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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**“ I am not a member of the Church of Christ, but I am asking this question in the hope that you can help. I have been taught that a child is born in sin, but I find this very difficult to accept, Could you please explain?”**

This is a very difficult question to answer insofar that it is well-nigh impossible to give a complete psychological account of why man sins; the Bible never professes to do this. Sin cannot be explained; it is there, and the most we can do is acknowledge the fact. We can, and we will, explain its nature and its consequences, but there is an area of this subject over which much controversy has raged and which has caused more confusion than enlightenment; I refer, of course, to the teaching that a child is born with a totally depraved nature. However, let us return to first principles and try to unravel this complex subject as objectively as we can.

#### **Initial Acceptances**

We must begin our study by accepting a number of facts as being true, otherwise we shall have no ‘solid ground’ on which to build our arguments.

We start by accepting that there is a Creator God who is Good, **all** Good. Therefore, everything which He created must have been of His essential nature, i.e., Good. In that case, His essential nature of Goodness would not allow Him to be the originator of evil. This argument is confirmed in the early chapters of Genesis where the record says, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

We now have, on the face of it, what seems to be a problem. Gen.3:1 states, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” In view of this statement, do we then believe that the serpent (which is subsequently identified as Satan) was one of the beasts that God created? No, because Gen. 1:25 states, “And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the face of the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.” So we are driven to the inevitable conclusion that if God did not create Satan in the garden, then Satan, in the guise of the serpent, must have entered from elsewhere. Furthermore, the Bible, by its frequent allusions to a diabolic agency, asserts quite forcibly that the advent of sin into the world is not explainable in terms of the God-nature.

According to the words of Jesus when He said that He could call down legions of angels to defend Him, we cannot doubt the creation of an angelic host. If God, as we teach, gave to man the freedom of choice, it is reasonable to assume that He did exactly the same to His created angelic host. If one in the hierarchy of the angelic host, say Satan, had opposed the Good Will of God, then that would have been the antithesis of Goodness as per the Divine Will and would consequently be designated as evil. As essential evil cannot exist in the presence of essential Goodness, then banishment from God would have been automatic; there is a place prepared for the Devil (Satan) and his angels. What is then more predictable than that Satan, from his place of banishment, should have entered into the world to attempt to thwart the Divine Will in the creation of man?

You see, dear questioner and reader, we are dealing with the direct bearing of evil against the Divine Will; it may be popular to personalise the sacrifice of Jesus and say 'He died for my sins' but we are dealing with something which is more significant than even that. Jesus died to relieve us from the state of sin as embodied in Satan. Once the true nature of God has been revealed as absolutely holy, then the sin is revealed in its stark opposition to that holiness. The final exposure of sin was in the Person of Jesus. The limitation of sin is in the victory of Jesus over death through His glorious resurrection, and through the preaching of the Good News and our acceptance of it. It is significant that David realised the enormity of what he had done when confronted with Nathan when he had to cry out to God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). It is quite evident that man could not have relieved himself of this sinful state; the burden of guilt was placed on the Christ of God and He carried it to Calvary.

So what is the most important lesson we have learned from this? The Bible teaches us that sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), so consequently there is no transgression until man chooses to assert his own will as rule of action against the declared and known will of God. In short, the Sinner becomes a law unto himself.

#### What About Infants?

In view of what we have learned I would confidently assert that infants are not capable of knowing and understanding the revealed Will of God, therefore, they cannot assert their wills against God's Will, and consequently they cannot sin. When the time comes that they know and understand the Will of God and either ignore or oppose it, then they will sin, but that will be their responsibility and they will thus be accountable before God, but that is vastly different from saying that a child is born with a depraved nature.

Furthermore if we are to ascribe total depravity to infants then we must say that sin is a hereditary disease and is present from birth because of our Adamic nature, but what does the Bible say? In Duet. 24:16 we read, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; everyman shall be put to death for his own sin." Also in Job we read, "And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself" (Job 19:4). Over in the N.T. we have Paul exhorting the Galatians as Christians to bear one another's burdens, in fact, to help one another. But further on he says, "For everyman shall bear his own burdens" (Gal. 6:5), and it seems that he is referring to the burden of personal sin. The idea that infants who die unbaptised are doomed to eternal perdition finds no corroboration in the Bible, and indeed, is repugnant to the spirit of Christ and to human reason.

#### The Consequences of Sin

From what we have said, we have learned one cardinal fact, namely, that sin makes a person answerable to God. We are 'in debt' to God, and it is a debt that we ourselves have not the power to discharge. No amount of meritorious works can relieve us of sin; only the blood of Christ can do that. Outside of Christ we are 'lost,' and this means we have no communion with God. If we are denied communion with God because of sin, then this means we are cut off from the source of life, therefore, the Bible refers to us as 'dead.' Indeed Paul argues quite clearly that "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In order to live again a person must come into contact with the source of life; this life is to be found in Christ Jesus, the Son of God. When we believe in Him, repent of our sins, confess His name and are immersed in water into Him, then the 'sting' of death will be removed. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But

thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

The current social tragedy is that sin has become so devalued that people see it merely as drinking, swearing, lying, etc., but these are only symptoms of that greater malady which assumes cosmic proportions, and which required the direct intervention of God in the Person of His Son for its alleviation. The sooner people realise this the more they will come to fear the consequences of sin; loss of communion with God; social maladjustments; and all the frailties and ills which the flesh is subject to. Unhappily, in many quarters, the subject of sin has become unmentionable. Sinners are referred to as maladjusted, environmentally unsuited, spiritually deprived, etc. This suits satan fine; he can keep people in his kingdom of darkness from which love and grace would seek to draw them. But let us not delude ourselves; the message of the Bible is "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Dear reader, even though the consequences of sin are dire, we are offered a lifeline. That lifeline is Christ. Lay hold on life. At the same time let us realise that our Heavenly Father is not a monster who will condemn helpless and harmless babes to perdition. Our God is a loving God. Let us trust Him.

*All questions please, to :-  
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