

The Doctrine of Original Sin

A careful study of Romans 5:12 — mortality, not guilt, passed to all humanity.

Study Guide compiled by Pleasant Springs Church • ESV & LXX

Central Text

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned —"

Romans 5:12 (ESV)

LXX/Greek: Διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι' ἑνός ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

1 The Textual Basis

Romans 5:12 is the central biblical text for the doctrine of Original Sin. The text teaches that Adam's sin brought death into the world — but notice carefully what spread: *death*, not guilt. Adam's sin introduced mortality into humanity. The Greek phrase *ἐφ' ᾧ* (*eph ho*) can mean "so that" or "with the result that," emphasizing the spread of death as the consequence, not the automatic transfer of guilt.

2 Mainstream (Traditional) Understanding

Traditional theology, following Augustine and later systematized by theologians like Millard Erickson, teaches that Adam's guilt is transmitted to all humans at conception. Erickson's "federal headship" model views Adam as humanity's representative whose guilt is imputed to all. While this view has been dominant in Western Christianity, it creates significant theological difficulties — most critically with the nature of Jesus' humanity.

3 The Problem of Jesus' Humanity

If Adam's guilt is biologically inherited, Jesus — as a true descendant of David "according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3) — would have inherited it as well. Attempts to solve this by appealing to the virgin birth, the immaculate conception of Mary, or bypassing normal human descent are textually unsupported. The biblical witness is clear: Jesus was fully human, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). This is only coherent if guilt is not biologically transmitted.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV): "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

LXX/Greek: κευρωρισμένον ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν

4

Alternative Reading of Romans 5:12

Romans 5:12 teaches that *mortality* (death), not guilt, was passed to all humanity through Adam. The key grammatical note: ἐφ' ᾧ functions causally — death spread because all sinned (i.e., because mortality leads to the conditions in which sin becomes inevitable). Example: Jesus inherited mortality but not guilt. He died — but not because He sinned. He died because He took on real human flesh, which is mortal.

Romans 5:12 (ESV): "...so death spread to all men because all sinned"

LXX: ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον — "with the result that all sinned"

5

Universal Human Condition

All humans, because of mortality and their resulting separation from God, inevitably sin and incur real personal guilt. Children who live long enough will eventually sin, fulfilling Romans 3:23. This is not inevitability imposed by guilt inherited at conception — it is the natural trajectory of finite, mortal creatures living in a world fractured by Adam's choice. Like a broken clock that will eventually fail, all humans will eventually sin.

Romans 3:23 (ESV): "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

LXX: πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ

6

The Fate of Innocents

Infants, unborn children, and the mentally incapacitated are not guilty before God because they have not willfully sinned. Sin, as consistently taught in Scripture, requires volition and personal rebellion against God's known will — which they cannot enact. This is not a liberal softening of sin; it is a consistent application of God's justice and mercy. God does not condemn those who have not transgressed.

Deuteronomy 1:39 (ESV): "...your little ones...who today have no knowledge of good or evil..."

7

Resurrection as the Answer

Salvation for both sinners and innocents is possible only through Christ's resurrection. The same Adam-Christ contrast that explains universal death also explains universal resurrection hope: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The Book of Revelation's imagery of the "books of deeds" (Revelation 20:12) applies to those with a moral record of choices. Innocents are not found there — they are found in the Book of Life.

1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV): "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

LXX: ὡςπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζῶσονται.

8

Consistency with Depravity

This view does not deny human depravity or the seriousness of sin. All humans are born into mortality and the practical inevitability of sin. But they are *guilty* only when they personally sin. Psalm 51:5 ("Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me") means humans are born as *sinner*s by *nature* — into a corrupted condition — not that they are guilty of Adam's specific act at conception.

Psalm 51:5 (ESV): "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

LXX (Ps 50:7): ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήμφθην, καὶ ἐν ἁμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέν με ἡ μήτηρ μου.

9

Objection: Does This Lead to Universalism?

Romans 5:18 states: "...one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men." Does this teach universal salvation? Paul clarifies immediately in verse 19: "...the many were made righteous." Christ's work is sufficient for all and effective for all innocents — but effective for adult sinners only for those who believe. The contrast is not universalism; it is the abundance of grace over the abundance of sin.

Romans 5:18-19 (ESV): "...one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners..."

10

Conclusion

Original Sin is best understood as mortality and the inevitable trajectory toward sinning, not the transmission of Adam's legal guilt. This view:

- ✦ Preserves Jesus' true humanity and sinlessness
- ✦ Affirms God's justice in judging only personal sin
- ✦ Maintains God's mercy toward innocents
- ✦ Underscores the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection for all
- ✦ Is consistent with the full sweep of both LXX and New Testament teaching

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