

Is the Doctrine of “Original Sin” in Scripture?

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The words “original sin” are not found in the Bible. The theory of “original sin” was developed by Augustine in the 5th century A.D., who taught that the entire human race was seminally present inside Adam. According to Augustine, when Adam sinned the entire human race also became guilty, that every person on earth inherits Adam’s sin and every baby is born guilty of “original sin.” Augustine further taught that infant baptism removes the guilt of original sin.

Augustine’s doctrine of original sin teaches:

- The entire human race was inside Adam in the Garden of Eden.
- When Adam sinned, all humanity became guilty.
- Every person on earth is born guilty by inheriting Adam’s first sin.
- Infant baptism removes the guilt of original sin.

Although Augustine is admired by many, he believed in other doctrines that many Christians would not accept. He taught that those who are elect are to make up for the fallen angels, so that the number of angels will be complete again. He taught that the death of Christ was a payment for what was rightly owed to the devil for our redemption. He believed in purgatory and prayers for the dead. He taught that all humans are polluted by original sin except for Mary, and unbaptized infants are damned because of inherited Adam’s sin and guilt. He believed in the intercession of saints to change circumstances.

Many people have been taught that we are guilty of Adam’s sin, but they have never taken the time to examine whether this doctrine is biblical. When we search the Scriptures we find that Augustine’s theory does not line up with God’s Word.

Doctrine of “original sin” teaches	God’s Word teaches
Babies are born guilty of Adam’s sin.	Babies are born in innocence
The human race pre-existed in Adam before they were born.	Humans come into existence at conception and did not pre-exist before that.
People become sinners by inheriting Adam’s first sin .	People become sinners when they decide to disobey God for the first time.
A spiritual sin is contained in physical sperm.	Sin is a spiritual problem and is not contained in sperm.
Adam’s first sin is literally transferred to all generations through sex.	Sin cannot be transferred from one person to another.
You are held accountable for what Adam did	You are not held accountable for the sins of someone else but for your own actions.
Infant baptism washes away original sin	The blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin

Why the Doctrine of Original Sin Isn’t Biblical

1. Augustine developed his doctrine on a mistranslation of Romans 5:12.

Romans 5:12 says, “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.” The late Dr. J. W. MacGorman, who was professor of Greek and New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, refutes Augustine’s doctrine of original sin. MacGorman writes in his commentary on Romans:

The Vulgate, a 4th century Latin translation of the Bible, wrongly translated the last clause of Romans 5:12. Where the Greek text has “because all men sinned,” the Vulgate rendered, “in whom all sinned.” Adam was regarded as the unnamed antecedent of “in whom.” **Upon the basis of this translation error in the Vulgate, Augustine developed his doctrine of original sin.** Thus he held the whole human race sinned in Adam’s sin. By virtue of our physical descent from Adam, we inherit his guilt. Augustine taught further that infant baptism removes the guilt of original sin.

In the 17th century, Johann Cocceius proposed a different theory of original sin. He taught God entered into a covenant with Adam as the federal head of the human race. This had been called the “Federal Theory of Original Sin.” The theory was born in Europe, not in Eden. (J. W. MacGorman, *Commentary on Romans*, p.79)

Where in the Bible does it teach that God made such a covenant with Adam or that he is the “Federal head of the human race”? Nowhere.

2. People become guilty because they sin, not because they are born.

Dr. MacGorman writes in his commentary on Romans:

In Romans 1:18 to 3:20, Paul set forth his doctrine of sin. Here he showed how all men, Gentiles and Jews alike, have become guilty because all men had sinned (3:9,19,23). Human guilt derives from human sin; it is not inherited. Men are guilty because they have sinned, not because they are born. Is it not interesting that Paul managed to demonstrate the guiltiness of all men in this earlier passage without any reference to Adam? (J. W. MacGorman, *Commentary on Romans* p.79).

Roman Catholic scholar Herbert Haag writes, “The idea that Adam’s descendants are automatically sinners because of the sin of their ancestor, and that they are already sinners when they enter the world, is foreign to Holy Scripture.” (*Commentary on Romans* p.83)

3. The doctrine of “original sin” contradicts these Scriptures:

The term “original sin” is not found anywhere in the Bible, yet it contradicts many verses.

Ezekiel 18:20 “The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

If the son does not bear his father’s guilt, how is it possible to inherit Adam’s guilt? This verse states that sin and guilt are not inherited.

1 John 3:4 “Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law.”
It doesn’t say that sin is inherited but sin occurs when a person willingly disobeys a law.

Romans 7:7 “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”
Paul came to know sin through the knowledge of the Law, not through being born.

Romans 14:12 “So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.”
We will not give an account for Adam’s sin, but for what we did.

Romans 14:23 “Whatever is not from faith is sin.”
A newborn baby doesn’t know anything about faith and cannot sin.

James 1:14-15 “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”
A person has to be tempted before he can sin.

James 4:17 “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”
To sin you must know the right thing to do. Babies don’t know right from wrong.

2 Cor. 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
We will be held accountable for what we have done, not for what Adam did.

4. **People don't automatically inherit sin from Adam, nor do we automatically inherit salvation from Jesus.**

Romans 5:19 says, "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."

Adam brought sin into the world, and Jesus brought salvation into the world.

We do not automatically inherit sin from Adam, and we do not automatically inherit salvation from Christ. Dr. MacGorman writes:

We know that the death of Christ on the cross does not automatically grant all men a right standing with God. **We do not inherit salvation through Christ's obedience apart from our personal involvement in faith. Nor do we inherit condemnation through Adam's disobedience apart from our personal involvement in sin.** (*Commentary on Romans*, p.83).

5. **If we inherit original sin from Adam, then why don't we also inherit every sin of our ancestors?**

The doctrine of "original sin" does not explain why Adam's descendants are held responsible for **Adam's first sin only** and not for his later sins, nor for the sins of all the generations of our forefathers that followed Adam. Why is only the one sin supposedly passed down to other generations?

Following the logic of inheriting sin, we should also inherit every single sin from every one of our ancestors going back to Adam. If my father committed murder before I was conceived, does that also make me guilty of murder because I am his son? If sin is inherited, I would be guilty of every sin of my parents, and my grandparents, and my great-grandparents, and so on back to Adam. However, the Bible does not teach that we inherit sins, or that we are guilty for what someone else did.

6. **Infant baptism doesn't remove "original sin" because baptism doesn't remove sin.**

Those who believe the doctrine of Augustine about inheriting sin from Adam must also agree with his teaching that infant baptism is the only way to get rid of it.

However, 1 John 1:7 says that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Augustine taught that infant baptism cleanses people from the sin of Adam, which would be salvation apart from the blood of Christ. Infant baptism is not found in Scripture, nor does the Bible teach that water washes away sins. Only the blood of Jesus can do that.