

Are Children Born With Sin?

by Moisés Pinedo

Have you ever seen the face of a newborn child, touched the soft skin of his rose-colored cheeks, and sensed his innocence when looking into his beautiful eyes? In stark contrast, Catholic teaching alleges that “small infants are sinful!” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares:

Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called (1994, 1250, emp. added).

The Bible teaches that children do not bear the sin of their parents (Exodus 32:32-33; Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20). However, Catholics are quick to point out that David declared: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). To understand this passage, we must keep in mind that the subject of Psalm 51 is **David’s** sin, not original sin. Consider the nouns and possessives David used to indicate that the sin which he was talking about was the sin **he** committed: “Blot out **my** transgression” (vs. 1); “Wash **me** thoroughly from **my** iniquity, and cleanse **me** from **my** sin” (vs. 2); “I acknowledge **my** transgressions, and **my** sin is always before **me**” (vs. 3); “Against You, You only, have I sinned” (vs. 4); etc. There is not even the slightest allusion to some kind of original sin in the psalmist’s supplication. In fact, it was from his **own** sin and transgression that the psalmist desired to be freed.

But, why did he refer to the moment in which he was formed in the womb of his mother? The psalmist could have been using hyperbole (cf. Psalm 58:3; Colley, 2004), or emphasizing the condition in which his mother conceived him. In the latter case, although he was born without sin, he was born into a world that was covered, plagued, and influenced by sin.

Consider also that the psalmist made these pleas for forgiveness as an adult. He used present-tense verbs to plead for forgiveness: “**Have** mercy upon me...**blot out** my transgressions” (vs. 1); “**Wash** me thoroughly...**cleanse** me from my sin (vs. 2); “I **acknowledge** my transgressions” (vs. 3); “**Purge** me with hyssop...**wash** me” (vs. 7); “**Make** me hear joy and gladness” (vs. 8); “**Hide** Your face from my sins...**blot out** all my iniquities” (vs. 9); “**Create** in me a clean heart...**renew** a steadfast spirit within me” (vs. 10).

David’s pleas for forgiveness were due to a sin (or sins) that he committed long after his birth. The psalmist himself made this fact clear in a parallel passage, where he prayed: “Do not remember **the sins of my youth**, nor my transgressions” (Psalm 25:7, emp. added). If Psalm 51 is a plea to be freed from original sin, how do Catholics explain that God anointed, blessed, and used David while he bore the sin of the first man?

Additionally, the psalmist declared that he was “shapen” and “conceived” in iniquity (51:5, KJV). This is not a reference to birth (as Catholicism claims), but to conception. To be consistent with the Catholic idea that Psalm 51 supports the dogma of original sin, we must conclude that original sin is transmitted at the moment of conception. If that is the case, the Catholic Church will have to rework its theology concerning baptism to include a way to “baptize” children **before** birth to save them from “the power of darkness” (*Catechism...*, 1994, 1250).

To arrive at a correct interpretation of Psalm 51, we also must consider other biblical passages where similar expressions are used. For example, Isaiah declared: “The Lord has called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother He has made mention of my name” (49:1). In Jeremiah 1:5, God told His prophet: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you.” If by the expression, “I was brought forth in iniquity” (Psalm 51:5), David alluded to the original sin he bore, how do Catholics explain Isaiah and Jeremiah’s declarations of sanctity from the womb? Were these two prophets born without the contamination of original sin? According to Catholicism, only Jesus and Mary were born in a completely holy condition. These passages cannot be reconciled with the Catholic dogma of original sin (see Colley, 2004).

But, what about Romans 5:12, where the apostle Paul wrote that “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”? Does this verse teach that we bear Adam’s sin? No. As we observed in another article (cf. Pinedo, 2009), this verse teaches that death—the consequence of sin—spread to all men, not because Adam sinned, but

“because **all** sinned” (5:12; cf. Romans 3:23). Of course, this “all” cannot refer only to Adam. Nothing in the Bible teaches, indicates, or implies that children are born with sin.

Paul indicated that where there is no law, there is no sin (Romans 3:20; cf. John 15:22). And the apostle John declared that “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). If infants cannot know the Law of God or understand it, they cannot commit lawlessness.

Jesus Himself said: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for **of such is the kingdom of God**” (Mark 10:14, emp. added). Paul declared that none who are unclean can enter into the kingdom of heaven (Ephesians 5:5). Jesus added: “[U]nless you are converted and **become as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3, emp. added). If children come to the world with a “fallen human nature and tainted by original sin” (to use the words of the *Catechism*), why would men have to become as little children, who are also “contaminated” with sin? The Bible is clear: sin is not inherited. No baby has ever been born bearing the guilt of Adam’s sin. No one bears the responsibility for Adam’s sin but Adam himself.

REFERENCES

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