravity undermines the power of the gospel to affect salvation in the life of man, destroys man's ability to believe the gospel and live a sanctified life, and attacks the perfect purity of Jesus Christ or denies that He became like us. The doctrine of inherited depravity is not some unimportant theological doctrine without practical consequences. Instead, it's a doctrine which takes the heart out of the gospel message. As such, it must be resisted and opposed wherever it raises its ugly head. – *Mike Willis*

## REGENERATION: PELAGIAN, ARMINIAN, CALVINIST

### *Regeneration or the New Birth*

Who or what is the cause of this radical spiritual transformation that the Bible refers to as “regeneration” or being “born again”? Pelagians understand regeneration to be nothing more than reformation, a mere exchange of one set of habits for another set (achieved, of course, by a free act of will). Since man is not constitutionally depraved, that is, depraved by nature, being at worst the innocent victim of bad examples and other circumstances beyond his control, he does not need re-creation, only redirection.

Arminians believe that regeneration is brought to pass by the divine will and human will working in conjunction with one another. Or if they say that God alone regenerates, he does so only when and because the individual believes by a free act of will, or does not resist the overtures of grace. For example, we are told that “God cannot and to say the same thing—*will not* regenerate a heart that will not admit him. God respects the sovereignty-within-limitations with which he endowed man at creation” (William G. MacDonald, “The Spirit of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975], p. 86).

Calvinists insist that the sole cause of regeneration or being born again is the will of God. God first sovereignly and efficaciously regenerates, and only in consequence of that do we act. Therefore, the individual is passive in regeneration, neither preparing himself nor making himself receptive to what God will do. Regeneration is a change wrought in us by God, not an autonomous act performed by us for ourselves.

Man’s status in regard to regeneration is that of a recipient, not a contributor. Man is spiritually, in relation to regeneration, what Lazarus was physically, in relation to resurrection: dead, passive, unable to do anything at all, wholly subject to the will of him who gives life and breath to whomever he desires. Consequently, as Shedd explains,

“the new life is not implanted because man perceives the truth, but he perceives the truth because the new life is implanted. A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated. He is not regenerated because he first repents, but he repents because he has been regenerated” (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2b:509).

***Here, then, is my point.***

In the doctrine of regeneration we are asserting that beneath and before all positive human response to the gospel, whether faith, repentance, love, or conversion, there is a supernatural, efficacious, and altogether mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. This work of the Spirit is both prior to and the effectual cause of all activity on the part of man. To sum up, the Holy Spirit regenerates a person in order that a person may convert to God.



The doctrine of man's total moral depravity, the bondage of the will, the teaching of Scripture on faith and repentance as God's gifts to his elect, as well as the doctrine of grace, all converge to demand that we understand regeneration to be prior to and therefore the cause of faith. What follows is a brief discussion of two passages in the Gospel of John that have great relevance for our study (see also Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23–25; 1 John 5:1).

1. *John 1:11–13*

“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

It is likely that here John is addressing unbelieving Jews who imagined that natural descent from Abraham was sufficient to guarantee admission into the family of God. Several observations are in order.

We must first determine the relationship between the divine begetting (v 13) and the human exercise of faith (v 12). Is receiving Christ (v 12) the prerequisite of the new birth (v 13), as if to say that the new birth is conditioned upon receiving Christ and believing on his name? Or is the begetting by God the root, cause, and presupposition of faith (as I have been arguing)? The latter is surely correct, and for several reasons.

First of all, John 1:13 is parallel with John 3:6 (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”). The point of the latter text is that all human and earthly effort can do nothing but produce that which is human and earthly. It cannot generate spiritual life.

Second, in John 6 coming to Christ (faith) is impossible for a man unless God draws him. In other words, John 6 denies to man any willingness to respond positively to the gospel apart from effectual grace. Are we to believe that John 1 affirms what John 6 denies? Certainly not.

Third, verse 13 says that God imparts life. The emphasis, as in John 3, is obviously on the divine source, origin, and cause of new life in Christ as over against any human or earthly or physical contribution.

Fourth, to suggest that human faith precedes and causes divine begetting (i.e., the new birth) destroys the point of the analogy. The point of describing salvation in terms of “divine begetting” is to highlight the initiative of God in making alive or giving birth to that which was either dead or nonexistent. To suggest that man can *act* spiritually before he *exists* spiritually, that he can behave before he is born, is not only ridiculous but also undermines the force of the analogy between physical begetting and spiritual begetting.

Fifth, even though the threefold negative in verse 13 refers primarily to physical begetting or aspects of the human reproductive process, it would seem extravagant for John to speak in this way if, after all, the human will does contribute to regeneration or in some way precedes and conditions the work of God.

What exactly then, does verse 13 mean? In general, the point of verse 13 is that birth into God's family is of a different order from birth into an earthly human family. One does not become a child of God by the same process or as a result of the same causal factors as one becomes a physical child of Abraham.

Let us now look at each of the three negations. First, one does not become a child of God by being "born of bloods." The plural form of the word blood may be explained in one of three ways: 1. the ancient belief that birth was the result of the action of blood, in this case, the blood of one's father and mother; 2. the blood of many distinguished ancestors; 3. drops of blood. Whichever of these views (or perhaps another one) that you adopt, the point is that spiritual life is not genetically transmitted!

Second, spiritual birth is not "of the will of the flesh." This probably refers to sexual desire, although "flesh" in John does not mean sinful lust. " 'The will of the flesh' is that desire that arises out of man's bodily constitution" (Leon Morris, 101).

Third, spiritual birth is not caused by the "will of man." It may be that since the word for "man" here is the Greek word for a male rather than a female, the phrase refers to "the procreative urge of the male," thus making it a more specific expression of the previous (second) phrase. In ancient days the man was looked upon as the principal agent in generation, with the woman no more than a vessel for the embryo. If these three phrases do not rule out all conceivable human causes in regeneration, the final phrase does. If regeneration is "of God," with no additional comment, then surely it cannot be of anything or anyone else.

## 2. *John 3:3-8*

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' "

This passage has been the focus of discussion for several issues not directly related to our subject. I do not intend to address them or to be sidetracked by questions concerning Christian baptism and the like (although I would like to say that a reference to Christian baptism is nowhere to be found in the text).

The reference to being born "of water" should be interpreted against the background of the Old Testament in which water was frequently a *symbol* for purification or cleansing from the pollution of sin. See Exod. 30:20-21; 40:12; Lev. 14:8-9; 15:5-27; Num. 19; 2 Kings 5:10; Ps. 51:2-3; Isa. 1:16; Jer. 33:8; Zech. 13:1. We should note especially Ezek. 36:25-26, the passage I believe our Lord had particularly in mind: "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I

will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Thus, to be born “of water and Spirit” is to be purified from the guilt of sin and inwardly renewed, both of which are wrought in us by the sovereign regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

I only wish to make a couple of brief but important observations.

We are told in verses 6–8 of the manner of regeneration. In verse 6 we are told that “each birth completely conditions the character of its product. The natural [i.e., the flesh] cannot produce anything but the natural, and by an invariable law does produce the natural. The supernatural [i.e., the Spirit] alone produces the supernatural, and it infallibly secures the supernatural character of its issue. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and it is *only* that which is born of the Spirit that is spirit” (Murray, “Regeneration,” *Collected Writings*, 2:185–86). Human nature is capable of propagating or producing only human nature. It is unable to produce anything that transcends its character as human. Simply put: like produces like. Or better yet: you can’t get a spiritual effect from a physical cause.

The illustration our Lord employs in verse 8 is especially instructive. Like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit is invisible and mysterious (you “do not know where it comes from and where it is going”). Like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit is efficacious and sovereign (it “blows where it wishes”) and cannot be pinned down by human contrivance. And like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit reaps observable fruit (“you hear the sound of it”). John Murray summarizes the message of our Lord with these words:

“While the wind is invisible, irresistible and not subject in any way to our will, it does manifest its presence where it is: we hear its effects. So is it with the new birth. It manifests itself in the fruit of the Spirit—“that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. By a secret, incomprehensible operation when, where, and how the Spirit pleases, he begets, or gives birth to, men, and this is a birth that becomes manifest in the fruits that are appropriate to its nature and purpose” (187–88).

What we have been looking at is the order or process in which salvation is received by the elect of God. We have been concerned with how the Good Shepherd draws his sheep unto himself. As is frequently the case, the hymn writer has a way of bringing it all together:

“I know not why God’s wondrous grace  
To me He hath made known  
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love  
Redeemed me for His own.  
I know not how this saving faith  
To me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word  
Wrought peace within my heart.  
I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus thro’ the Word,  
Creating faith in Him.  
But I know whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I’ve committed  
Unto Him against that day.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Storms, S. (2006). [\*Studies in Divine Election\*](#). Oklahoma City, OK: Sam Storms.

# REGENERATION: WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS!

## Regeneration – A Study of Matthew 19:28

By Wayne Jackson

“And Jesus said unto them, Truly I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

There is much controversy as to the meaning of this important passage. What does it actually teach?

### **The Context**

The context of this passage is set in the waning days of Jesus’ ministry — within the final six months. The Lord had left Galilee and was making his way toward Jerusalem and his appointment at Calvary. Along the way he gave some “tough” teaching, the forthcoming kingdom requirements as regards divorce and remarriage (19:3-12). Christ had made demands upon the wealthy young ruler that bewildered the apostles (vv. 16-26). Peter boasted that they had left all to follow the Master, and he wished to know what reward would accompany such sacrifice (v. 27).

Christ responded in two ways. First, there would be a more immediate reward for the apostles personally (v. 28); then there would be the more comprehensive promise embracing “every one” who surrendered to his authority, i.e., sacrificed for his “name’s sake” (vv. 29-30).

Regarding Matthew 19:28, the text of our focus, three major views are entertained as to its meaning.

## The Premillennial View

The Premillennial (from “pre,” before, & “millennium,” 1,000) proponent sees this text as pertaining to an alleged return of Christ in order to set up an earthly kingdom over which he will then reign from Jerusalem with his apostles as special authority agents (see Scofield, p. 1026). This regime is supposed to continue for a literal 1,000 years.

Louis Barbieri, a millennialist that is affiliated with the Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

“Though the nation [of Israel] was then rejecting His offer of the kingdom, the kingdom would come, with its extensive remaking of things spiritual (Isa. 2:3; 4:2-4; 11:9b), political (Isa. 2:4; 11:1-5, 10-11; 32:16-18), and geographical and physical (Isa. 2:2; 4:5-6; 11:6-9; 35:1-2). Christ will **then** sit on His glorious throne (cf. Matt. 25:31; Rev. 22:1)” (p. 65).

There isn’t a solitary text in the quotation above that relating to a post-Christian-age, **literal reign of Christ upon the earth for a millennium**. It really is incredible that a passage like Isaiah 11:1ff would be so applied, when an inspired apostle gives it a Christian-age application (cf. Romans 15:12). And the prophetic thrust of Isaiah 35:5-6 is adapted by Jesus to his earthly ministry (Matthew 11:5), not to some earthly regime following his Second Coming.

## Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 19:28

There is another point worthy of serious consideration in this connection. Many scholars have seen a parallel between the “Son of Man” imagery in the Matthew text, and that set forth in Daniel 7:13-14 (see, for example, Blomberg, p. 301). The parallelism suggests that the same event is under consideration in both texts. If that is the case, then the Matthew passage cannot refer to an event connected with the **return** of Christ, for the scene in Daniel’s document depicts the glory associated with Christ’s **approach to heaven**, hence, is an allusion to the reign of Jesus that commenced following his ascension back into heaven (cf. Acts 2:30-36). See also MacKnight (p. 334).

## The Heavenly Reward Concept

Some scholars see Matthew 19:28 as a promise, fortified with symbolism, of special honor to be bestowed upon the apostles in the final, heavenly order of things. Not infrequently, the notion of a “renovated earth” is incorporated into this concept. Lenski represents this viewpoint. He says that the “regeneration” finds its fulfillment “‘when the Son of man shall seat himself on his throne of glory,’ namely visibly before the whole world, which he will do on the great day of judgment. This ‘rebirth’ thus refers to the rebirth of the world.” (p. 759; also Foster, pp. 1028-1029).

Though I do not incline to this viewpoint, I do not consider it to be of any particular danger, if one does not argue for a **literal** renovation of the material earth (which, unfortunately, many do), a position that is contrary to the clear testimony of Matthew 24:35, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 21:1.

## The Present Messianic Era

The third idea is that the “regeneration” of Matthew 19:28 refers to the Christian age that commenced on the day of Pentecost. The N.T. word “regeneration” (*palingenesia*, from *palin*, “again,” and *genesis*, “a birth”) is found but twice in the New Testament (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5). In the latter text, the term is employed in a spiritual sense of the conversion process (consummated at water baptism) by which one becomes a “new creature” in Christ. Why it should be assumed that it takes on a material sense in Matthew’s account, without there being sufficient evidence for that conclusion, is somewhat puzzling. Generally, references from Philo and certain Greek secularists are used to buttress the idea that a renewal of the “cosmos” is the thrust of Matthew 19:28. But why should these writers carry more weight than the evidence of the New Testament itself? The fact is, the “eschatological” interpretation has been imported into the text due to certain theological presuppositions. In this regard, even some lexicographers have become commentators.

## The Matthew 19:28 / Acts 3:21 Connection

Scholars frequently point out that *palingenesis* belongs “to the same conceptual field” as such expressions as “new person,” “new creation,” and “restoration” — in Acts 3:21 (Balz & Schneider, p. 8). This is an important point. Many scholars specifically identify Matthew 19:28 and Acts 3:21 as pertaining to the same time/event.

In Acts 3:21 Peter says that God is going to “send the Christ who has been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive [retain; cf. NIV] until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of his prophets that have been of old”. It is generally conceded that the “regeneration” of Matthew 19:28, and the “restoration” of Acts 3:21, represent the same thing.

Concerning this text, I am taking the liberty of quoting from my own commentary on Acts (Jackson, p. 40).

“Verse 20 indicates that Christ was a divine ‘appointment’ in the plan of God, and though the Lord is now in heaven, the Father will ‘send’ Jesus back again (an allusion to the second coming). For the present, however, the heaven ‘must hold’ (McCord) the Lord until ‘the times of restoration of all things.’ Or, as another version has it: ‘He must remain in heaven until the time comes.’ What is the ‘restoration of all things’? It is not a universal salvation (Matthew 7:13-14), nor the restoration of national Israel ‘to its destined status’ in a millennial, earthly reign of Christ (as asserted by Vine, 662). Rather, it is the fulfillment of God’s purpose in attempting to reclaim fallen humanity, as now being implemented in the gospel age, the consummation of which will occur when Christ comes again. Here are two crucial points from the verse context itself. (1) In the chronology of the passage, the second coming of Christ occurs after the ‘restoration,’ not before it (as premillennialists teach). (2) The apostle specifically parallels the ‘times of the restoration of all things’ (21), with ‘these days,’ i.e., the Christian age (24). Note the phraseology:

- The prophets spoke of the restoration of all things (21)
- The prophets spoke of these days (24)

The parallelism is too obvious to miss. Even the millennialists concede that the 'these days' of verse 24 is 'the Messianic Age' (Toussaint, 362)."

Concerning this "restoration," J.A. Alexander wrote:

"Till this great cycle has achieved its revolution, and this great remedial process has accomplished its design, the glorified body of the risen and ascended Christ not only may but must, as an appointed means of that accomplishment, be resident in heaven, and not on earth" (p. 118).

### **The Throne of Glory**

The motive for associating the period of "regeneration" in Matthew 19:28 with the Second Coming, as many do, appears to be on account of the connection between "regeneration" and the "throne of his glory," which, later on in Matthew 25:31, is identified with the Lord's return. But as every serious Bible student knows, words can be employed in different senses in various contexts. For instance, numerous times in Matthew's Gospel the word "kingdom" is used of the church (cf. 16:18-19), yet in 25:34, "kingdom" refers to that regal realm that's to be "inherited" at the time of the Savior's return.

The fact is, Christ's entrance into his "glory," and being seated upon his "throne," are used synonymously with the commencement of his reign on Pentecost (see: Luke 24:26; cf. Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:37; see also: Acts 2:30ff; Philippians 3:21; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3; 2:7; 1 Peter 1:21).

J.W. McGarvey observed:

"[Christ] sat down on that throne when he ascended up to heaven, and he will still be seated on it in the day of judgment. . . 'The regeneration' then, is contemporaneous with this period, and therefore it must be that process of regenerating men which commenced on the Pentecost after the ascension. . . ." (p. 170).

F.F. Bruce stated that the "regeneration" was "inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection" and that it was the same as the "church" of Matthew 16:18, "in which," he says, "the apostles would exercise the authority promised in 16:19; 18:18" (p. 71).



## Thrones of Authority

The reference to the apostles sitting on “thrones” judging the tribes of “Israel” would be a reference to the authority of these men, as bequeathed by Christ, and implemented by their subsequent teaching in the church (the new Israel of God — Galatians 6:16) and as manifest in the sacred writings that remain authoritative today. As Coffman pointed out:

“This was not a reference to literal thrones but to spiritual thrones of eminence and authority in Christ’s kingdom, from which they should exercise influence, not over fleshly Israel but over the spiritual Israel which is the church (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 3:29)” (pp. 298-299).

We believe that this final concept is a very legitimate interpretation of Matthew 19:28, though one that appears to have been overlooked, or disregarded, by most modern commentators.

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