

Original Sin

By T. Pierce Brown

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The dictionary defines *original sin* as “the sin by which the human race, rebellious against God because of Adam’s disobedience, was deprived of grace, and made subject to ignorance, evil, death, and all other miseries.” The doctrine of “original sin” has probably given rise to more additional false doctrines than any other single teaching. In its simplest terms it means that as a result of the fall of Adam every person is born depraved, and this perverted state is the cause of all his evil acts.

Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397) taught that through the sin of Adam all men come into the world tainted by sin. When he baptized Augustine in 385, it was easy for Augustine to use that doctrine to excuse his life of debauchery. Although Augustine gave the framework of the doctrine, which Roman Catholics came to accept, Calvin made it more popular and acceptable to Protestants in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The “tulip theory” is a summary of Calvin’s theology. The *T* stands for *total hereditary depravity*. The *U* is for *universal condemnation*. Since some will be saved, Calvin followed Augustine’s assumption that God elected all men and angels to salvation or condemnation and the number is so certain that it can neither be increased nor diminished. The *L* is for *limited salvation*. The natural consequence is that of *irresistible grace*, which takes care of the *I*. if a sovereign God saved a depraved person, he would not be able to resist God’s gracious effort to save him. God then makes it impossible for that person to be lost, so the *P* is for the *perseverance of the saints*.

The teaching is false at every point. In *The Banner Of Truth*, June 1993, Fred Blakely said:

Man was not merely damaged by the fall of Eden; he was completely ruined. Adam's nature was defiled, and so separated from God – made spiritually dead – and this state has been transmitted by the natural birth to all his posterity.

My questions to Blakely are: If a person is born completely ruined and spiritually dead, does God need to operate on him in a special way to get him into a position where he will receive the gospel? What causes a child to sin that is any different from that which caused Adam to sin?

Every false doctrine has enough truth about it to make it appealing but usually leads to many other doctrinal errors. For example, it is true that man has no power to move himself from a sinful state to a saved state by his own power. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Consequently, salvation is by grace.

Calvinistic theologians pervert those truths and assume that since "no man can come unto Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him," the Father must draw by "irresistible grace" because man is by nature incapable of coming to God, which makes God the sole actor in the salvation process.

Jesus said, "Every one that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me" (John 6:45). It is true that man has no power to save himself, but since "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), Peter could properly say, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). They had power to accept or reject God's offer of mercy and salvation.

The theory of inborn depravity is false from start to finish. It is assumed that Adam's sin so corrupted his nature he could

not choose to do right. Then it is assumed that the nature of his corrupted spirit was transmitted to his descendants. The Bible does not teach either of these views.

Adam had the same freedom of choice after his sin to obey or disobey that he did before. God made him with the ability to obey or disobey. He decided to disobey. If one takes the position that a person who sins today does so because of his "fallen nature," he should be able to answer the question: If my fallen nature causes me to sin, what caused Adam to sin?

The Bible presents humans as having freedom to choose, and being blessed or cursed as a result of those decisions.

It is speculated that since man was made in the image of God, when he sinned, he broke that image. All his descendants are born after the image of an earthly father, who is totally depraved. It is assumed that when Genesis 5:3 says that Adam became the father of a son "in his own likeness, and after his image," it means that Seth and all his descendants were no longer in the image of God.

Contrary to that, 1 Corinthians 11:7 says, "For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God." James 3:9 expresses the same idea when it says, "Men ... are made after the similarity of God." There is not one verse in the Bible that teaches that mankind ceased to be born in God's image because Adam sinned. God is "the Father of our spirits" (Heb. 12:9). Man does not inherit his spiritual qualities from his physical father.

No one, from Augustine down, can answer these simple questions:

- If it is possible for a sinful person to transmit a depraved nature to his offspring, why is it not possible for a redeemed and pure person to transmit his holy nature to his offspring?
- We may become "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet.

1:4). Why is that not transmitted?

- What is there in man's present nature that causes him to sin that was not in Adam's nature that caused him to sin?

Some answer, "We have a greater tendency to sin than Adam did." We then ask, "Where do you get that information?" Apparently the first time they were tempted, Eve and Adam succumbed. Whatever tendency they had, it was before the fall. Adam's tendency before the fall appears to be as great as ours after the fall.

Here are some Bible truths showing the falsity of the doctrine of original sin: Ezekiel 18:20 says: "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." Children are not born hereditarily, totally depraved.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "Except ye become converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Can any sensible person imagine him saying, "Except ye become converted and become unable to do a good thing or think a good thought (totally depraved), you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven?"

In Mark 10:14 he says, "Of such are the kingdom of heaven." Does the kingdom of heaven consist of corrupt and totally depraved sinners?

Genesis 3:5-7 says:

God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

Instead of their sin causing moral blindness which was transmitted to their children, as all who theorize about their “fallen nature” teach, they now could recognize good and evil.

Adam and Eve, before the fall, knew what was good and evil. They had intellectual awareness that it is right to obey God and wrong to disobey him. If they had not known it was wrong, they would not have been condemned for eating forbidden fruit. Then when they sinned, they knew by experience.

It is impossible for us to live without sin. Paul says, “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). And 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

If we rephrase the question, we can better understand the answer. “Is my nature such that I have to sin all the time?” The simple answer is that the statements of Paul and John, indicating the universality of sin, are general truths that do not apply to specific situations. Suppose you were standing by Paul after he was told, “Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins,” and you asked Paul as he arose from the water, “Do you now say you have no sin?” Paul’s answer, “My sins are washed away and I have no sin.” If a person can live without sin for one minute, then he does not have a sinful nature that makes him sin all the time. That does not deny the general truth that all have sinned.

The idea that a person is created so that he has to sin, and then God condemns him for doing it, places God in a bad light. It makes God a respecter of persons. What sort of God would it be who would say, “Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28), and make man where he could not do it, nor even want to do it?

No wonder those who concocted that idea had to come up with another false doctrine like “irresistible grace” to help solve the problem! The other false doctrine only made the problem

worse, for then God would have to arbitrarily elect some to salvation and others to damnation by sovereign grace. You would have no right to question him!

No civilized society could function properly founded on the premise that man is born naturally evil and unable to make any moral choices. We admit that a pregnant mother who is a drug addict may pass on to her child a physical body that craves dope. But to pass on a physical characteristic is far removed from having an evil spirit.

The easiest and proper way out of all those problems is to recognize the Bible answer: All men are born with the same nature Adam had when he was created – with the ability to choose right or wrong. When man chooses wrong, he sins, but does not transmit that nature to his children any more than Adam did. Even though every mature person sins, it does not follow that he is required to do so by divine decree. It is true that “there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:11-12). Still, this is the choice of the created and not the ruling of the Creator.

Working the Works of God

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

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The Bible teaches that works have nothing to do with salvation, and it teaches that works are necessary to salvation.

Still, the Bible does not contradict itself.

How can this be? How can the Bible say two things that seem to be diametrically opposed and yet not contradict itself? It would appear to be self-evident that works cannot be both necessary and unnecessary to salvation.

Since the Bible is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it must be true and therefore cannot contradict itself. Truth, in order to be truth, must be coherent. If two statements contradict, either one or both of them must be false, but there is no way they can both be true. How, then, do we deal with the fact that the Bible says works are not necessary to justification, and also says that we are justified by works?

Some assume a “take your pick” attitude and go blithely down the path not knowing how to reconcile the two statements – and, possibly, not caring. The honest person however cannot do this and must either reject the Bible or find a logical way to harmonize the two statements.

Various Works

To understand the Bible we must define its terms correctly. It is necessary to understand accurately how Bible writers use the word “works” (sometimes “deeds”), or we will be confused. A survey of how the Bible uses this word will help us to avoid the confusion of misunderstanding. A failure to understand something correctly leads to incomprehension and perhaps unbelief.

Following is a partial list of “work(s)” mentioned in the Old and New Testaments:

- The work God does – Gen. 2:2; Judges 2:7; Ps. 71:17; 1 Cor. 12:6; John 6:28-29; John 10:37; John 14:10
- The work man does in providing food and shelter – Gen. 3:17-19; Exod. 23:12; Exod. 26:1; Eccl. 2:4; Matt. 21:28

- The work man does in obeying specific commands of God – Gen. 6:13-22; John 9:4; 1 Cor. 15:58
- Work of iniquity (evil) – Ps. 6:8; Ps. 14:1; Jer. 1:16; Ezek. 33:26; Matt. 7:23; Luke 13:27; John 3:19; Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:19; Rom. 13:12 (“works of darkness”); Gal. 5:19-21 (“works of the flesh”)
- Work of righteousness (good) – Ps. 15:2; Acts 10:35; Matt. 5:16; Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; James 1:4; James 3:13
- Works that are worthy of repentance – Acts 26:20
- The mighty works (signs, miracles) of Jesus – Matt. 11:23-24; John 10:32; Acts 2:22
- Works of the Law of Moses – Rom. 3:20; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:2
- Greater works done by Jesus’ disciples – John 5:20; John 14:12
- Good and bad works by which all men shall be judged – Rom. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12
- Human works apart from works of God – Rom. 9:11; Rom. 11:6
- Converts to Jesus – 1 Cor. 3:14
- Apostolic signs, and wonders, and mighty works – 2 Cor. 12:12
- Work of sinless perfection – Eph. 2:9; Col. 2:21-23
- The power that works in the saved – Eph. 3:20; Eph. 4:12
- The word of God that works in the believer – 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:12; 2 Tim. 2:21
- Works that justify – James 2:24; James 3:13
- Works of the devil – 1 John 3:8
- The ungodly works of ungodliness – Jude 1:15

This gives a sample of various “works” mentioned in the Bible. It is a mistake to suppose that the word work(s) always refers to condition of acceptance with God. It does not!

Even a casual glance at this list will convince the thoughtful

Bible student this is a complicated subject, having many interrelated parts. It is difficult to deal with because of the need to take different relationships or points of view into consideration.

The mighty acts of Jehovah are works. Creation (Ps. 8:3-6; Ps. 19:1; Ps. 33:4; Ps. 92:5; Ps. 102:25; Ps. 104:24), redemptive acts in history like the Exodus (Judges 2:7-10).

Jesus is our perfect example in all things (1 Pet. 2:21). The Savior went about doing good (Acts 10:38-39; John 4:34; John 5:36; John 10:25-38; John 15:24; John 17:4). His words and his works confirmed his authority and mission.

Humans are sinless at birth, seeing that Jehovah is the Father and Giver of the human spirit (Heb. 12:9; Eccl. 12:7). As the child matures it comes to understand that some things are right and other things are wrong, but chooses to do wrong things and ignore right things. This is called sin – sin of omission and sin of commission. This is the something a person knowingly does to himself. Iniquity separates a soul from its God (Isa. 59:2). Those who die in sin cannot go where Jesus is; they “shall not inherit the kingdom of God (John 8:21; Gal. 5:19-21).

In his infinite compassion Jehovah sent Jesus to offer himself sacrifice for sins (John 3:16; John 10:18; Matt. 26:28).

We access the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb of God through belief (John 8:24).

“They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29).

Saving belief is a work that includes other works. Faith is shown by works (James 2:18). “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Abraham was justified by works produced by faith

(James 2:21-22). Works make faith perfect (James 2:22). Sinners are justified by works and not by faith only (James 2:24). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

Jesus said, "He that believeth (a work) and is baptized (a work) shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:22). In baptism the sinner, "is buried with Christ" and is "raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). In baptism we are buried "with" Christ and we are raised "with" him believing that God will keep his promise to save "he that believeth and is baptized." Peter tells us that baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21). In baptism our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

The spirit that is born again in the water of baptism (John 3:5) enters the kingdom of God, where faith continues to work, bringing glory to God (Matt. 5:16). The saved "work the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 16:10), abound "in every good work" (1 Cor. 9:8). Servants of righteousness "end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:5). The child of God is "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10); the saint is "fruitful unto every good work" (Col. 1:10). The Christian "works out his own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Paul prayed that God the Father may "comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (2 Thess. 2:17). Women professing godliness are to adorn themselves "with good works" (1 Tim. 2:10). If a man desires the office of bishop, he desires "a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). Widows to be enrolled are to be "well reported of for good works" (1 Tim. 5:10). The new covenant lauds the good works of some that are "evident, and cannot be hid" (1 Tim. 5:25). Those described as "a vessel unto honor" are "prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). "The man of God" is "furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). Preachers are to be "an ensample of good works" (Titus 2:7), "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Followers of Jesus are to "be ready

unto every good work" (Titus 3:1). Paul desired "that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8). "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister" (Heb. 6:10). "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). Our Lord Jesus "make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:21).

The "wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). Behave seemly among the pagans, "that, wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). "My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). Jesus knows and commends the works of his disciples on earth (Rev. 2:2, Rev. 2:9, Rev. 2:19; Rev. 3:8). Those who die in the Lord are blessed because "their works follow with them" (Rev. 14:13).

On the last great judgment day, God will render unto every man "according to their works, whether they be good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12).

It is because of a present and future judgment that we must avoid the works of the flesh ... the works of darkness ... the works of the devil. Abstaining from all evil works is critical to the believer.

In the light of what the new covenant has to say about the importance of good works – works of faith – works that justify (James 2:24) – it seems strange that anyone would say that works have nothing to do with salvation ... unless, of course, he is blinded by denominational dogma.

The Bible does warn us that we cannot live to maturity and be sinless (Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:2-6). "All sin and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It also tells us the works of the Law of Moses cannot save us (Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:10). If eternal salvation could come by the Mosaic Law, then the death of Jesus was needless, because the people had that law for 1,500 years before Jesus was born of a woman (Gal. 2:21). We are also told that we cannot save ourselves by austerities (Col. 2:18).

Some honest person may be misled into wrongly supposing that when the Bible tells us we cannot be saved by our own works because it is not possible for us to live without sin – sooner or later all will sin and fall short of God's glory, that it is saying that even works of faith and righteousness – works of God – do not save. Also some will read Bible passages which say that the works of the Law of Moses cannot save, and mistakenly conclude that works have nothing to do with salvation. This study should clear that up because it gives indisputable proof that there is no justification without works.

It is indisputably true that works are necessary to justification (James 2:24), but it is also true that some works cannot save – the work of living a perfectly sinless life – the work of devising our own scheme of redemption – the works of the Law of Moses – the works of darkness, which are the works of Satan.

So, it is true that works both save us and have nothing to do with our salvation, depending on what kind of works you are talking about.

It is not possible for a reasonable adult to be sinless and therefore, in this sense, one cannot save himself by his own works. We cannot be saved by the works of Satan, nor by the works of the Law of Moses, nor by any human invention. Such works have no power to save and many of them are an offense to

God.

Still, it is true that the work of faith (the works produced by faith, see Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:26), bring the sinner into a right relationship with his Creator, help to maintain that relationship, and will one day be the reason for his promotion to glory (Matt. 25:31-46). To say that works have nothing to do with salvation is to fly in the face of Bible teaching.

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Anti-Christ (antichrist)

By A. B. Gregoreo
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No other term in the Bible stirs the imagination and fires such wild speculation as that of "antichrist." The speculation is extreme among those religious teachers holding the various premillennial theories. It is the stuff of scary movies and novels that attract multitudes of superstitious worldlings. In their ignorance, authors weave a web of error. God's word provides the light that will help us understand the who and what of "antichrist."

The term is a combination of "anti" and Christ. "Anti" has two basic meanings: (1) "over against," hence one who puts himself in the place of Christ; (2). "opposition to," i.e., one who stands in opposition to Christ.

From first to last, the story of the Bible is that of Satan's attempts to take the place of God, and his opposition to the Creator's rule and will. This was first displayed in heaven in the misty past when certain angels, not content with their

position, sinned and were cast down to hell (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan then appeared in Eden to corrupt the only creatures made in God's image (Gen. 3:1-6).

In Noah's day he nearly succeeding in snaring all of humanity in his vile net (Gen. 6:9-12). In Egypt, Satan's man enslaved the Hebrews and slaughtered their male children. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, crushed God's people and demanded that they worship his image (Dan. 3:1-5).

The Holy Spirit inspired Daniel to foresee Satanic efforts to hinder and even destroy God's cause. From the broken Grecian Empire he saw a "little- horn that rose up to persecute God's people (Dan. 8:9-14; 23-25). This represented the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (176-164). He hated the Jews and their religion. Their temple he robbed. He placed an image of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies. A swine was sacrificed on the sacred altar and the temple defiled with its blood. He forbade circumcision. Every copy of the Hebrew Scriptures that could be found was destroyed. He tore down the walls of Jerusalem. Truly he was anti-God.

Daniel also saw yet another little horn that persecuted God's people. It sprang from the Roman Empire and most likely represented the vicious emperor Domitian (Dan. 7:23-26). From Nero onward most of the Roman emperors were antichrist.

Jesus was confronted by antichrist forces of evil. At his birth, wicked Herod the Great sought to have him murdered. When his ministry was launched, the Jewish hierarchy waged an ongoing war against him and his teaching. Ultimately they secured his death. The Master warned his disciples of imposters who would claim to be Christ, i.e. messiah (Matt. 24:5). With deceitful signs they would lead many astray, even among the elect (Matt. 24:24).

Paul warned of a coming "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:1-12) – described as the "son of perdition." He would oppose and exalt

himself against all that is called God or worshiped. He would sit in the temple of God and set forth himself as God. His coming would surely be a work of Satan. He would use lying signs and wonders to deceive people. This malevolent spirit of anti-Christian iniquity was already at work in Paul's day.

The apostle John wrote of "antichrists," not just one single evil individual. In his day there were already many antichrists. They formerly had been among the faithful churches but they have gone out from them because they were no longer with them in heart and mind (1 John 2:18-19). They were liars because they denied that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22). They denied his Sonship to God. They were false prophets. In their teaching they denied Jesus had come in the flesh, i.e., his incarnation. They were actively at work in John's day and he warned the brethren to reject and avoid them. They were deceivers (2 John 7). Because they did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, they had not God (2 John 9). There is an attitude or spirit held by certain false teachers then and now which John labels "anti-Christian" (1 John 4:1-3).

Antichrists are of two varieties. There are those yet within the church. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "From among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). He likewise warned Timothy that "some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Such antichrists seek to corrupt the faith and practice of the church. They seek power and control over congregations.

Some create their own churches that compete with Christ's church for the souls of men. These are counterfeit churches that do great damage to Christianity. We see popes who put themselves in the place of Christ, claiming to be the head of the church (Eph. 1:22). Of similar nature are the founders and heads of denominations. Founders and leaders of all the cults

that pervert the message of the Master seek to situate their "church" in the place of Christ's sacred body as antichrist. Most prominent in this class of antichrists are those theologians and "pastors" who have embraced one of the many varieties of religious skepticism. Claiming to be Christians, they deny Jesus existed from eternity, that he is God, that he was virgin born, that he worked genuine miracles, that his death secured forgiveness of humanity's sins, and that he arose and ascended back to heaven. Occupying positions in seminaries and churches, these unbelievers are against Christ and his holy Cause.

Then there are those antichrists who in no way are associated with Christianity. They are unbelievers of every stripe who hate Jesus, his church, his word, and his disciples. Their hatred drives them to make war against the saints (Rev. 12:13-17). This warfare can be violent, physical persecution such as Rome and Jews employed in the early years. Modern examples of this violent anti-Christian spirit are seen in Russia under Communism, China, Cuba and most Muslim nations.

The opposition of unbelieving anti-Christians can be ideological such as presently prevails in academia, the media and the entertainment industry. They ignore the existence of Christianity, or they marginalize Christians. They subject them to ridicule and continual assaults on their faith. This opposition can take the form of legal harassment. Anti-Christian organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State use every legal trick to hinder, hobble, and undermine the influence of Christianity in America.

Imagining antichrist to be some horrid supernatural enemy who is to come at the end of our age, many are ignorant, blind, and unaware of the antichrists working in their very midst!

Paul describes the end of all such anti-Christian enemies, "Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his coming"

(2 Thess. 2:8). In the day when the Christ returns, "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God " (Phil. 2:10-11). This will certainly include every person who has set himself in the place of Christ or worked against his cause!

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