A Biblical and Theological Critique of the Soteriology of Five-Point Calvinism

Chapter One (Adam Harwood) A Critique of Total Depravity

The Bible uses several words to communicate the concept of sin, such as the Hebrew words *hata* ("to do wrong"), *awon* ("iniquity"), *pasha* ("to rebel"), and the Greek words *adikia* ("unrighteous"), *parabasis* ("transgression"), and *hamartia* ("to miss the mark"). Sin is any deviation from God's revealed will. People sin by either failing to conform to God's standards or explicitly opposing them.[1] People sin by their thoughts, attitudes, speech, or actions—either by acting wrongly or failing to act rightly. Sin is against God and nature.[2] Sin is a reminder that the world is not the way it should be.[3]

God's good creation has been defiled by sin. Presently, neither this world nor humans are the way God created them in the beginning. Since the first couple, Adam and Eve, chose to disobey their Creator (Genesis 3), humans have been broken and live in a fallen world. The effects of their rebellion against God can be traced through the book of Genesis in the escalation of violence and death, and the consequences of sin can be seen today. Why does a hurricane drown the coast and cancer ravage a body? The root cause is that we live in a fallen world. Why do some people make sinful choices that result in the abuse or murder of innocent victims? Humans are broken and sinful, which does not excuse sinful deeds. People should be held accountable for their actions. The point is, the Bible accounts for the situation. The first couple's disobedience in the garden introduced these occasions of moral evil (events caused by a person's will) and natural evil (events not caused by a person's will, such as weather and illness) that damage God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31).[4] Thankfully, God did not leave people in this hopeless and helpless condition. Instead, he came to the rescue by sending his Son to earth to live a perfect life and then die as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29). God will redeem and restore his creation in Christ. At that time, the people of God will live with him in a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no sin, death, or dying (Revelation 21–22). However, until God's plan of restoration and salvation is complete at the future return of Christ, we live in bodies and in a creation

[1] David J. Sigrist, "Sin," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).
[2] Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).
[3] Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
[4] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NIV.

that longs for restoration (Romans 8). We inhabit a body of death (Rom 7:24) in a beautiful-but-broken world. Three things are true about sin and sinners.

First, *sin is universal*. Every person has been impacted by sin. This impact is unavoidable. Even Jesus, who was sinless and committed no sin (Heb 4:15; 9:14; 1 Pet 2:22), was impacted by sin. Jesus was crucified by sinful people (Acts 2:23), took on the sin of the world (John 1:29), and became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). The impact of sin is indeed universal. In Romans 1–2, Paul indicted every person as an idolater and lawbreaker, both Jew and non-Jew. "All have sinned," he wrote, "and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Second, sin is not *a* human problem; sin is *the* human problem. It was the sin of the first couple that ruptured their relationship with their Creator and introduced shame, alienation, and death into the created order. Human sin prompted the sacrificial system, which resulted in God's judgment on sin being deferred (Rom 3:25–26) until its culmination in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross—which Paul calls a demonstration of God's love (Rom 5:8). Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus came to give his life for sinners. Sin is *the* human problem, and God solved that problem at the cross of Christ.

Third, *sinners cannot save themselves*. Paul reminds believers they are saved by grace through faith, "and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). Salvation is "not by works, so that no one can boast" (v. 9). Any boasting about salvation will be in God because only God saves sinners. Paul clarified to Titus that God saves people because of his kindness, love, and mercy—not because of their righteous actions (Titus 3:4–5).

God created a good world; humans fell, and all of creation and every person is wounded by sin, for which God provides the only remedy in the cross and resurrection of Christ. Christians are broadly unified on these statements about the problem of and solution for sin.

However, rather than maintain this broad and unified understanding of sin, theologians have attempted to explain further the details of the doctrine of sin. Multiple views developed and Christians divided as they attempted to answer these precise doctrinal questions. One of those topics over which Christians differ concerns the doctrine of *original sin*, which refers to the nature and effects of the first couple's sin on all people. Christians agree that sin is the universal human problem, and sinners cannot save themselves; however, Christians differ over the issues of human guilt and salvation. This chapter addresses these areas of difference:

1. What do people inherit from Adam's sin in the garden?

2. When can sinners repent of their sin and confess Jesus as Lord to be saved?

What Do People Inherit from Adam's Sin in the Garden?

Two Christian Views of Original Sin

The first question to be addressed in this chapter is what do people inherit because of Adam's sin in the garden? Though the views can be categorized further and nuanced more precisely, Christians affirm two main positions on original sin. *Inherited guilt* is the view that all people inherit from Adam sinful inclinations, mortality, and the guilt of Adam's sin. *Inherited consequences* is the view that all people inherit from Adam sinful inclinations and mortality, not the guilt of his sin. Theologians who write about original sin assign various terms, but they generally distinguish between those two main positions.

In *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, Pier Franco Beatrice distinguished between what Joseph Turmel originally called hereditary sin and hereditary decline.[5] *Hereditary sin* is the view that all people suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, primarily physical death, and his descendants are guilty of sin transmitted from him. *Hereditary decline* is the view that all people suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, primarily physical death, but this view denies that sin is passed to Adam's descendants. Hereditary sin corresponds to inherited guilt, and hereditary decline corresponds to inherited consequences.

Donald Macleod, in "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," detailed the debates among Reformed theologians about what was received from Adam. Macleod referred to the two views as immediate imputation and mediate imputation. *Immediate imputation* is the view that Adam's descendants receive an immediate imputation of both corruption and guilt due to Adam's sin. *Mediate imputation* is the view that Adam's descendants inherit corruption from him, but guilt is mediated through their own sinful acts.[6] Immediate imputation corresponds to inherited guilt, and mediate imputation corresponds to inherited consequences.

Thomas H. McCall provided a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the historic Christian theories of original sin. He detailed six major options, definitions, and representatives:

1. *Symbolic and existential interpretations*—deny the existence or importance of Adam and Eve (F. R. Tennant, Paul Tillich)

[5] Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans. Adam Kamesar, AAR Religion in Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–8.
[6] Donald Macleod, "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Hans Maudeme and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 139–44.

2. *Corruption-only doctrines*—corruption without corresponding guilt due to Adam's sin (Christian theology before Augustine, the Orthodox Church, Ulrich Zwingli, Richard Swinburne, Stanley Grenz)
3. *Corruption and guilt: federalism*—all people are guilty of Adam's sin because he represented humanity in the garden (Francis Turretin)
4. *Corruption and guilt: realism*—all people are guilty of Adam's sin because they were present with him in the garden (Augustine, Jonathan Edwards)
5. *Corruption and guilt: mediate views*—all people are guilty due to the corruption from original sin, not for the sins of Adam and Eve (Anselm, John Calvin, Henri Blocher)
6. *Conditional imputation of guilt*—all people ratify the guilt of Adam when they knowingly commit their first act of sin (Millard Erickson)[7]

The first view is not considered in the present study because it denies the historicity of the first couple and their sin in the garden. View 2 corresponds to inherited consequences, and views 3–6 correspond to inherited guilt.

Beatrice (who wrote from Italy), Macleod (from Scotland), and McCall (from the United States) used different terms to identify the same theological distinctions. This chart illustrates the relationship between their terms and the terms used in this chapter.

Terms used in this chapter	***Inherited guilt***—all people inherit a fallen world, sinful inclinations, mortality, and the guilt of Adam's sin	***Inherited consequences***—all people inherit a fallen world, sinful inclinations, and mortality
Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*	*Hereditary sin*—all people suffer the effects of Adam's sinful act, and his sin is transmitted to his descendants, resulting in their guilt	*Hereditary decline*—all humanity suffers the consequences of Adam's sin, primarily physical death, with no transmission of sin and guilt
Donald Macleod, "Original Sin in Reformed Theology"	*Immediate imputation*—all people receive an immediate imputation of Adam's guilt	*Mediate imputation*—all people inherit corruption from Adam, but guilt is mediated through their own sinful acts
Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature*	*Corruption and guilt* (federalism, realism, and mediate views); *Conditional imputation of guilt*	*Corruption-only doctrines*

[7] McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 149–76.

Both perspectives acknowledge that sin has impacted God's creation, including all of Adam's descendants. Both views also acknowledge all people will inherit corruption (which some refer to as a sinful nature), and both views depend on the person and work of Christ alone for salvation. The inherited guilt view, however, adds that all people are guilty of Adam's sin. In this chapter, I affirm both views as orthodox but argue for the inherited-consequences view.

Early Church Fathers Who Affirmed Inherited Consequences

Historical theologians generally agree that the concept of original sin as people inheriting the guilt of Adam's sin was virtually unknown in the entire Christian tradition until the later writings of Augustine. Instead, the early church—in both the East and the West—affirmed views consistent with inherited consequences. Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Mark the Hermit, Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus all rejected inherited guilt. For these and other pastor-theologians, Adam's sin did not result in total human depravity but a weakened will, physical death, and other non-condemnatory results consistent with inherited consequences. J. N. D. Kelly explained, "There is hardly a hint in the Greek fathers that mankind as a whole shares in Adam's guilt." The same was true of the Latin fathers. Though they viewed sin as a "corrupting force," the guilt of Adam's sin "attaches to Adam himself, not to us." Many in the early church rejected Augustine's later views of predestination and the loss of human free will, though they were labeled (many inappropriately) as Pelagians or semi-Pelagians. Most who opposed Augustine were orthodox theologically, affirming the necessity of God's grace for salvation and denying that sinners initiate their own salvation.

John Chrysostom (AD 349–407) wrote, "We do baptize infants, although they are not guilty of any sins."[8] He also commented on Rom 5:19 that a person is not a sinner due to Adam's sin but only after an individual transgresses the law.[9] In *On Infants' Early Deaths*, **Gregory of Nyssa** (ca. AD 335–394) addressed the spiritual condition of infants. He considered them to be neither good nor bad. Infants who died would be with God because their souls had never been corrupted by their own sinful actions.[10] **Tertullian** (ca. AD 160–225) mentioned that infant souls are unclean in Adam, which is consistent with the inherited-consequences view. He also questioned why there was a rush to baptize them. Those who later taught inherited guilt insisted on the practice of infant baptism and wrongly assumed that water baptism cleansed the infants of Adam's guilt. Tertullian referred to the souls of infants as "innocent,"

[8] John Chrysostom, "On Infants," in *The Later Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 69.
[9] John Chrysostom, "Homily 10," in NPNF[1], 11:403.
[10] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Infants' Early Deaths," in NPNF[2], 5:372–81.

and he differentiated between infants and children based upon their capability to commit sin.[11] This view of original sin as inherited consequences was affirmed in the early church and continues to be affirmed by other Christians today, including the Orthodox Church.[12]

Augustine's Views on Inherited Guilt

Historians and theologians are in broad agreement that Augustine, a fifth-century African bishop, shaped the Western world's view of original sin.[13] His theology profoundly influenced both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. Whether or not one is aware of Augustine's influence, all Christians who think about human sin are influenced by his views. This section provides a summary and critique of some of his views on inherited guilt.

Augustine taught that humans were created from sin-infected material. He interprets the lump of clay in Romans 9 to refer to a *massa peccati* (mass of sin), a lump of sin-infected dough from which God subsequently created every human. The single mass of dough fermented and was infected with *originalis reatus* (hereditary guilt) as a result of Adam's sin. Augustine referred to this concept of "mass" frequently in his writings, and it forms the basis of his view that God predestined a certain number of people to salvation to replace the fallen angels.[14]

Augustine taught strange views on sexual union and Christian marriage, rather than affirming the goodness of sexuality within a Christian marriage. For example, Augustine taught that in the garden Adam existed in a spiritual body and therefore did not experience concupiscence—the battle between the flesh and spirit.[15] Instead, Adam and Eve were joined spiritually, and their offspring were spiritual and nonflesh.[16] After their disobedience

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[11] See Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul* 39–41, 56, in *ANF*, 3:219–21, 232; and Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18, in *ANF*, 3:678.

[12] "Most Orthodox theologians reject the idea of 'original guilt.'" Rather, explains Timothy Ware, "Humans (Orthodox usually teach) automatically inherit Adam's corruption and mortality, but not his guilt; they are only guilty in so far as by their own free choice they imitate Adam." Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, rev. ed. (1963; New York: Penguin, 1993), 224.

[13] Stan Norman wrote, "The Augustinian doctrine of original sin has exerted profound influence upon the theology of the church. Since his time, theologians have affirmed, rejected, or modified the Augustinian position. One cannot construct a Christian understanding of sin without engaging in some way Augustine's doctrine of original sin." R. Stanton Norman, "Human Sinfulness," in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 366.

[14] See Augustine, *To Simplician—On Various Questions* 1.2.16, 19–20, in LCC 6:397–98, 401–4; Letter 186, in The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, 46 vols. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), 30:191–221; Sermon 294.15, in WSA 3/8:190. See also Paula Fredriksen, "Massa," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 545–47.

[15] Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* 2.8.10, in WSA 1/13:77–78.

[16] Augustine, *On Genesis* 1.19.30, in WSA 1/13:58.

against God, their bodies became mortal and fleshly, and their union resulted in sinful, mortal offspring.[17]

Augustine taught that hereditary sin—including guilt—is passed from parents to their children through human semen. In the garden, all humanity was contained in the body of Adam.[18] After Adam freely sinned against God, his human seed was defective, which resulted in the corruption of his progeny.[19] So, all humanity sinned because all were *in illo* (within him), comprising an *omnes unus* (single person).[20] For Augustine, new birth in Christ via baptism answers this corrupt physical birth facilitated by sinful sexual desires and defective human semen.[21]

Augustine taught that infant baptism washed away the guilt of original sin. Augustine supported his view with three arguments. First, humans are produced through sinful desire from corrupt human seed through which parents transmit original sin to their children. Thus, infants are corrupt due to the transmission of sin from their parents. Second, the distress and ills to which infants are subject is explained by punishment due to their guilt.[22] Third, Augustine cited the liturgical practices of exorcism and exsufflation, in which the devil and his demons are cast out and renounced. Thus, baptismal practices confirm infants are under the devil's power.[23] Augustine concluded that humans, at the time of their birth, are destined for damnation unless redeemed by God's grace via water baptism.[24] In his study of original sin, Norman P. Williams observed, "There is no clearer instance of the control exercised by liturgical or devotional practice over the growth of dogma than that provided by the study of the relations between the custom of infant baptism and the doctrine of original sin."[25] In

[17] Augustine, *On Genesis* 2.21.32, in WSA 1/13:92–93.
[18] Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants* 3.7, in NPNF[1] 5:71.
[19] Augustine, *Against Julian: Unfinished Work* 4.104, in WSA 1/25:465–67; 2.123, in WSA 1/25:217–18.
[20] "In our own persons we did not yet exist, but we were present in Adam, and therefore whatever befell Adam was our fate too." Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 84.7, in WSA 3/18:208.
[21] Augustine distinguished between other people and Jesus: "God fashioned all of us, you see, from the stock of sin. He, though, was even made man differently, he was born of a virgin, a woman conceived him not by sexual desire, but by faith, he did not derive the stock of sin from Adam." Augustine, Sermon 246.5, in WSA 3/7:106.
[22] See Augustine, *Against Julian: Unfinished Work* 1.22, 5.64, 6.23, in WSA 1/25:63–65, 595–99, 661–64. "I do not say: The newborn are wretched because they are proved guilty. Rather, I say: They are proved to be guilty because they are wretched." Augustine, *Against Julian: Unfinished Work* 6.27.22, in WSA 1/25:682.
[23] "The Church would neither exorcise the children of the faithful nor subject them to the rite of exsufflation, if it did not rescue them from the power of darkness and from the prince of death." Augustine, *Against Julian* 6.5.11, in WSA 1/24:484. Kelly explained that for Augustine, "The practice of baptizing infants with exorcisms and a solemn renunciation of the Devil was in his eyes proof positive that even they were infected with sin." Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 363.
[24] Augustine, Sermon 294.16–17, in WSA 3/8, 191–92.
[25] Norman P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green, 1927), 223.

other words, the practice of baptizing infants fostered the doctrine of original sin (understood to include guilt).

Augustine considered unbaptized infants to be condemned. In AD 412, Augustine wrote a letter to Marcellinus in which he addressed the topics of original sin and the baptism of infants. Augustine made the case that infants are incorporated into Christ and his church only via baptism. Without baptism, they are guaranteed damnation. "Damned, however, they could not be if they really had no sin."[26] Augustine concluded that since infants could not have committed a sinful act during their young life, we must believe—even if we cannot understand it—infants inherit original sin. Augustine argued that infants are either saved by union with Christ through water baptism or they will be condemned. Infants could not be damned by their own sinful acts because they have not committed any sinful acts; thus, one must affirm that infants inherit sin.

A Reply to Augustine's Views on Inherited Guilt

Augustine's views on inherited guilt deserve a reply. The idea that the lump of clay in Romans 9 is a mass of sin out of which God creates humans cannot be justified from the biblical text. That interpretation, coupled with his belief that Adam and Eve existed in spiritual bodies to create a child with a body only after the fall, is rooted in gnostic dualism, not a Christian view of creation. Augustine's negative view of sexuality—even within marriage—resulted in his view that human semen was defective, which resulted in the corruption of all humans who supposedly existed in Adam seminally. Augustine's views contradict the Christian view of the goodness of marriage as well as sexual relations between a husband and wife, celebrated in Song of Solomon as well as Proverbs, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. Augustine's view that humans are created by defective seed in Adam is contradicted by the psalmist: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Ps 139:13–14).

Against Augustine's views that humans were created from a mass of sin or defective semen since marital sex is bad, Christians should affirm the goodness of God's creation—especially of people, all of whom are made in his image (Gen 1:27)—as well as the goodness of sexual relations in a Christian marriage.

Most Protestant Christian groups do not teach that infants must be baptized to be united with Christ in the event of their physical death. Baptists, for example, argue that the New Testament example is that some people who hear the message of the gospel respond in repentance of sin and faith in Christ; many of the relevant texts indicate those individuals

[26] Augustine, *Baptism of Infants* 3.7, in NPNF[1] 5:71.

were baptized. There is no explicit example of an infant being baptized. Jesus never called infants and young children to repent of sin—neither their own sin nor Adam's sin. Rather, Jesus welcomed and blessed them, and he pointed to them as examples of citizens of the kingdom of heaven. God can, by his mercy and through the atonement provided by Christ's work on the cross, welcome those who die as infants into heaven—apart from water baptism.

Augustine's Biblical Support for Inherited Guilt with Replies

Augustine found biblical support for his view of inherited guilt in two Old Testament and three New Testament texts. Following is his interpretation of those texts and my critique of his explication.

JOB 14:4

Augustine defended infant guilt by citing an idea introduced by the Greek translation of Job 14:4.[27] The Hebrew text of Job 14:4 reads, "Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!" However, the Greek translation introduced a concept not found in the Hebrew text, "Who shall be pure of filth? No one, not even if his life on earth is one day!"[28] While the Hebrew text asserts only that no one is able to bring purity out of impurity, the Greek variant adds the idea that a one-day-old person will not avoid the filth. Athanasius referred to "the heretics" who interpret the "filth" mentioned in the Greek translation of Job 14:4 to refer to sin—as did Augustine. Instead, Athanasius interpreted filth as those things that coated an infant at birth, such as vernix, amniotic fluid, and the mother's blood.[29] Athanasius asked a series of rhetorical questions, "What sin can a child that is one day old commit? Adultery? Not at all, because it has not reached the age to have pleasure. Fornication? Not that either, because it does not yet have desire. Murder? But it is unable even to carry a murder weapon. Perjury? No, for it cannot yet make an articulate sound. Greed? It does not yet have awareness of the money of another, or even its own." Athanasius concluded, "Since newborns are completely without a share in these misdeeds, what sin can a one day old baby have, save only, as we said, bodily filth? Scripture does not say, 'No one is pure from

[27] In a letter to Jerome, Augustine referred to infant guilt derived from Adam and quoted approvingly Jerome's citation of the Job 14 passage as evidence of original sin: "In thy sight no one is clean, not even the infant, whose time of life on earth is a single day." Augustine, Letter 166.3.6, in NPNF[1], 1:525. In his *City of God*, Augustine quoted Job 14:4: "There is none clean from stain, not even the babe whose life has been but for a day upon the earth." Augustine, *The City of God* 20.26.1, in NPNF[1], 2:446.

[28] The Greek is *tis gar katharos estai apo rhupou; all'outheis*. Randall K. Tan, David A. deSilva, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear Septuagint: H.B. Swete Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Job 14:4.

[29] Beatrice, *Transmission of Sin*, 197–98.

sin,' but 'from filth.'"[30] Augustine's appeals to Job 14:4 to support infant guilt rested on a faulty foundation because his interpretation depended on a concept added in the Greek translation that does not appear in the Hebrew text.

PSALM 51:5

Augustine quoted Ps 51:5 in *Confessions* when he asked, "But if 'I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,' where, I pray thee, O my God, where, Lord, or when was I, Thy servant, innocent?"[31] In a sermon, Augustine quoted from the verse, "Lo, I was conceived in iniquity," then asked about the kind of sin to which David would have been referring. He answered with this question, "How then can he say he was conceived in iniquity, unless iniquity is derived from Adam?"[32] Augustine continued his exposition of Ps 51:5:

> In another place a prophet declares, "No one is pure in your sight, not even an infant whose life on earth has been but one day" (Jb 14:4–5, LXX). We know that sins are canceled by baptism in Christ; Christ's baptism has power to forgive sins. Well, then, if infants are completely innocent, why do mothers come running to church when their babies are ill? What does that baptism effect, what is there to be forgiven? What I see is an innocent crying, not someone getting angry! What has baptism washed away? What is destroyed by it? The inheritance of sin is destroyed. If the baby could speak, if he had David's reasoning power, he would answer your question, "Why do you regard me simply as an infant? Admittedly you cannot see the load of sin I carry, but I was conceived in iniquity, 'and in sins did my mother nourish me in the womb.'"[33]

In his comments on Ps 51:5, Augustine quoted the Greek translation of Job 14:4 to argue that a one-day-old infant is unclean, and he added that the only remedy for his sin is water baptism. He also speculated that if one were to ask a one-day-old infant about his condition, the infant would declare his iniquity. Augustine explained that people conceived by the flesh are subject to judgment, which is why Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit rather than the flesh. Augustine concluded, "The verdict has been solemnly given: in Adam all have sinned.

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[30] Athanasius, *Fragments of Matthew* 9, in PG 27:1368–69. As Beatrice explained, "Athanasius rejects the interpretation as heretical, because for him as for all of the Greek Fathers, even if it is true that the sin of Adam passed to his descendants (see *Or. c. Arian.* 1.51 in PG 26.117C: *eis pantas anthrōpous ephthasen hē hamartia*), this is to be understood in the sense that death has reigned over all men, even the just, since all are subject to corruption and to the passions of their nature; see *Or. c. Arian.* 3.33 (PG 26.393b)." Beatrice, *Transmission of Sin*, 198n35.

[31] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7.12, in NPNF[1], 1:48–49.

[32] In this source, Scripture quotations appear in italics rather than quotation marks. Psalm 51:5 is Ps 50:7 in the Septuagint; thus, Augustine's sermon is on Psalm 50. Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 50*, in WSA 3/16:418.

[33] Augustine, in WSA 3/16:418.

The only new-born baby who could be born innocent is one not born from the work of Adam."[34] For Augustine, fleshly conception transmits Adam's sin.[35]

Unlike Augustine, most Bible interpreters do not read infant guilt into their exegesis of Ps 51:5. Rather, they clarify that David was pointing to the pervasiveness of his sin, which reached to the earliest moments of his life, and he was condemning neither his mother nor sexual union as sinful.[36]

Though Ps 51:5 is frequently cited to support the Augustinian view of infant guilt, most English Bibles translate the verse as David saying he was conceived in sin or was sinful, rather than saying he was born guilty.[37] To cite the verse to support infant guilt is to affirm more than the author stated in the verse.

EPHESIANS 2:3

Augustine supported his view of original sin as hereditary sin with three New Testament texts. The first of those texts, Eph 2:3, includes the Greek phrase *ēmetha tekna physei orgēs* ("we were by nature deserving of wrath"). In context, this passage suggests that people are "dead" in their "transgressions and sins" (v. 1) and walk according to the world and to Satan (v. 2). Because they are not believers in Christ, they are by nature subject to God's wrath. Augustine saw in the Latin translation, however, support for his interpretation that ***al*** people (not just unbelievers) deserve God's wrath because they were born physically. The Latin text was translated, "by nature, sons of wrath."[38] The Latin word behind "nature" is *natura*, which carries the idea of physical birth and is the way Augustine used the term. In *On the Trinity*, Augustine referred to "the sin of the first man passing over originally into all of both sexes in their birth through conjugal union, and the debt of our first parents binding their whole posterity." In the same passage he quoted Eph 2:1–3 and explained that "by nature" means "as it has been depraved by sin."[39] When discussing the man born blind (John 9), Augustine

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[34] Augustine, in WSA 3/16:419.

[35] Beatrice, *Transmission of Sin*, 98.

[36] As Allen P. Ross explains, "David then acknowledged that he was morally impotent. He was born *a sinner*, that is, at no time in his life was he without sin" (italics in the original). Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1:832. See also: "David was not saying that his birth was illegitimate, or that his parents sinned when they performed the sexual act at his conception. He was acknowledging that there never was a time when he was without sin. He was born in the state of sin, or rebellion against God, which is common to all humanity until reconciliation with God occurs. David's statement is a poetic expression of the biblical teaching about this pervasive, inborn or 'original' sin (see Rm 3:23)." Allen P. Ross, "Introduction and Notes: Psalms," in *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*, ed. Ted Cabal et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2007).

[37] The CSB is a notable exception that provides this problematic translation, "Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me."

[38] The Latin reads *natura filii iræ* (the Latin Vulgate and English translation are from the CPDV).

[39] Augustine, *On the Trinity* 13.12, in NPNF[1], 3:175.

quoted Eph 2:3 and explained that because of Adam's sin, evil had taken root in every person as a nature and every person is born mentally blind.[40] Augustine condemned the fleshly conception of humans, claiming that "carnal generation is from the transgression of original sin."[41] All people are children of wrath by nature, because they originated from the human foreskin, which signifies original sin.[42]

Augustine misinterpreted Eph 2:3 to mean that all people are under God's wrath due to their physical birth because sin is passed on by the fleshly act of conception.[43] The biblical text, however, indicates that *unbelievers* are subject to God's wrath due to their sinful acts rather than due to their physical birth.[44]

HEBREWS 7:4–10

Augustine concluded that just as Levi was in the loins of Abraham to pay the tithe to Melchizedek (Heb 7:4–10), all humanity was in the loins of Adam when he sinned in the garden, which makes humanity subject to judgment.[45] In reply, verse 9 says the tithe Levi receives now, he already paid, "so to speak" (NASB; "in a sense," CSB) because he was in Abraham's loins. The phrase indicates some type of analogy is in play, and it is the extent of the analogy that is discussed. The difference between the tithing event and the disobedience in the garden is that Levi was not counted as having paid the tithe simply because he was in his grandfather's loins. To compare the analogies, the consequences of Abraham's actions were not simply imputed to Levi. Rather, upon Levi receiving the tithe, it could be considered that Levi had already paid the tithe. Thus, Heb 7:4–10 does not concern original sin.

ROMANS 5:12

Augustine found support for inherited guilt in a misinterpretation of the Latin version of Rom 5:12. At the end of the verse, Paul wrote that all die *eph hō pantes hemartōn* ("because all sinned"). Reading from a Latin text, however, Augustine saw the phrase *in quo omnes peccaverunt* and wrongly interpreted it to mean "in whom all sinned." The resulting interpretation was that all humanity dies because all humanity sinned in Adam. The Greek phrase *eph hō*, however, which corresponds to the Latin *in quo*, means "because." As

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[40] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 44.9, in NPNF[1], 7:245.
[41] Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants* 2.15, in NPNF[1], 5:50.
[42] Augustine, *Against Julian* 6.7.20, in WSA 1/24:490.
[43] See also Augustine, *Questions on the Gospels* 2.38, in WSA 1/15–16:401; and Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 57.20, in WSA 3/17:144.
[44] "All Christians, Jew or Gentile, once lived according to the desires of 'our flesh,' by which he means carrying out in actions one's sinful inclinations." Witherington added, "This verse, despite the protest of Barth, does deal with the idea of having a fallen human nature, though it does not say how ' obtained it." Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A*
Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 253.
[45] Augustine, *Against Julian: Unfinished Work* 6.22, in WSA 1/25:656–61.

support for this interpretation, we may simply consult major English Bible translations.[46] Against Augustine's interpretation, Rom 5:12 states all die because all sin. Though Rom 5:12 provides the primary biblical support for an Augustinian view of original sin, the verse became significant for his view only when he began to debate Pelagians on original sin.[47] For Pelagius, Adam's sin brought death into the world, but each person is held responsible for their own sin. Adam's sin was the first and primary example of sinful behavior, but his descendants are indicted as guilty for the same reason as Adam—because of their own acts of rebellion against God.[48] The early church interpreted Romans as well as Adam's relationship to humanity in similar ways. For Augustine, however, the Adam-Christ parallel represented two processes of being born: sinful people are born naturally by the natural man (Adam), but children of God are born spiritually by grace through Christ.[49] This Adam-Christ parallel is seen when Augustine paired the verse with 1 Cor 15:22, which he quoted, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."[50] For Augustine, Adam passed sin to his descendants by procreation, resulting in all people being destined for eternal damnation, including unbaptized infants.[51]

Though some interpret Rom 5:12 like Augustine, other Christian scholars reject inherited guilt. James D. G. Dunn wrote on Paul's view of Adam and sin from Rom 5:12–21: "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."[52] Donald G. Bloesch explained, "The text in Romans to which Augustine often appealed (5:12) does not tell us how Adamic sin is related to general human sin and therefore cannot be used to argue for inherited sin or guilt; it simply informs us that death pervaded the whole human race 'inasmuch as all have sinned' (REB)."[53] Joseph Fitzmyer cautioned readers of Rom 5:12 to distinguish between Paul's writings and the later teachings of the church. This Catholic scholar explains that the doctrine of original sin (the view that all people inherit both a sinful nature and guilt) is a later

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[46] The CSB, ESV, LEB, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV render the phrase in question as "because all sinned." Other translations use different words to communicate the same idea. For example, the KJV used the phrase "for that all have sinned." Even the NABRE (New American Bible, Revised Edition), the translation used on the website of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, translated the phrase with a variation of "all sinned."

[47] Augustine quoted Rom 5:12 only three times before his debates with the Pelagians, and none of those occurrences of the verse concerned the transmission of sin. Beatrice, *Transmission of Sin*, 102.

[48] See Pelagius's views in *Pelagius' Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Theodore de Bruyn, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 92–93 (5:12); 94 (5:15); 99 (6:19); 104 (7:17).

[49] Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants* 1.19, in NPNF[1], 5:22.

[50] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 3.12, in NPNF[1], 7:22.

[51] Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and On the Baptism of Infants* 1.21, in NPNF[1], 5:23: "Such infants as quit the body without being baptized will be involved in the mildest condemnation of all."

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

[53] Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 43–44.

teaching of the church rather than the 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.[54]

Conclusion on Augustine's View of Inherited Guilt

Augustine's view of inherited guilt was based on his distorted views of humanity, sexual union, and Christian marriage, and his poor interpretations of key biblical texts. Augustine misinterpreted Job 14:4; Ps 51:5; Eph 2:3; Heb 7:4–10; and Rom 5:12. The best-known example is that Augustine quoted Rom 5:12 to affirm that all sinned in Adam, which is not what the apostle Paul wrote. Augustine viewed infant baptism as the solution for the problems of inherited guilt and demonic possession among infants. The early church affirmed human sinfulness, but Augustine's interpretations of Scripture and views of inherited guilt were innovations that were rejected by many of his contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of Christians.

Reformed Theologians Who Have Rejected Inherited Guilt

This doctrinal dispute is not determined by whether one identifies with the theological ideas of Reformed theology.[55] Macleod identified the "debate that divided Reformed theologians in the middle of the seventeenth century" between advocates of the views of *mediate* and *immediate* imputation.[56] In his monograph on original sin, Henri Blocher acknowledged his debt to Reformed theology but then denied any biblical basis for alien guilt, the view that Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity. Blocher called the view "repugnant."[57] Macleod and Blocher are cited as examples of Reformed theologians who acknowledge different views on inherited guilt among Reformed Christians.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), a Magisterial Reformer, rejected inherited guilt. Zwingli affirmed Adam's unity with humanity and sin's devastating effects, but he called original sin a "sin that they never had." Though Martin Luther attacked Zwingli's position as Pelagian, Zwingli

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[54] Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33, ed. William F. Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 408–9.

[55] The term "Reformed" here refers to the Arminian-Calvinist tradition.

[56] Macleod, "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," 140.

[57] "With all due respect to the Reformed theology to which I am indebted, I have been led to question the doctrine of alien guilt transferred—that is, the doctrine of the imputation to all of Adam's own trespass, his act of transgression. If Scripture definitely taught such a doctrine, however offensive to modern taste, I should readily bow to its authority. But where does Scripture require it?" Blocher added, "I see no necessity for the idea that alien guilt was transferred (that is, that Adam's particular act was reckoned to the account of all). This idea is repugnant to common moral taste (including that of Christians), and finds no support in Scripture." However, Blocher affirmed a view which entails "guilty depravity." Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 5, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 128–30.

defended his view of original sin by asking, "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?" Zwingli distinguished between *disease* and *sin*. The word *disease* refers to the "original contamination of man," "defect of humanity," or "the defect of a corrupted nature." Adam's fault brought this to every person (Rom 5:14). The word *sin*, however, "implies guilt, and guilt comes from a transgression or a trespass on the part of one who designedly perpetrates a deed." Zwingli was unwilling to state that the inheritance from Adam should even be called "sin" because Zwingli denied that the inheritance from Adam involves "guilt," which would imply a sinful deed.[58]

Though some Wesleyan-Arminians affirm inherited guilt, the view of **Jacob Arminius** (1560–1609) was consistent with inherited corruption.[59] Methodist theologian **John Miley** (1813–95) argued for "native depravity without native demerit."[60] Further, he rejected inherited guilt as "openly contradictory to the deepest and most determining principle of the Arminian system."[61] Miley described original sin as "the corruption of the nature of every man . . . whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually."[62]

Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932), a Reformed philosopher who especially identifies with the views of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, wrote, "Unlike a sinful act I perform, original sin need not be thought of as something for which I am culpable (original *sin* is not necessarily original *guilt*); insofar as I am born in this predicament, my being in it is not within my control and not up to me."[63] Plantinga distinguished among sinful acts, original sin, and original guilt. He affirmed the first two concepts but not original guilt.

Thomas H. McCall and **Oliver D. Crisp** are, like Plantinga, analytic theologians who reject inherited guilt. McCall, an Arminian, argued for the plausibility of other views but endorsed the "corruption-only" view, which is consistent with inherited consequences.[64] McCall explained, "We are, of course, guilty for sin. But we are guilty for the sins that *we commit*; we

[58] Ulrich Zwingli, "On Original Sin," in *On Providence and Other Essays*, trans. S. Jackson (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983), 3–10.
[59] See Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149–50.
[60] John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1892), 1:521.
[61] Miley, 1:522.
[62] Miley, 1:523.
[63] Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 49; italics in the original.
[64] The corruption-only theory "offers consistency with both explicit biblical teaching on sin and death and the broader witness to moral responsibility." McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 203.

are not guilty for something that our first parents did."[65] He argued that original guilt is contrary to Scriptures that teach that the guilt of others is not imputed to us, such as Deut 24:16; Jer 31:29–30; and Ezek 18:20. McCall clarified, "Adam is guilty for his sins. And while we suffer the results of Adam's sin, it is our own sin for which we are guilty."[66] Crisp argued for a "moderate Reformed doctrine of original sin."[67] Crisp notes the "thin" biblical support for original guilt and points out that original guilt is not part of the church's "dogmatic core" of beliefs on original sin; only some Protestants affirm it.[68] He points out that the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* (1562) and Reformed *Belgic Confession* (1561) affirmed the corruption of human nature without any claim of inherited guilt.[69] "Original sin is an inherited corruption of nature," but people do not bear the guilt of Adam's sin. Rather, people are "culpable for their actual sin and condemned for it."[70]

Baptists Who Have Rejected Inherited Guilt

Though some Baptists affirm inherited guilt, many have explicitly rejected the view. English General Baptist **John Smyth** (1570–1612) wrote, "There is no original sin (lit., *no sin of origin or descent*), but all sin is actual and voluntary, viz., a word, a deed, or a design against the law of God; and therefore, infants are without sin."[71] **Edgar Y. Mullins** (1860–1928) rejected the doctrine of inherited guilt.[72] Rather, a man "is guilty when he does wrong." Mullins explained, "Men are not condemned therefore for hereditary or original sin. They are condemned only for their own sins."[73] **Walter T. Conner** (1877–1952) rejected inherited guilt. Conner reasoned that sin implies willful disobedience to God, which requires the knowledge of moral truth. Sin is universal, inevitable, and hereditary due to our relationship with Adam. There are thus "seeds of evil tendency in the child's nature," which will eventually result in the child committing an act of transgression upon reaching an "age of moral responsibility." Before that time, though, the child "does not have personal guilt" because he or she has not

[65] McCall, 161.
[66] McCall, 161.
[67] See Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 139–55.
[68] Crisp, 145–46.
[69] Crisp, 147–48.
[70] Crisp, 152–53. Crisp also affirmed, "Possession of original sin leads to death and separation from God irrespective of actual sin" (p. 153). However, God can provide atonement for those who possess original sin yet do not attain moral accountability, such as infants and those with mental impairments (p. 150).
[71] See "A Short Confession of Faith in Twenty Articles by John Smyth," in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2011), 94; italics in the original.
[72] Edgar Y. Mullins was a pastor and professor of theology. At various times during the beginning of the previous century, he was president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Baptist World Alliance.
[73] Edgar Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917; repr., Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 302.

yet developed personal responsibility, namely "the powers of self-consciousness and self-determination."[74] Conner emphasized, "The idea that Adam's sin as an act of sin is charged to his descendants and on that account they are guilty and hence condemned, is an idea too preposterous to be seriously entertained."[75] **Stanley Grenz** (1950–2005) wrote, "Romans 5:12–21, like Ephesians 2:3, does not clearly and unequivocally declare that all persons inherit guilt directly because of Adam's sin. The biblical case for original guilt is not strong." Grenz concluded, "Our human nature has been corrupted."[76] He described the development of moral responsibility. "Somewhere in childhood we move from a stage in which our actions are not deemed morally accountable to the responsibility of acting as moral agents. In short, we cross a point which some refer to as the 'age of accountability.'"[77]

James Leo Garrett Jr. (1925–2020) provided historical perspective: "Southern Seminary has had a wide divergence of views on your topic; for example, between Boyce and Dale Moody and between Dale Moody and Al Mohler. Southwestern Seminary, on the other hand, has consistently been on one side: we are not guilty of Adam's sin. Walter T. Conner repeatedly took this stance." It is Garrett's testimony that for more than one century, the theology faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) has affirmed unanimously that people are *not guilty* of Adam's sin. Garrett explained, "Conner was in the theology department at SWBTS from 1910 to 1949. I have known, I believe, every person who has taught theology as a full faculty member since 1949, and I cannot identify any one of these who taught that we are all guilty of the sin of Adam (and Eve), with one possible exception."[78] According to Garrett, the faculty of Southern Seminary have differed on the view of inherited guilt, but the faculty of Southwestern Seminary have always rejected it.

Billy Graham (1918–2018), a Baptist evangelist who declared the gospel to millions of people, commented on original sin. In Graham's view, Adam and Eve sinned by choice, and subsequent generations inherit "the tendency to sin" and also become "sinners by choice" due to their own sin and rebellion against God upon reaching the age of accountability.[79]

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[74] Walter T. Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937), 131–43. Conner taught theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas from 1910–49.
[75] Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman, 1945), 29.
[76] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 205.
[77] Grenz, 209.
[78] The one possible exception was a new faculty member whose view Garrett did not know. James Leo Garrett Jr., correspondence to the author January 22, 2013, used with permission.
[79] Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 71.

Baptist Confessions That Do Not Affirm Inherited Guilt

The major ecumenical councils of the first five centuries did not address original sin. Those councils addressed topics such as the Trinity and the humanity and divinity of Christ. Though some historic Baptist confessions affirmed inherited guilt, others either did not affirm it or rejected the view. The First London Confession (1644), a Particular Baptist statement of faith, affirmed no theory of imputation. It noted that Adam and Eve fell into disobedience, for which death came upon all. All are conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, and all are by nature children of wrath and subjects of death. The statement was consistent with both inherited guilt and inherited consequences. The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations, Gathered According to the Primitive Pattern (1651) was the first General Baptist statement representing more than one church. In that statement, "all mankind are liable to partake of the same death or punishment" that fell on Adam for his transgression. Jesus Christ suffered for every person, and he will raise all humanity "from that death which fell on them, through or by the first Adam's sin or offence, as surely as they partake of it." In other words, death results from our certain participation in sin—not because Adam's guilt is imputed. The True Gospel Faith (1654) referred to Adam breaking God's law and declared that death was brought on himself and all his posterity—with no mention that his posterity inherits guilt. The New Hampshire Confession (1833) declared "all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint but choice."

The doctrine of inherited guilt is not contained in the Baptist Faith and Message (2000). Article 3 explained that Adam's "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."[80] The article affirmed an inherited human inclination to commit sinful actions but did not affirm inherited guilt. It is reasonable to infer from the BFM that infants and young children have not yet reached an age (or stage) of moral accountability before God.[81] Rather, they will later become capable of moral actions and then will certainly transgress God's laws and fall under just condemnation. The first edition of the BFM, published in 1925, described humans as under condemnation *before* they become transgressors. Article 3 of that edition stated Adam's "posterity inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors." That section of the article, among others, was changed in 1963 and remained unchanged in the 2000 revision. **Herschel Hobbs** (1907–95)

[80] See The Baptist Faith and Message: Revised 2000, art. 3, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 514. Hereafter, the Baptist Faith and Message is BFM.

[81] Chad Brand, "Accountability, Age of," in Chad Brand et al., ed., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2003), 17: "Age at which God holds children accountable for their sins. When persons come to this point, they face the inevitability of divine judgment if they fail to repent and believe the gospel."

presided over the BFM 1963 Study Committee. Hobbs described the changes between the 1925 and 1963 editions of the BFM, commenting specifically on article 3.

The result of the fall is that men inherit, not "a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin" (1925), but a "nature and an environment inclined toward sin" (1963). In the latter "condemnation" comes upon individuals following transgression "as soon as they are capable of moral action." This, of course, agrees with the position generally held by Baptists concerning God's grace in cases of those under the age of accountability and the mentally incompetent.[82]

Hobbs was clear on the meaning of the revised statement of faith. People do *not* inherit "a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin" (per 1925) but a nature "inclined toward sin." Also, condemnation *follows* transgression, which comes as soon as people are capable of moral action. Although it was *possible* to read inherited guilt into the BFM 1925, the 1963 revision made such a move nearly impossible. Though not all Baptists today agree with Hobbs's interpretation, it is reasonable to suggest that Hobbs, who was the president of the Southern Baptist Convention that convened the study committee that revised the BFM in 1963, was articulating the view of the majority of his constituents.

The Impact of One's View of Original Sin on Other Doctrines

The Doctrines of Humanity and Christ

In previous writings, I argued for an "inherited sinful nature," the view that all people inherit from Adam a sinful nature, not his guilt.[83] Though I am in general agreement with the method and findings of those studies, I no longer refer to inheriting a *sinful nature* and prefer instead to refer to inherited *consequences*. The problem with affirming that people inherit a sinful *nature* is that if human nature is essentially and inherently sinful, then Jesus (who was truly human and divine) would have been a person whose human nature was sinful. However, Scripture is clear there was no sin in him. Not only did Jesus not sin, but he also was not sinful in any way. If one affirms that human nature is essentially and inherently sinful *and* one denies that Jesus's human nature was sinful, then one would be affirming that Jesus's human nature was not truly human—a conclusion which would fail tests for orthodoxy that have been in place since the early ecumenical councils. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for

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[82] Herschel H. Hobbs, "Southern Baptists and Confessionalism: A Comparison of the Origins and Contents of the 1925 and 1963 Confessions," *Review and Expositor* 76, no. 1 (1979): 63. Peter Lumpkins first alerted me to this article.

[83] See Adam Harwood, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Adam Harwood, *Born Guilty?: A Southern Baptist View of Original Sin* (Carrollton, GA: Free Church Press, 2013); Adam Harwood, "Commentary on Article 2: The Sinfulness of Man," in Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone Can Be Saved*, 37–53; Adam Harwood, "A Baptist View," in *Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry*, ed. Adam Harwood and Kevin E. Lawson (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 155–85.

human sin because he was both truly divine and truly human.[84] The property of being sinful is common to fallen humanity but not essential to authentic human nature. Though it might be proper to refer to my human nature as corrupted and twisted, this is different than arguing for the existence of a thing called an inherited sinful nature.[85]

The Doctrine of Salvation

An explicit denial of inherited guilt sometimes raises this objection: How can one deny imputed guilt but affirm imputed righteousness? To reply, one must ask what the Bible teaches concerning the conditions required for a person to be counted righteous by God. Romans 3:21–22 states, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (ESV; see also Rom 3:28 and 4:5). Romans 4:22–25 likewise affirms: "That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (ESV). Paul's point in Romans 3–4 is that others are made righteous in the same way as Abraham, by faith. In the Bible, being counted by God as righteous does not require one to affirm the imputation of Adam's guilt; one must only believe in Jesus.

When Can Sinners Repent and Believe?

The second question is addressed briefly: When can sinners repent of their sin and confess Jesus as Lord, to be saved? To answer that question, I will summarize and critique the doctrine of total depravity defined as total inability. If total depravity were defined only as humans are sinners in need of God's grace in Christ, then doctrinal differences would not emerge. However, total depravity is typically defined to include the views that all people are born spiritually dead and unable to repent of sin and call on the Lord unless they are first granted by God the gift of faith and the will to believe.[86]

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[84] For the classic argument for this position, see Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*.

[85] See McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 207–18; and: "We are by nature 'children of wrath' (Eph 2:3) because the virus of sin has corrupted our inner being, but our lack of resistance to this virus is what renders us culpable before God. Our essential nature is good, for we are created in God's image; our existential nature is evil, for we have allowed the proclivity to sin to gain mastery over us. Guilt is not inherited, but the weakness that leads to sin is part of our human inheritance." Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 47.

[86] Though it is possible to define total depravity without including total inability, the doctrine is not typically defined that way in the theological literature. Thus, the doctrine of depravity in this chapter includes inability.

Total Depravity as the Inability to Repent and Believe

The Canons of Dort is a document that resulted from the series of meetings held by the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1618–19 to address theological differences between the followers of Jacob Arminius and the followers of John Calvin. Three articles are quoted to support the definition above of total depravity.[87]

Article 3 stated, "Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform."[88] The distinction in their view is that people do not become children of wrath due to their sinful acts, but they enter the world as children of wrath. Also, sinners are unable to return to God apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit. In other words, sinners must be saved to return to God.

Article 9 stated, "The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called."[89] Although the confession claimed sinners *cannot* return to God unless they are first regenerated, article 9 blames sinners when they are not converted.

Article 14 stated, "Faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent—the act of believing—from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself." Other Christians view salvation as the gift of God and faith as the means for that salvation. The confession, however, views faith as the gift of God, which he gives to only some people. Thus, only those people who have been given a gift of faith will be saved.

The doctrine of total depravity is explained as total inability in the writings of some theologians. James Boice and Philip Ryken explained, "In this sad and pervasively sinful

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[87] The articles are from the section titled, "The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine: Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs." See the text in "The Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1618–19," in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, vol. 2, *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 569–600.

[88] "Synod of Dort," 2:584.

[89] "Synod of Dort," 2:585.

state we have no inclination to seek God, and therefore *cannot* seek him or even respond to the gospel when it is presented to us. In our unregenerate state, we do not have free will so far as 'believing on' or 'receiving' Jesus Christ as Savior is concerned."[90] They clarified that unbelievers "cannot" respond to the gospel by repenting and believing in Jesus when it is presented. Consistent with article 3 in the Canons of Dort, they taught that a person believes in Jesus *after* they are born again. Mark DeVine wrote, "Humanity's fall into sin results in a condition that must be described in terms of spiritual blindness and deadness and in which the will is enslaved, not free." DeVine continued, "We need to ask whether the Arminian insistence that the work of the Holy Spirit frees the will to either repent and believe or refuse to do so does not evidence a deeper misunderstanding of the nature of depravity itself."[91] John Piper wrote, "Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it."[92] "Regeneration precedes faith," R. C. Sproul explained. He added, "We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe."[93] R. Albert Mohler Jr. also affirmed that regeneration precedes faith:

> In the mystery of the sovereign purposes of God and by his sheer grace and mercy alone, the Word was brought near to us. As a result, we were called, made alive, and regenerated. We then believed what we otherwise would never have been able to believe, and we grasped hold of it, knowing that it is the sole provision of our need. We came to know of our need and of God's response and provision for us in Christ, and then we came to know of our necessary response of faith, repentance, confession, and belief.[94]

According to these views of total depravity, spiritual blindness and deadness results in the enslavement of the human will so that people do not have the ability to repent and believe the message of the gospel unless they are first regenerated, or born again.

The Implications of Total Depravity as the Inability to Repent and Believe

If total depravity as the inability to repent and believe is true, then two implications follow. First, people are able to exercise faith in Christ only if and after God gives them the gift of faith through the grace of regeneration. Second, all commands and invitations in the Bible to repent and believe can be obeyed only by people to whom God first gives faith and who are first born again by the Holy Spirit. These implications are supported by those who affirm the

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[90] James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 30; italics in the original.
[91] Mark DeVine, "Total Depravity," in Barrett and Nettles, *Whomever* He *Wills*, 35 (see intro., n. 22).
[92] John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 50.
[93] Robert C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 72.
[94] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Power of the Articulated Gospel," in *The Underestimated Gospel*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 19.

doctrine. Loraine Boettner wrote, "The regeneration of the soul is something which is wrought in us, and not an act performed by us. It is an instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is not even a thing of which we are conscious at the moment it occurs, but rather something which lies lower than consciousness. At the moment of its occurrence the soul is as passive as was Lazarus when he was called back to life by Jesus."[95] Boettner described salvation as something that occurs to a spiritually dead person. He compared the passive nature of the salvation of a spiritually dead person as analogous to the physical resuscitation of a physically dead person. Thomas J. Nettles wrote, "Regeneration of sinners is like the birth of a baby, who is actually passive in the process and comes into life as a result of the work of outside forces. The child has nothing to do with being born. Being born again, according to Jesus, is like that."[96] Nettles compared being born again spiritually to being born physically; in both instances, he claimed, the person is passive in the process. Matthew Barrett clarified the reason why only some people are saved: "God promises that eternal life will be granted on the condition of faith. However, God never promises that He will bestow faith on everyone."[97] For Barrett, as well as others in this perspective, God saves only those people to whom he grants faith.

A Biblical Case for the Ability of Sinners to Repent and Believe for Salvation

A Biblical Theology of Repentance

In the Old Testament the primary word for repentance means "to turn back" (*šûb*). Jeremiah used the term when he declared that Jerusalem "refused to repent" (Jer 5:3). God's people refused to turn away from their sinful actions and return to him. One resource described the Hebrew word this way: "The basic meaning of return or change in direction is used metaphorically to express repentance as a change in direction away from sinful actions toward obedience to God." In the New Testament the key words are the noun "repentance" (*metanoia*) and the verb "to repent" (*metanoeō*). John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministries by declaring that people should repent (Matt 3:2; 4:17). They used the imperative form of the word, which means they were issuing a command. Jesus denounced the cities that did not repent (Matt 11:20), which implies that they could repent but refused to do so. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter identified Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ

[95] Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 165.
[96] Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 289.
[97] Matthew Barrett, "The Scriptural Affirmation of Monergism," in Barrett and Nettles, *Whomever* He *Wills*, "Monergism," 124 (see intro., n. 22).

and commanded that people repent (Acts 2:38). In his sermon at Mars Hill, Paul declared that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30b). Repentance has been defined as "the acknowledgement and condemnation of one's own sins, coupled with a turning to God." Kenneth Keathley identified genuine repentance of the whole person—mind, body, and will—in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–24). The younger son evidenced a change in his thinking (v. 17), his emotions (v. 19), and his will (v. 18). Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which results in salvation (2 Cor 7:10). In the Old and New Testaments, people who repent of their sin and turn to God receive healing, restoration, and salvation.

A Biblical Theology of Faith/Believing

The word *faith* rarely appears in the Old Testament as a noun.[98] The primary word used is a verb translated "to believe" (*ʾmn*). For example, Abram *believed* the Lord, and the Lord considered Abram's response as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Also, when Judah was threatened with invasion, King Jehoshaphat led his people to seek the Lord and his help. The prophet Jahaziel declared they would see the salvation of the Lord. Before the victory, the king told the people, "*Believe* in the LORD your God, and you will be established; *believe* in his prophets, and you will succeed" (2 Chron 20:20 CSB; emphasis added).[99] The people believed the Lord and the Lord delivered them. As a final example, upon hearing the prophet's warning that their great city would be overthrown in forty days, "the Ninevites *believed* God" (Jonah 3:5; emphasis added). Rather than referring to faith as a concept, Old Testament authors referred to people who believed, or trusted, God.

Believing in Jesus is a foundational concept in the New Testament. The concept of faith appears 243 times as a noun (*pistis*, "faith") and 241 times as a verb (*pistueō*, "to believe"). To have faith is to believe. In the New Testament, the Old Testament concept of believing God incorporates believing his Son. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10), saw the faith of the paralytic's friends (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5), and told the bleeding woman that her faith made her well (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34). Paul described the message he preached to both Jews and Greeks, "They must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). In John's Gospel, faith is never a noun (*pistis*, "faith") but always a verb (*pistueō*, "to believe"). The emphasis is striking because other biblical authors use both terms. John's exclusive use in his Gospel of the verb reveals a point that the author intended to make to his

[98] The word *faith* appears only four times in the Old Testament in the NASB (Deut 32:51; Job 39:12; Ps 146:6; Hab 2:4).

[99] In a clever wordplay in the Hebrew, the verb forms *haaminu* ("trust") and *theamenu* ("you will be safe") come from the same root verb, *ʾmn* ("to believe"). *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (n.p.: Biblical Studies, 2006), 2 Chron 20:20.

audience. John had no interest in mentioning faith or belief as a concept. However, John uses the verb "to believe" ninety-six times to emphasize the need for people to believe in Jesus.

The terms for belief can refer to knowledge or trust. Some people believe only in the sense that they know something to be true (knowledge). But mental assent *only* to theological truth will not save a person. Consider, as examples, that demons believe (*pisteuein*, "to believe") that there is one God (Jas 2:19), and demons addressed Jesus as Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7). Those statements of theological truth were uttered by demons who were not and never will be saved. Salvation requires repenting of sin and believing Christ in the sense that one is personally entrusting themselves to Christ. Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). Salvation is a gift of God that is received by faith or trusting in Christ. Keathley rightly stated, "Faith is the instrument by which we accept salvation."[100]

A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Death

Scripture reveals various metaphors for sinners who have not yet repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus for their salvation. They are referred to as sick (Matt 9:12), blind (Matt 15:14; 2 Cor 4:4), lovers of darkness (John 3:19), and dead (Luke 15:24; John 5:24; Eph 2:1). Some Christians misinterpret spiritual deadness to mean a person *cannot* repent of sin and believe in Jesus unless God first grants them faith. However, Scripture does not require that view.[101] Rather, such an interpretation says more than Scripture and is contrary to the plain meaning of several texts. Faith is the means of salvation.[102] To assert that God grants faith to only some people is to wrongly affirm that God desires only some people to believe in Jesus.[103]

Consider the metaphor of spiritual deadness. In the garden, Adam and Eve, who died spiritually when they ate the fruit, were able to hear from and respond to God (Gen 3:10–13). In the parable of the prodigal son, the spiritually dead person (the son) was able to return to his father (Luke 15:24). Like the two previous parables (vv. 7, 10), the son returning to the father depicts a sinner's repentance. The spiritually dead son was able to repent of his sin and return to his father. In John 5:24, a spiritually dead person is able to hear and believe in Jesus. In the story of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus raised his friend from *physical* death (John 11). As already noted, some Christians conflate the metaphor of being raised from *spiritual* death (Eph 2:1) with the story of Lazarus being raised from *literal* death. Ronnie W. Rogers noted, "I disaffirm that the technical meaning of being spiritually dead is adequately illustrated by using Lazarus or dead people in a cemetery, etc., in order to show that like

[100] Keathley, "God in Salvation," 577.
[101] See David L. Allen, "Does Regeneration Precede Faith?" *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 34–52.
[102] People are saved by grace *through* faith (Eph 2:8).
[103] For the case that God desires every person to be saved through faith in Jesus, see Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone Can Be Saved*.

them, the lost who are dead in sin cannot believe until they have been given life—regenerated. This picture is contrary to the panoply of Scripture. For example, Rom 10:9 says, 'If you confess . . . and believe in your heart' which no physically dead graveyard man can do, but a spiritually dead man, by the grace of God, can do."[104] Affirming that people are spiritually dead does not require a denial that sinners can repent and believe in Jesus.[105] In Scripture, spiritually dead people can and do respond to God.

Paul's remark in Acts 17:30 indicates who God commands to repent of sin. Paul declared, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." The preaching of the apostles included the call to repent of sin and believe in Jesus to be saved (see Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 20:21; 26:20). The command to repent implies that people are *able* to repent. It would be unjust for God to command a task then judge people who could not comply for failing to do that which he commanded.[106] God, who desires the salvation of every person and commands every person to repent and believe in Jesus, draws every person to himself (John 12:32).

Baptist confessions affirm both the sinfulness of humanity as well as the ability of sinners to repent and believe in Jesus. Article 6 of the New Hampshire Confession (1833), titled "Of the Freeness of Salvation," stated, "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which refusal will subject him to an aggravated condemnation."[107] Rather than describing people as unable to respond to God, the confession claimed that "nothing prevents" a sinner's salvation except the sinner's "voluntary refusal." According to "The Faith of Free Will Baptists" (2013), "the call of the Gospel is co-extensive with the atonement to all men, both by the word and strivings of the Spirit, so that salvation is rendered equally possible to all; and if any fail of eternal life, the fault is wholly his own."[108]

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[104] Ronnie W. Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist: The Disquieting Realities of Calvinism* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 22.

[105] Rogers, 21; see also Rogers, *Does God Love All or Some? Comparing Biblical Extensivism and Calvinism's Exclusivism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 160–65.

[106] "If someone is going to be condemned because they personally failed to do something (in this case, to believe), then they must have been capable of doing it in the first place. Otherwise no guilt could attach to their action, and their condemnation would be unjust." John C. Lennox, *Determined to Believe? The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, and Human Responsibility* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 145.

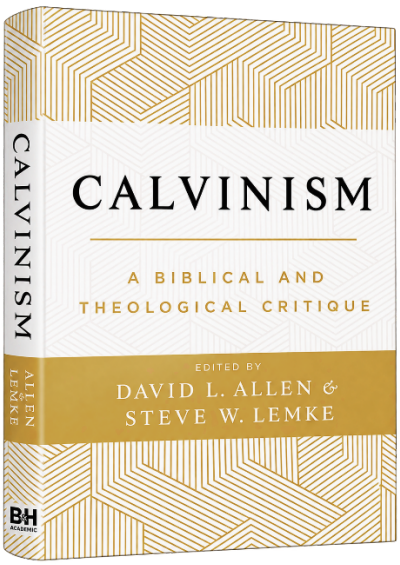
[107] In 1853, J. Newton Brown added or changed the italicized portions: "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth *but* his own *inherent depravity and* voluntary *rejection of the gospel*, which *rejection involves him in* an aggravated condemnation." Though the 1853 edition mentions depravity, both editions indict the individual sinner for rejecting the gospel. See the New Hampshire Confession, art. 6, "Of the Freeness of Salvation," in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 363.

[108] "The Gospel Call," chap. 8 in "The Faith of Free Will Baptists," pt. 2 in *A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc.* (Antioch, TN: National Association of Free Will Baptists, 2013), 10.

All Christians should affirm that sin separates them from the God whom Scripture declares to be "holy, holy, holy" (Rev 4:8). It was our sin combined with his love for us, the world, which resulted in God giving his Son to die on the cross so that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). All Christians must also affirm that people are saved by God's grace through faith, not by their works (Eph 2:8–9). The doctrine of total depravity, however, affirms much more than the sinfulness of humanity and the grace of God. The doctrine of total depravity, when defined as total inability, insists that people respond to God in repentance and faith only *after* they are born again. In other words, people repent and believe *because* they are born again. A better interpretation of the Bible, however, is that people are saved from sin and reconciled to God when and *because* they repent of their sin and believe in Jesus (see Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21; 16:31).

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented two views of original sin and advocated for inherited corruption against inherited guilt. I also argued for total depravity as the inability to save oneself rather than the inability to repent and believe in Jesus. Though Christians differ on these details of original sin and total depravity, they are united on declaring that all people are sinners in need of God's grace that is available only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. As these doctrinal discussions continue, may we be faithful witnesses of the crucified, risen, and returning Son.



Harwood, Adam. "A Critique of Total Depravity." In *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*, edited by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, 15–48. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022.

RPT QUOTES: "If total depravity were defined only as humans are sinners in need of God's grace in Christ, then doctrinal differences would not emerge" (page 40, page 20 of this PDF); "I also argued for total depravity as the inability to save oneself rather than the inability to repent and believe in Jesus" (page 48 of book, page 27 in this PDF)