

ORIGINAL SIN, SINFUL NATURE, TOTAL DEPRAVITY

In John 9:1-2 Jesus and His disciples see a man blind from birth. The disciples want to know who sinned (him or his parents) that he should be born blind. Their logic – because this bad thing had happened, someone sinned. Either he was sinful at birth or his parents passed the guilt of their sin on him. Jesus surprised them with this answer: Neither.

If sin leads to death, why do innocents die? Why is it that everyone sins? These questions have been on the minds of humanity for thousands of years. Indeed, multiple doctrines have been established to explain this. Let us look at three of these doctrines: The Doctrine of Sinful Nature (it is in our nature to sin); The Doctrine of Original Sin (we inherit the guilt of Adam's sin); The Doctrine of Total Depravity (we cannot help but to sin as we are completely evil). Are these wholesome, Spiritual doctrines, or are these false doctrines of men?

The Doctrine of Sinful Nature originates with the teachings of Augustine of Hippo around 400 AD. He believed and taught that when Adam sinned human nature changed. What was once good became evil, and this evil nature was passed on through human procreation. This accounts for our desire to sin; it is our nature.

Doctrine of Original Sin is a subsequent doctrine that Augustine completed. His thought was that since when Adam sinned human nature changed, and all people die, that we inherit from Adam the guilt of sin. Augustine declared that babies are born sinful because of this inherited guilt.

Doctrine of Total Depravity came along much later when (a former Augustinian monk named) John Calvin (1550 AD) drew a new conclusion from the concept of a sinful nature: original sin makes us totally depraved and completely unable to do anything good. If there is any good choice or thing in us, it is because God miraculously placed it there. Thus when a person is saved, it is because God deliberately changed their character first and compelled them to be saved, against their will.

The vast majority of people who profess to be Christians today pursue one of these three ideas, or perhaps even all three. But is this actually in line with what the Bible says?

The prophet Ezekiel was sent to the exile of Judah to explain to them why they were going into captivity. God was angry with Israel, and many of the people believed that "God is punishing us for our parent's sins". Ezekiel chapter 18 is a single response to this accusation against God. In summary, God was angry that they thought this.

In Ezekiel 18 God's message was simple: I punish people who commit sin. God goes through the chapter to explain that He does not punish others for our sins; "the soul who sins will die". He does not punish parents for their children's sins, nor children for their parent's sins. The wages of sin are imputed on the one who sins. Obviously, this chapter creates a serious problem with these three doctrines. So now we ask: are these things in the Bible?

Is there a Sinful Nature? If you searched Scriptures you would find that this phrase is not found in them. But it is stated that *God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...."* (Genesis 1:26a). Man was made NOT with a sinful nature, but with a nature in the image of God. Many would suggest that this was altered after Adam sinned, but the Bible never says that. It does say that all of us have a nature that is in His image, even to this day (James 3:9). In fact, Solomon explained in Ecclesiastes 7:29 "*Behold,*

I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices". Solomon does not speak of only Adam, but all mankind. We are made upright, but choose to sin. If man has a sinful nature from birth, then so does God, as we are in His image. Such a declaration is blasphemy.

Is There Original Sin? Once again, no such term or idea is found in the Bible. But the Bible does say (God) *"will render to each one according to his deeds"* in Romans 2:6. God told Cain in Genesis 4:7 *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."* God makes it clear that Cain has the power to resist, and that he had not sinned yet. To declare that we can inherit the guilt of our parents sin is directly the opposite of God's repeatedly declarations that He is just and does not punish parents for children, children for parents. The doctrine of Original Sin a declaration is that God is unjust and dishonest.

Is There Total Depravity? You guessed it, it is never stated in the Bible. But it is stated in 1 John 3:12 that the reason Cain sinned was because of the nature of good and evil works, NOT inherent nature within. *"Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."*

These are evil and ungodly doctrines. They are contrary to the Scriptures, which never declare them. Instead we see that Scriptures do say we are made in God's image, and that God saw us as good, and that we can choose to do good or evil. These false doctrines fail to explain why Adam sinned. Adam and Eve were made "good" (Gen. 1:31) and we have their nature (1 Cor. 15:22). The same things that caused them to sin cause us to sin (Gen. 3:3, 1 John 2:16).

These false doctrines require other false doctrines to be substantiated. If sin is not a choice, then there is nothing we can do to be saved (saved by faith only). If salvation is not a choice, then there is nothing we can do to be lost either (once saved, always saved). If there is nothing within us to choose what is good and God directly inserts this, then God only choose some to be saved (false predestination).

But the biggest problem with these doctrines can be expressed in one word: Jesus. Jesus was man (1 Timothy 2:5). He came in the same flesh we inhabit (Romans 8:3). He was tempted in all of the same ways we are, yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). If these doctrines are true, then Jesus was a sinner too. Our salvation, which depends on His purity, is a failure.

These doctrines were an attempt to answer a question seen in John 9. Why do innocents seem to suffer the wages of sin? It is because while we do not inherit the guilt of sin, we do inherit the consequences of sin. We see this idea in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve died (spiritually) the day they ate of the fruit (Gen. 2:17). But the additional consequence of being put out of the garden and denied the tree of life was something that affected them and all of their descendants (Gen. 3:22b-23). Physical death and suffering are the consequences of Adam's sins, not the wages (1 Cor. 15:22). The wages of sin is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23), imputed only to the one who sins.

These doctrines are an attempt to answer another issue as well: why do we all sin? Of course, that is not exactly true. Not all sin; Jesus did not sin; babies do not sin. But more importantly, you can choose not to sin, just as God told Cain. But it still seems like we all sin. This is because while we do not have a sinful nature, we do have a fleshly nature, which does have a propensity to sin. Paul described this in Romans 8:3 when he said *"God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh"*. Sinful flesh is not speaking to the idea that flesh is sinful (as Jesus was God in the flesh). Instead, it means that flesh has desires, and uncontrolled those desires lead to sin (James 1).

Paul said in Romans 7:18 *"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."*

We have a propensity to sin that is born in our flesh. This is why Adam and Eve sinned; they too were in the flesh. That is why temptation has not changed. God declared that we are to rule our flesh and make the choice not to sin. We are not born sinners. We cannot deny that we have the ability to rule over sin. To succeed in this choice we need to be spiritual.

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Romans 8:8-9