**Biblical Foundations – The Doctrine of Sin (Pt.4)**

**What is sin? Where did it come from? Do we inherit a sinful nature from Adam?**

**Actual Sin in Our Lives**

1. **All People Are Sinful Before God**- Scripture in many places testifies to the universal sinfulness of mankind. (Psalms 14:3, Psalms 143:2) In the New Testament, Paul has an extensive argument in Romans showing that all people, both Jew and Greeks, stand guilty before God. (Romans 3:9-10) It is here he asserts that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) James admits, “We all stumble in many ways.” (James 3:2) If he as a leader and an apostle in the early church could admit that he made many mistakes, then we also should be willing to admit that of ourselves. John also affirms the universal nature of sin in humanity. (1 John 1:8-10)
2. **Does Our Ability Limit Our Responsibility**- Pelagius, a popular Christian teacher active in Rome about AD 383-410 and then later in Palestine, taught that God holds man responsible ***only for those things that man is able to do***. Since God warns us to do good, therefore, we must have the ability to do the good that God commands. The Pelagian position rejects the doctrine of “inherited sin” and maintains that sin consists only in separate sinful acts. However, the idea that we are only responsible before God only for what we are able to do is contrary to scripture, which affirms both that we “are dead in trespass and sins” in which we once walked (Ephesians 2:1) and thus unable to do any spiritual good and also are guilty before God. Moreover, if our responsibility before God were limited by our ability, then extremely hardened sinners, who are in great bondage to sin, could be less guilty before God than mature Christians who were striving daily to obey him. And Satan himself, who is eternally able to do only evil, would have no guilt at all.
3. **Are Infants Guilty Before they Commit Actual Sins**- Some maintain that scripture teaches an “age of accountability” before which young children are not held accountable for sin and are not counted guilty before God. However, the passages in the previous lesson on “inherited sin” indicate that even before birth children have a guilty standing before God and a sinful nature that not only gives them a tendency to sin but also causes God to view them as “sinners.” (Psalms 51:5) Some passages speak of final judgment in terms of actual sinful deeds that people have done (Romans 2:6-9) but these verses do not say anything about the basis of judgment when there have been no individual actions of right and wrong, as with children dying in early infancy. In such case we must accept the scriptures that talk about ourselves as having a sinful nature before the time of birth. Yet it is certainly possible for God to bring regeneration (new spiritual birth) to an infant even before he or she is born. This was true of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:15) We might say that John the Baptist was “born again” **BEFORE** he was born. From this it is clear, that God is able to save infants in an unusual way, apart from hearing and understanding the gospel, by bringing regeneration to them very early, sometimes before birth. We should also recognize that it is God’s frequent pattern throughout scripture to save children of those who believe in him, i.e., Noah (Genesis 7:1), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9) Cornelius the Roman centurion (Acts 11:14), Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-31). These passages do not show that God automatically saves the children of all believers (Esau and Absalom), but they do indicate that God’s ordinary pattern, or expected way in which he acts, is to bring the children of believers to himself.

Regarding the children of unbelievers who die at a very young age scripture is silent. Therefore, we must simply leave the matter in the hands of God and trust him to be both just and merciful.