

Lesson 46: Chapter 6: Paragraph 2-3: The Effects and Transmission of Sin

OUTLINE

Death through Sin
Sin throughout the human race

INTRODUCTION

Why do we die? Why do we sin? Why do we suffer? Because of the loss of loved ones; because of the horrible things we do to others and even ourselves; and because of the terrible suffering that we see and experience these are the questions that are forced out of every single one of our hearts in this life. Some like the Hindus see death and suffering as an illusion. Those who have an evolutionary worldview have to view death and suffering as natural and 'just there' with no hope of rescue and reversal. We are all living under the pressure of a broken condition in a broken world. Our hearts are crying out for relief, and we try to find temporary relief in so many worldly things. We come to the biblical answers to these questions as we come to chapter 6, paragraphs 2-3.

So far we have looked at the original condition and the Covenant of Works man was put in when in Eden. Then we looked at Genesis 3:1-7 to see the first sin. Then we dwelt on the definition of sin drilling down into the different paradigms, the difference between mortal and venial, and many of our desires as sinful and not neutral, highlighting the nature of sin as lawlessness; its deadliness and internal nature. We are now in a position to look at the effects of sin. Paragraph 2 focuses on the death that results as a punishment from sin, a death that afflicted Adam and Eve, and through them us. And paragraph 3 focuses on the transmission of sin, how we inherit the original sin and its consequences in Adam.

Death through sin

Para: 2: 'Our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them whereby death came upon all: all becoming dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.' Now firstly, we should note that the effects of sin have fallen upon the human race not through the federal headship of Adam and Eve, but just Adam, the teaching of the NT in places like Rom. 5:19 makes this clear, 'For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.' James Renihan in his commentary on the 1689 highlights that the WCF, the Savoy and the 1689 all emphasize Adam and Eve as the source of sin. The reason for this is not deny Adam's exclusive representative role over humanity but as push back against the Socinians. The Socinians revived the error of Pelagius that every person stands individually before God and is not represented by another. They denied that there was any imputation of Adam's sin, or nay pollution being passed down to all of mankind, but that every human being stood before God as if they were Adam and Eve. They only saw Adam's example, and a world where many had sinned before us as the effects of Adam's sin. They denied pollution and imputation, this stress on the physical parenthood of Adam and Eve was a way to underline the historical impact of the fall on all of the human race.

The confession lists three results from the first sin. The loss of original righteousness, you will remember that they were created good, and able to sin and able not to sin. They had an original righteousness that they would confirm through a probation and enter into a state of confirmed righteousness and be glorified. Whatever original righteousness they had was lost. The Socinians denied that this would have included an inclination towards the good. The Socinians wanted a neutral will in Adam and Eve, because they denied the noetic effects of the fall and wanted a neutral will in every person after the fall. For them to be inclined to the good would be as unfair as our view of the fallen humanity being inclined towards evil. This is an important point. If you have ever thought that maybe it is unfair that as fallen sinners we are born with a disadvantage because we are inclined towards evil, and that God would be unjust to punish our sin. Remember that Adam and Eve were inclined towards the good and were not neutral. In fact God is inclined towards the good and is perfectly free. We must be careful to impose a false standard on this question.

Secondly they lost their communion with God, this is what is recorded in Gen. 3:23-24, 'therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.' We are all born dead in sin and separate from God.

The main concern of the paragraph is to show how death came upon them, and through them to us all, 'and we in them whereby death came upon all: all becoming dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.' Theologically death is described as temporal—the loss of physical life, the delay of instant death and living in a fallen environment resulting in suffering in this life; spiritual—the impact of the punishments of sin upon us which include the imputation of original guilt, and the pollution of our natures inclining us towards sin; and eternal death—judgement of sin in the intermediate state upon dying, and then eternal punishment in the lake of fire after the judgement.

The 1689 is at pains to show the connection between the original sin and how it impacts all of us. Death is not natural, ageing is not natural, the living death full of suffering is not natural but part of God's curse upon sin, part of the punishment for sin poured out on Adam's original sin. Our desire for sin, our inability to do any thing perfectly good, a mind that contrives evil, a body subject to sickness, death and suffering. Here is the explanation; it is because of the original sin.

Sin throughout the human race

Para. 3: 'They being the root, and by God's appointment, standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of the sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation, being now conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, the servants of sin, the subjects of death, and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus set them free.'

What we are seeing here is how the two main branches of our sin problem, pollution and guilt flow from our connection to Adam. The confession talks about they being the root of humanity; that this arrangement is by God's appointment not by some self-evident pattern in nature; whereby they or more importantly

Adam was a representative for all mankind through whose actions we inherit imputed guilt and a corrupt human nature. We need to take some time to establish these ideas biblically. We have here something that is not self-evident but something that we believe because it is clearly taught in the bible.

The key text we need to consider is Romans 5:12-19, but especially 12-14. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.' In the context Paul is trying to ground the Christians assurance, he has listed several benefits the Christian has in Christ 5:1-11, now Paul looks at the mechanics of how this is all possible by comparing our union with Adam and how we receive death through his actions, and our union with Christ and how we receive life through His actions. Paul begins in these verses with Adam. Now we must note that this section is difficult, there are new ideas, and tight and awkward sequences of logic which can make it difficult to track with it.

Firstly, we need to pay attention to a few mechanical points as they relate to the shape of Paul's argument as we begin. Note that Paul begins with the word 'therefore' indicating to us that the next section is not unrelated but connected to the verses we have just looked. There are some that think Paul lost his train of thought and got caught up in an unimportant oddity in these verses, but rather we have outlined and will prove that this section is tightly bound to Paul's overall purpose in establishing our assurance. Secondly, Paul begins to point out a contrast, but in order to clarify his point, he breaks off from the contrast and it is only made clear later on in the section. You will notice that he begins with the words, 'just as...' now you would expect that shortly after his first statement you would have the appropriate follow up, 'likewise/even so/also.' But having made an important point that 'sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.' He feels that statement is open to misunderstanding so he adds v13-14 for clarification so that it is not misunderstood. Paul might have failed an exam for bad style, but we need to see that he is making his argument serve his purpose, that we might understand. It have read something like this, 'just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned; so righteousness came into the world through one man, and life through righteousness, for life will spread to all in Him for they are all righteous in Him.' In this way Paul would have been drawing out a comparison between Adam and Christ showing us how each one was alternately responsible for death and life, sin and righteousness. However, Paul first statement is so controversial and unexpected, so different to what we would normally expect that he has to clarify it for his readers, and we are glad he did. So if you find yourself reading this and getting a little lost in the logical sequences, now you can see why.

Firstly, notice that Paul bases his argument on the premise of a real and historical Adam. There are those who believe that it does not matter if you believe Genesis 1-3 or not, or whether there was an historical Adam or not. What we need to stress here is that Paul took the historical person of Adam seriously. Paul was not an evolutionist who believed that the person of Adam was merely a myth or a fable where animals can talk to teach us some basic

truths. No Paul believed in the historical reality of Adam. This is not a luxury but a necessity for the Christian.

Secondly, Paul takes seriously the narrative of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are tempted by satan and fall into sin. Paul makes the statement 'sin came into the world,' what does he mean by this statement? What is the origin of sin? God did not make sin, He is not the author of sin. We have already spoken about how satan fell, tempted man and so sin entered into the world.

Paul makes the connection between sin and death. We die because of sin, more specifically Paul says, 'death spread to all men because all sinned.' Now here is where the controversy begins to come into it. There have been different views with regard to how sin and death are related. We are not going to engage with those views that think that death was a part of the universe and evolution is the only reality we need to grasp. No this is not what the Bible teaches us, God made all things good and death came into the world through sin. There have been various ways in which Christians have attempted to relate sin to death, and in particular how we understand the statement, 'death spread to all men because all sinned.'

Pelagius a 4th Century British Monk denied that there was any relationship between Adam and our sin and death. He taught that Adam was created neither good nor bad, but neutral, this was to preserve a particular notion of free will. He taught that there was no such thing as original sin, that there was no pollution to our natures, and that we do not inherit Adam's criminal record. To Pelagius sin is not a condition but actions. And whenever a person sinned, his/her nature was left unaffected, they resorted to their neutral position unchanged by their actions once they had been committed. Pelagius claimed that a person can perfectly keep God's law. And when he needed to explain why everybody sinned he claimed that we have all followed a bad example, and this for him is the only way sin is passed from one generation to another. If we were to put it in terms of the nature versus nurture debate today, he would say that our sins are all because of nurture. This of course implies that we do not need to be born again, or receive the inward work of the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. Pelagius's teachings were condemned by the church in the Council of Carthage in 418, and the Council of Ephesus in 431. And if Pelagius were to interpret 5:12 he would have to say that we die for our own sins not for Adams'.

John Murray lists four reasons why Pelagius is wrong: Firstly, there are many historical examples of people who have died without sinning, in particular we need to think of the many babies that die in the womb. We need to give an account of this reality from Paul's words in Romans 5:12. Secondly, Paul goes on in v13-14 to argue that there are those who sinned, but NOT like Adam yet died. Thirdly, 5 times in this section Paul emphasizes how it is through 'one man,' 'one man's trespass,' and 'one trespass,' making it impossible that Paul is thinking about every individual who dies dying for their own sins when he explicitly links it to Adam's actions. Fourthly, if we say that we all die individually for our individual sins, then the contrast that Paul is trying to construct falls apart for then we would have to argue that likewise we are all saved by our own individual righteousness. However, Paul is showing us that we are condemned by another's sins, just as we are saved by another's righteousness.

I will skip over the discussions of mediate or immediate imputation, and the realist conceptions of original sin.

We come now then to what Paul is actually trying to tell us. We sinned when Adam sinned, and died when Adam died, because he was representing us and his actions were imputed to us. Now Paul had made this simple statement in v12, 'so death spread to all men because all sinned--.' However, knowing that there would be those who would not get his full meaning he breaks into his own comparison and clarifies what he means. Paul is not unaware of the difficulty of this teaching and he anticipates how it could be misunderstood, so he adds v13-14, 'for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.' Paul uses the time between Adam and Moses, a time when there was no clear law from God like what we have in the Garden and the 10 Commandments, that is no clear law with a death penalty attached apart from the death penalty for murder in Genesis 9. Yet he points out, although there is a lack of laws carrying the death penalty, everybody dies. He is telling us that the reason everybody dies is because they had already sinned and died in Adam. He is using this simple argument to show that we should not be thinking as we ordinarily would when it comes to being responsible for sin, that we are all accountable for our own actions, Paul is demonstrating something different. He is talking about guilt that comes through the actions of another.

He points out at the end of v14 that the way in which we sinned and died in Adam is the basis upon which we are to understand our being saved in Christ. He points out that Adam is a type for Christ, that is he demonstrates certain principles about how we are saved in Christ. Now please remember that I told you we are going to be confronted with strange and alien ideas that our natural fallen minds will want to reject, we have already noted the problem of God allowing sin, the reality of a historical Adam, now we are looking at the difficult teaching of the imputation of Adam's guilt. And not only the imputation of Adam's guilt, but also the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

God has chosen to deal with the human race through representatives, 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 'For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.' Also 1 Cor. 15:47-49, 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.' This may be an alien concept to you, but it is not without precedent in our experience. For example, if we think about an ambassador, he is one man who represents a nation. Or if we think about a nation signing a treaty of surrender, when Japan surrendered in WWII, the emperor signed the surrender. Likewise, God in His wisdom has set over us legal heads, and only two who can save or damn us in Adam and Christ. Many in our day resent being represented by another, we live in an age where we hate our politicians who represent us and spare them no criticism when it comes to criticising their policies and actions on our behalf. So we find it hard to recognise that God has chosen to save and damn us through these covenantal heads. Perhaps some of you would like to think that if you had been Adam you would not have sinned. Let me suggest to that the method God designed is better and wiser than any other possible scenario than you can think of. You might think that a universe without a devil, or the fall, or each person representing themselves would be better. Forgive me I don't think that you are cleverer than

God and gladly submit to His ways even though I struggle to comprehend them. Let me end with one closing thought. If you do not like the fact that God has caused the fall of the human race in Adam, then by the same token you must not like Him saving us in Adam. For just as He has caused us to be guilty and die through the first Adam, He has caused those who have believed to be made righteous and alive through the Last Adam. Without this principle of representation you would not be righteous by another's righteousness, and salvation would have to be of your own making. I hope you can see and rejoice in the wisdom of God, and wonder at His ways as you behold them.