

Commentary on Article 2: The Sinfulness of Man



Adam Harwood, Ph.D.

Adam Harwood is Associate Professor of Theology, occupying the McFarland Chair of Theology; Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry; Editor, Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Article Two: The Sinfulness of Man

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will or rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned. While no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, we deny that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15–24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5; 7:15–16; 53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9; 31:29–30; Ezekiel 18:19–20; Matthew 7:21–23; Romans 1:18–32; 3:9–18; 5:12; 6:23; 7:9; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 6:9–10; 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27–28; Revelation 20:11–15

Southern Baptists affirm that Adam's single act of disobedience in the Garden was an egregious rebellion against a holy God. His judgment against sin is visible throughout the Old Testament atonement motif, culminates at the Cross of Christ, and will be fully realized at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Questions concerning Article 2 of the Traditional Statement (TS) are justified because one's doctrine of sin informs one's doctrine of salvation. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to die in order to offer Himself as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Any rejection of our lost and sinful condition is a rejection of His stated mission. The TS affirms both man's lost condition and God's gracious provision of salvation by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8–9) as the only way by which people may be saved from their hopeless and helpless condition.

Of the ten articles, the strongest objections to the TS have centered on Article 2, entitled "The Sinfulness of Man." Specifically, the article denies both incapacitated will and inherited guilt. Rather than address the points on which there is agreement, this chapter will focus on those points of disagreement. Because Article 8 in the TS addresses free will, this chapter will deal briefly with incapacitated will and at length with inherited guilt.

Does Article 2 Affirm That People Can Resist God's Saving Grace?

Yes. After providing two qualifications, Article 2 affirms that people can resist God's saving grace. First, Article 2 affirms that "no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort." Second, it denies "that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel." With those qualifications stated explicitly, Article 2 declares, "We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will." Chapter 8 deals with free will in greater detail. In summary, Article 2 denies the Calvinistic view that sinners are unable to repent and confess faith in Christ until they are first regenerated by God. Instead, the TS affirms that people who are saved by grace alone are called and enabled to exert their will by placing their faith or trust in Christ alone.

The Bible describes the sinful and lost condition of humanity (John 3:36; Rom 3:9–20). The Bible also declares that God loves the world (John 3:16), Christ died for the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2), and all people in every place are called to repent (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 17:30). Will God hold people accountable for failing to do what they are unable to do? If God calls all people to repent and there are open invitations for people to respond in faith to Christ, then it follows that people are able to repent and place faith in Christ.¹

The denial of an incapacitated will in Article 2 is a denial of Calvinism's doctrine of irresistible grace, also known as monergism. Roger Olson rejects irresistible grace but explains the view is biblically and logically necessary if one accepts total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. Olson writes,

As for logic, the argument is that because people are totally depraved and dead in trespasses and sins, unless God elects him or her, the person will never respond to the internal calling of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit has to change the person inwardly in an effectual manner, which is regeneration. Then the born again person desires to come to Christ, in which case he or she is given repentance and faith (conversion) and justification (forgiveness and imputation of Christ's righteousness). This process is called "monergistic grace" or just "monergism."²

Steve Lemke denies the doctrine of irresistible grace, or monergism. While rejecting any idea that any person "can achieve salvation apart from God," he identifies the theological debate as "whether humans have any role at all in accepting or receiving their own salvation." Calvinists explain that God does not violate a lost person's will but changes their will through regeneration so they are drawn to Christ. Compatibilism is the Calvinist view that a lost person's will is irresistibly changed through regeneration so they now desire Christ. Lemke explains that compatibilism is not a solution because there is no opportunity for a person to choose otherwise.

¹Calvinists distinguish between natural and moral inability. For more on this internal discussion, see works of Jonathan Edwards, Andrew Fuller, A. A. Hodge, and William Shedd.

²Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 156.

Lemke presents a robust argument from Scripture that God's saving grace is *resistible*. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem; He wanted to gather them to Himself but they "were not willing" (Matt 23:37 HCSB). The rich young ruler appears unwilling to follow Jesus' instructions about inheriting eternal life (Luke 18:18–23). Other examples of resistible grace in the parables of Jesus include the two sons (Matt 21:28–32), the vineyard (Matt 21:33–44), and the soils (Matt 13:1–23).

Lemke also notes the "all-inclusive invitations" in Scripture. He writes, "The key issue, then, is whether salvation is genuinely open to all persons or merely just to a few who receive irresistible grace." He notes God's desire for the salvation of all people (Matt 18:14; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2) and traces all-inclusive invitations throughout the Bible (Joel 2:32; Matt 7:24; 10:32–33; 11:6; 11:28; 12:50; Luke 9:23–24; John 1:7; 3:15–16; 4:13–14; 6:40; 6:51; 7:17; 7:37; 8:51; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 2:21; 10:43; Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 John 2:23; 4:15; 5:1; Rev 3:20; 22:17).³

Richard Swinburne, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford, writes, "My assessment of the Christian theological tradition is that all Christian theologians of the first four centuries believed in human free will in the libertarian sense, as did all subsequent Eastern Orthodox theologians, and most Western Catholic traditions from Duns Scotus (in the fourteenth century) onwards."⁴ Likewise, the TS resists monergism and affirms libertarian free will.

Does Article 2 Deny That People Inherit Adam's Guilt?

Yes. Article 2 makes two particular claims regarding our inheritance from the first Adam. First, Article 2 affirms that all people inherit "a nature and environment inclined toward sin." Second, it denies that Adam's sin renders "any person guilty before he has personally sinned." This view of inherited sinful nature (or inclination) appears to be more consistent with a plain reading of the Bible than the view that people inherit guilt. Also, the verbiage for Article 2 was taken from Article 3 of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) 1963 and 2000. By approving the BFM in 1963 and 2000, the SBC excluded from the convention's confession any notion of inheriting of the guilt of Adam's sin.

The BFM 2000 affirms that people inherit a nature inclined toward sin. (See the single-underlined words in the illustration on page 32.) Article 2 of the TS attempts to clarify Article 3 of the BFM 2000, which provides this explanation concerning Adam's posterity: "as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation." The TS

³Steve W. Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 109–62.

⁴Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Clarendon, 1998), 35. This claim is explored in Christopher J. Eppling, "A Study of the Patristic Doctrine of Free Will," Unpublished Th.M. Thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009.

restates the view as follows: “every person who is capable of moral action will sin.” The TS then denies explicitly that people are born with the guilt of the first Adam’s sin. We regard this to be an implication of the BFM: “We deny that Adam’s sin ... rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned.” (See the double-underlined words in the illustration on page 32.)

This denial of inherited guilt is not intended to be a judgment that such a view is outside of Christian orthodoxy or Baptist theology. Rather, Christian history is replete with examples of faithful biblical exegetes and noteworthy theologians who affirm inherited guilt. The doctrine of inherited guilt is one attempt to explain our relationship to the first Adam. Many Baptists have affirmed inherited guilt in their doctrinal statements, as have other respected streams within the larger Christian tradition, such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. Of course, groups can share one theological conviction (such as inherited guilt) without sharing all theological convictions. Some Calvinistic Baptists, for example, have mounted impressive arguments against infant baptism.⁵ Why? Baptists are neither Lutherans nor Presbyterians nor Roman Catholics. It should cause our Calvinistic brothers to wonder: Is it consistent to affirm Augustine and Calvin’s problem of inherited guilt but reject their answer of infant baptism? If so, then why?

Inherited guilt is the shared theological premise among many traditions which baptize their infants. How long will Calvinistic Southern Baptists agree with them in accepting the problem of inherited guilt but rejecting their solution involving infant baptism? The reply from Calvinistic Southern Baptists will be, “We affirm believer’s baptism.” We say, “Rightly so.” But consider the possibility that a similar reading of Scripture which causes them to reject infant baptism causes us to reject infant guilt.

Calvinistic Southern Baptists typically affirm some variation of the inherited guilt view, which teaches that the guilt of Adam is passed (or imputed) to all people—with the exception of Jesus. Imputed guilt is their explanation for why infants sometimes die. John Murray was not a Southern Baptist but a well-respected professor of theology at Princeton Seminary and Westminster Seminary. In his work *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, Murray raises this question and answers with imputed guilt. He quotes Rom 6:23 to argue that the wages of sin is death; infants sometimes die because Adam’s guilt is imputed to all people.

Article 2 denies inherited guilt. What is the reply to John Murray’s argument that infants sometimes die because of Adam’s guilt? According to Rom 6:23, death is a result of sin. True. But Rom 6:23 does not state that every physical death is the result of that person’s individual guilt. Is there any other biblical support for our view that physical death isn’t always the result of the guilt of our own sin? Yes.

⁵See as examples Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); and Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism versus Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2003).

**Illustration: Is Article 2 of the Traditional Statement
Consistent with Article 3 of the the BFM 2000?*****Baptist Faith and Message (2000) Article 3: Man***

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5,7,18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.

***A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan
of Salvation (2012) Article 2: The Sinfulness of Man***

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's own sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of free will in all people or rendered all people guilty before they have personally sinned. While no one is even remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, no sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15-24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5, 7:15-16;53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9, 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 5:12, 6:23; 7:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 6:9-10;15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-15

Consider the tragic story of the first son of David and Bathsheba. Their infant son did not die because of his own guilt. The text of 2 Samuel 12 is clear that the infant died as a result of David's sinful actions, which were ultimately a result of Adam's sin. Our view is not that infants are sinless; instead, they have inherited "a nature and environment inclined toward sin."⁶ Infants are *not guilty* before God because they have not yet knowingly acted in sinful ways. Why do they sometimes die? As was the case with David's first son, infants are sometimes impacted the sweeping consequences of God's judgment against the sinful behavior of other people, such as the sinful actions of King David which resulted in the death of his infant son. But physical death as a result of another person's sin should not be equated with bearing the guilt of another person's sin. Because infants live in a body and world inclined toward sin, this sometimes results in the death of not-guilty infants. Consider also the murder of infant boys carried out by Pharaoh and by King Herod (Exod 1:22 and Matt 1:16). Does the Scripture indicate they died because of the guilt of Adam or because of the royal decree? The view of inherited sinful nature affirmed in the TS is consistent with both the BFM and the Bible.

It is not necessary for all Southern Baptists to deny inherited guilt. However, a denial of inherited guilt seems more consistent with the language of the BFM 2000, and it is necessary that Southern Baptists who affirm the convention's statement of faith affirm that people inherit from Adam a nature inclined to sin. Why? That is the view found in Article 3 of the BFM 2000.

In the following sections, evidence will be provided from the Bible, church history, and systematic theology in favor of inherited sinful nature over inherited guilt, as expressed in Article 2 of the TS.

A Defense for Article 2 from the Bible

Southern Baptists who affirm the TS explicitly reject inherited guilt. The Bible teaches that Adam's sin had devastating consequences for humanity and no one escapes sinfulness. But we are held accountable by God for our own sin and guilt, not the sin and guilt of Adam.

Deuteronomy 1 & Numbers 14

Recall the story of the twelve spies. Two saw grapes; ten saw giants. Why did Israel wander in the desert for forty years? Because they voted with the ten spies, who failed to trust God. Deuteronomy 1 and Numbers 14 record God's judgment against them. Because the Israelites failed to trust God, the "evil generation" was prohibited from entering the Promised Land. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the older generation (defined in Num 14:29 as twenty years and older) would

⁶Others prefer to speak of inherited death in order to argue that sin is attached to but not fundamental to the human nature; also, inherited death may account for the dying of creation mentioned in Romans 8. Regardless, the language of both the TS and the BFM 2000 claim that we now have both "a nature and environment inclined toward sin."

not enter the Promised Land. Instead, they would wander around and die in the desert. After the last of that generation died, the younger generation of Israelites would enter the land. What was the *single reason* the younger generation was spared God's judgment? Their age.

This is not to suggest that twenty years is an age (or stage) of accountability for every person. But according to Deut 1:39, that younger generation had "no knowledge of good or evil." They lacked moral knowledge and were spared from God's judgment. In his commentary, Weinfeld writes that the phrase in Deut 1:39 refers to males "not yet of responsible age." In support of this view, he compares the phrase to Isa 7:15, cites the parallel passage in Num 14:31, and notes the age of twenty years as a time of accountability (Exod 30:14 and Num 1:3). Weinfeld adds, "According to rabbinic tradition, man is not accountable before the age of twenty."⁷

Although not held guilty for the sins of their fathers, the younger generation nevertheless experienced some of the negative consequences or wages of sin. They wandered in the desert, unable to inherit the Promised Land until the last person of the older generation died. In a similar way, infants today are not held responsible for the actions of previous generations, up to and including Adam. Like the younger generation in the Deuteronomy/Numbers account, infants experience the consequences of sin for which they are not counted guilty.

John MacArthur holds a similar interpretation of Deut 1:39 and links that with the spiritual condition of infants today. In his book *Safe in the Arms of God*, he writes, "The Israelite children of sinful parents were allowed to enter fully into the blessing God had for His people. They were in no way held accountable, responsible, or punishable for the sins of their parents. Why? Because they had no knowledge of good and evil, right or wrong." Then, he quotes Ezek 18:20 (ESV), which reads, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."⁸

Psalm 51:5

After David's sin with Bathsheba and confrontation by Nathan, the king offers this confession in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (NASB). In what way should his statement be understood? David wrote that he was brought forth in "iniquity" (*'āwōn*) and conceived in "sin" (*ḥēṭ*). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (CHALOT)* defines *'āwōn* as "activity that is crooked or wrong." Similarly it defines *ḥēṭ* as "fault (against men)" and "sin (against God)." In both instances, this standard

⁷Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 151.

⁸John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 45.

lexicon defines the words in reference to wrongful *actions*. Did David regard the circumstances surrounding his conception to be sinful?

The following comments are made concerning Psalm 51:5 in the United Bible Society's *A Translator's Handbook on The Book of Psalms*:

In vivid language the psalmist confesses that he has been a sinner all his life. The literal language, "In iniquity I was given birth, and in sin my mother conceived me" (see 58.3), is hardly the basis for biological, anthropological, or theological pronouncements about the nature of the human being as sinner. Were the words to be taken literally, they would mean that the psalmist's mother sinned when she became pregnant (which implies either that sexual intercourse as such is sinful or that she was guilty of fornication or adultery), and that at the moment of his birth he was already a sinner. What the psalmist is saying is that he (and so, by implication, everyone) is a sinner; sin is ingrained in human nature and permeates all of human activity. In some languages it may be better to follow the example of TEV or of GECL: "Wrong and guilt have characterized my life ever since my mother gave birth to me."⁹

Other scholars who comment on the meaning of Psalm 51:5 render a similar judgment. Franz Delitzsch explains that David's "parents were sinful human beings, and this sinful state (*habitus*) has operated upon his birth and even his conception, and from this point has passed over to him." Edward Dalglish observes that "the psalmist is relating his sinfulness to the very inception of life; he traces his development beyond birth (*chuwl*) to the genesis of his being in his mother's womb—even to the very hour of conception (*yacham*)." Bruce Waltke writes that it "supports the notion that at the time of conception man is in a state of sin (. . .)." Mitchell Dahood concurs, "All men have a congenital tendency toward evil."¹⁰

Michael Goulder notes that "critics are almost unanimous in taking v. 5 to refer to the universality of human sin, transmitted from generation to generation." In his commentary, Hans-Joachim Kraus writes, "'*Āwōn* and *hēt* have from the hour of birth been the determining forces under whose signature life began. The petitioner wants to say that the primordial cause, the root cause of my existence, is interwoven with corruption."¹¹ None of these Old Testament

⁹Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reymann, *A Translator's Handbook on The Book of Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991) in Translator's Workplace Version 5.0, Summer Institute of Linguistics and United Bible Society.

¹⁰Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, translated by Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 137; Edward Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One: In the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 121; Bruce Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976): 12, 12; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100*, in vol. 17a of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 4.

¹¹Michael Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalm 51–72): Studies in the Psalter, II*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 102, edited by David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 53; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary*, translated

scholars derive from Psalm 51:5 that people are guilty of sin from birth. Instead, they affirm that sinfulness is present at the first moment of life.

Romans 5:12

Joseph Fitzmyer cautions readers of Romans 5 to distinguish between Paul's writings and the later teachings of the church. The Catholic scholar explains that the doctrine of original sin (the view that all people inherit both a sinful nature and guilt) is a later teaching of the church rather than an explicit teaching of Paul. The doctrine of original sin was developed from later Augustinian writings and solidified through the Sixteenth Council of Carthage, the Second Council of Orange, and the Tridentine Council.¹²

Romans 5:12 begins with the word "Therefore." What was Paul's previous argument? In Rom 5:1–2, Paul explains that we have been justified by faith and have peace with God through Christ. Also, through Christ we have access by faith to this grace. In vv. 3–5, those who have been given the Holy Spirit can hope in their suffering because of what God produces in them. Christ died for "the weak," "ungodly," people who were "still sinners" (vv. 6–8). Verse 9 begins in a way that is similar to v. 1 ("Since, therefore, we have been justified..."). Verse 1 mentions being justified by faith; verse 9 mentions being justified by His blood. Verses 9–11 provide assurance that we will be saved from God's wrath by the life provided by Jesus.

In verse 12, Paul states that "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (v. 12). Sin entered the world through one man, Adam. Death entered the world through sin. Death spread to all men. Why? The answer is found in verse 12, "because all sinned." The text states neither "in whom all sinned" nor "because all sinned in Adam." Death spread because people sinned. Even worse, "death reigned from Adam to Moses" (v. 14). But Christ is anticipated, and Adam is described as "a type of the one to come" (v. 14).

The remark that "one trespass led to condemnation" (v. 18) is clarified in v. 19, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (ESV). Do these verses teach that all people inherit the guilt and condemnation of Adam? If this is pressed as the meaning intended by Paul, then the parallel to all people inheriting guilt and condemnation is all people inheriting justification and life (v. 19). In order to affirm universal sinfulness but deny universal salvation, Millard Erickson posits a "conditional imputation" of Adam's guilt. People must ratify the work of Adam by personally and knowingly sinning just as they must ratify the work of Christ by

by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 503.

¹²Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with introduction and Commentary*, in vol. 33 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 408–09.

personally and knowingly repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Savior and Lord.¹³

What does the text of Rom 5:12–21 not say? The text makes no mention of a covenant between God and Adam and it makes no mention of imputation of Adam's guilt. Can those ideas be found among the systematic theologies. Yes. Can they be found in this passage? No. In his monumental work *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, James D. G. Dunn, articulates his rejection of inherited guilt as follows: "Nevertheless, guilt only enters into the reckoning with the individual's own transgression. Human beings are not held responsible for the state into which they are born. That is the starting point of their personal responsibility, a starting point for which they are not liable."¹⁴

Perhaps other biblical texts support the doctrine of inherited guilt. Perhaps not. Either way, they are not discernible in Rom 5:12–21. Instead, we see that death spread to all of humanity because of the sin of one man, Adam. Thankfully, God answered the spread of death and condemnation through Adam with the hope of justification and life through Christ.

A Defense for Article 2 from Church History

Certain people question the denial of inherited guilt by citing historical statements affirming the view. We too have given careful study to the biblical text. And we are persuaded by the words of the Bible to reject inherited guilt in favor of inherited sinful nature. If it can be demonstrated from the words of the Bible that we have been wrong as a convention (failing to affirm inherited guilt since 1963), then we will revise Article 2. But we will not be persuaded by citations of systematic theology textbooks, even if they happen to have been written by Southern Baptists. Certain Southern Baptist theologians have been writing academic papers for several years attempting to argue that twisting a plain reading of the Bible to fit on a theological framework is precisely what has contributed to the present difficulties.¹⁵ We prefer to deal in a conversation about the words of the Bible alone. The Reformation cry was *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). We agree. Let the assertions and claims about this matter be drawn from an appeal to Scripture alone as we discuss this matter. To establish that this view is not a recent innovation within church history, examples will be provided from the following periods of church history: Patristic, Reformation, and Southern Baptist history.¹⁶

¹³Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 656.

¹⁴James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 97.

¹⁵See David Allen, Ken Keathley, et. al, "Neither Calvinists nor Arminians but Baptists." White Paper 36 (September 2010) at http://www.baptistcenter.net/papers/Neither_Calvinists_Nor_Arminians_But_Baptists.pdf (accessed September 3, 2012); and Eric Hankins, "Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: Toward a Baptist Soteriology" *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 8 no. 1 (Spring 2011): 87–100.

¹⁶More detail on these and other examples can be found in my book, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 81–152. Emphasis in the quotations is mine.

Known as “Golden Mouth” for his skills in oratory, John Chrysostom (AD 374–407) is regarded as one of the most significant preachers in the first thousand years of Christian history. He wrote: “We do baptize infants, although *they are not guilty of any sins*.”¹⁷

Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–390) preached, “For this is how the matter stands; at that time they begin to be responsible for their lives, when reason is matured, and they learn the mystery of life for of *sins of ignorance owing to their tender years they have no account to give*, and it is far more profitable on all accounts to be fortified by the Font, because of the sudden assaults of danger that befall us, stronger than our helpers.”¹⁸ Gregory taught the following ideas in the passage above: First, people are not born with the responsibility of Adam’s sin. Rather, they become morally responsible at the point in life at which their reason matures and “they learn the mystery of life.” Second, they are not responsible for sins committed prior to this time of responsibility. Infancy is obviously included in the earliest period of life; Gregory called this period the “tender years,” which is a time *prior* to people becoming “responsible for their lives.” All sins committed during these “tender years” are regarded by God as “sins of ignorance,” for which the person will not have to give an account.

In *On Infants’ Early Deaths*, Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–394) addressed the spiritual condition of infants. They were neither good nor bad; infants who died would be with God because their souls had never been corrupted by their own sinful actions.

Eastern theologians were not the only ones who rejected (or failed to advocate for) inherited guilt. Among the pre-Augustinian Western fathers, Tertullian (ca. 145–ca. 220) is often cited in support of the view that infants inherit sin and guilt. Although he mentioned that their souls are unclean in Adam, he also questioned why there was a rush to baptize infants, referred to their souls as innocent, and differentiated between infants and children based upon their capability to commit sin.¹⁹

Inherited guilt was rejected by one of the most important of the Magisterial Reformers, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531). Like Martin Luther, Zwingli rejected the Augustinian notion that baptism removed the guilt of original sin. However, he admitted to holding that view at one time. In 1525, he admitted that the controversy with Anabaptists “has shown us that it is not the pouring of water which washes away sin. And that was what we once believed, although without any authority in the word of God. We also believed that the water of baptism cleansed children from a sin that they never had, and that without it they would be damned. All these beliefs were erroneous, as we shall see later.”²⁰ Zwingli still affirmed both Adam’s seminal unity

¹⁷John Chrysostom *On Infants*, edited and translated by Henry Bettenson, in *The Later Christian Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 169.

¹⁸Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28, in NPNF2 7:370.

¹⁹See my treatment of Tertullian’s *A Treatise on the Soul, Against Marcion*, and *On Baptism* in my book, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants*, 96–101.

²⁰Ulrich Zwingli, *Of Baptism*, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol.

with humanity and sin's devastating effects upon humanity. But he stated the effects on infants in new ways.

Martin Luther attacked Zwingli's position as Pelagian because of his use of free will, so Zwingli offered a reply to Urbanus Rhegius in Augsburg. In defending his view of original sin, Zwingli asked this question: "For what could be said more briefly and plainly than that original sin is not sin but disease, and that the children of Christians are not condemned to eternal punishment on account of that disease?"²¹ Zwingli defended his view by distinguishing between the words *disease* and *sin*. *Disease* refers to the "original contamination of man," "defect of humanity," or "the defect of a corrupted nature." Romans 5:14 reveals that Adam's fault brought this to every person. *Sin*, however, "implies guilt, and guilt comes from a transgression or a trespass on the part of one who designedly perpetrates a deed."

In his *Systematic Theology*, James Leo Garrett, Jr. categorizes Zwingli's view as one of five "Theories Not Teaching the Imputation of Guilt" and labels it "Theory of Uncondemnable Depravity." Garrett identifies Zwingli with this view and explains, "This theory holds that human depravity always leads to sin but is not sin per se, and hence human beings are not condemned for their depravity but for the sins to which depravity has led."²²

E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist World Alliance, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899–1928). Mullins was the architect of the *Baptist Faith and Message* 1925. He rejected the doctrine of inherited guilt, as does the Traditional Statement. Mullins argued that man is not guilty because of his nature. Also, according to Mullins, man is not guilty because he was represented by Adam in the Garden or because we were seminally present in Adam. Rather, man "is guilty when he does wrong." For Mullins, Adam's guilt is not imputed to humanity. Mullins explained, "Men are not condemned therefore for hereditary or original sin. They are condemned only for their own sins."²³

A Defense for Article 2 from Systematic Theology

The appeal to set aside the systematic theology textbooks, even those excellent volumes produced by Baptists, is not based upon the notion that our view cannot be supported. To the

XXIV: Zwingli and Bullinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 153.

²¹Ulrich Zwingli, *On Original Sin*, translated by Samuel Jackson, in *On Providence and Other Essays* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 3.

²²Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:489–91. Garrett also includes under "Theory of Uncondemnable Depravity" Charles G. Finney and New England Congregationalists Samuel Hopkins, Nathanael Emmons, Timothy Dwight, and Nathaniel W. Taylor.

²³E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1917; reprinted 1974), 294, 302. For examples of other Southern Baptists who have denied inherited guilt, see my booklet *Born Guilty? A Southern Baptist View of Original Sin* (Carrollton, GA: Free Church Press, 2013), 20–22.

contrary, we find support for our view in a systematic treatment by a respected Baptist theologian who blazes a trail leading through the confusion and back to the Scriptures. Millard Erickson is a professor of theology whose book, *Christian Theology*, is commonly used in the classrooms of Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. He is profiled among the statesmen and thinkers in a chapter of George and Dockery's book, *Baptist Theologians*. Erickson's many teaching posts have included both Southwestern and Southern seminaries.

In *Christian Theology*, Erickson argues for a view known as conditional imputation. In this view, Adam's guilt is imputed to a person only *after* he knowingly sins. For this reason, infants are free from Adam's guilt and God's judgment. At the point that a person first knowingly sins, he becomes accountable to God. This is the justification for an age or stage of moral accountability. Pointing to Romans 5, Erickson explains that just as the work of Christ is not universally imputed but must be individually ratified (or received), so the work of Adam is not universally imputed but must be individually ratified (or received).²⁴

Following the biblical intuition of Millard Erickson, the TS rejects imputed guilt. We understand the Bible to teach in Romans 5 and other biblical texts that Adam's sin had devastating consequences for humanity but we are held accountable by God only for our own sin and guilt.

Conclusion

While affirming the universal and inescapable sinfulness of all people, Article 2 makes two important denials, both of which conflict with particular doctrines of Calvinism. First, Article 2 denies that sinners are unable to respond to freely respond to God's gracious invitation to repent of sin and place their faith in Christ. Calvinists appeal to the doctrine of total depravity to claim that sinners are unable to repent and trust Christ apart from the monergistic work of regeneration. The TS differs. The universal appeals for people to repent and believe in Christ imply that any sinner can actually repent and believe in Christ. Second, Article 2 denies that people inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. Instead, the TS remains consistent with the BFM 1963 and 2000, which fail to mention inherited guilt and explicitly describe what people inherit from Adam. People inherit a nature and environment inclined toward sin. Eventually, people will become transgressors and be subject to condemnation. Neither the Bible nor the BFM requires an affirmation of inherited guilt. The TS, like many theologians throughout church history, simply goes one step further and denies inherited guilt.

²⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 652–56.