

June, 2008

# Pause Ponder Profit

## Another Look At The Effects Of Adam's Sin

by Gene Lyles

The effects of Adam's sin has been a great controversy down through the centuries. Very early in the history of the church the doctrine of inherited sin (also known as "original sin"), became a divisive issue. Greek philosophy was greatly responsible for this doctrine being introduced in the church due to Greek philosophers who had come to the conclusion that flesh was inherently sinful. They believed it was impossible to avoid sin while living in the flesh. This is why the Gnostics in the church denied that Jesus came in the flesh, which the apostle John exposed in 1 Jn. 4:1-3.

The Jews also had their own notion that children inherit the sins of their fathers, as suggested by the accepted proverb among them that "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). God, through the prophet Ezekiel, refuted this proverb, yet it was still accepted to some extent among the Jews during the early days of the church. Therefore, between Greek and Jewish influence, the doctrine of inherited sin was among the earlier false doctrines to invade the church.

It is natural for men to want to believe that sin is inherited because this places the guilt on someone other than self. Thus it was easy for

the doctrine of inherited sin to become an accepted, doctrine even though it was false to the core. Yet regardless of its falsity, it became more and more accepted as the years went by. Not only did it become widely accepted, but it became a cardinal doctrine among the apostate leaders. From this doctrine came numerous other false ideas such as infant baptism, the immaculate conception of Mary, the exaltation of Mary to a position of worship, sprinkling for baptism, unconditional election, and the direct operation of the Spirit in conversion. So what finally evolved from the doctrine of inherited sin was a host of fallacious teaching that came about due to a misconception of the effects of Adam's sin.

It was finally decided by the apostate leaders of the third and fourth centuries that Adam's sin corrupted both his physical nature and his spiritual nature. They further concluded that the corruption of his physical nature was what caused him to die physically. Since they concluded that his sin corrupted both his physical nature and his spiritual nature, then they decided that by the natural birth all men inherit this same corruption. It was further decided, and all this without any scriptural foundation, that by inheriting, a corrupt spiritual nature from Adam, all men were born totally depraved and could not respond to God's will of their own volition, thus the free agency of man was totally lost. The greater portion of this theology must be credited to Aurelius Augustinus who was bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 396 A.D. to 430 A.D. It is said that his mind was the crucible in which the religion of the New Testament was most completely fused with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy (Encyclopedia Britannica, No. 2, page 754, Par. 1). This ought to tell us something as to why Greek influence was so strong in helping promote the doctrine of inherited sin, and why we ought to be leery of it.

It would be unfair in this study not to mention Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine, who strongly opposed his fallacious doctrine. Even though Pelagius had a strong following, his opposition was counted as heresy by the apostate leaders and he was finally

*(Continued on page*



---

excommunicated from any connection with those who held this fallacious position. However, there were many who believed as he did, and they continued to oppose this fallacious doctrine that Augustine had concocted, only to be executed or excommunicated for their opposition. Needless to say, the doctrine of inherited sin prevailed, and continued to gain acceptance among the apostate leaders.

During the period of the great Reformation, because the doctrine of inherited sin had prevailed down through the years, it was accepted by the more outstanding reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Wesley. However, there was at least one great reformer, Huldreich Zwingli, who did not accept this fallacious doctrine, but his opposition was kept at a very low profile as far as history is concerned. Some denominational preachers of today do not seem to know that there was such opposition during the period of the reformation.

As European theologians and preachers came to America, they brought with them the Augustinian theology of inherited sin and all its various conclusions. Even though some questioned the doctrine, it was generally accepted among both Catholics and Protestants in the early days of the American frontier, and continues to prevail unto this day. Because it is so generally accepted, it is extremely difficult to get people to study what the scriptures actually teach concerning the effects of Adam's sin. I have found that even some of the most conservative brethren are reluctant to delve deeply into this matter.

This writer makes no claim of a scholarly approach to this study, for he is certainly no scholar. Yet when it is found that great scholars of the past and present cling to such a fallacious doctrine, we do not hesitate to take issue with them, for we are not alone in opposition to this doctrine. There are few, if any, preachers in the church of the Lord, whether liberal or conservative, who do not strongly oppose the idea of inherited sin. Even the few preachers among us who have recently accepted a part of the Augustinian package, have not yet accepted the idea of inherited sin.

What bothers me is that some brethren who so

cling to the idea of our being partially corrupted in nature by Adam's sin. In his commentary on Rom. 5:12, page 104 and 105, brother David Lipscomb had this to say: "It is certain that Adam, as soon as he sinned, was both bodily and spiritually cut off from vital union with God. . . It is conceded by all that in his sin he was standing for all. All his posterity have died or will die. . . Adam's sin has corrupted our bodies: our own sins corrupt our spirits". (underlines added)

On what scriptural grounds did brother Lipscomb conclude that Adam's sin corrupted our bodies, but did not corrupt our spirits? It seems to me that there was still an element of Augustinian theology embedded in his thinking. Brother Lipscomb's thinking seems to be the prevailing view of most brethren today. Personally, this writer has not been able to draw the same conclusion from his study of the scriptures that brother Lipscomb has drawn. Thus I feel it is my duty to present the conclusions that I have reached. There will no doubt be disagreement, for when a view has prevailed for some time, it is not easy to accept a contrary view. This is why it is so difficult to get Catholics and Protestants to give up the doctrine of inherited sin. It has been around for centuries, and accepted by very scholarly men. Thus it is obvious that we cannot decide a matter strictly on the basis of what great Bible scholars have said, or how long it has been around. We must go to the pure source of truth, the God-breathed scriptures with our minds free of any preconceived notions in order to draw a correct conclusion.

As a beginning point let us consider whether it was God's intention, when he created heaven and earth, that this cosmos should continue throughout eternity. The following passages clearly state that such was not His intention (Psa. 102:25-27, Heb. 1:10-12, Matt. 5:18, Matt. 24:35, 2 Pet. 3:10-12, Rev. 21:1-3). Some respond to this by saying that all these passages were given after Adam sinned, as though such was determined by God as a result of Adam's sin. It seems rather strange that there is nothing in the context of these passages to suggest such. Is it not arbitrary to conclude such since there is nothing in the context of these passages to suggest such? Furthermore, the apostle Paul clearly stated that that which is seen (created) is temporal (2 Cor. 4:18). This would include

---

heaven and earth as well as our fleshy bodies, and the context here shows that Paul had the fleshy body in mind when he said this.

Inasmuch as Adam's physical body was created from the dust of the earth, it must also return to the dust from which it came (Gen. 3:19), for God did not design Adam's fleshy body to be eternal. In the garden was the tree of life which could have given eternal life to Adam had he eaten there of, but be cautious. We must not conclude from this that the tree of life would have given him eternal life in the flesh for two reasons. First, because the scriptures clearly teach that corruption (a fleshy body) cannot inherit incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50). Second, since God clearly declared that this heaven and earth would be removed from the scene, there would be no place for Adam and his off springs to live eternally in the flesh, as erroneously taught by Jehovah's Witnesses.

There is nothing I find in the scriptures which suggest that the tree of life was designed to prevent physical death, but rather was designed to give eternal life, just as the gospel is not designed to prevent physical death, but is rather designed to give eternal life to all who walk therein. Did our Lord not say that whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die? (Jn. 11:26). Did he mean that we would not die physically? Certainly not! Why then can't we understand the effect of the tree of life in the same way we understand the effect of the gospel, except for the fact that the tree of life did not have the potential to atone for sin whereas the gospel does. Some have suggested that the tree of life was designed to give man strength and vigor so he would not decay physically. This suggestion, however, does not cover death by accident or physical mishap.

It has also been suggested that we do not know whether Adam ate of the tree of life prior to his sin. By necessary inference it seems to me that we can know. If you will notice in Gen. 3:22 where God said: "Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden. . ." To me, to take also necessarily infers that he had not yet eaten of the tree of life. I certainly would not be bold enough to deny the necessary inference here if I

were trying to contend that he had already eaten of the tree.

Now to the final and most controversial part of this study. Did Adam's sin corrupt our physical nature so as to cause us to die physically? My answer to this question is an emphatic NO! Adam died because he had a physical, mortal body unfit for eternity. We die physically because we inherit from Adam the same physical, mortal body that he had, temporal in nature, and unfit for eternity. We have already seen that Adam's sin did not corrupt his spiritual nature. Why then I should we conclude, that his sin corrupted his physical nature so as to cause both him and us to die physically? If such is true, where is the scripture that teaches such? We can find where Augustine taught both conclusions, but we can't find where the scriptures teach either.

One would be hard pressed to prove from the scriptures that Adam's nature was in any way changed either physically or spiritually because of his sin. If this cannot be proven, then it must follow that he died physically because he had a mortal, physical body that was created subject to physical death. We die physically for the same reason that he did. God told Adam that he would return to the dust because he was made from the dust (Gen. 3:19). Most brethren consider returning to the dust to be one of the consequences of Adam's sin along with the cursed ground, the thorns and thistles, bread by the sweat of his face. But please observe that these consequences were to continue "till thou return unto the ground". If I am any judge of a necessary inference, then returning to the dust was not a consequence of his sin, but rather a consequence of his being made from the dust of the earth.

Some brethren insist that 1 Cor. 15:21-22 teaches that we die physically because of Adam's sin. But a careful examination will reveal that this context doesn't even mention Adam's sin. The overall context deals with our fleshy nature which we received from Adam through the natural birth. The context further suggests that we must put off this fleshy body in death, not because Adam sinned, but because we inherited from him a mortal body. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would still have to have been changed from mortal to immortal from a corruptible state to an incorruptible

state before he could enter into eternal life. According to this context, this comes about by death, as illustrated by the planting of a seed (1 Cor. 15:35-36). The only exception to death is in case we are living when the Lord returns, and even then a transformation must take place (1 Cor. 15:51-54). God, by divine right, made exceptions to the rule in the case of Enoch and Elijah, but this doesn't change the normal procedure of what this context is discussing. This context is in no way discussing the sin of Adam, or the effects of his sin. It is discussing our fleshly nature which we received from Adam, and how it must be put off in death before we can receive a glorified body. It is Christ's resurrection from the dead that gives us this hope of a glorified, immortal body. Brethren, let us not read something into this context that simply isn't there.

In conclusion let me ask this question. Why is it so unreasonable to believe that in Adam all die according to 1 Cor. 15:21-22 because we obtained from Adam a mortal, corruptible, body that was created subject to death? This is exactly what verses 47-49 of 1 Cor. 15 teaches, all of which is in the same context. Also, we find that Hebrews 9:27 clearly states that it is appointed of man once to die, and there is nothing in this context that remotely suggests that we are appointed to die because of Adam's sin. Again I say, if we die physically because of Adam's sin, why do infants die in infancy, for we all agree that they have no sin of their own, and they certainly do not inherit sin from Adam. Brethren, can't we see that our problem is that we are still hanging on to a part of the old Augustinian doctrine without accepting the whole package? I personally do not accept any part of it, and I hope I have given sufficient reasons to cause others to reject it.

*I thoroughly commend this article.  
It caused me to study and thus I will  
correct my preaching and teaching.  
I hope and pray that it will have  
such benefit for you.  
—James A. Brown*

Non-profit Org.  
U. S. Postage Paid  
Permit # 356  
Paragould, AR

**Second and Walnut  
Church Of Christ**  
400 N. 2nd St.  
P. O. Box 356  
Paragould, AR 72451

**Paragould Church of Christ** — Profit is a monthly publication of the Second and Walnut Church of Christ, Paragould, Arkansas.

**Sunday**  
Radio 1490 AM . . . . . 9:00 A.M.  
Bible Study . . . . . 9:45 A.M.  
Worship . . . . . 10:45 A.M.  
Worship . . . . . 6:00 P.M.  
**Wednesday**  
Bible Study . . . . . 7:00 P.M.

Teacher: James A. Brown  
Phone: 870-236-3371  
[www.paragouldchurofchrist.com](http://www.paragouldchurofchrist.com)