

“INHERITED SIN.”

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Sermon Texts: Romans 5:12-21
Belgic Confession: Article 15

Introduction.

If we look to modern American culture for our worldview or belief system there are plenty of folks out there are telling us we are OK, we are basically good, we are beautiful on the inside, we just need to get in touch with that good place deep inside.

We have been taken in by the modern pop-psychology and positive thinking self-help movements. We don't like to entertain any negative thinking about ourselves. Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller and their followers don't talk about or preach about sin. And my guess is that Joel Osteen doesn't much either.

But it doesn't take much to look around at the reality of our world and have to say, “Houston, we have a problem.”

Sin is the universal cosmic bummer. It has ruined everything. Satan and Adam are the two biggest fools who ever lived and their sin is the most irrational thing anyone could ever do. But just because Adam went and did something really stupid, why should that mean that we do the same? Why does his sin have anything to do with us?

The American idea of rugged individualism works against this doctrine of inherited sin. We are loners, we stand or fall on our own. We don't think of ourselves as connected to each other and all the way back to Adam's actions. We are especially unwilling to take the blame for anyone else's actions.

But if we are basically good then why is sin so universal in every age and in every culture?

Some might try to answer by saying that our culture or our environment or other influences have a negative effect on us, so that's why sin is everywhere. These folks would say that we sin by imitation, we see sin and then we do sin.

So the follow up question to that is, “Then where did the sin come from in the first place? How did it get started, if we are basically good?” If people started out good and sinless then we should find some cultures or societies that aren't corrupt. But everywhere we go we find police and locks on doors and passwords on computers.

The answer is found in the doctrine of original sin or inherited sin explained in Article 15.

Belgic Confession, Article 14 is about what happened to Adam.
Belgic Confession, Article 15 is about what happened to us.

Inherited Sin.

The Belgic Confession uses two common metaphors, a tree and a spring. If the whole *tree* is bad then the problem must be with the roots. As Jesus said, a good tree does not produce rotten fruit, so if the fruit is bad the tree must be bad to the very core. If the *spring* is contaminated, what flows from it will be bad as well.

The Bible teaches and our Reformed creeds and confessions affirm that our original parents both sinned and that by the disobedience of Adam the entire human race was plunged into the darkness of sin.

Psalm 14:3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

When we talk about *original sin* we are not talking about Adam and Eve's first sin. What we are talking about is the result of their first sin. Original sin refers to sin derived from its origin. Adam's sin is the origin of all other sin, the source of our inherited sin.

Romans 5:12-21.

Romans 5 is the classic Scripture teaching on how and why sin Adam's sin has been passed down to us.

First, we learn that Adam and Christ are both representatives for others. They are Federal heads or covenant heads.

God made a covenant with the first man, Adam. He was Federal head or representative head or the covenant head and patriarch of our race. We were all in Adam, we are Adam's seed. If he stood, we stood; if he fell, we fell.

Because Adam sinned we are all born with a sinful, corrupt human nature. We are conceived in sin, which is passed down and inherited from generation to generation.

So here's a question. When Lucifer or Satan fell, why didn't all the angels fall with him? Because the angels don't reproduce. One doesn't come from another. They have no generational relationship with each other.

Second, Romans 5 teaches us the way Adam's sin is passed down is called *imputation*.

Romans 5:12, 18-19 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Imputation means to attribute something to someone or to credit to one's account. When you swipe your credit card the credit card company imputes to you or credits to you money, even if you don't have it yourself.

I Peter 1:18-19 ... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

There are three imputations in Scripture.

Adam's sins to man.

Man's sins to Christ.

Christ's righteousness to the elect.

Third, in Romans 5 Paul shows the remedy to our inherited sin problem by showing the parallel between the condemnation that came from the first Adam and the mercy and grace and forgiveness that came from the second Adam.

Romans 5:15-16 For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

It's how we roll. There was not a time when I was not a sinner. From the moment of my conception I have been a sinner and I will die a sinner. I was born with an inward, internal motivation toward sin. My heart is desperately wicked. I am a chief among sinners.

Even if there were no demons to tempt me and even if there were no bad examples around to imitate, I would still sin.

Only in heaven will I no longer be a sinner, but will be righteous, clothed in the perfect, imputed obedience and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Sin is universal.

It has infected every person in every part of the globe in every age of humanity, from Adam to the present.

Sin is permanent.

There is no getting rid of it completely in this life. God's grace purifies us, but it doesn't perfect us. Sin is subdued by grace, it's mortified by the help of the Holy Spirit, but it's not removed until we are taken to heaven and made to be like Christ.

Sin totally corrupts every part of us, sometimes this is called Total Depravity.

Total depravity is a phrase used to make explicit how far reaching are the effects of original sin. It means that our entire human being and nature is corrupted by sin. Sin infects our intellect, our thoughts, our actions, our desires, our wills, our intentions, and our emotions.

It refers to extent not to degree. It doesn't mean we are all as bad as we possibly can be, some of us are worse than others. But it does mean that every part of us is bad and capable of being worse.

We have a total inability to do anything that would earn us merit or favor with God.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

It's like a weed, you pull it out and think you got it all, but it sprouts up again. It's like barnacles on rocks or piers, it clings tenaciously. It's deeper than most of us know or are willing to admit.

If you had told Peter that in a couple of hours he would deny Christ he would have denied that strongly.

If you had told David that he would commit adultery and murder he would have called you crazy.

If you had told Hitler when he was young he would be responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews, he would not have believed you.

Never underestimate the power of evil, the power of temptation, the power of Satan, the power of greed, lust, pride, envy, hatred.

Why doesn't God remove all our sin from us when we become born again?

Why are we still sinners as well as saints?

First, to show us the power of His grace as He prevails over sin and again and again forgives us. He who is forgiven much loves much.

Second, to keep us humble like that thorn in Paul's flesh. It keeps us from pride and boasting. To teach us to hate sin (see Paul in Romans 7).

The story is told of the Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, that after the people there embraced Christianity, he torn down all their idols except one, so that there would be a constant reminder of their former idolatry so they would hate it.

Third, so that we will not grow too attached to this life, but long for heaven and to be free from this body of death. To keep our eyes fixed on heaven as we depend on God for help to resist and overcome and kill sin in us. To keep us begging for Jesus' blood to wash away our guilt and shame, and for the Holy Spirit's to kill the power of sin in us.

Application and Conclusion.

What good is gained by our knowing about the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of inherited sin?

Why do Reformers talk so much about sin? Isn't that negative and discouraging? Reformers love salvation by grace. If you diminish sin, you diminish salvation. If you make sin less of a problem, then you make grace less of a big deal. The better we understand the depth of our sinful depravity, the better we understand how great a gift has been given to us.

Reformers are not naïve about the world. When we read the newspaper we are not surprised and shocked at what is happening. We know that the hearts is desperately wicked. We know people are born basically bad and that apart for God's Word and Spirit and grace they will do bad things. Reformers have a sober perspective on reality.

Reformed parents know they have given birth to sinners. So when your kid's sins become visible or known around town or around the church what should our reaction be? Shame, horror, embarrassment? Why that when everyone already knows they are sinners and they sin?

The right response is to deal with it, not be embarrassed about it. If you have to take your child to another room to be disciplined, it should seem totally normal. If all we are is ashamed or embarrassed or trying to find ways of hiding it, then we show that we don't think sin is normal or that everyone does it.

If as members of this congregation we think the young parents here should have perfect kids or that the pastors or elders or deacons kids should be little angels, then we are thinking unbiblically.

The issue is not sin, the issue is always what do we do about the sin. Do we look for someone to blame the way Adam it, or do we look for some way to help? Do we deal with it in a Biblical way, with firm discipline and gracious love?

But Reformers also have a very clear understanding of where the remedy and hope lies. It's the grace and mercy of God and God alone. The darkness of sin is driven away by the light of the glory of Jesus Christ and the Gospel of His grace.

This makes Jesus the most important person in the universe. All evil and sin and death were defeated by Jesus on the cross. Jesus Christ is the objective truth and hope that the world needs to hear and know.

We are a part of the world's only hope. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the world's only hope and that Gospel has been given to the Church of Jesus Christ. Your labors and your investing and your prayers for the church and her mission on earth as not wasted or fruitless. In fact the mission of the Church is the only thing worthy of our life's energies. We are a part of the only solution and the only thing that will survive the fire at the end.

Until that day:

Philippians 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.