

mean? According to proponents of original sin and total depravity, an infant is a guilty sinner. Surely the Apostle would not be encouraging his brethren to be evil. The obvious meaning is that Paul wanted the brethren to be free from evil, as an infant is free from sin.

In consideration of the Scripture's view of the innocence of infants, it is no wonder that the conversion process is likened to a new birth. Consider **John 3:5**: *“Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* Therefore, if Scripture compels us to return to our infant-like innocence, we must necessarily assume that infants are indeed innocent before God and have not inherited sin or guilt.

All Men Go through a Process of Straying

The scriptures show that all eventually stray from their infantile innocence. **Ecclesiastes 7:29** reads, *“Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”* Mankind begins upright, i.e., in good standing before God, but is later pulled away by sin. Isaiah says to Israel, *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).* You cannot be separated from something that you were not joined to in the first place, in the context this was not just a general condemnation on mankind from the fall but was a specific plea to the Israelites of his day. Paul writes in **Romans 7:9**, *“I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.”* Just two chapters after Paul supposedly taught original sin, he refers to the fact that he was once alive without the law, but when sin came, he died spiritually and was now in debt to Christ for

salvation. If man was created upright and later separated from God, he must have been unified with Him at one point.

The doctrine of inherited sin and guilt cannot be meshed in with these passages without doing violence to their context and meaning.

Conclusion

The doctrine of original sin and total depravity come into conflict with many scriptures that explicitly and implicitly affirm that babies are innocent before God, and cannot make moral decisions between good and evil. This is consistent with God's just and holy character, who will only bring into judgment those who can discern between good and evil and understand what it means to come to Christ. It would be reasonable and necessary to infer that humans with severe mental disabilities that prevent them from this knowledge and decision-making are also unaccountable to God due to their child-like state. Thanks be to God for His justice and goodness!

- Mitchell Rutherford



If you would like to know what it means to be a Christian, please enrol in our online courses at seekingtruth.life.

Presented by:



Are Babies Born Sinners?



The doctrine typically termed in the religious world “original sin” has influenced the majority of Christendom today. The doctrine states that the sin of Adam is passed down to mankind through procreation. Mankind, therefore, inherits the moral guilt of sin from birth. Many add to this the doctrine of “total depravity”: the belief that not only do we inherit sin, but we also have a total inability to do good from birth. The implication is that infants, as soon as they are conceived, are wicked, morally corrupted sinners. Many of this persuasion have adopted the tongue-in cheek phrase “vipers in diapers” to refer to the wickedness of infants.

The History of Original Sin and Total Depravity

Original sin was unknown to early Christian writers. Early Second-century apologist Aristides of Athens (C. 124-125 AD) wrote, “*And when a child has been born to one of them [Christians], they give thanks to God; and if moreover it happens to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins.*” Centuries later, the theologian Augustine of Hippo popularised the doctrine of original sin (5th century). Augustine was incredibly influential, and the doctrine became mainstream in the Western Roman Empire. From here, it would become an inseparable part of the doctrinal teaching of the Roman Catholic church. A millennia later, the influential John Calvin, a Swiss reformer, developed the doctrine of total depravity from Augustine’s teaching. Consequently, the doctrine is now mainstream in many denominations today.

It may be shocking to know many people think babies are sinners. While it may be difficult for us to process that an infant could be a sinner, we must not rely heavily on the emotional argument, but consider what the scriptures have to say about this matter.

Infants Inherit Death, not Sin

In the first few chapters of Genesis, one is taken on

a wild rollercoaster. The world begins “very good,” and man begins his existence in a perfect paradise. Things quickly go wrong, however, when Adam and Eve decide to partake of the fruit of the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, a fruit that God had forbidden them to eat (**Genesis 3:3**). Creation is cursed, and death enters the world. God’s chilling words to Adam remain the fate every human must face today: “*For dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (v. 19).

The original sin committed in Eden had immense implications for the whole world. We all face its consequences, but do we inherit the sin and guilt of Adam and Eve? **Romans 5** is often used as a proof text for the doctrine. However, upon careful reading, all it reveals is that Adam introduced death into the world through sin. Anyone can suffer from the consequence of sin, even if it is not their own (E.g., a drunk driver hits someone who is perfectly innocent, but the innocent party suffers). We suffer the consequences of Adam’s sin through death, though we did not commit nor are we held accountable for Adam’s sin. Any interpretation of **Romans 5** cannot come into conflict with other clearly stated biblical teachings. Here are three of those teachings...

The Innocence of Infants

At the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy, we have a generation of Israelites who were not permitted to enter the promised land because of their constant rebellion against God. The Israelites thought their children would be prey to the same fate. Moses says otherwise, “*Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them, I will give it, and they shall possess it*” (**Deuteronomy 1:39**). God was not going to punish those children, because at that point they did not have a knowledge of good and evil. The phrase “*knowledge of good and evil*” is the exact phrase used to refer to the tree in the Garden of Eden. They were, therefore, innocent before God,

just as Adam and Eve had no knowledge of good and evil before partaking of the forbidden fruit.

The prophet Ezekiel has much to say about our responsibility for personal sin. **Ezekiel 28:15 reads**, “*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.*” Earlier in Ezekiel, we have the prophet explaining God’s justice: “*The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*” (**Ezekiel 18:20**). Each person is responsible for their own sins; no one bears the guilt of the sins of their fathers. To gel the doctrine of original sin with this passage is to fit a square block in a round hole – it is impossible! If a child has no knowledge of good and evil and cannot inherit the sins of their parents, then we cannot inherit Adam’s guilt.

God compels us to Return to our Childlike Innocence through Christ

In scripture, there are many places where we are encouraged to return to our original innocent condition. If scripture teaches that children bear the guilt of the original sin, we must conclude that there are serious contradictions in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. **Matthew 18:3** reads, “*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” The Lord makes this comment in a discussion about rank in the Kingdom of Heaven; he is talking about the humbleness involved in conversion. We must become like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This implies that little children have certain attributes that enable them to be automatically justified before God. The Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian church, “*in malice be babes*” or in some translations (NASB 1995, ESV), “*in evil, be infants.*” (**1 Cor. 14:20**). What does this