

“Original Sin”

So far we have seen what our beloved fathers describe concerning what was lost by sin. Sometimes they speak about what is “inherited” instead of what is lost. You will notice, that so far, we have not used the term “original sin” because this was a very late concept developed in Latin theology from the term, *originalis peccatum*. This was primarily understood (or misunderstood) from the Latin reading of Romans 5:12. The original Greek reading of the verse-- “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because (ἐφ’ ᾧ) all sinned.”-- the term ἐφ’ ᾧ is to be understood as “for the reason that,” “since” or “because” all sinned. So the East understood this as inheriting mortality as a consequence of Adam and Eve’s transgression, but NOT inheriting guilt. However, the Latin translated the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ as *in quo*, or “in whom all sinned.” This implied that all humanity sinned in Adam, or in Adam’s sin.¹

This contributed to many confusing debates, and incorrect conclusions which brought about a great divide between East and West, still prevalent today. To make things even more confusing, many Anglicans, Methodists, Adventists and others have adjusted their teachings on “original sin,” to distinguish themselves from Augustinian or Calvinist teachings. Even some Catholic thinkers, in light of Scriptural and patristic research, have interpreted and reinterpreted original sin in different ways today. What is important for us, however, is to clarify and summarize what we do not ascribe to related to this concept. This list is by no means comprehensive.

1. We did not inherit the personal sin of Adam and Eve.

We have inherited “a fallen state” or “corrupted nature” from Adam, but we are not personally responsible for the sin of Adam, for it is not ours. But what we inherit is the universal condition of sin, separation, death, corruption, etc. As stated above, Adam's sin produced a “corruption” or “fallen state” of human nature, but did not transmit to us his actual, personal sin.

St. Cyril of Alexandria explains in his commentary on John 9, the healing of the man born blind, that God does not punish someone for another’s sin. God’s declaration in “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation” (Ex 34:5-7) is best understood through the story of Ahab in which God reserves punishment until the third and fourth generations, but only where each generation is itself guilty of sin.² For God declares to us very clearly in Ezekiel that “the soul who sins, he shall die...[while the] man who is righteous, he will surely shall live!” (Ez 18:4, 9). Thus, each one bears his own iniquity and cannot be punished for the sins of others.

2. We did not inherit the personal guilt or culpability of Adam and Eve.

Based on the Latin reading of Romans 5:12, St. Augustine taught that both Adam’s sin and guilt are imputed to us and that everyone is *guilty* of Adam’s sin and actually took part in the sin of Adam and Eve. This inherited culpability is the central point of the Latin doctrine. This

¹ A few Latin readers like Julian of Eclanum who knew Greek preferred to translate ἐφ’ ᾧ instead with *quia*, “because,” such that all died “because” of sin, all sinned. Weaver, I, p. 203.

² See Daniel Keating, *Divine Life, 111-112; citing In Jo. 9:2-3* (Pusey, ii. 146-148).

interpretation seems to begin with St. Augustine, who asserted that all of humanity is guilty for Adam's sin, because we were one with him in that choice.³ This "creationist view of sin's transmission" is based on the inaccurate translation of Romans 5:12.⁴

These concepts had deep roots in the West during the time of the Reformation in writers such as John Calvin, creating a great divide between East and West in the theology of the consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, as well as salvation and the Mysteries. Western writers claimed that children are guilty for the sins of their parents and that unbaptized infants suffer the fate of hell due to Adam's sin, but their suffering is mild in comparison.⁵

Yet the Eastern Fathers unanimously reject this notion of collective guilt. While St. Cyril of Alexandria says that "Adam's guilt afflicted the whole of human nature" he understands that we are not to be held responsible for the personal guilt of Adam.

What has Adam's guilt to do with us? Why are we held responsible for his sin when we were not even born when he committed it? Did not God say, "*The parents will not die for the children, nor the children for parents, but the soul which had sinned, it shall die*" (Ez. 18:20)? How then shall we defend this doctrine? The soul, I say, which had sinned, it shall die. We have become sinners because of Adam's disobedience in the following manner.... After he fell into sin and surrendered to **corruption**, impure **lusts** invaded the nature of his flesh, and at the same time the evil law of our members was born. For our nature contracted **the disease of sin** because of the **disobedience** of one man, that is Adam, and thus many became sinners. **This was not because they sinned along with Adam, because they did not then exist, but because they had the same nature as Adam**, which fell under the law of sin. Thus, just as human nature acquired the weakness of corruption in Adam because of disobedience, and evil desires invaded it, so the same nature was later set free by Christ, who was obedient to God the Father and did not commit sin.⁶

3. We don't inherit sin as a bodily element or a physical object.

This is the main misunderstanding of many Western writers which creates much confusion. One of the first to confuse these concepts and develop the doctrine of original sin in the West was **Tertullian**. He is the first to suggest that Adam's condemnation, mortality, and fallen (or corrupt) nature are transmitted from parent to child through the soul. He believed the soul was created by both parents (not directly by God) and so the child inherits a "second nature" from Adam that causes him to sin.⁷

Sin has no nature (*physis*) in itself that makes it inheritable, but it is a state or operation. When Manichaeus taught such heresy, St. Athanasius responded:

[Manichaeus] impiously asserts sin to be the nature, not the operation...from disobedience to God's commandment, man became receptive of the seed sown by the enemy, and thenceforward sin was active in

³ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 2.15.

⁴ St. Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sin and on the Baptism of Infants*, II.11, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.xvi.vi.html>; see also commentary Abrosiaster cited in David Weaver, "From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian ExegesisI" part 1: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27:3 (1983): 187-206, 200, and N.P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London: Longmans, 1927) 307.

⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 363, 46.

⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanation of the Letter to the Romans* (PG 74:788-9), trans. Gerald Lewis Bray, Thomas C. Oden, *Romans* AACCS, pp 142-143.

⁷ "The evil that exists in the soul...is antecedent, being derived from the fault of our origin [ex origine vitio] and having become, in a way, natural to us. For, as I have stated, the corrupted nature is a second nature [*alia natura*]." Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 19, 39:41, 41:11.

man's nature, in the direction of every appetite: not that the devil had fashioned a nature in him, God forbid! For the devil could not be a maker of a nature, as Manicheans impiously think: but he out of a transgression produced a perversion of nature, and thus it was that death reigned over all men.⁸

In his writing *Against the Heathen*, St. Athanasius also explains that sin cannot be inherited because sin has no "substantial existence":

In the beginning wickedness did not exist. Nor indeed does it exist even now in those who are holy, nor does it in any way belong to their nature. But men later on began to contrive it and to elaborate it to their own hurt...The truth of the Church's theology must be manifest: that evil has not from the beginning been with God or in God, nor has any substantive existence; but that men, in default of the vision of good, began to devise and imagine for themselves what was not, after their own pleasure.⁹

As St. Severus of Antioch explains:

The sin of those who engendered us, viz. the sin of Adam and Eve, is not naturally (*kata physin*) mixed with our substance (*ousia*), as the evil and impious opinion of the Messalians, in other words the Manichees, claims, but because they (Adam and Eve) had lost the grace of immortality the judgment and the sentence reach down to us, when, following a natural disposition. we are born mortal insofar as [we are born] of mortal parents. but not sinners insofar as we are of sinful parents. For it is not true that sin is a nature (*physis*) and that it naturally passes from parents to their children."¹⁰

As mentioned above, sin is an action, an activity which led to a status of sinfulness and disobedience. For example, if a man becomes a thief and begets a son, his son does not inherit his sin of stealing from the father. He may be born in the state of poverty, but not in an act. He may decide also to become a thief, in following his father, but it is not a physical thing or object that can be inherited.

Therefore, Holy Baptism doesn't "wash away" original sin as an object, but provides for us a new status, relationship, and renewal of the image of God affected by sin. This includes the grace of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the restoration of the image as explained by St. Cyril of Alexandria. As we read above, St. Cyril explains how through the sin of Adam, the penalty of corruption and death was "transmitted to the whole race." It is the penalty, but not the guilt or actual sin itself.

4. We did not inherit a loss of free will.

According to St. Athanasius, humanity is not naturally sinful, but according to nature, is corruptible and mortal.¹¹ St. John Chrysostom explains how we never lose our free will but still keep our choice to follow Him.

What then? Does nothing depend on God. All depends indeed on God, but not so that our free-will is hindered. One might say 'if then it depends on God, why does He blame us?' This is why I said 'so that our free will is not hindered.' So, it depends on us, and on Him. For we must first choose the good, and then He

⁸ St. Athanasius, *Two Books Against Apollinaris*, 8-9.

⁹ St. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, 2, 7.

¹⁰ R. Draguet, *Julien d'Halicarnasse et sa controverse avec Sévère d'Antioche sur l'incorruptibilité du corps du Christ* (Louvain: Imprimerie P. Smeesters, 1924), pp. 130-131; quoted in: John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Orthodox Thought*, p 227.

¹¹ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4.

leads us to His own. He does not anticipate our choice, lest our free will should be outraged. But when we have chosen, then great is the assistance He brings to us.¹²

However, our free will became enslaved in the law of sin. St. Paul expressed this struggle in Romans 7:

"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Ro 7:15–25).

So man has free will, but because of the law of sin he is unable to live a life of holiness without the grace of God. So, he is under the law of sin as one sitting in prison who would like to leave, but is unable.

5. We did not completely lose our value as the image of God after sin.

As St. Athanasius and St. Cyril explain, after the Fall, the image of God was tarnished and the imprint or seal of the Holy Spirit lost its clarity. However, we did not completely lose all value. For John Calvin related the concept of original sin to his teaching of “total depravity” in which no value is left for the human nature and salvation is left by “faith alone” and by “grace.” Minimizing or overlooking of the role of the person’s work, including repentance, service, and participating in the life of the Church and Her Mysteries, is obviously problematic.

6. Sin that leads to destruction.

2 Pe 1:4-11

"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord" (2 Pe 2:4–11).

¹² St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Homily 12.5.

Active punishment of God to demonstrate how sin leads to destruction. He actively destroyed it in order to teach us that there is destruction here that is from God. God interferes to show, to warn, to guide humanity about the dangers involved here. He also sends Jonah to Nineveh to warn them.

“In the Loins of Abraham”

Being born in a status of sin enables us to commit sin as we pray in the Litany of the Departed, “For no one is pure and without blemish even though his life on earth be a single day.” He is in a sinful nature even though he did not commit sin. Here, St. Paul speaks about how we are called sinners, and because of this we commit sin.

St. Athanasius speaks about how humanity enters from sin to sin, and continue in death as humanity inventing sins (Romans 1). When the law of sin enters and controls the person, even if they wish to do good and cannot.

“Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” (Heb 7:9-10)

1. context of ch. 7 and letter of St. Paul to Hebrews was speaking about how OT is shadow of the NT in general. He is comparing the priesthood of Christ is superior than the priesthood of Levi, not about original sin. He didn't use this examples in Romans, and none of the fathers use this example (St. Athanasius, St Cyril) until the 13th century. it was a very late interpretation. He took Melchizedek as type of the priesthood of Christ, and Abraham represents the Levitical priesthood. Whoever gives the tithe is lower. So he considered that since Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, that the ... so did St. Paul mean this literally or symbolically? If literally, Christ who came from the tribe of Judah was also in the loin of Abraham.
2. Second, if we take it literally, when we apply Adam's sin. St. Paul didn't use this example in Romans 5 when speaking of the sin....used in a different context.
3. Then we are also in the loins of our fathers and grandfathers, so would be guilty for their sin as well. If we commit sin b/c we are in the loins, then why don't we also? St. Paul uses this to see how unique sin led to us...but here using for link... Levi and Judah also in the loins of Abraham, so then humanity also in the loins of Abraham so why not to apply it in this case.
4. St. Paul spoke about Adam and Second Adam. If we take it literally that we sinned in Adam, then we would also be victorious in Christ literally. He represents humanity, but we are not born in Bethlehem and crucified on Golgotha literally. So we say humanity fell but not actual. As in 1 Cor. 15:22-23, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.” So this is understood symbolically. Or else we would have died thousands of years ago, and we would already be raised.