



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Effects of the Fall, or the Original Sin of Man”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, again we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the teaching concerning man, concerning his fall, concerning the things that point to the redemptive work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Enable us to understand ourselves and enable us, Lord, to understand the provisions, which Thou hast accomplished in our behalf. And we would particularly commit this hour to Thee and as we study, again, the great doctrine of sin, enable us to understand it and to profit from it. We pray.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

[Message] Now, we have come a considerable length in our study of the doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin; for we began with the mystery of man and the crisis of identity. Then we looked briefly at the problem of the creation and evolution. We went into a consideration of the nature of man, dealing with dichotomy and trichotomy and the image of God in man. Man's probation or amissability versus indefectibility. And then we began a study of the fall itself. And we are now looking at the effects of the fall. And our subject tonight is, “The Effects of the Fall, (the second study) or The Original Sin of Man.”

Will you turn with me to Romans, chapter 7, and listen as I read verses 13 through 25. Romans, chapter 7, verse 13 through verse 25.

“Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in my members in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

Tonight, we’re going to deal with one of the great topics of the Bible; the doctrine of Original Sin. Now, this is a doctrine that touches all of the areas of human life, particularly, the moral and ethical areas.

We are living in days in which we have learned a great deal, so psychologists and psychiatrists tell us, about psychoses. And it is not my intention tonight to give you any instruction in an area in which I am very, very much of an amateur. But there are other areas which psychologists also deal with, which affect Biblical teaching. They are the areas that affect our neuroses. And it is without question the place of the Bible to comment on some of them.

Neuroses or formerly called neuroses, but, I think, now, they are frequently referred to by the term, character disorders. Some of them are: defective conscience, emphasis on immediate gratification, and an inability to learn from past experiences. Now, notice the ethical covering of these things.

Defective conscience. What does that mean? Well, that means there is little or no guilt over behavior that should demand or should provoke guilt, often, the fruit, in our day, of parents who subtly reward bad behavior. And then there is the emphasis on immediate gratification. That is nothing more than an inability to work out long-range goals. The demands of chastity may require saying, “no,” to strong urges. The demands of honesty may also require an uncomfortable facing of facts. The demands of integrity require some labor for success. Short cuts, immediate gratification; these are the things that we like to yield to. And, of course, an inability to learn from past experiences is not simply stupidity, as we might think that it is; it really is a condition of no internal guilt. We have a calloused conscience often. And so, we call it an inability to learn from our past, when it is really, again, the problem of recognizing what we are.

Well, one thing I think we all will grant; and that is, that sin is deeper than our sins. Someone has said, “The Garden of Eden tells us how the human predicament got the way that it did. The rest of the Bible tells us what the predicament is.” Well, we have seen how we got into the predicament in which we are. It is the result of the fall of Adam.

T. S. Elliot has recognized some of this; for he says, “A curse comes to being as a child is formed. And anybody who writes deeply about human nature recognizes the fact of sin.”

Shakespeare recognizes it as he pictures Lady MacBeth in her trance, walking up and down and looking at her hands, saying, “Out! Damned spot! Out! Here’s the smell of the blood still.” And she cannot free herself from the feeling of guilt over what has been done.

Cardinal Newan said, “The human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal tragedy.” Well, that’s what the Bible means when it speaks of sin that is “original.” Now, that term is not, strictly speaking, a Biblical term. But, the doctrine is so Biblical, that it is certainly fair and just to say that it is a Biblical doctrine.

Reminds me of a woman who was having explained to her the doctrine of original sin, and when the explanation was over, she said, “Well, if all of us are really as bad off as all that, then God help us!” And that, of course, is precisely the point. We are that bad off. And the only person that can help us is God.

Last time, we pointed out that the first effect, really the last two times, I think, we pointed out that the first effect of the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden was the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity. In other words, when Adam fell the whole race fell. He was our representative. He was our federal head. And the guilt that Adam had as a result of his sin in the garden is a guilt that has been imputed to us; reckoned to each one of us so that we are “born” under sin. Now, we do not become sinners. But we are sinners when we are born. We have imputed to us the guilt of Adam’s sin, and then, of course, some other things are said in the word of God about us, too. And that is what we want to look at tonight. And so, we are coming to the second effect: Original Sin. And Roman I in our outline “The Biblical Teaching on Original Sin.”

What is, Original Sin? Why is it so called? Well, let me introduce this division with a note on original sin. It’s not in the outline, but it is necessary for us to understand what

we are going to look at, when we look at the texts. What is, original sin? Sometimes, original sin is spoken of broadly; and sometimes, narrowly. When it is spoken of broadly, and you may find writers writing of original sin in this broad sense, they are referring to the guilt of Adam’s first sin, that which is imputed to us. Second, the loss of original righteousness, not only the guilt of Adam’s first sin, but the loss of original righteousness, a negative thing and third, the corruption of our whole nature. Speaking broadly, original sin covers all of these things. The imputation of Adam’s sin, the corruption of our nature, the loss of original righteousness. This is Original Sin.

Now, speaking narrowly, theologians usually speak of original sin as simply original, inherited corruption; the third aspect of the broad view. And this is the common way in which people speak of original sin. They refer to the corruption of our nature, which is inherited from Adam. Not the guilt of Adam’s first sin, but the corruption of our nature, which is inherited from Adam.

Why is it called “original sin?” Well, we all should know why it is called original sin. Here are some reasons why; in the first place, it is derived from our first parents. And so, it is original in that sense. It comes from Adam and Eve. And, second, it is the origin of all of our other sins. And so, it is “original” sin in that sense; our inherited, corrupt nature is the origin of our acts of sin. We don’t become sinners by sinning, but we sin because we are sinners, born that way, with an inherited, corrupted nature. And, it is also original because it is present in all of us from our birth and it is not something that we learn by imitation.

Now, the Bible has these things to say about original sin. So, let’s take our Bibles, now, and turn to some of these passages that I have listed up on our outline. And first of all, let’s turn to Psalm 51 in verse 5. Psalm 51, verse 5. The Psalmist writes, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” Now notice, as David has written the psalm, in the first few verses of the psalm he has been speaking about his transgressions, plural, his acts of sin.

“Be gracious unto me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. (Acts of sin, you see.) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from sin. For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.”

So, he has been confessing his actual sins through the fourth verse. But now, in verse 5, he acknowledges that there is something deeper within him and that is, original sin; his heredity depravity, which he pronounces not just weakness, but sin. “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Now, in the following verses he speaks of this as a burden, and he also expresses the desire to have deliverance from it. Verse 6: “Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being. And in the hidden part, Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” Verse 10: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me.” In other words, he is not so much concerned with the acts of sin for he recognizes that these acts of sin are the products of his nature. And so, he is concerned about that. “Create within me a clean heart, O God.” Verse 13: “Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee.” Verse 17: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

So, it is evident from Psalm 51, that David recognized that he sinned with transgressions, actual sins, but he also recognizes that the real problem is deeper than our sins. The real problem is our “sin” at the inmost part of our being. Our inherited, corrupt, evil nature.

Let’s turn to Jeremiah, chapter 17 and verse 9. Jeremiah, 17 and verse 9. This is a familiar text. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; Who can understand it?” The heart. Our problem is that we have heart trouble, someone has said.

Dr. Barnhouse used to like to comment upon the Evangelist’s plea to give your hearts to Jesus by saying, “That idea was all wrong. What would God do with the filthy thing if you did give it to him.” And he was trying to express the idea that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Now, the remark, it seems to me, while expressing a truth does overlook the fact that in the Bible, itself, we have the expression: “My son, give me thine heart.” But that text in the Proverbs has in mind, “Give me thine heart in order that it may be cleansed by God.” This text, at least, expresses the idea that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And, the trouble with us is not the outward acts; but the inward disposition is our real difficulty.

Now, let’s turn over to the New Testament, and see that our Lord expresses the same thing. Matthew, chapter 7 verse 16 through verse 19. Matthew, chapter 7 verse 16 through verse 19. Jesus says:

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Sixteen “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Now, our Lord simply says that men are known by their fruits; moral acts reveal our moral character. Our moral deeds do not constitute our character, they manifest our character. They tell others what we really are. And, furthermore, since the Bible says that the fruits of men’s acts are universally evil, that everyone is a sinner, what does that say about the tree? Well, if the fruit is always bad, that says that the “tree” is bad. And so, our Lord’s statement here, is a reflection of the fact that if our acts are evil, they are evil

because they are evil at their root. And since, I say the Bible says we are universally sinful, well, it’s obvious that we are also universally sinful in our inmost being.

Turn over to John, chapter 3 verse 6, John 3:6. This is another familiar text used in our Lord’s interview with Nicodemus. And he says “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” That born of corrupt parents is corrupt is our Lord’s point, because he is opposing in this text “flesh” to “spirit.” That which is born of the spirit is, of course, holy. Now, opposed to that is that which is born of the flesh. And since, that which is born of the spirit is holy that opposed to it is evil. That which is born of the flesh is unholy. In addition, in this passage, he’s giving us reasons why a man must be “born again.” So, we need to be born again because we are born in sin. That’s why we need to be “born again.” That which is born of the flesh is flesh. So, here, our Lord indirectly teaches original sin.

Now, turn to our passage in Romans chapter 7 that we read. Now, we will not have time to debate the question of whether Romans 7:13 through 25, has to do with a Christian or a non-Christian. There are, I think, very good reasons why it is most likely that Paul is speaking about a Christian. And, here he is trying to describe some of the struggle that goes on in a Christian’s heart, who seeks to do the law of God in the power of his own flesh. And the chapter teaches “constant” defeat.

One who is dead to the sin and dead to the law, as he has said in the preceding verses, might feel rather self-confident. And, consequently, he might think that he can do something for God now that he has died to the law by his identification with Christ and also, he has died to sin, with respect to sin, then, if I have died to sin and I have died to the law, then I may be able to do something for the Lord. Well, Paul answers part of this question by saying, you know, the law is not sinful. The difficulty is with what the law had to work with. After pointing out the character of the law, he, in this section, points us out to the fact that our deepest problem is “indwelling sin.” That’s a real difficulty; indwelling sin. And that sin which began in unbelief has become the ruling principle of

our lives. We saw that the essential nature of sin is unbelief. But that unbelief persisted in, becomes the ruling principle of a man’s life. Manifests itself in autonomy and issues in acts of sin. So, he’s dealing with that ruling principle here. And, the essence of the whole passage is that there is no hope within us.

Now, Paul doesn’t give us much of a remedy here. He doesn’t really say anything much except, “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.” Reminds me of the cartoon that Mr. Schultz had in one of his presentations in the paper, sometime ago. Lucy was looking at Charlie Brown, both were leaning on a wall, Charlie Brown having a very downcast look. And she said, “Discouraged again, eh, Charlie Brown?” And, he didn’t say anything. And so the next panel says, “You know what your trouble is? The whole trouble with you is that you are you.” Boy, there’s a lot of psychology in that isn’t there? [Laughter] “The whole trouble with me is that I am I.” And Charlie looks up and says, “Well, what in the world can I do about that?” And she, with learned affectation, says, “I don’t pretend to be able to give advice. I merely point out the trouble.” [Laughter]

Now, that is what Paul is doing here. And, in the 7th chapter, he is saying, the real trouble is indwelling sin. Notice verse 18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” And I should have read verse 17, “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” Verse 20, “But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” Indwelling sin is my problem. Verse 25, the last sentence, “So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” And so, Paul has found within himself as he looked within himself a principle that acts with the fixedness of a law, and it is the law of indwelling sin that though he may wish to do the good, or that though he may wish not to do the bad, he discovers that he does the bad or fails to do the good every time; for the law of indwelling sin is the inmost law of his being. And that’s the way we are, apart from God.

Now, we shall never find deliverance from indwelling sin as a Christian until we have come to realize, “Wretched man that I am, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.” Someone has said, “O wretched man” that is the most spiritual and scriptural cry in the whole of the Bible, for you see it says exactly what the woman said who said, “If the situation is as bad as that, then God help us.” Well, it is. So, original sin, inherited, inherent corruption, which we have derived from the sin of Adam. We all have it. Christians have it.

Now, Ephesians, chapter 2 verse 3. Ephesians 2, verse 3. In Ephesians 2:3, I’m going to comment on two things here. One, we’ve already commented upon I think. But it needs commenting upon because there are some people who think, still, that we really become sinners by the acts that we do. Now, I want you to notice that in Ephesians 2:3, Paul says, in the last clause “And were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” Now, the thing I want you to notice about it is, first of all, is that Paul says that we are by nature “the children of wrath” not children of sin, but children of wrath, by our very constitution. Now, wrath is what follows when we have been convicted of sin. Wrath is the punishment for sin. Now, if wrath is the punishment for sin, then there must have been a previous sin. And if we are, by nature, children of wrath, then it is evident that we are regarded by God to “have sinned” when we enter into our nature. So our sin is not the sin that we commit, it is the sin that Adam committed, which is our federal head. And so, as a result of our identification with him, we are born, we are by our very constitution, children of wrath. That is, we are born in and under judgment.

Now, I stress that because there are people, still, who just cannot accept the idea of federal headship. But, Paul teaches it. And, if Paul teaches it and if the Bible teaches it, then we better cast our lot with that and allow the Holy Spirit to make plain to us things that may be a little difficult.

The word translated here, “by nature,” is the word *phusis* in Greek. Now, we could transliterate that P-H-U-S-I-S. It is a word that stands opposed to “what is acquired,”

or what is “super-induced.” So when we say that something is true by nature, we mean that we have not acquired it. We have not super-induced it. So, what it says is that we are born in a state of condemnation, in a state of sin. Because, obviously, if we are born in a state of condemnation it’s because of sin. So, we’re born in that state, as well. So, the text then teaches not only original sin, but it also teaches the imputation of Adam’s first sin. Now, let’s look at a couple of other places where we have this word. Turn over to Romans, chapter 2 in verse 14 and verse 27. Romans 2:14, “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively (Now, the Greek says simply, by nature, so he’s referring to what Gentiles do by virtue of their nature.) Verse 27: “And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?” Now, I said, 2:27, but that word does not occur there. I may have a, I don’t have time to look it up in my Greek text, so we’ll just have to pass on.

Let’s turn over to chapter 11 verse 21 and verse 24. Speaking here about the Jewish people and the Gentiles who grafted him, he says, “For if God did not spare the natural branches.” There’s the word, the branches that are by nature, the natural branches? What are the natural branches? Well, those are people that are born Jews. “Neither will he spare you.” Chapter 11 verse 24: “For if you were cut out from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree.” In other words, the Gentiles contrary to their birth, were grafted into the olive tree which is Israel’s blessings. Now, turn over to Galatians, chapter 2 verse 15. I’m reading you all these passages so that you will see that the word *phusis* means that which we have by nature not that which we acquire. Galatians, chapter 2 verse 15, Paul says, “We who are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles.” Now, what does he mean when he says, “Jews by nature”? He means that by our original constitution we are Jewish. We are born Jews. So when he says, “We were by nature the children of wrath,”

he means that’s the way we were born. That’s the way we came into existence. We were under the wrath of God.

Final text, Ephesians, chapter 4:17 through 19. Now, since next week we’re going to talk about “free will” since this is one of the effects of the fall in ability, I’m not going to say too much about this passage since it is one of the passages we will deal with a little bit. I want you merely to notice that the things that Paul is saying thoroughly agree with what we find here. Ephesians 4:17 through 19:

“For this I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

You’ll see that that text not only expresses the evil of our nature, but its consequent actions particularly in the 19th verse.

Well, now, let’s come to the theological doctrine of original sin. We’ve seen what the Bible says. There’s no question about it, the Bible teaches that we inherit a corruption of our nature by reason of our relationship to Adam. Capital A - The elements of Original Sin.

There are these elements in original sin. And if I don’t have time to cover but these three, original guilt, original pollution, and total depravity, we will have covered sufficiently. We can forget the rest because these are really the important things. These are the elements of original sin.

First, original guilt. Now as you can see, we are speaking here in the broad sense, original sin, original guilt, original pollution, total depravity. Original guilt. Guilt refers to the relation which sin bears to judgment or the penalty of the law. Now, remember, I

think we spoke about this. We can speak of our original guilt in two ways. We can speak of it as *reatus culpae* which means, liability, to blame. And we can speak of it as *reatus poenae*. That is not Russian, that is Latin. *Reatus poenae* or liability to punishment. So that, the original guilt is of two kinds *reatus culpae*, *reatus poenae*. In other words, a man may do something that is wrong, but if there is no law against it, it is not really known as “sin” among men. There must be law for one to be liable to punishment.

Now, we all know instances that could illustrate this fact that there are things that we do that are wrong, but there’s just no law against it. In fact, there are times when we really commit things that are wrong, and we know that they are against the intent of the law. But since there is nothing wrong with it, we say, “it’s perfectly legal.” “It’s perfectly legal.” And it is, “perfectly legal.” I’m assuming that it is, of course. It may be perfectly legal, and you may not be regarded by the law as committing anything that is wrong when you do it, except that deep down in your heart you have a little feeling, a sneaking suspicion, that it is probably not right. But it’s legal. So you see, original guilt may be spoken of in two ways: liability to blame. This is the intrinsic moral ill-desert. *Reatus culpae* of an act or state.

Turretin, one of the great Calvinistic theologians, calls it “Potential guilt.” That is, it’s bad, it’s evil, but since there’s no law against it, it’s only “potential guilt.” Now, that *reatus culpae*, the liability to blame, cannot be removed by forgiveness. There is no way for a man guilty of blameworthiness to have that blameworthiness removed.

Let me give an illustration. A man may commit a crime. He may become a criminal and so it is necessary for him to be brought to trial. He is brought to trial. He is convicted of his crime, which he has committed. He is sentenced to ten years in prison. And then eighteen months later he is released. That’s the way our law works, you know. Well, that may be an exaggeration. You can see how I fell about some of the practices that go on in our society. Well, at any rate, this man is released. And, though he may have legally satisfied all of his debts to society, what do we say about such a man? Well,

we say, “He’s got a record.” There’s no possible way for him to escape the fact that he has a record.

Now, the same thing is true of you, my dear Christian friends. You have a record; for you have sinned against God. You are blameworthy because of your sin. There is no way for your blameworthiness to be covered in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He does not cover our blameworthiness. He takes our punishment upon himself. He takes our liability to punishment and bears that. He does not cover our blameworthiness. You see, that’s why James calls us, who are Christians, in chapter 4 verse 8, sinners, sinners.

Now, if my blameworthiness had been covered, as well as my liability to punishment, I would say to James, “Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute; I’m no longer a sinner. I’m saved.” But James would then give me a little lecture on *reatus culpae* as over against *reatus poenae* pointing out that you are still a sinner. Your guilt has been paid, but you are still a sinner because you still have a record.

Now, the other night in Oklahoma City, I’ve been flying up every Thursday night and speaking in Oklahoma City on this same series of topics, and so, when I came to *reatus culpae* and *reatus poenae*, I, in the inspiration of the moment, I not only said, you know, that we are people that have a record, but throughout all eternity we shall be known as sinners. Well, that was too much for somebody in the audience. Afterwards, they came up to me and said, “Dr. Johnson? I thought that when we got to heaven we would be perfectly cleansed.” I said, “Now, I did not say that we were not perfectly cleansed. I said that our *reatus culpae* would still be with us, our blameworthiness.” We are always worthy of moral ill dessert, because that is what we have, that is sin, that is evil which we have committed and there is no possible way to erase it.”

It’s just like a woman who gives her very precious possession of her virginity away. There is no possible way for that ever to be restored to her. There is no possible way. That’s why it is so important for young people to be careful.

Now, I said to my friend, she happens to be a very good friend of mine, and I wanted to stay on good terms with her. Her husband was a very close friend of mine, and furthermore, they had entertained me in their home, just a week before that. And I said, “Well, I may have spoken too hastily, because, frankly, that’s not in my notes. I just simply wanted to point out the fact that we are still sinners. Now, I’m not certain about eternity. But I’ve been thinking it over and I still think I’m right. I believe that throughout all eternity, it will be possible for us to be referred to as sinners in the sense that we have a record. And that is why, I think, throughout all eternity I’m going to be grateful because I remember I have a record. And that record has been paid for by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And, I think, throughout all eternity I shall be reminded of that fact every time I look over at the Lamb of God. And reflect upon the sacrifice that he accomplished for me. So, I’m not going to make any great issue out of it. I just think I’m right on that point. [Laughter] But I may be wrong. And when we get to heaven, I won’t mind if you come up and tell me, “You were wrong, Dr. Johnson.” There are three other places where that may happen, too. So, anyway. No, I’m just kidding.

Now, the second aspect is the important one, *reatus poenae*; that is our liability to punishment. Now, that, of course, is as a result of our original guilt, since we are identified with Adam and his sin. Now, this is the usual sense in which we speak of the guilt of Adam’s sin. We’re not talking about *reatus culpae*. We’re talking about *reatus poenae* our liability to punishment. Because, we, in our federal head, have sinned.

Now, second, the second element of original sin, original pollution. Now, I’ve already pointed out that not only does original sin involve guilt, it involves pollution. That is, our nature is infected. It’s not simply the absence of good, but it is a positive disposition to evil. Did you notice in Romans, chapter 7 in verse 23, the way Paul expresses this indwelling sin. He says, this indwelling sin is waging war in us. Look at verse 23 of Romans, chapter 7, “But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind.”

Now, you really want to know what the real trouble is deep down in your heart. The real trouble is that there is a war going on in your heart. And, one side is the side of our Lord, the new nature which he has implanted there, and the other side is that which is there from the beginning, your old nature, or the flesh, or indwelling sin which dwells in our members, and those two are fighting a tremendous war. And, furthermore, if you do not rely upon the Holy Spirit, the war that is waged by indwelling sin will always be the victorious war. Look, he says “I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.” And he is describing a present thing; for all of these verbs are in the present tense. This warfare that goes on always has one conclusion. We lose. We lose. We lose. Like the Philadelphia Eagles. Every time they get on the field, they say, you know we lose. [Laughter] Except the other day. Original pollution...

Now, total depravity. This is the third element of original sin. This really is pollution viewed in its pervasive character. So, I think, it would be theologically correct for us to say, original sin has simply, the two elements; original guilt and original pollution. We could add loss of righteousness, if we liked. Or, narrowly, we could speak of original pollution. When we talk about total depravity, we are talking about how this pollution has pervaded all of our being. So, we are really talking about much the same thing. What does “total depravity” mean?

Now, some very good men do not understand total depravity. Let me read you a little statement by C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis is a very perceptive man, was a very perceptive man. He’s more perceptive now because he’s in the presence of the Lord. But, he was an unusual man, very unusual. He was an Oxford don in literature, one of the really great minds of our day. And, furthermore, he had a remarkable conversion. In the last years of his life, he had a remarkable ministry as an apology for Christianity, among the intellectuals. I recommend you read all of C.S. Lewis’ books. They are worthwhile.

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, he says this. “This chapter will have been misunderstood if anyone describes it as a reinstatement of the doctrine of total depravity. I disbelieve that doctrine, partly on the ground that if our depravity were total, we should not know ourselves to be depraved.” That’s a very acute comment. “If our depravity were total, we should not know ourselves to be depraved. And, partly, because experience shows us much goodness in human nature.” Now, that’s very clever. But that’s very wrong. And, furthermore, he demonstrates that he was an Oxford professor in literature and not in theology. Because, you see, he doesn’t understand what total depravity is. He’s seen the term. He’s heard people speak about it. And so, his idea of total depravity is that by total depravity we can do nothing good. And his comment would be correct. If it were true, we could do nothing good then how could we know that we would be totally depraved? And how could we explain that men do do things that are, so far as we can tell, good? His problem is he does not understand total depravity.

What does total depravity mean? Well, let me tell you what it does not mean, first and then tell you what it does mean. It does not mean that every man is as bad as he can be. I wouldn’t want to live in a society in which every man is as bad as he can be. It doesn’t mean that. Second, it doesn’t mean man has no knowledge of God’s will nor any conscience at all. It doesn’t mean that man has no knowledge of God’s will. It does not mean he does not have a conscience. God has actually implanted a conscience within all men, the Gentiles, in place of the Mosaic law. They did not have the Mosaic law, but they had a conscience. Paul teaches that in Romans, chapter 2. And third, it does not mean that man is incapable of disinterested affects and actions towards men, so far as we can tell. It does not mean a man cannot be benevolent. And, fourth, it does not mean that every man will commit every sin. That’s practically the same as every man is as bad as he can be, but those are the things that total depravity does not mean. So, when we use the term, let’s not use it in that sense. Otherwise, we’ll provoke a wise response like

C.S. Lewis’. And we shall lose our doctrine because we have not understood what the Bible really teaches upon that point.

What does it mean? Well, it means, first, that corruption touches every part of human nature. That is, it touches my mind, it touches my heart, it touches my will, it touches my affections. The whole of the man is involved. Not every part of the man in the sense that all of the man is altogether sin; that is, he’s as bad as he could be. But, sin has touched every facet of his being, has touched it. Second, that he does not do any spiritual good. That is, he does not possess any good in relation to God. Now, we read in John chapter 5 in verse 42, these words “But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves,” Jesus said. So, it means that corruption touches every part of human nature. It means that there is no spiritual good in man; that he does not do good in relation to God.

Let me give you an illustration. This is an illustration that H.A. Ironside used to give on total depravity. He said that he at one time heard Dr. Joseph Cooke, the great Boston lecturer of the last century; answer a question about total depravity in this way. He said he had in his home a very beautiful and valuable clock. It had an exceedingly handsome case, a very fine set of works, a nice appearing dial, and elegantly finished hands; it was altogether a good clock. But it had one fault. It wouldn’t keep time. It had been gone over by many different clock makers, but no one had been able to correct the fault. As a timepiece, it was totally depraved. The one thing that it should do, it did not do. And though it had many beautiful facets about it, lovely to look upon, it was depraved. And so, the man who may do good so far as men are concerned, nevertheless, in his inmost being is depraved, for he does not do with reference to God the things that he ought to do. And that corruption touches every part of the man. I think we can probably go so far as to say this, no, I cannot prove this and so you will just have to realize this is something that Johnson has thought up. It seems to me, too, that when we see men do great works of benevolence that we should remember that great works of

benevolence may also come from sinful motives. For example, a man may do a great work of benevolence in order to have men say, “Isn’t Mr. So and So a great man?” Now, I know this exists. And you know it exists, too.

Some years ago, a friend of mine was talking with one of the officials of Southern Methodist University, and it was the time when they were interested in building up their Sustentation Fund that comes around every year, so far as I know. Why, it’s a good thing to have an educational institution. But, this man, who was a leader in the University said this. He said, “You know, it’s an interesting thing, but we can get as much money as we want, providing we name the buildings that we build after the men. But it’s very difficult for us to get money for general fund. Because, you see, then there is no glory.”

And so often when you read, I’m not going to accuse anybody, but, often when you read of great works of benevolence, attached to them that such-and-such a building will be named in honor of So-and-So, you do not necessarily think that those are good works in the sight of God. They may arise from very poor motives. So, it seems to me, that total depravity may be true even in our most outstanding works or good works

Now, the proof of original sin. We have five minutes. Some of the theological arguments are related to some of the things that we’ve said. And I’ll just run down through them. We have the argument from the universality of sin. It is asserted, assumed, and proved that all men are sinners. The Bible addresses men as sinners. If they are not, then the Bible is not adapted to their needs. Experience and history confirm these things, that sin is universal. And, if sin is universal, it proceeds from the heart; therefore, the heart must be universally wicked. And so, original sin is a necessary implicate of the universality of sin. And then, the argument from universal depravity. Well, the extent and depth of our nature’s corruption is proved by its fruits and every type of sin; by its atheisms, by, especially, its universal rejection of Jesus Christ. And the very fact that there is a universal rejection of Jesus Christ is a reflection of the depravity of the human heart. It is incurable, of course.

Now, we can turn that around positively. We cannot only say that it is man’s depravity is universal in the negative sense; he’s always doing things bad. But, he’s never doing the things that he should do. Remember, Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, “If any man love not our Lord, Jesus Christ, let him be anathema Maranatha.” In other words, our responsibility is not only to not do the evil, our responsibility is to do the positive. And so, if we do not let him be anathema, under the curse. And Paul adds, “Maranatha.” The Lord is coming. That, you know, was the greeting that the early Christians reserved for one another. They greeted each other on the street, not by “Hi,” but by, “Maranatha! The Lord’s coming.”

I have a good friend. He’s a Bible teacher, a very fine Bible teacher. He said he was exhorting an audience at a Bible conference about six or seven years ago, and he was telling them that “We as Christians do not look for the Lord’s coming as we ought to.” He said, “The early Christians that was on their lips every day. The Lord’s coming. They greeted one another with Maranatha. Maranatha, the Lord’s coming.” So, he held the saints over the barbeque spit for a little while and the next morning he said he was going down to the dining room and others were going down. He said he overheard two women talking. One of them had spotted him coming. She was talking a little loud and he heard what she said. And she said, “There’s that preacher that spoke so bad to us last night about the Lord’s coming. She said, “Now you keep quiet. I’ll handle him this morning.” And so as he came up, she said, “Good morning, Mr. Straus. Marijuana.” [Laughter] Oh, laymen had a good laugh over that. So did I.

Third, the argument from sins early manifestation. Let’s look at a text. We have a minute. Psalm 58:3, I’ve been reading through the Bible a second time. That’s my good work. I tell you that every week. And, I’ve been marking out some of these little texts which have new significance for me since I’ve been studying anthropology over the last year or so. And, Psalm 58 in verse 3, notice, “The wicked are estranged from the womb;

These who speak lies go astray from birth.” From the womb, from birth. So, right from the beginning sin is manifested.

Fourth, the argument from the necessity of redemption. Now, you, obviously, know that argument. Men are blind, they are dead, they are obdurate, they must be saved. Even infants need regeneration, for they die. And if they die, what does that tell us about infants? That infants are under judgment and if they die they are under judgment, why are they under judgment? They are under judgment because of Adam’s sin; the same judgment you have. And so, if even infants who have not yet sinned by the breaking of a law, if even they must be saved, well, then it’s obvious that infants inherit a depraved nature. They are guilty of original sin, just like anyone else. Now, don’t worry. I think the Bible teaches the salvation of infants. But they are lost as long as they live. It’s in the moment of death that God reckons to them that they were not able to receive for themselves the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. He does that through his grace.

And, five, the argument from the universality of death. The fact that everybody dies is proof that everybody is under sin, under wrath, thus, under original sin. Where is the seat of original sin? Well, in Romans chapter 7, it says, “Sin that is in my members.”

Is it in the body? Well, not entirely in the body because the Bible also speaks of sins of the mind, sins of the heart. Is it in our sensuous nature only? No, I think that original sin is something that pervades the whole man; his soul and his body. It has sensuous characteristics, it has intellectual characteristics, it has emotional characteristics, it is something that touches us, all of us. We are totally depraved. All of our faculties are affected by sin.

I have D in my notes, but only C up there that’s why I am looking up there. I don’t tell you everything I know, by the way. [Laughter]

Now, we’ll just pass by Roman III by saying that the historical objections are the objections of the semi-Pelagians who did not accept original sin. And the Arminians; they

also accepted the semi-Pelagian position. They believed that we were affected by Adam’s sin. They admitted that we were involved but they denied total depravity. They denied the guilt of original sin and they denied the bondage of the will. The Arminians, in the 17th century, followed the semi-Pelagians of the 5th, 6th centuries. The philosophical objections are the same objections that are raised against all of these great doctrines of the Bible that imply God’s sovereignty. Like, it’s inconsistent with moral obligation. It would be if this were something imposed upon us by God. It’s not something imposed upon us by God. It’s something that we have imposed upon ourselves by our fall in Adam. So, our inability is self-imposed. They say it is inconsistent with the justice of God. But, we had a full and fair probation in Adam. And, as I said last time, I’m glad it was that way. Because, you see, by being in our representative man, Adam, we can be in our representative man, Jesus Christ.

It represents God as the author sin. No, God is the author of our essence. But he is not the author of that evil disposition which we have brought upon ourselves by our sin.

Well, it’s inconsistent with our free agency. No, it’s not inconsistent with our free agency. We’ll talk about that specifically next time.

Time’s up. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the truths of Scripture, for they tell us what we really are. And thus, as we see what we really are, we see reality. We are able to understand ourselves, and we are able to understand others. And in knowing what we are, we are more inclined to turn to Thee for deliverance. For what we see is not good. May the presence of the Holy Spirit go with us and be constantly cleansing us, guiding us, directing us into the love of God.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“The Effects of the Fall, or Original Sin in Man” by S. Lewis Johnson
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