

## XII

### Man in the State of Sin

**1. The Origin of Sin.** The Bible teaches us that sin entered the world as the result of the transgression of Adam and Eve in paradise. The first sin was occasioned by the temptation of Satan in the form of a serpent, who sowed in man's heart the seeds of distrust and unbelief. Scripture clearly indicates that the serpent, who appears as the tempter in the story of the fall, was but an instrument of Satan, [John 8:44](#); [Rom. 16:20](#); [2 Cor. 11:3](#); [Rev. 12:9](#). The first sin consisted in man's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This eating was sinful simply because God had forbidden it. It clearly showed that man was not willing to subject his will unconditionally to the will of God, and comprised several elements. In the intellect it revealed itself as unbelief and pride, in the will as the desire to be like God, and in the affections an unholy satisfaction in eating of the forbidden fruit. As a result of it man lost the image of God in the restricted sense, became guilty and utterly corrupt, and fell under the sway of death, [Gen. 3:19](#); [Rom. 5:12](#); [6:23](#).

**2. The Essential Nature of Sin.** At present many substitute the word 'evil' for 'sin,' but this is a poor substitute, for the word 'sin' is far more specific. It denotes a definite kind of evil, namely, a moral evil for which man is responsible and which brings him under a sentence of condemnation. The modern tendency is to regard it merely as a wrong done to one's fellow-beings misses the point entirely, for such a wrong can be called sin only in so far as it is contrary to the will of God. Sin is correctly defined by Scripture as "lawlessness," [1 John 3:4](#). It is lack of conformity to the law of God, and as such the opposite of that love which is required by the divine law. The Bible always contemplates it in relation to the law, [Rom. 1:32](#); [2:12-14](#); [4:15](#); [5:13](#); [Jas. 2:9](#), [10](#); [1 John 3:4](#). It is first of all *guilt*, making men liable to punishment, [Rom. 3:19](#); [5:18](#); [Eph. 2:3](#), and then also *inherent corruption* or moral pollution. All men are guilty in Adam, and are therefore born with a corrupt nature. [Job 14:4](#); [Jer. 17:9](#); [Isa. 6:5](#); [Rom. 8:5-8](#); [Eph. 4:17-19](#). Sin has its seat in the heart of man, and from this center influences the intellect, the will, and the affections, in fact the whole man, and finds expression through the body. [Prov. 4:23](#); [Jer. 17:9](#); [Matt. 15:19](#), [20](#); [Luke 6:45](#); [Heb. 3:12](#). In distinction from the Roman Catholics we maintain that it does not consist in outward acts only, but includes evil thoughts, affections, and intents of the heart. [Matt. 5:22](#), [28](#); [Rom. 7:7](#); [Gal. 5:17](#), [24](#).

**3. Sin in the Life of the Human Race.** Three points deserve consideration here:

*a. The connection between Adam's sin and that of his descendants.* This has been explained in three different ways. (1) *The earliest explanation is called the realistic theory*, which is to the effect that God originally created one general human nature, which in course of time divided into as many parts as there are human individuals. Adam possessed the whole of this general human nature; and through his sin it became guilty and polluted. Naturally, every individual part of it shares this guilt and pollution. (2) *In the days of the Reformation the representative theory came to the foreground.* According to this view Adam

stood in a twofold relation to his descendants: he was their natural head, and he was their representative as the head of the covenant. When he sinned as their representative, this sin was also imputed to them, and as a result they are all born in a corrupt state. This is our Reformed view. (3) *A third theory, not so well known, is that of mediate imputation.* It holds that the guilt of Adam's sin is not directly placed to our account. His corruption is passed on to his descendants, and this makes them personally guilty. They are not corrupt because they are guilty in Adam, but guilty because they are corrupt.

*b. Original and Actual Sin.* We distinguish between original and actual sin. All men are born in a sinful state and condition, which is called original sin, and is the root of all the actual sins that are committed.

(1) *Original sin.* This includes both *guilt* and *pollution*. The guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us. Because he sinned as our representative, we are guilty in him. Moreover, we also inherit his pollution, and now have a positive disposition toward sin. Man is by nature *totally depraved*. This does not mean that every man is as bad as he can be, but that sin has corrupted every part of his nature and rendered him unable to do any spiritual good. He may still do many praiseworthy things in relation to his fellow-beings, but even his best works are *radically defective*, because they are not prompted by love to God nor done in obedience to God. This total depravity and inability is denied by Pelagians, Arminians, and Modernists, but is clearly taught in Scripture, [Jer. 17:9](#); [John 5:42](#); [6:44](#); [15:4](#), [5](#); [Rom. 7:18](#), [23](#), [24](#); [8:7](#), [8](#); [1 Cor. 2:14](#); [2 Cor. 7:1](#); [Eph. 2:1–3](#); [4:18](#); [2 Tim. 3:2–4](#); [Tit. 1:15](#); [Heb. 11:6](#). (2) *Actual sin.* The term 'actual sin' denotes not only sins consisting in outward acts, but also those conscious thoughts, desires, and decisions that proceed from original sin. They are the sins which the individual performs in distinction from his inherited nature and inclination. While original sin is one, actual sins are manifold. They may be sins of the inner life, such as pride, envy, hatred, sensual lusts, and evil desires; or sins of the outer life, such as deceit, theft, murder, adultery, and so on. Among these there is one unpardonable sin, namely, *the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*, after which a change of heart is impossible, and for which it is not necessary to pray, [Matt. 12:31](#), [32](#); [Mark 3:28–30](#); [Luke 12:10](#); [Heb. 6:4–6](#); [10:26](#), [27](#); [1 John 5:16](#).

*c. The Universality of Sin.* Scripture and experience both teach us that sin is universal. Even the Pelagians do not deny this, though they ascribe it to external conditions, such as a bad environment, evil examples, and a wrong kind of education. There are passages in which the Bible directly asserts the universality of sin, such as [1 Kings 8:46](#); [Ps. 143:2](#); [Prov. 20:9](#); [Eccl. 7:20](#); [Rom. 3:1–12](#), [19](#), [23](#); [Gal. 3:22](#); [Jas. 3:2](#); [1 John 1:8](#), [10](#). Moreover, it teaches that man is sinful from birth, so that this cannot be considered as the result of imitation, [Job 14:4](#); [Ps. 51:5](#); [John 3:6](#). Even infants are considered sinful, for they are subject to death, which is the penalty for sin, [Rom. 5:12–14](#). All men are by nature under condemnation, and therefore need the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Children are never made an exception to this rule. [John 3:3](#), [5](#); [Eph. 2:3](#); [1 John 5:12](#).

**To memorize.** Passages to prove:

*a. That sin is guilt:*

[Rom. 5:18](#). "So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life."

[1 John 3:4](#). "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."

[Eph. 2:3](#). "Among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

*b. That sin is pollution:*

[Jer. 17:9](#). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?"

[Rom. 7:18](#). "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not."

[Rom. 8:5](#). "For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

*c. That sin has its seat in the heart:*

[Jer. 17:9](#). Cf. above under [b](#).

[Matt. 15:19](#). "For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings."

[Heb. 3:12](#). "Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God."

*d. That Adam's guilt is imputed to us:*

[Rom. 5:12](#). "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." Also verse [19](#). "For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous."

[1 Cor. 15:21](#), [22](#). "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

*e. That man is totally depraved:*

[Jer. 17:9](#); [Rom. 7:18](#); [8:5](#). Cf. under [b](#). above.

*f. That sin is universal:*

[1 Kings 8:46](#). "For there is no man that sinneth not."

[Ps. 143:2](#). "And enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no living man is righteous."

[Rom. 3:12](#). "They have all turned aside, they are become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one."

[1 John 1:8](#). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

**For Further Study:**

- a. Can you give some other scriptural names for sin? [Job 15:5](#); [33:9](#); [Ps. 32:1](#), [2](#); [55:15](#); [Rom. 1:18](#); [5:15](#); [1 John 3:4](#).

- b. Does the word 'evil' ever mean anything else than sin in Scripture? If so, what? Cf. [Ex. 5:19](#); [2 Kings 6:33](#); [22:16](#); [Ps. 41:8](#); [91:10](#); [Prov. 16:4](#).
- c. Does the Bible explicitly teach that man is a sinner from birth? [Ps. 51:5](#); [Isa. 48:8](#).

### Questions for Review

1. *What is the biblical view of the origin of sin?*
2. *What was the first sin, and what elements can be distinguished in it?*
3. *How would you prove that Satan was the real tempter?*
4. *What were the results of the first sin?*
5. *Do the words 'sin' and 'evil' mean the same thing?*
6. *Where does sin have its seat in man?*
7. *Does sin consist only in outward acts?*
8. *What different views are there respecting the connection between Adam's sin and that of his descendants?*
9. *What is original sin, and how does actual sin differ from it?*
10. *How do you conceive of total depravity?*
11. *What proof is there for the universality of sin?*