



July 20, 2008

Original Sin

As Paul addressed the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he told them they would see him no more and after he departed “grievous wolves” would enter in, some of whom would arise from amongst their own number. (**Acts 20.29-31**). In the waning days of the first century the shadow of false teaching had begun to rise. Paul warned the Thessalonians that there would be a falling away and characterized the nature of that and the effect it would have on the world. (**2 Thess 2**). This was the beginning of the process of departing from God’s word. It was foretold, it was noted as already having started, and would cause many to be lost. As we turn to the results of this we find that there are a number of damaging false doctrines that have been “popularized” to the point that even those who are not religious are familiar with their concepts to some degree, and have clouded the minds of so many that they may be prevented from recognizing the truth at all. The idea of original sin is one of those ideas that came into being, apparently very early in the days of the church, and has taken root in the religious mind. This idea has spawned false doctrines that are equally as damaging if not more so. Last week we discussed infant baptism and how it arose. This week we will look at the roots of this practice and then return to the subject of infant baptism showing how a false doctrine cost many their lives. Paul tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (**Rom 3.23**). Paul compares Christ and Adam and what was brought into the world by each of them. Paul stated that sin entered into the world by one man (**Rom 5.12**) referring to Adam, and it was by one man, Christ, that justification was made possible (**Rom 5.19**). The belief that arose based on this and other passages was that the guilt of sin was an inherited aspect of humanity and therefore was passed on to all who are born. Since we are infants in the beginning then that meant that we are born with this collective guilt. Many aberrations of doctrine and practice have arisen over this in spite of the fact that it is not mentioned in the New Testament, or the Old. In Romans 5, used as the basis for this belief, there are statements that show us that Paul is using this as a figure to demonstrate the far reaching consequences of the sin of Adam, and the sacrifice of Christ, not the inherited nature of sin. Paul states, “*For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.*” (**Rom 5.15**). An interesting and logical point can be made here. If one does not have to do anything to be guilty of sin, other than being born, then why does anyone have to do anything to receive salvation, since Christ offered himself for us? A simple question but one that speaks to the contradictory nature of the idea of original sin. A number of false assumptions and resultant doctrines have arisen from this misunderstanding. One of these is the idea of total depravity; that one is so immersed in the sinful nature of mankind that they cannot choose of their own will to serve God but must be changed in order to be able to accept the grace of God. There are debates con-

cerning this and some believe they can exercise free will, choose to follow God and therefore escape the corruption of the world while others believe one must be chosen or “predestinated” to be what God wants us to be. None of these doctrines are found in the New Testament but there are millions who hold to them. The interesting thing is that the idea of original sin, as presented in one history, was an argument against the teachings of the Gnostics. If that is the case then we have a false assumption being used to combat false doctrine. As is the case with other errors, the idea of original sin may indeed be a philosophical twist on the scriptures to combat falsehood. That is a reminder to all of us that the best way to counter any false doctrine is to use the scriptures alone. Other distortions of the idea of original sin have been formed as well. There is a notion that original sin is distinct from actual sin and is referred to as a “**sin nature**”. God recognized that the imagination of man was only evil continually from his youth up (**Gen 8.21**). The scriptures do not imply that the nature of man was corrupted by God in anger. The statement in Genesis is an observation made by the Lord himself. We understand that as humans we are prone to temptation and may give in thus committing sin. The mainstream concept, held in the popular culture, is the idea that original sin is of a sexual nature since Adam and Eve were naked and covered themselves with leaves which were later replaced with skins by God. Adam and Eve, when naked, were “innocent” that is they had not sinned. Today we refer to the innocent as those who have not achieved sexual awareness and are therefore childlike. Adam and Eve, in their innocence and naked state, were told to be fruitful and multiply. That implies procreation and means that the sin of Adam and Eve had nothing to do with sexuality. A popular misconception holds that sex is “forbidden” (some religious groups have taught that sex is necessary but should not be enjoyed) and the images include the “apple” as the forbidden fruit. A popular television show uses this very image as part of the opening graphics. The idea of original sin has tainted the idea of responsibility for sin, clouded the idea of an age of accountability, diminished and tainted the idea of sexuality in a God sanctioned marriage and has led to myriad problems based on these erroneous ideas. Next week we will look at how this idea transferred to infants and how those who did not accept such falsehood were persecuted and killed for their refusal to go along with what had become an entrenched doctrine in the “church”.

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