

THE NATURE OF SIN

It is the intent of this presentation to bring clarity to a subject that many have long misunderstood. The subject is part of a bigger presentation known as the nature of sin—its origin, effect and consequence to the human family, God’s provision as solution, and its final eradication. In regards to the subject under discussion in particular, we will be looking at the following:

- What Constitutes Human Beings as sinners.
- How Could Jesus Be Sinless As a Baby...if He took our Fallen Sinful Nature.
- How Deep is Sin in Human Nature.

Before we engross ourselves in this subject, let us look briefly at the principle of biblical solidarity, which runs throughout Scripture.

I. God’s Government –Basis of Law

When God created man, he did so in accordance with the principle of Law. Natural and Spiritual laws were invested in the human machinery, by the hands of Christ when He formed Adam. The first man, Adam (which means *mankind* in the original language) was created with the power to beget in his own image. Since God created “of one blood all nations of men” God saw, as it were, a fountain of life, in Adam, as the ‘father of the human family’. In other words, He saw *in Adam every human being* coming out of the loins of Adam as his posterity. Thus, God created every human being who were to live on the face of the earth, He created them *in Adam*.¹

Therefore, when Adam sinned, all His posterity sinned in Adam.² The whole human race came under the “condemnation of the Law of God”. Though Adam’s guilt was not transferred to his offspring (since guilt is by personal volition), yet the whole race was now subject to the consequences of the violated law—which would result in the Second Death. Thus, Satan triumphed in bringing ruin to the whole human race. But God made provision for this tragedy—sin.

1. The Divine-Human Family p.15-16 by W.W. Prescott.

2. Romans 5:12-17.

II. What Constitutes Human Beings as Sinners

a. How is Sin defined biblically? Sin is defined in a number of ways in the Scriptures:

Romans 14:23 – Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

James 2:9 – If you have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

James 4:17 – Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

1 John 3:4 –Whosoever committeth sin tansgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Of all the definitions here listed, the SOP quotes most often the 1 John 3:4 definition as the standard definition. This being said, we need to understand what this verse really is saying. On the surface, it conveys the idea that if you “break a set of rules, you sin.” This obviously lends to the notion that we human beings have a “behavioral problem”. Fix the behavior and the sin issue is resolved. But is sin just a “behavioral problem”, or is it deeper, in our human psyche?

The Bible states that the “heart is deceitful above all and desperately wicked, who can know it?” (Jer.17:9). SOP has this to say:

*“Today sin is the same malignant thing that it was in the time of Adam...The **depravity of the human heart**, the guilt of transgression, the ruin of sin, are all made plain by the cross where Christ has made for us a way of escape.” -FW 96.2*

*“The commandments of God are comprehensive and far reaching; in a few words they unfold the whole duty of man. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:30, 31). In these words the length and breadth, the depth and height, of the law of God is comprehended; for Paul declares, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). The only definition we find in the Bible for sin is that “**sin is the transgression of the law**” (1 John 3:4). The Word of God declares, “**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23). “**There is none that doeth good, no, not one**” (Romans 3:12). Many are deceived concerning **the condition of their hearts**. They do not realize **that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.** -1SM 320.1*

It is clear than that sin, which = the transgression of the law is directly related to the “natural heart” or the “depravity of the human heart”. This phrase “transgression of the law” is much more than wrong behavior, it is dealing with the “condition of the heart”.

Notice this statement:

*By nature **the heart is evil**, and “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” Job 14:4. No human invention can find **a remedy for the sinning soul**. “**The carnal mind is enmity against God**: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” “**Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.**” Romans 8:7; Matthew 15:19. -DA 172*

There is an obvious link between the “evil heart”, the “sinning soul”, the “carnal mind”

And “evil thoughts”. Are we not thus born “alienated” from heaven.

b. Romans 3:10-18, 23 Reality

These verses indicate we are all sinners, none righteous, no not one. We are corrupt to the core from the start. Verse 23 tells us that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The verb ‘sinned’ is in the aorist sense of the word, referring to when ‘sin’ all began. Well, it all began in Adam. So, we all sinned ‘in Adam’ (objectively), and we all fall short (subjectively) in our own experience.

c. What occurred when Adam sinned?

The Bible says that Adam and Eve lost their robe of light, and with the light, went the Spirit of God. “When Adam sinned, man broke away from the heaven-ordained center. A demon became the central power in the world” {CT 33}. The earth was plunged into darkness. (It seems she is using the word ‘man’ in a pluralistic since. There are many such statements throughout her writings.)

From a corporate perspective, the whole family of Adam sinned, when Adam disbelieved His Maker and ate the fruit. The apostle Paul intimates this in Romans 5:12, 3:23, which we looked at and other places. The whole race was created in Adam, which means “mankind”. Thus, when Adam sinned, in a pluralistic sense, we all “sinned in Adam”. The contrast between the “one that sinned” (Adam) and the “obedience of the one” (Christ) is clearly set forth in Romans 5:15-19.³ These verses speak primarily in the objective sense. That is, what Adam did, all humanity did in Adam and what Christ (the second Adam) did, so did all mankind in Christ.

d. The Condition of Adam’s family, His posterity?

i) Inherent Propensities

- a. According to her own definition in the statement, it is the tendency, leaning or inclination to disobey God and to do wrong in the posterity of Adam received as an inheritance from birth; this kind of propensity therefore, belongs to the realm of the **physical nature** and primarily deals with its **cravings** and **desires** which are unnatural and sinful as a result of the Fall and have their origin or seat in the body (**AH 127**);
- b. Jesus must have taken this physical liability upon Himself by merely being born into the human family and made subject to the law of heredity (**DA 49**); this is the basis for Paul’s claim that Jesus was “made like unto His brethren” (**Heb 2:17**),

ii) Evil Propensities

Is the tendency, leaning or inclination to disobey God as a result yielding to temptation by choice or exercise of the will; **evil propensities** therefore belong to the realm of exercising the will, the power of choice, in response to the inherently sinful cravings of a fallen physical nature; **evil propensities** has to do with the development of a defective character or spiritual nature as result of indulging in sinful practices.

e. Problem passages: Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Isaiah 48:17

There are a few passages in the Bible that are difficult to explain, for those who believe human beings are regarded sinners, by choice. These verses are restated for our convenience, here:

Psalms 51:5 – Behold I was **shapen in iniquity**; and **in sin** did my mother conceive me.

Psalms 58:3 – The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as **soon as they be born, speaking lies**.

Isaiah 48:8 --...for I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a **transgressor from the womb**.

It could be argued that the first text in Psalm 51 refers to our sinful nature, and that is a plausible argument, for the Hebrew language seems to convey that “iniquity” refers to our fallen sinful nature, we inherited from Adam. This does not make us sinners, for was not Jesus also, ‘shapen in iniquity’?

But of the last two verses, there is really no ‘wobble room’ they are quite clear. Because of these two passages, many who have stumbled across them have used these as support for the position, we are “born sinners”.

So, there are two questions we need to ask at this point:

- 1) How do we resolve this problem, if we are not born sinners?
- 2) Maybe our understanding of what ‘sinner’ means needs to be more encompassing?

As we saw in page one, an evil heart, a carnal heart is the core meaning underlying the phrase, “transgression of the law” as a definition for sin. The behavior is just the manifestation of that enmity against God, laden deep within our psych, or very nature, a sinful nature at that. Should we then not consider a broader definition of what ‘sinner’ entails? It is not something we **do**, but something we **are**, because of our heart enmity against God.

The difference between us and Jesus, is that He was “**holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.**” {Hebrews 7:26}.

It is not correct to say, as many writers have said, that Christ was like all children. He was not like all children. Many children are misguided and mismanaged... His inclination to right was a constant gratification to His parents... {5BC 1116.7}

*No one, looking upon the childlike countenance, **shining with animation**, could say that Christ was just like other children. He was God in human flesh. When urged by His companions to do wrong, **divinity flashed through humanity**, and **He refused decidedly**. In a moment He distinguished between right and wrong, and placed sin in the light of God's commands, holding up the law as a mirror which **reflected light** upon wrong. It was this keen discrimination between right and wrong that often provoked Christ's brothers to anger. Yet His appeals and entreaties, and the sorrow expressed in His countenance, revealed such a tender, **earnest love** for them that they were ashamed of having tempted Him to deviate from His strict sense of justice and loyalty (YI Sept. 8, 1898). {5BC 1117.3}*

Obviously, this statement above indicates Christ's desire to do right, refusing "decidedly" the wrong. Thus, as the Psalmist states, His delight was in the law of God revealing no-'heart enmity' with the law or His Father at His incarnation. The major difference between He and us is clear: we are born alienated from God, with a natural inborn enmity, which He was not.

One of the ways I've been able to adequately solve this dilemma is to read what one of our pioneers (second generation Adventists) left on record for future generations:

"Take the parallel again between the first and the second Adam. [Romans 5:19] By the offense of one, by the disobedience of one, many were constituted sinners, - that is, Adam by dis-obedience permitted sin to come into the flesh, and every descendant of Adam, **as a consequence of that one act, had a tendency to sin. If he would not struggle against it, he would commit sin himself**, but no moral guilt would attach to any descendant of Adam unless he himself yielded to that tendency. But if he does not struggle against it, he will yield and sin will appear in him.

Now by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous; or by one man's obedience the free gift came upon all men to justification of life. That is, by this union of the divine with the human in Christ, and by this meeting of our humanity in Jesus Christ, and from the fact that the punishment met upon him for all men, "He has caused the punishment of all to meet upon Him." Because of that, every human being receives a tendency or feels *a drawing toward* righteousness; and if he does not resist, he will be drawn to righteousness. But he will receive for himself no consideration because of that righteousness or of that drawing to righteousness unless he, himself, yields to that tendency. He will be drawn to Christ, he will be in Christ, and then he will personally receive the benefits of justification of life which came upon all men, just as in the other case when he yields to the tendency to sin he receives the condemnation personally which came upon all men in Adam.³

f. what difference does it really make?

We all need a Saviour, we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Whether we are 'born sinners' or sin after we are born, it is still inevitable, that fallen sinful nature needs redeeming. The only way that could occur was by putting our fallen corrupt nature to death at the cross, "in Christ." And in the resurrection of Jesus, God gave to humanity the *divine (Gr, zoe)* life of Christ. Thus, if we choose Him, we receive this holy, righteous life and as we keep choosing Him, the day will come He will seal us, blotting out our sins, so we will live forever with Him.

Where it makes a difference is understanding as much as we can of the mystery presented below. This will be our subject for another time.

How Could Jesus Be Sinless as a Baby... If He took our Fallen Sinful Nature?

3. The Divine-Human Family p.37 by W.W. Prescott