

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 21

THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world,
and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned....*

Romans 5.12

The doctrine of original sin states more than the fact that the sin of Genesis 3 is the first human sin. This doctrine focuses on the impact of the first sin on the whole human race and all its members. Original sin means two things for all human beings: first, when Adam sinned the entire human race sinned so that all members of the human family have the status of sinner conferred on them by Adam's one act of sin; second, the corruption of human nature that occurred through the first sin has been passed on to all through procreation, Jesus Christ who entered the human race through virgin birth being the only exception.

The universal sinfulness of mankind is a reality that is observed and stated in various ways throughout the OT. The apostle Paul brought this truth into his exposition of the gospel in Rom 3.9-20. Throughout Rom 1.18-2.29 he pressed for this: "...for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin" (Rom 3.9). This charge of universal sinfulness is backed up with a catalogue of OT citations that spells out that all human beings have sinned and gone astray (vv 10-18). In Rom 3.23 the apostle writes, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Universal sinfulness confirms the doctrine of original sin, but it does not teach the doctrine itself. This doctrine is only taught in Romans 5.12-21.

A. THE BIBLICAL TEXT ON ORIGINAL SIN: ROMANS 5.12-21

The comparison between Adam and Christ is taken up in two biblical passages: Rom 5.12-21 and 1Cor 15.21-22 and 45-49. The theme of 1 Corinthians 15 is resurrection, and in this chapter Paul points out the parallel between Adam and Christ on the theme of death and resurrection. His thesis is stated in 1Cor 15.21-22: "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." The focus in Romans is not on death but on sin through which death comes. So when Paul turns to Adam in Rom 5.12, the eye is not fixed on death that came through Adam but on the cause behind this: his act of sin and the way that impacted the whole human race. This focus on sin makes Rom 5.12-21 the key biblical passage on the theme of original sin.

1. The vantage point (5.1-12a)

"Therefore, just as through one man..." (Rom 5.12a).

Paul does not take up the subject of the significance of Adam's sin for the whole race as a topic in itself. He begins his discussion with the word *therefore* (Rom 5.12), and this conjunction anchors the discussion on Adam's sin in what has been said about our salvation through Christ's death in 5.1-11. We have to go back to this passage to gain the vantage point from which we are to see the doctrine of original sin opened up for us in 5.12-21.

a. Total salvation (vv 1-2)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Paul has fully established the doctrine of justification by faith in Rom 3.21-4.25. In Rom 5.1-2 he turns attention to what follows from justification by faith. In three steps he moves from being justified by faith to full and eternal salvation. From the point of view of the believer, he moves through the three reference points in time: past, present and future. He first looks to *the past*: having been justified by faith (Rom 5.1-2). The perfect tense Paul uses (*having been* justified) looks to the past but sees a continuing state—we were justified when we first believed, and now as those who believe we enjoy the status of being righteous before God. The continued state of being justified yields *the present* position of having peace with God and standing in grace. From this position we see *the future* in which we will possess the glory of God (i.e., the resurrection life of Christ), and this future glory is secured in our present state so that we have a confident hope.

In Rom 5.1-2 Paul opens up to us a view of our total salvation from its beginning in justification to its end in the hope of the glory of God. He works out the solid connection between the beginning and end in vv 3-11.

b. Full salvation and Christian experience in the world (vv 3-5)

3) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul now takes up the problem of Christian experience in the world, which is summed up in the word *tribulation*. The word translated *tribulation* refers to destructive pressure. It was set in contrast with glory, honour and peace in Rom 2.9. How can the confidence of total salvation be upheld in view of the fact that Christian experience in the world is one of tribulation? Paul shows how tribulation, which in experience eclipses the hope of glory, actually initiates a development that further yields the hope of glory. But, the certainty of the hope is not rooted in our experiential development. It is rooted in the love of God which is poured out in our hearts through the Spirit given to us. Our experience of tribulation serves to make us aware that the basis of our hope is not in our earthly experience but in the love of God.

c. The logic of salvation (vv 6-11)

6) For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. (8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (11) And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Our hope has only one basis—the love of God (v 5). The love of God is seen in one act—the death of Christ for us (vv 6-8). The logic of this love that gave Christ in death is worked out in vv 9-10. The love of God through the death of Christ is such that it guarantees full future salvation (notice the use of the future tense in vv 9-10)—salvation from wrath (v 9) and in the resurrection life of Christ (v 10). This causes the believer to boast or exult in God (v 11).

Justification by faith fully answers the problem of sin presented in Rom 1.18-3.20. But, the logic of salvation by which all in Christ receive the glory of God in the resurrection life of Christ goes way beyond the view opened up to us through Paul's indictment of the human race. We have all sinned, and each one must exercise faith in God through Christ to be justified. But, now we see that full life and salvation are given to all through the one act of one man—the death of Christ. Sin in its totality and in all of its

consequences is answered by one act of one man. This fact opens up a new perspective on sin, and Paul presents this perspective in the comparison of Adam and Christ in Rom 5.12-21.

We will use a metaphor to grasp the new perspective on sin. Think of Rom 1.18-5.12 as a journey out of the jungle of sin. We began as lost in the jungle of human sin, thick with the growth of sin. Paul joined us where we were in our native lost condition. He focused us on our liability in sin before God, and guided by the light of God's judgment he led us to the exit from this jungle of sin. The exit is justification by faith. From here Paul takes our minds on the wings of hope to the high mountain peak of the glory of God. From this vantage point, the apostle points us to look down on the jungle from which we came. Now the jungle is seen in an entirely different way. Rather than seeing the thick growth of human sins, we see all sin as one. To fully grasp our salvation, we have to survey sin from this new vantage point. Now sin is no longer seen from the point of view of sinners—their actions with all their differences. Sin is now seen in the light of God's full salvation from it. To get this view, sin must be seen in direct comparison with the salvation that came through Christ.

2. Working out the issues (5.12-17)

Paul opens the discussion on Adam's sin by setting up a comparison: "Therefore, just as through one man..." But, after presenting the first half of the comparison, he leaves it to work out some issues of critical importance for the comparison in vv 13-17. The fact that Paul breaks off the comparison at midpoint makes it difficult to follow his train of thought. But, he only breaks it off to prepare us to understand the comparison properly and to see the truth of it.

a. Establishing Adam's side of the comparison (vv 12-14)

i. *Introducing Adam's side of the comparison (v 12)*

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

Paul introduces Adam's side of the comparison in a chiasm as follows:

- A. Through *one man* (v 12a & b)
 - A1. Sin entered (v 12a)
 - A2. Death entered through sin (v 12b)
- B. To *all men* (v 12c & d)
 - B2. So death spread to all men (v 12c)
 - B1. Because all sinned (v 12d)

In this chiasm, Paul is presenting an equation of Adam (v 12a-b) and all men (v 12c-d). What happened through Adam involved all. Paul works with the connection between sin and death. Since death comes through sin, the fact that death passed on all through Adam's sin means that in Adam all sinned. This is a startling deduction, so Paul must break off the comparison to enable his readers to see that this is indeed the case.

ii. *Proof from universal fact (vv 13-14)*

13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Paul ties the argument of vv 13-14 to v 12 with the word *for* by which he indicates that he will now prove or explain his point. He points to the period between Adam and Moses in which mankind was not given a special law as was given to Adam in the Garden and to Israel at Mt Sinai. In this period, "...sin was in the world..." We must read this line in v 13 in light of Paul's opening assertion in v 12a—"...through one

man sin entered the world....” Adam’s sin was the only sin through which sin entered the world. Since this entrance, sin has been a present and active reality in the world.

The next point Paul makes is that sin is only imputed or legally reckoned where there is a law. This means that without the law, a person’s sinful act, though it is truly sinful and misses the mark set by God for human life, cannot be the cause for the death sentence passed over him. Adam sinned under a specific law, and that law decreed that death would be the result of his sin. But, after the fall God left the human race without a revealed law until Moses. This means that while sin was in the world, the sins people committed were not the basis for their death. They died because of Adam’s sin.

The point that Rom 5.13-14 makes is important for the doctrine of original sin. Adam’s sin had a double impact on the world. Through his one sin, sin was present in the world and death reigned. The connection between sin and death is maintained. Where death reigns, sin is active, but neither the presence of sin nor the reign of death was due to the sins of the people in the ancient world. All was due to Adam’s sin.

The way Adam’s sin impacted the human race is rooted in creation. God created mankind as a race, and that means that the whole race was created in Adam. Strictly speaking his children are not created to stand on their own two feet in a private relationship with their maker. They are born to live within Adam’s relationship with God and to inherit all that was his. This would have worked wonderfully for his children if he had not sinned. But, the fact is he sinned, and the laws of family solidarity and inheritance mean that his children must share in his sin and live under the sentence passed over him. The long period in which God left mankind without a law is the historical demonstration of this fact.

iii. Looking ahead: Adam as the type of Christ

We must keep our vantage point in mind. The apostle is making us look at the impact of Adam’s sin from the point of view of our salvation in Christ. He is making us look at Adam in light of Christ. Paul turns our attention to this at the end of v 14 when he says about Adam, “...who is the type of him who was to come.”

The fact that Adam was a type of Christ who was to come is important for understanding the divine intention involved in original sin. God did not set up the race to fall in Adam only to multiply the misery of existence in sin. Rather, mankind was created as a race to make the incarnation possible through which the Son of God would become the head to achieve righteousness and eternal life for mankind. This means that while the solidarity of the human race has worked against the children of Adam at first, this very reality is the basis for Christ’s union with us and our union with him. While we are born in Adam’s sin and under the death sentence passed over him, we are born into a history that has its goal in Christ. All children who are born in this world are born within the scope of God’s gracious purpose for mankind realized in Christ.

b. The contrast in the nature of the two transactions (vv 15-17)

The comparison established between Adam and Christ is only a likeness in their relation to mankind. The fact that Adam acted as the head of the human race makes him the counterpart of Christ who also acted so that all that he did and achieved belongs to those in him. But, the nature of the transactions carried out through Adam and Christ stand in sharp contrast, and now Paul proceeds to work that out.

The direct contrast is not between two human acts and their consequences. Such a contrast would set up a neat and tidy balance, but it would do a major injustice to what came through Christ. To see the comparison that Paul is pursuing, we have to see the imbalance. To press this, Paul sets up the contrast between a divine act and a human act. He is contrasting the free gift of God by God’s grace with the human act of Adam. Before we think of the comparison of the acts of two men, we must think of the contrast between God and man in terms of divine grace and a human act. By its very nature, the way divine grace works is different from the way a human sin has its consequences. Paul is pressing us to see this, and this is important for our understanding of the doctrine of original sin. There is the danger that when we see Adam and Christ in comparison we will see that what comes through Christ answers exactly to what comes through Adam. Paul sets the correct perspective before he draws the comparison in Rom 5.18-19.

i. *Expect more from a gift by grace (v 15)*

But the free gift is not like the [trespass]. For if by the [trespass] of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (Note: to conform the translation to the rendering of the words for sin in Rom 5.12-21 given in the first study on the doctrine of sin [WCG 17, What is Sin?] we have changed the word *transgression* in the NASB with the word *trespass*).

Paul introduces the leading idea in the contrast with the term “free gift” (*charisma*). The free gift is presented as the grace (*charis*, stressing the favour out of which the gift is given) of God and the gift (*dorea*, pressing the point that what was transacted through Christ was by its nature a gift) by the grace (*charis*) of Christ. If we just listen to the ring of v 15, we will be struck with the way Paul makes Christ’s side of the comparison resonate with the sounds of grace. On Adam’s side, the sound is monotone and dull. Paul just speaks of a trespass, a simple act that simply has consequences. The consequences are for reaching and long lasting, but they are confined to being mere consequences of the act.

Paul joins the two sides with the phrase, “not like,” and then points to the difference we are to expect with the phrase, “much more.” He engages our minds to reason that what divine grace gives is expected to be very different from the consequence of a sin. When we think of grace and gift, we do not expect traffic in consequences. Grace gives freely and by its very nature abounds. It is above consequences. Grace covers the scope of the consequences of the trespass in that it is given to many, but we are to expect it to outstrip the consequences in that grace *abounds* to many.

ii. *The difference between the way judgment and grace work (v 16)*

The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one [trespass] resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many [trespasses] resulting in justification.

Now Paul is looking at the transactions that were carried out through Adam and Christ. Again we are looking at a contrast (not like). This is the contrast in the way judgment and grace operate.

- The judgment: from *one trespass* resulting in *condemnation*.
- The gift: from *many trespasses* resulting in *justification*.

Judgment works with the strict logic of due consequences. Judgment must be according to works. So, under judgment a trespass results in condemnation. Grace, in contrast, does not measure out consistent consequences. It works in a way that is opposite to judgment: from trespass to justification. Grace also is shown to work in a far greater way than judgment. Judgment dealt with *one* sin. Grace worked with a far larger problem—many trespasses. In Christ God did not simply deal with Adam’s sin and the condemnation that resulted from that one sin. He dealt with the vast multiplication of sin through human history. We all die because of one sin that merited death under the law, but in Christ we are justified of many sins that merit death under the law.

iii. *The difference in our position (v 17)*

For if by the [trespass] of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Now Paul turns to look at the total change in the human position. For this he draws in the theme of death reigning from v 14. Notice the imbalance he sets up. Death reigned through Adam’s trespass, but this is not balanced with life reigning. Rather, the apostle speaks of us reigning in life. The subjection to death is not replaced with a subjection to life. Rather, the slave under death is made a king in life. In v 15, Paul left us with the thought that we should expect greater things from grace. Now he has filled it in.

Paul introduces another imbalance in Rom 5.17 between what happened through the transgression and what will happen to those who "...receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness..." Here we see a major difference between our lot in Adam and our life in Christ. The reign of death happened, and we were born under it. We had no role in coming under it. But, the grace in Christ does not work by birth. We receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, by which Paul is referring to justification by faith (the central theme of Romans up to this point). The gift is not imparted in the way the consequence of sin is transmitted.

3. The comparison (vv 18-19)

Now that Paul has established both the similarity between Adam and Christ and the difference between what transpired through each, he can present the comparison between the two in full. Paul works out the comparison in two themes:

a. The judicial results of the actions of the two heads (v 18)

So then as through one [trespass] there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

i. *The comparison*

The comparison is that the one act had consequences for all. The *all* are the sum total of those who are under the head.

ii. *The contrast*

There is a twofold contrast: in the nature of the single acts and in their outcomes. The contrast is presented in the terms set in vv 16-17 as follows:

- The *one trespass* resulted in *condemnation* (tying into v 16).
- The *one act of righteousness* resulted in *justification* (tying into v 16) of life (v 17).

Both the acts and the consequences are presented from a judicial point of view. "Trespass" and "act of righteousness" are terms of judicial evaluation of action. In the eyes of the court, the act is seen as a trespass or an act of righteousness. Condemnation and justification are verdicts passed by the judge.

b. The status conferred (v 19)

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

In v 18 Paul drew into the comparison the points he made in vv 15-17 about the different effects of Adam's sin and God's grace through Christ. Now he draws in the earlier point he made in vv 12-14—that all sinned in Adam.

i. *The comparison*

The comparison consists in the expressions "many were made..." and "many will be made..." The term translated with *made* is a word that means *to be placed down* (so literally) or *to be put into a position*. What Paul is not saying is that as a result of Adam's sin we received a sinful nature so that we sin and thus are sinners. The whole discussion in Romans 1 to 5 is forensic (having to do with judgment), and the point that Paul is making is that by the one act the many are placed in a given category of sinner or of righteous.

We can see what Paul means by looking at how we are made righteous in Christ. He has developed the doctrine of justification fully in Rom 3.21-5.11. In 4.5 he stated that God justifies the ungodly. This eliminates any idea that God justifies us by first making us inherently righteous and then declaring us righteous because of our godliness. The order is the other way around. We are made righteous in our way of life as a result of God declaring us righteous, i.e., the justification. When Paul says in 5.19 that through Christ's act we are constituted or put in the position of righteous, he is drawing in the truth of justification by faith that he has already established. We have to give the same force to Paul's parallel statement about the many being constituted sinners by Adam's act. We are not constituted sinners by our sinful nature or actions. By Adam's one act, because we are in Adam, we are put in the position of sinners. Our sinful nature and deeds are a consequence of this.

ii. *The contrast*

Again Paul presents a twofold contrast of the one act and its consequence for people.

- Through *the one man's disobedience* the *many were made sinners*.
- Through *the obedience of the one* the *many were made righteous*.

By presenting Adam's sin as an act of disobedience, Paul is bringing out what is implied in vv 13-14. Adam was given a law, and he disobeyed God. The point echoes Gen 3.17 where God points to Adam's disobedience as the basis for the judgment passed over him. Christ's act of obedience is his death referred to in Rom 5.6.

The words, disobedience and obedience, refer to the way the two heads related to God. In line with this, we should understand the terms, sinners and righteous, as referring to the way the two heads make all others relate to God. The word, sinners, is a class designation (Gal 2.15) for those who are not in a covenant relationship with God. The "righteous" were those who continued within the covenant in contrast to those who left the covenant (Lk 5.32). If this understanding of the terms is correct, the sense of Rom 5.19 would be as follows: because Adam turned from God in disobedience, those born under his headship are placed in a position in which they are not aligned to God; because Christ related to God in obedience, those under his headship are placed in a position that is rightly aligned to God, and this is the position of being justified by faith.

Note: In v 18 Paul speaks of *all* whereas in v 19 he speaks of *the many*. What is the difference? It is clear from the context and the parallelism that the *all* and the *many* refer to the same people. But, there is a difference in nuance. The word *all* stresses the group as a whole whereas the term *many* focuses on the individuals that make up the group. Condemnation and justification are verdicts which God the judge passed on all through the single acts of Adam and Christ. But, each person is placed into the position of sinner in Adam and righteous in Christ.

4. The Law between Adam and Christ (vv 20-21)

In Rom 5.20-21, Paul integrates the meaning of the Law of Moses into what he said earlier about Adam and Christ. To gain an understanding of these verses, we will pay close attention to how they are tied into vv 12-19.

a. **Reactivating the original nature of sin (v 20a)**

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase...

i. *The law and universal sin*

Paul introduces the law in v 20 in a way that ties into v 12a. He takes the word used for sin's entrance in v 12 (*eiselthen*) and adds a prefix to it (*pareiselthen*) to depict the law as entering in alongside of sin. The point Paul is making about the law is significant. The law was introduced into a world of sin. This fact is heard in the Ten Commandments. God presented the laws as prohibitions—"Thou shalt not...." This negative form shows that God addressed the people as those who by nature are idolaters, murderers, etc. This is pointed out in 1Tim 1.8-11—the law was not given for the good but for sinners. The fact that people are native sinners was established before the law was given, and the law was introduced to Israel as a people in the native sin of mankind. So, what was the purpose of bringing in the law alongside of sin that had entered the world?

ii. *The function of the Law*

Paul gives the purpose of the introduction of the law alongside of sin as follows: "so that the trespass would increase." Let's take a close look at this.

The trespass is the one trespass he has been talking about, i.e., Adam's sin (vv 13-19). The law's function was to make the trespass *increase*. The word Paul uses here is *pleonazo* which means *to be more or to grow*. Paul's point is indicated in v 16. Adam committed *one* trespass, but in Christ *many* trespasses are forgiven. How did the one grow into many? In v 20 Paul gives the answer—through the law. In Rom 4.15 Paul said that without the law there is no transgression, and in 5.13-14 he points out that without a law to be broken people could not sin in the way Adam did. Once the law was given, each act of sinful desire became an act of transgressing the law. Under the law, each sin became like Adam's original sin, with the result that the full nature of sin as it was committed by Adam is now reintroduced into human experience.

b. Seeing grace in light of the law's impact on original sin (vv20b-21)

Paul introduced the law in relation to Adam's sin in v 20a. Now he will relate the law's effect to grace which he contrasted to Adam's sin in vv 15-17.

i. *Magnifying grace (v 20b)*

...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...

Paul's point in the contrast between Adam's trespass and grace was that grace abounded (vv 15-17). Now Paul presents this feature of grace in the setting where the original sin multiplied through the law. Let's put v 20b as follows: "but where sin increased (*pleonazo*), grace super-abounded." Paul takes the word for abounding in vv 15 and 17 and prefixes the preposition *huper* (over) to it. Introduced into the world of the original sin, grace abounds; but where the original sin multiplied grace super-abounded.

The point we are making from the way Paul shifts his words is important. The immediate effect of the law was to make sin worse—to multiply the trespass. But, the multiplication of sin only served to bring out the greater abundance of grace. Grace is so great that the bare fact of original sin could not provide a sufficient background for it to be revealed. It took the multiplication of the original sin to bring out the greatness of grace. Grace is always greater than sin. It is greater than the multiplied sin under the law, but the multiplication of sin enables us to grasp the fuller sense of grace than the original sin would allow us to see.

ii. *Seeing sin in a new way (v 21a)*

...so that, as sin reigned in death...

In light of the law, Paul makes us see sin in a new way—it is *reigning*. Let's trace the development of thought involved. In v 12 Paul said that sin *entered* the world and death through sin. In vv 14 and 17 he

points out that death reigned. But, after introducing the role of the law he says that sin reigned in death. What is involved in this shift from the reign of death to the reign of sin in death?

Without the law, people lived in Adam's sin and death claimed them apart from any action of their own. So, in a real sense death reigned over them. But, the sense of what reigned over people changed through the giving of the law. Under the Law of Moses a person's own sin, rather than Adam's sin, is the cause of the condemnation of death. We must grasp the point here. Yes, the Israelites had to die because of Adam's sin. But, within the covenant of the law, a trespass became the cause of death as the curse of the covenant. So, when the Israelites died for their sins in the wilderness or were killed by their enemies in the land, they did not simply die under the universal reign of death. Their death took on a covenantal significance. The law thus shifts the focus from universal death to the breaking of the law. What claims the life of the person now is not universal death but sin working through his own action.

iii. *Grace seen in contrast to the way sin works under the Law (v 21b)*

...even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The direct contrast in Rom 5.15-17 is between sin and grace. Now Paul places grace in direct contrast to the way sin is seen under the law, i.e., the reigning power in death. Paul says that grace reigns *through righteousness* (to set it in direct contrast to sin) *to eternal life* (to set it in contrast to death).

In Rom 5.12-21, Paul looks at the original sin in two settings. The first is the setting given in the period between Adam and Moses in which no divine law was given. In this situation the fact that Adam's sin impacted the whole human race was demonstrated. The second setting is given by the Law of Moses. Under the law, reigning power of sin is demonstrated. The two settings show up the two sides of original sin. First, it is a matter of the status of sinner conferred on the world. Second, original sin involves the power of sin in fallen human nature.

B. ORIGINAL SIN IN FOCUS

1. The focus on Adam

Sin originated with Satan, but Satan's sin was not the original sin. The first human sin was committed by Eve, and the narrative of Genesis 3.1-6 is focused on this sin, but this sin is not the original sin. In Romans 5.12-19, Paul does not speak about the one woman's sin. He teaches that sin entered the world through one man, Adam. In the narrative of the first sin, Adam comes in as the last actor and the least active, but in the doctrine of original sin, Adam is the sole figure.

In 1Cor 15.45-49, Paul points out why the focus is on Adam. God created Adam from the ground, and all other human beings bear his image (v 49). Adam was the created head of the human race. Original sin is not about how sin came about. For this scriptures turn our attention to the temptation of Eve. Original sin is about the status of the human race as a whole, which status is conferred on all its members, and this could only be defined through Adam because he is the head of the race.

Adam's role as the head is indicated in the narrative of Genesis 2 and 3. Not only was he created first, but the first law that defined sin and that spelt out the sentence on sin was given to him. While the serpent worked through Eve, God called on Adam and passed the sentence of death over him and not over Eve. In fact, through Eve God gave the promise of the birth of the seed, which amounts to a promise of life.

The fact that the doctrine of original sin does not follow the narrative of the first sin is important. Satan contradicted God's created order in bringing in sin, but the status and state of the human race in relation to God is determined by God's order and law. The doctrine of original sin is tied to the created order.

2. The two sides of original sin

In our study of the human dimensions of sin and its consequences, we saw that the first sin affected every aspect of human existence, and this includes all of creation. The doctrine of original sin, however, is narrowly focused on the impact of Adam's sin on all of his children, i.e., the affect that his sin has on our person. There are two sides to this impact. The first is our status in relation to God. The second is the impact of Adam's sin on our human nature.

Our status in relation to God is, from our point of view, somewhat abstract. It is not a matter of how we feel about ourselves but how the first law defines us in relation to God. While the legal aspect of original sin is abstract, it is nonetheless very real. It becomes a final reality in the universal fact of death. Here we must pause and take in the biblical understanding of death.

From our point of view, death is like a natural law that rules all life in the world. The Bible gives some support to this. The fact that Adam and Eve's continued life depended on the tree of life shows that human nature in itself was not immortal. Cut off from the tree, they would die. Mortality is based on the fact that human beings are creatures of flesh and not spirits. But, the mortality of flesh only took over human existence due to God's judgment of sin. Human death is tied to sin. Where there is death, there is sin behind it. This is essential to Paul's logic in Rom 5.12-21. The rule is spelt out in Rom 6.23: "For the wages of sin is death." Death entered the world through sin, and every member of the race is born under the death sentence and so is legally liable for Adam's sin.

The second side of original sin is not abstract at all. When we studied the human dimensions of sin, we noticed how the act of sin took over the whole being of the sinner. Sin worked through Eve's human nature and settled into that very nature. This effect of sin on human nature was permanent, and all of Adam and Eve's children are born with that sinful nature. In the NT this nature is called the flesh. In Rom 7.5 Paul speaks of the time when in our native state we were *in the flesh* and the sinful passions were in us. In Rom 8.8 the apostle says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (v 8). The only other type of person is the one who is in the Spirit (v 9). Jesus pointed to the same truth in John 3.6 when he said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Jesus is responding to Nicodemus' idea of a man entering his mother's womb a second time to be born. Any birth through the mother's womb is a birth of flesh from flesh, and so does not bring about that birth that is required to see and enter the kingdom of God. David gave expression to the fact that sin is transmitted through procreation when he confessed, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 51.5).

The sin nature is passed on through procreation. But, a person does not get his legal status in sin from his parents. This is conferred on him directly from Adam by virtue of the fact that he is a member of the fallen human race.

3. Original sin in human experience

When we handle the doctrine of original sin, we must take note of where this doctrine is placed. Paul does not introduce it when dealing with the question of sin that leads up to the presentation of the truth of the gospel in Rom 3.21ff. When addressing the question of sin prior to the revelation of the gospel, the apostle only deals with sins committed by people that make the whole world accountable to God. Here he looks at sins in light of the knowledge of the creator given in creation and in the light of the conscience and the law. Conscience and law focus the human mind on actual sins committed for which people are liable to God's judgment, and the gospel builds on this awareness of sin. To bring the doctrine of original sin into this context would be confusing. We must keep in mind that Paul opens up the view into Adam's sin from the point of view of the full salvation realized in Christ. If someone does not share this point of view, he will not be able to understand the doctrine of original sin. For the non-Christian, this doctrine would only confuse the issue by turning away from what the conscience and the law press on him—that he is guilty before God, and the gospel introduces Christ into this setting.

The doctrine of original sin deepens the Christian's view of the human problem. It is not just the case that all have sinned. The problem of sin goes deeper than the individual's own actions or even existence. A person is not a sinner because he has sinned. At a deeper level, he sins because he is a sinner. The sinner does not simply have to be forgiven for his own sins, he has to be transferred from his status in Adam and be given a new nature. The greater depth of sin exposed by this doctrine serves to show up the greater height of grace.

The doctrine of original sin raises the question about infants and God's judgment. Since all are born in the original sin, do infants that die perish under God's wrath? Our moral sense reacts to the thought. This moral intuition gets support from Paul's discussion on sin and judgment in Romans.

Paul's discussion of sins that make people liable to judgment is carried out under the heading of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven" (1.18). This wrath is not revealed against original sin. It is revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." In keeping with this, the judgment of God deals with the deeds of people (1.32; 2.6,12). More specifically, the wrath "in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" will be due to an unrepentant heart (2.5).

The condemnation that resulted from Adam's trespass (5.16) was not the wrath to be revealed in the future day of wrath. It was the sentence of death passed in the Garden that God carried out by cutting off mankind's access to the tree of life. All are born under this sentence, and people must relate to God through the sentence of death. If they do not repent in view of God's condemnation of sin, they will come under eternal wrath in the coming day of judgment.

The eternal judgment will be passed on individuals and not on the human race. Mankind as a race will be redeemed. Those who refuse to repent and turn to God will be judged with eternal judgment. They will be expelled from creation (for the lake of fire was not created for mankind and is not part of the creation of Genesis 1), and those who turn to God will be the redeemed human race through which God realizes his purposes for mankind. The eternal wrath is only for the refusal to repent under the awareness of judgment on sin, and the judgment on that day will be of individuals for their actual deeds. While infants are "constituted sinners" in Adam (5.18), they have not committed the sinful deeds that merit eternal wrath.

Christ's death dealt with the burden of the collective guilt of the race so that as God's provision for the human race as a whole it is effective for infants. But, infants are not like believers. A believer is no longer constituted a sinner. He is constituted righteous in Christ. He receives this position in his justification by faith.

In Christendom baptism is often seen as the means by which the original sin is removed. There is no basis for this in Rom 5.12-21. Our position in Christ by which we are not in Adam is tied to justification (Rom 5.16,17,18,19), and Paul has made it abundantly clear that we are justified by faith.

Having said this, we should add that baptism does bear on the theme of original sin in the life of the believer. The "old man," i.e., our old identity in Adam, was crucified with Christ (Rom 6.6). Our death to sin occurred upon being united with Christ through faith. Baptism is the burial that follows the death (6.4). By this burial, the body in which the old man had his existence is publicly committed to the fact of the old man's death with Christ so that this body might be committed to being the organ through which the new man lives in this world. Let's put this in terms of original sin as we have come to understand it from Rom 5.12-21. Through the original sin we received the status of sinner, and this status defined our bodies as the organ of sin. By being joined to Christ, we lost the status of sinner and received the status of righteous. The transfer of status must be carried through in our bodies—we must transfer the ownership of our bodies. Sin no longer defines and owns us, so we are no longer to give our bodies over to the dictates of sin. We are in Christ and must give our bodies over to living in Christ. Through baptism, we remove our bodies from the identity that original sin conferred on it, i.e., that it belonged to sin. We are to begin our new walk with this decisive step, but this transfer in our bodies engages us in the battle with sin that makes us keenly aware of sin as a power.

