

Q. Why did Adam sin if he wasn't first a sinner?

A. The answer to the general question, "Why do people sin?" is that all people have inherited sin and the tendency to sin from Adam. But what about Adam himself? Why did Adam sin? Adam didn't have a sinful ancestor from which to inherit sin or a sinful nature. Before he sinned, Adam wasn't a sinner. So, why did he sin?

The answer of some theologians is that Adam simply created sin. For example, in his *Dogmatic Theology*, W.G.T. Shedd says, "In respect to its having no sinful antecedent out of which it is made, sin is origination *ex nihilo*. Sin is the beginning of something from nothing, and there is this resemblance between it and creation proper. In holy Adam, there was no sinful inclination or corruption that prompted the first transgression. Adam started the wicked inclination itself *ex nihilo...*" (544, one volume edition). But to create something out of nothing is God's territory, not man's. Shedd's problem is that he has painted himself into a corner by assuming the first man to be holy (notice "holy Adam" in the quote above). Nothing in the Bible says that Adam was holy, but once Shedd makes the mistake of imagining this, he has no choice but to explain Adam's sin as something the first man, using an attribute of God, creates out of nothing.

The answer isn't really that complicated. Adam was sinless, but as is obvious from the fact that he did sin, God created Adam with the potential to sin. Being sinless and being unable to sin are two very different things. Although God created Adam in His image, this does not mean Adam was perfect or holy or had all of the attributes of God. It means that Adam, unlike the animals, was rational. Unlike what so many theologians assert without biblical support, God did not create Adam with an innate sense of morality. So, until God gave him the command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam had no sense of right and wrong. It was in this way that he was sinless. Without a command, how could he sin? After the command—Don't eat from that tree!—Adam knew one thing that was wrong. It was wrong to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, with a little leading to his wife from the serpent and a nudge from her,

Copyright © 2015 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the World English Bible (WEB).

adamsinqa.pdf

what did he do? He ate from it. When they are under law, all human beings have a tendency to sin—even Adam.

Total depravity, then, might be defined as the end result of combining this tendency toward sin with the incitement created by law (Romans 5:20; 7:8, 13; 1 Corinthians 15:56). This inevitably results in people committing sin. Put a beaver in with trees and it will, by nature, gnaw them down to build dams and lodges. Put a person under the law, and that person will by nature break it. Taking away the law is like taking away the trees from a beaver. We can't break the law if there isn't one. The work of Jesus on our behalf not only resulted in God forgiving our sins that are past (Romans 3:25) and removed the imputation of Adam's sin (Romans 5:18-19), it also nailed the law to the cross (Colossians 2:14) so that it died to us (Romans 7:4-6). Thus, the New Covenant has no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

By the way, this helps to rid theology of a conundrum that has plagued it for centuries. Theologians teach that the human tendency toward sin is not something with which God created us. They say that it developed when Adam sinned, and is thus inherited by Adam's descendants as part of original sin. But, if this were true, how could Jesus, who did not inherit original sin, have "been in all points tempted like we are"? (Hebrews 4:15).

That Jesus did not inherit original sin is obvious because He had no sin. But if He did not inherit the temptation to sin, then the temptations in Hebrews 4:15 would not have been real temptations at all. For Jesus to be really tempted, His human nature must have had the human tendency toward sin but His God nature enabled Him to completely resist. He did not, of course, have total depravity because his human tendency toward sin never resulted in His sinning.

This would mean that we inherit Adam's sin and the human tendency toward sin in two distinctly different ways. They also likely have two different origins. While original sin started with Adam's sin, the human tendency toward sin had been a part of Adam, and has been a part of the human race, from Creation. The tendency to sin is always there but it is incited by law. Jesus inherited the human tendency toward sin through his human birth, but avoided Adam's original sin apparently by not having a human father.

So, why did Adam sin if he wasn't first a sinner? He sinned because God created him with a tendency toward sin that was incited when God gave him the law not to eat the forbidden fruit.

You may also want to read "What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/eden.htm>).

Peter Ditzel