

Adam, Eve, and Original Sin

By Jane Titrud

People who move in Christian circles are generally familiar with the Biblical story of man's Fall into sin. Familiarity, however, does not mean that all "Christians" share a common understanding and belief when it comes to the principle of original sin. Part of the problem is that there has been an influx of worldly ideas into the Church. Acceptance of the theory of evolution, for instance, has led many to relegate the Biblical accounts of Creation and the Fall to the realm of myth. The concept of original sin is thereby undermined in that it is rendered meaningless without a literal Adam. When people see death as a driving force of evolution and a completely natural occurrence, they also tend to disregard the truth that death is a consequence of sin. The field of counseling psychology likewise challenges true Biblical understanding in this case by portraying people as basically good and redefining human failure in terms of "sickness" rather than sin.

The truth of Genesis is important to the subject of original sin because the foundational information necessary for understanding in this case is basically found in Genesis. Certain other Old Testament passages, such as Jeremiah 17:9, hint at the common existence of a corrupt sin nature in the inner man as well. It is just that the formulation of specific doctrine with respect to original sin being a spiritual condition that requires salvation by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ had to wait until the New Testament. That is because the revelation of Christ and the work of Christ play a role in explaining it.

The passage that specifically teaches on original sin is Romans 5:12–21. Some of this is a bit obscure and subject to disagreement, but the most important aspects of the passage will be covered here. Verse 12 says that "*through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (NASB). The one man, of course, is Adam, and the fact that sin and death entered the world through this one man has to do with his disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden. Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, and the result was just what God said it would be—namely, death (Genesis 2:17). Physical death did not happen until later, but spiritual death or separation from God was immediate. The question is how did "*death spread to all men*" and what is the meaning of "*all sinned*"? These matters will be addressed shortly.

Verse 14 describes Adam as "*a type of Him who was to come,*" namely, Christ, and subsequent verses help to clarify what this means. But first note the following verses: "*by the transgression of the one the many died*" (v. 15b), "*the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation*" (v. 16b), "*by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one*" (v. 17a), "*through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men*" (v. 18a), and "*through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners*" (v. 19a). These phrases consistently show that Adam held a unique relationship with all of mankind. What he did affected all. Death, judgment, condemnation, and even the fact that men were generally made sinners came as the result of this one man's sin and somehow "*because all sinned*" (v. 12). This situation, moreover, has left mankind in need of God's salvation, for no one is able to escape the resulting condemnation apart from His saving grace. Within the same context, much of the passage therefore draws a parallel, albeit a negative one, between the adverse effects of Adam's sin and the results of the one righteous act of Christ (vv. 15–21), which brought salvation. This correlation, in turn, shows how Adam was a "type" of Christ. Note especially verse 18: "*So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of*

righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” The negative correspondence here shows that Christ’s one act of righteousness worked to undo the condemning aspect of original sin. Similar correlations exist in the other passages cited as well.

It is important to understand, however, that original sin is different from the personal transgressions we all commit. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make statements to the effect that there is no one who does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalms 14:2-3; Romans 3:23). Yet, these statements have to do with personal acts of sin or “sins” (plural). “Sin,” “the principle of sin,” or “original sin” (sin-gular), by contrast, has to do with an underlying, inner propensity to commit such acts that stems from the fall and the relationship Adam held in connection with all of humanity from the beginning.

A corrupt sin nature exists in all of us and leads to the virtual inevitability of committing sins. Romans 7:14–23 describes how this underlying sin nature even results in a form of bondage: *“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.”*

Yet, how is it that one act of sin by the first man came to be the basis for the sinfulness of the rest of humanity? Moreover, how is it that *“death spread to all men, because all sinned”* (Romans 5:12)? Since the excerpts from verses 15–19 quoted earlier consistently associate the sin of Adam with the sin of all, surely this is part of the answer.

Some say that we were all present “in Adam” in seminal form from the beginning. His sin was therefore our sin, and all thereby share his guilt because we “all sinned” by being “in Adam” from the beginning. From the point of Adam’s original sin, a sin nature or propensity to sin was then transmitted to all of mankind by means of a natural line of descent from our original ancestor.

Yet, an opposing view says that Adam held a form of federal or representative headship over all mankind such that when he sinned, he acted on behalf of everyone else who would ever exist. In other words, when he sinned *“all sinned”* — because all were “in Adam” via his representation (Roman 5:12). In this view, the consequences of sin and death thereby fell to everyone just as they fell to Adam. Adam’s personal guilt, however, did not. Guilt is acquired as each one commits his or her own individual acts of sin. These then are two main ways of explaining the phrase *“all sinned.”*

Differences of opinion in this matter have become defining factors in some major schools of theology, which is another reason why there is no general agreement over the exact nature of “original sin.” Nevertheless, the question of how original sin has come to affect all of mankind is a fair one that deserves careful consideration.

Looking at the issue from a different perspective may well shed new light on this subject. So far, this article has focused on Adam and his relationship to original sin. It is time now to change course and consider the situation with respect to Eve. In other words, how did Adam’s sin relate to Eve—or did it?

In Genesis 1:26-27, we are told that when God created man in His image, He created them male and female. That is to say, the woman was created as part of mankind from the beginning and should be considered as such. In chapter 2, which gives a more detailed account of human creation, we learn that Eve was even made from the flesh of the man (Genesis 2:21–23). A very real physical connection, therefore, existed between the two of them from the onset. At the same time, she was obviously not Adam’s descendant.

In Genesis 2, we also learn that God made a covenant with Adam alone before the creation of Eve (vv. 15–18). This covenant included a warning for him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of

the knowledge of good and evil or he would surely die (Genesis 2:16-17). It mentions nothing about whether this restriction would apply to Eve, however, since she was not party to God originally giving this covenant to Adam. She did not even exist at the time.

In Genesis 3:2-3, Eve states the terms of this covenant to the serpent, so we know that she knew about it then. Still, there is no direct indication in Scripture that God reiterated the same covenant He made with Adam to her. The fact that she knew about it does not necessarily mean that God extended the covenant to include her either. It is possible—even likely—that Adam merely passed this information along to Eve himself. And yet, the fact is that she died. She is obviously not living with us today. Merely keep this fact in mind for now as the basis for her death still needs to be determined.

The continuing storyline of Genesis reveals that Eve was tempted by the serpent, ate some of the forbidden fruit, and then gave some to her husband with her (v. 6). Thus, one might be tempted to think that sin and death ultimately entered the world through Eve rather than Adam. Yet, we have already seen that the Bible says the opposite (Romans 5:12). One can also observe that it was only after both had eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they became aware of their nakedness and grew fearful. That is, the Fall required the involvement of Adam.

Keeping this information in mind, it is time to consider the New Testament. Specifically, these facts will now be compared with what one finds in Romans 5:12–21.

As mentioned previously, Paul referred to Adam in Romans 5:14 as “*a type of Him who was to come,*” that is, Christ. A “type” is a historical fact that illustrates a spiritual truth. Types are generally found in the Old Testament but not revealed until the New Testament when they become fulfilled. Here again is another reason why specific doctrine relating to original sin had to await the coming and work of Jesus Christ. The explanation required the fulfillment of the typology pertaining to Christ.

Let us look again at verse 18: “*as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.*” Notice that “one” relates to “one,” and “all” relates to “all.” This defines the nature of the type. The results of each one’s action affected all of humanity in a negative, or positive, but correlating way. Any theory concerning the relationship between Adam and all of mankind in the matter of original sin, therefore, must include Eve, for she was certainly part of the “all” of corporate humanity. She, like Adam, is even our common ancestor.

Based on Romans 5:12–21, therefore, it would seem the most reasonable to conclude that Eve came under the condemnation of sin, died spiritually (the same as Adam), and eventually died physically because of her relationship via creation to Adam, rather than her personal act of disobedience. For if one were to say that the condemnation of sin and death came unto Eve because of her own transgression, then her situation would negate several of the statements in Romans 5. Condemnation and death would then not have come to “*the many*” (v. 15) or especially to “*all*” (v. 18) through the “*one*” [transgression of Adam]. Eve would be the exception. The typology between Adam and Christ would likewise be irrelevant in the case of Eve because her act of sin was independent of Adam’s. Indeed, her sin came first. In addition, the results of the work of Christ would then correspondingly fail to parallel and undo the negative effects caused by Eve’s transgression for she was not a type of Christ. Most of the statements in the passage of Romans 5:12–21 would thus break down. Furthermore, if one were to think in terms of original sin passing from one generation to another by way of heredity through Eve’s sin as well as Adam’s, then there would be two lines of descent to consider with

respect to original sin, not just one. Her relationship to this situation might seem to even negate God's entire plan of salvation since Eve too was an original ancestor of all. But of course, this is ridiculous and so is the scenario of her coming under condemnation for her own sin.

The idea of natural descent is problematic in the case of Eve in yet another way as well. The sin nature could not have transferred from Adam to Eve via natural descent, for she was not a descendant of Adam. She was supernaturally created from his flesh and created *before* Adam sinned (Genesis 2:21–24).

Since she was related by flesh to Adam, however, this gives one a valid reason to think that she died both spiritually and physically by coming under judgment for the sin of Adam through a form of federal or representative headship. This would put Eve's relationship to original sin in the same category as everyone else's. The typology between Adam and Christ would thus apply, and so would God's plan of salvation. Perhaps she was even created subsequent to Adam and from his flesh primarily for this purpose—to be included in God's plan of salvation.

We do not know whether Eve believed God in the sense that she was saved or not. What we do know, however, is that one righteous act of Christ achieved justification of life for “*all men*” (Romans 5:18). This truth just needs to be appropriated by faith. Since a federal or representative headship of Adam would have included Eve, she would thus have had at least the potential to be saved. And this would not have been so if she had died based upon condemnation for her own transgression.

The case of Eve would thus seem to supply a basis for proper understanding. The idea that Adam held a form of representative or federal headship over mankind from the beginning would seem to be the only option that fits the situation with respect to Eve. And realizing that God orchestrated His plan of salvation from the beginning to include all who would believe is indeed a blessing. It speaks of God's wisdom and foreknowledge as well as His mercy and love for all mankind.

Finally, the work of Christ not only resulted in justification for both sins and sin. If that were the end of it, then people in general would still be left in bondage to the principle of sin. When a person believes in Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior, however, he or she becomes a new creation in Christ, receives eternal life, and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then enables the believer to live apart from the bondage of sin and to walk in newness of life (Romans 8:1–4, 12–14). The sin nature still remains within, but one no longer has to obey it. The work of Christ in relation to original sin is, consequently, both sufficient and complete when it comes to salvation. And to this I say, Amen! And Praise God!