

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 4: ORIGINAL SIN — TRANSMISSION AND FEDERAL HEADSHIP HOW THE FALL OF ONE MAN BECAME THE RUIN OF ALL

Lesson 12

The Transmission of Original Sin

How Corruption Passes to Every Generation

Why Every Human Being Is Born Sinful

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” — Psalm 51:5

Key Texts: Psalm 51:5; 58:3; John 3:6; Ephesians 2:3; Romans 3:23; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Samuel 12:23

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Psalm 51:5, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

Lessons 10 and 11 established the doctrinal foundation of original sin: Adam's transgression as the covenantal representative of the human race (federal headship), the imputation of his guilt and the inheritance of his corruption to all his posterity (original sin), and the theological alternatives the church has rightly rejected (Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism). This lesson turns from the doctrinal architecture to the specific question that every thoughtful student of the doctrine eventually raises: how, precisely, does original sin pass from Adam to every subsequent human being? By what mechanism does the corruption that entered humanity in the garden of Eden become the condition of every person born in every generation across all of human history?

The answer the Reformed tradition has consistently given is natural generation: original sin is transmitted from parent to child through the natural biological process of human procreation. Each child born of human parents inherits, in that very process of natural birth, both the guilt of Adam's transgression (original guilt, the forensic liability) and the corruption of Adam's nature (original corruption, the moral and spiritual pollution of every faculty). This is not a mechanism that Scripture explains in the detail that modern readers might wish for; the Bible does not provide a biological or theological account of how, at the cellular or spiritual level, the inheritance of sinful nature occurs. But Scripture does consistently and repeatedly affirm the fact: human beings are sinful from conception, sinful from birth, sinful by nature, and the consistency of this affirmation across the entire biblical canon is the sufficient ground for the doctrine, even in the absence of a fully detailed mechanistic explanation.

This lesson examines the transmission of original sin in six major sections. Section I establishes the universality of sin from the biblical testimony, demonstrating that the Scriptures address the universal sinfulness of humanity without exception. Section II addresses the inborn character of sin, showing that biblical writers locate the sinful condition at conception and from birth rather than as the product of later imitation or socialization. Section III examines the testimony of human experience as the universal confirmation of what Scripture teaches. Section IV addresses the mechanism of transmission through natural generation, with specific attention to John 3:6's "flesh begets flesh" principle and its implications for the doctrine. Section V examines the critical question of Christ's sinlessness and the role of the Virgin Birth in securing it. Section VI addresses the pastorally urgent questions of infant guilt and the hope for infants who die in infancy, drawing on the 1689 Confession's specific affirmation and David's expression of hope in 2 Samuel 12:23.

The pastoral significance of this lesson extends in two directions. On one side is the question of the human condition: if original sin is genuinely transmitted through natural generation, then every person, without exception, without regard to moral seriousness, religious devotion, or parental virtue, enters the world in a condition of genuine guilt and genuine corruption that only the gospel's provision can address. On the other side is the question of infant destiny: the same doctrine that establishes infant guilt also establishes infant need, and the Reformed tradition's confident affirmation that God is able to save elect infants through the blood of Christ provides the specific, theologically grounded pastoral comfort that parents who have lost children in infancy most urgently need.

I. The Universality of Sin

No Exception in All of Human History Except Christ

A. The Old Testament Testimony

The universality of human sin is one of the most consistently attested doctrines in the entire biblical canon. It appears not as a contested theological proposition requiring elaborate argumentation but as a matter so thoroughly assumed by the biblical writers that its denial would strike them as a form of self-deception. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple articulates the universal sinfulness of the covenant people with the directness of a practitioner who knows the pastoral realities of ministry: "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin)" (1 Kings 8:46, NASB 1995). The parenthetical "for there is no man who does not sin" is not a theological argument; it is a factual observation offered as a settled assumption on which the prayer's petitions rest. Among the entire people of Israel, the covenant nation, the recipients of the law, the worshipers at the Temple, no individual exception to the universal rule of personal sinfulness can be identified.

The Psalter's testimony to universal sin is equally direct. Psalm 143:2's petition, "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous" (NASB 1995), is the psalmist's appeal to the divine mercy on the specific ground that no human being can stand under the divine scrutiny as genuinely and comprehensively righteous. Ecclesiastes 7:20's observation, "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (NASB 1995), makes the point in the language of universal human experience: the righteous man who never sins has never existed and does not exist. And Proverbs 20:9's rhetorical question, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin'?" (NASB 1995), expects the answer "no one," establishing that the claim of self-achieved moral purity is a form of self-deception that the wisdom tradition consistently exposes.

B. The New Testament Testimony

Paul's comprehensive indictment of universal human sinfulness in Romans 3:10–23 is the New Testament's most sustained and most rhetorically powerful account of sin's universal scope. Drawing on a catena of Old Testament texts (Psalms 14, 36, 53; Isaiah 59; Psalm 5), Paul establishes the universality in terms that leave no room for a righteous remnant: "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:10–12, NASB 1995). The repetition of "none" and "all" across the indictment is the rhetorical expression of the theological claim: the exception does not exist. And verse 23's summary, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NASB 1995), is the most concise and the most frequently cited biblical statement of the universality of sin in the entire New Testament.

The single exception to the universal rule of human sinfulness is Jesus Christ, whose sinlessness is as consistently and as comprehensively attested in the New Testament as the sinfulness of all other human beings. 2 Corinthians 5:21's "He who knew no sin", Hebrews 4:15's "without sin", 1 Peter 2:22's "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth," and 1 John 3:5's "in Him there is no sin" together establish that Christ's sinlessness is not a matter of degree (sinning less than others) but of absolute kind (not sinning at all). The consistent use of absolute language, "no sin," "without sin," "no deceit," "there is no sin", establishes Christ's sinlessness as a comprehensive, constitutional, and not merely a behavioral reality. The question of how this exception to the universal rule was secured is the specific topic of Section V.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:23–24, NASB 1995

II. The Inborn Character of Sin

Sinful from Conception, Sinful from the Womb

A. Psalm 51:5 and the Moment of Conception

The most direct and the most theologically concentrated biblical statement of the inborn character of sin is Psalm 51:5, David's confession in the aftermath of his adultery with Bathsheba and his arranged murder of Uriah: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (NASB 1995). The verse has been a cornerstone of the Reformed doctrine of original sin since Augustine, and its theological precision has been recognized across the entire history of the church's engagement with the doctrine of sin.

Three specific exegetical observations establish the doctrinal weight of Psalm 51:5. First, the verse places the sinful condition at the moment of conception ("in sin my mother conceived me"), not at the moment of birth or at the first conscious act of sin. The Hebrew *chyl* (brought forth in iniquity) and the phrase "in sin my mother conceived me" together establish that the sinful condition precedes both birth and any personal sinful act. David is not confessing that his mother sinned by conceiving him or that the act of conception was sinful; he is confessing that his own sinful condition was present from the very moment of his conception, that the earliest moment of his existence was already the existence of a sinner. Second, the verse establishes the sinful condition as the property of the individual conceived ("I was brought forth in iniquity") rather than as a general observation about humanity. David is making a specific, personal, first-person confession about his own condition from conception. Third, the verse locates the sinful condition in his origin ("brought forth," "conceived") rather than in his choices or experiences, establishing that the condition is inherited rather than acquired.

B. Psalm 58:3 and the Expression from Birth

Psalm 58:3 provides the complementary testimony to sin's inborn character, focusing on the expression of sinful nature from the earliest moments of conscious life rather than on its presence from conception: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth" (NASB 1995). The specific details of the verse are theologically precise. "Estranged from the womb" (*zoru merechem*) establishes the alienation from God as a condition present from birth rather than as the product of later choices. "These who speak lies go astray from birth" presents the specific sinful behavior, speaking lies, going astray, as characterizing the person from birth rather than emerging as the consequence of socialization into sinful patterns.

The pastoral significance of Psalm 58:3 is its specific refutation of the Pelagian account of sin as learned behavior. If sin were primarily a matter of imitation, of learning sinful patterns from a sinful environment, one would expect the Psalm to locate the beginning of sinful behavior at the point where the social learning environment begins to exert its influence. Instead, the Psalm places the estrangement from God and the expression of sinful character at birth itself, before any meaningful social learning could have occurred. The wicked of Psalm 58 do not become estranged from the womb and begin to go astray at birth because they learned these patterns from a corrupting environment; they are estranged from the womb because the sinful nature that generates these behaviors was present before the birth that Psalm 58:3 identifies as the starting point of their expression.

Ephesians 2:3's "by nature children of wrath" (*phusei tekna orgēs*) is the New Testament's most direct parallel to Psalm 51:5's inborn-condition theology. The word "nature" (*phusis*) designates what a thing is by virtue of its constitution rather than by virtue of its choices; and the "children of wrath" designation applies to all without exception ("even as the rest") as a matter of what they are by the constitution they inherited rather than of what they have done by the choices they have made. The wrath-deserving condition is not the product of specific sinful acts committed after the age of moral consciousness; it is the condition of human existence from its beginning in the natural generation that transmits Adam's nature to every member of his posterity.

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth."

Psalm 58:3, NASB 1995

III. The Testimony of Experience

Every Parent a Witness to the Doctrine

The doctrine of original sin's inborn character finds confirmation, though not its doctrinal ground, which rests on Scripture alone, in the universal testimony of human experience with children. Every parent in every culture in every generation of human history has observed the same phenomenon: children do not need to be taught to sin. Selfishness, anger, deception, and rebellion emerge spontaneously from the earliest age of moral awareness, before any meaningful social modeling of these behaviors has had opportunity to take effect, and with an energy and creativity that vastly exceeds the modeling that could plausibly have been provided by the family environment.

The Pelagian account of sin as learned behavior faces a specific and persistent problem from the testimony of parental experience: if sin is primarily the product of imitation and social learning, one would expect parents who deliberately model virtuous behavior to raise children who do not exhibit sinful behavior until later, when external influences beyond the home begin to exert their corrupting influence. But the universal experience of parents is that sinful behavior, selfishness, anger, deception, willful defiance, appears in children long before external corrupting influences could plausibly account for it, and appears with a spontaneity and a vigor that suggests it is arising from within the child rather than being absorbed from without. The toddler who has never observed a lie tells lies spontaneously; the infant who has been surrounded only by gentle and patient care becomes furiously angry when its will is crossed; the young child who has been raised in a home of transparent honesty learns to deceive with remarkable speed and sophistication. These observations are not anecdotal curiosities; they are the universal testimony of parental experience to the reality that Psalm 58:3 describes: the wicked speak lies and go astray from birth, not because they were taught to do so but because the sinful nature they were born with generates sinful behavior as its natural, unremarkable fruit.

The theological interpreter does not use the testimony of experience as the primary or sufficient ground for the doctrine of original sin; that ground is the biblical testimony established in Sections I and II. But the testimony of experience functions as a powerful and universally available confirmation of what Scripture teaches, the kind of confirmation that should cause the attentive observer to say, "What I see in the nursery is exactly what the Bible has prepared me to see: a human being who is sinful by nature, whose sinfulness expresses itself spontaneously and without external prompting from the earliest moments of conscious life." The doctrine is not primarily an inference from experience; it is the biblical teaching whose experiential confirmation is so universal and so consistent that even those who have never studied the doctrine can observe its implications in the behavior of every child they have known.

"For there is no man who does not sin."

1 Kings 8:46, NASB 1995

IV. The Mechanism of Transmission

Flesh Begets Flesh, John 3:6 and Natural Generation

The specific mechanism by which original sin is transmitted from generation to generation is natural generation: the biological process of human reproduction by which parents transmit their human nature, fallen, guilty, and corrupted since Adam's transgression, to their children. This is the consistent position of the Reformed tradition, expressed in both the Westminster Confession (VI.3) and the 1689 Baptist Confession (VI.3), which describe original sin as being "conveyed to all their [Adam and Eve's] posterity descending from them by ordinary generation."

A. John 3:6 and the Principle

Jesus' statement to Nicodemus in John 3:6 provides the New Testament's most compressed theological statement of why natural generation produces fallen human nature: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which

is born of the Spirit is spirit” (NASB 1995). The verse is not primarily a statement about the mechanism of original sin’s transmission; it is a statement about the necessity of the new birth for entrance into the Kingdom of God. But in establishing the necessity of the new birth, it simultaneously establishes a principle about what natural generation can and cannot produce: that which is born of the flesh, of natural human generation from human parents, is flesh, the fallen human nature in its entirety.

The “flesh” of John 3:6 is not primarily physical matter; it is the fallen human nature in its comprehensive character as fallen, morally and spiritually corrupt, constitutively oriented away from God, incapable of producing the spiritual life that the Kingdom of God requires. What natural generation from human parents produces is “flesh” in this sense: not merely a physical body but a human nature that bears the Fall’s full consequences, including both the guilt of Adam’s transgression and the corruption of every faculty that the Fall introduced. This is why the new birth from above (verse 3) is necessary: natural generation cannot produce the spiritual nature that the Kingdom requires, because “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” No amount of excellent parenting, moral modeling, religious instruction, or cultural formation can transform what natural generation has produced; only the sovereign, creative work of the Spirit can produce the new spiritual nature that the Kingdom of God requires.

B. The Realist and Federalist Accounts of the Mechanism

Within the Reformed tradition’s consistent affirmation that original sin is transmitted through natural generation, two accounts of the specific mechanism have been proposed. The realist account (associated with Augustine and some later Reformed theologians) holds that all human beings were “in Adam” in a seminal sense, that the entire human race was germinally present in Adam’s loins (cf. Hebrews 7:9–10’s use of this concept in the Melchizedek argument), and that when Adam sinned, all who would descend from him seminally participated in that sin and therefore justly bear its consequences. The federalist account (the more distinctively Reformed position) holds that Adam was appointed by God as the covenant representative of the human race and that his guilt is imputed to his posterity not because they were physically present in him but because he stood and acted in their legal and covenantal place. The guilt is imputed by divine covenantal reckoning; the corruption is transmitted by natural generation.

The practical implication of both accounts is the same: every person born of human parents in the ordinary way inherits both the guilt and the corruption that Adam’s transgression introduced. The theological precision of the mechanism matters for the academic discussion but does not affect the pastoral reality: every child born carries the full weight of original sin into the world, needing precisely the gospel’s provision that the doctrine has established is the only adequate response to the condition. Romans 5:12’s “death spread to all men, because all sinned” is the most compressed statement of the outcome of whatever mechanism the transmission involves: all have sinned (in Adam), and therefore the death that sin earns has spread to all, with the universality establishing the mechanism’s comprehensiveness whatever its specific character.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

John 3:6–7, NASB 1995

V. The Sinlessness of Christ and the Virgin Birth

Why the Exception Requires the Miracle

The most searching question that the doctrine of original sin’s transmission through natural generation raises is the Christological one: if original sin is transmitted through natural generation from human parents, and if Jesus Christ was genuinely and fully human, how was He born without original sin? This is not a peripheral theological puzzle; it is the specific doctrinal challenge that has driven some theologians toward alternative accounts of sin’s transmission and that the Virgin Birth is specifically designed to address.

A. The Virgin Birth as the Doctrinal Answer

The New Testament's answer to the question of how Christ could be genuinely human and yet sinless is the Virgin Birth: the miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, without the natural participation of a human father. Matthew 1:18–20 establishes the mechanism: “When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit... the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.’” Luke 1:34–35 provides the complementary account from Mary's perspective: “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.’”

The causal connection that Luke 1:35 establishes is theologically decisive: the child will be holy (“the holy Child”) because the conception is by the Holy Spirit rather than by natural generation from a human father. The sinlessness of Christ follows from the miraculous character of the conception: because no human father participated in the natural generation of the Child, the mechanism by which original sin is transmitted through natural generation from a fallen human father did not operate. Christ entered the human race not through the ordinary channel of natural generation from two fallen human parents but through the extraordinary channel of divine creative action, which exempted Him from the transmission of original guilt and original corruption that the ordinary channel would have produced.

The Virgin Birth is therefore not merely a miraculous sign, though it is certainly that. It is the specific doctrinal mechanism by which the eternal Son of God was able to take on genuine human nature while remaining free from the sinfulness that natural generation from fallen human parents would have transmitted. The sinlessness that was required for a substitutionary atonement, the priest who offers the sacrifice must himself be without blemish (Hebrews 7:26–27; 9:14), was secured by the Virgin Birth. And the humanness that was required for the atonement to be representative and vicarious was secured by the genuine human nature that the Spirit's creative work produced in the womb of the Virgin. The Virgin Birth secures both: genuine humanity and genuine sinlessness, the two requirements that the mediator must meet to accomplish the redemption that the fallen human race requires.

B. *The Comprehensive Sinlessness of Christ*

The New Testament's witness to Christ's sinlessness is not limited to the affirmation that He committed no specific sinful acts (behavioral sinlessness) but extends to the affirmation that He had no sinful nature (constitutional sinlessness). 2 Corinthians 5:21's “He who knew no sin” (*ton mē gnonta hamartian*) is the language not merely of behavioral purity but of experiential and constitutional freedom from sin: Christ had no acquaintance with sin, no experience of it from the inside as the corruption of a nature that was inclined toward it. Hebrews 4:15's “without sin” (*chōris hamartias*) modifies the description of Christ's high-priestly sympathy: He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin, the temptations were genuine (they engaged His human will and human experience in all their fullness) but they did not arise from the internal corruption of a sinful nature in the way that fallen human temptations characteristically do.

The comprehensive sinlessness of Christ is the specific qualification that makes His substitutionary atonement logically coherent. A sinful representative cannot bear the guilt of others and discharge their debt, because a sinful representative has his own debt to discharge. Only the sinless One can offer a sacrifice that is entirely for others, that is entirely unburdened by the weight of His own sin and entirely available to be offered on behalf of those whose sin it is bearing. This is the logic of Hebrews 7:26–27's “it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners... who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people.” The sinlessness is not merely a desirable quality; it is the specific, logically necessary condition without which the atonement could not have been what it needed to be to accomplish the rescue of sinful humanity.

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

Hebrews 4:15, NASB 1995

VI. Infant Guilt and the Hope for Infants Who Die

Genuine Sin, Sovereign Grace, and Pastoral Comfort

A. Are Infants Guilty Before God? The Reformed Answer

The question of infant guilt is among the most emotionally charged pastoral questions that the doctrine of original sin raises, and it requires both theological precision and pastoral compassion. The Reformed answer is yes: infants genuinely inherit both original guilt and original corruption from conception and are therefore genuinely guilty before God and genuinely in need of the gospel’s provision, but God is sovereignly able to save whom He will, including those who die in infancy, through the blood of Jesus Christ and the regenerating work of the Spirit, without requiring the age-conscious exercise of explicit saving faith as the means through which that grace is applied.

The biblical ground for infant guilt is clear and consistent. Psalm 51:5’s confession places the sinful condition at the moment of conception. Ephesians 2:3’s “by nature children of wrath” applies the wrath-deserving condition to all as a matter of nature rather than personal choice, with the “even as the rest” establishing the universality without age qualification. Romans 5:12’s “death spread to all men, because all sinned” applies to every member of Adam’s posterity, and the specific evidence that Paul offers in verses 13–14, that “death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam”, establishes that the death that spreads to all is not merely the consequence of personal sins but of the inherited sinful condition transmitted from Adam. Infants who die without committing personal sins are nevertheless subject to physical death (and in the absence of saving grace would be subject to spiritual and eternal death) because they bear the guilt and corruption of Adam’s transgression through natural generation.

The theological precision of the Reformed position on infant guilt serves a specific pastoral purpose: it maintains the seriousness of the human condition (including the infant’s condition) while directing the grieving parent toward the specific gospel provision that addresses it. If infants are not guilty (the Pelagian account) or are guaranteed salvation by virtue of innocence (the common sentimental account), then the specific comfort available to parents who have lost infants is the comfort of moral innocence rather than the comfort of atoning grace. The Reformed position offers a richer comfort: not the comfort of an innocence that the doctrine cannot sustain, but the comfort of a grace that is sovereign, sufficient, and able to apply the blood of Christ to precisely those who cannot apply it for themselves.

B. The Hope for Infants Who Die: 2 Samuel 12:23 and the 1689 Confession

The most directly pastoral passage in the entire biblical account of the question of infant destiny is 2 Samuel 12:23’s account of David’s response to the death of the infant son conceived in his union with Bathsheba. While the child was dying, David fasted, wept, and interceded. But when the child died, David’s behavior changed markedly: “But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (NASB 1995). The specific phrase “I will go to him” has been interpreted across the history of the church as expressing David’s confident hope that he will be reunited with his son in the presence of God, that the infant has gone to a place where David, by the grace of God, will eventually follow.

The interpretation of “I will go to him” as a confident hope of divine reunion rather than merely a neutral statement about the universality of death is supported by the entire emotional arc of the passage. David’s inconsolable grief while the child was alive and his sudden change of composure after the child died cannot be fully explained by the interpretation that “I will go to him” means merely “I will also die someday.” The specific consolation that David finds after the child’s death requires a more positive content than the simple

acknowledgment of death's universality; and the specific content of "I will go to him" as the ground of the consolation most naturally carries the hope of genuine divine reunion in the presence of God. David was a man who knew the grace of God in his own life with an intimacy and a confidence that expressed itself throughout the Psalter; and his confident "I will go to him" is the expression of that same trust in the grace of the God whose mercy is not limited to those who have reached the age of conscious faith.

The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 expresses the Reformed pastoral consensus on this question with theological care and pastoral generosity: "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth" (Chapter 10, Paragraph 3). Several specific theological decisions are embedded in this statement. First, the limitation to "elect infants": the confession does not assert the universal salvation of all infants (which would introduce a form of universalism with respect to the pre-age-of-accountability population) but maintains the Reformed doctrine of election as the ultimate ground of every salvation. Second, the affirmation that they "are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit": the salvation of elect infants who die in infancy is not the product of their innocence but of the same sovereign, Christ-secured, Spirit-applied grace that saves every other elect person. Third, the characterization of the Spirit's work as one "who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth": the Spirit's regenerating work is not limited to the channel of age-conscious, intellectually-mediated faith; He is sovereign in His application of Christ's atonement, and nothing in His nature or His power limits Him to working only through the explicit exercise of mature saving faith.

The pastoral comfort that this position makes available to parents who have lost infants or young children is the most robust and the most theologically grounded comfort available. It does not rest on the sentimental but unsustainable claim that infants are innocent and therefore automatically saved; it rests on the sovereign grace of the God who is able to apply the blood of His Son to precisely those who cannot apply it for themselves, and who has given us in David's "I will go to him" and in the confession's careful affirmation the specific, hope-sustaining word about the destiny of those who died before they could know, confess, or trust the One who loved them and gave Himself for them.

"But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

2 Samuel 12:23, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Original Corruption	The inherited moral and spiritual pollution of human nature that every person receives from Adam through natural generation. Distinct from original guilt (the imputed liability for Adam's transgression), original corruption is the actual defilement of every faculty of the human constitution, mind, will, affections, conscience, that results from the Fall. The Westminster Confession (VI.2) describes it as "become dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body." The 1689 Baptist Confession (VI.2) reflects the same account. Original corruption is the specific Hamartiological reality to which David confesses in Psalm 51:5 ("in sin my mother conceived me") and which Paul has in view in Ephesians 2:3 ("we were by nature children of wrath"). It is not guilt for a specific sinful act but the sinful condition of a nature that has been fundamentally disordered by the Fall's consequences and that generates actual sins as its natural, inevitable fruit.
Original Guilt	The forensic dimension of original sin: the real, objective, divinely reckoned moral liability that every member of Adam's posterity bears before God for Adam's transgression, not because each individual personally committed Adam's sin but because Adam acted as the covenantal representative of the entire race. Original guilt is the specific product of the federal headship of Adam: the guilt of the representative is imputed to those he represents, just as the righteousness of the Second Adam (Christ) is imputed to those He represents. Romans 5:18's "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men" is the primary Pauline statement of original guilt: the condemnation is not personal condemnation for personal sins but covenantal condemnation flowing from the representative's act. Original guilt is the reason infants are genuinely guilty before God from conception (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3), not because they have committed personal sins but because they stand in Adam's covenantal line and bear his guilt as their covenantal head.
Natural Generation (Propagation)	The mechanism by which original sin is transmitted from Adam to all his posterity: through the natural biological process of procreation. The Reformed tradition consistently identifies natural generation as the means of transmission, grounding this in John 3:6's principle ("That which is born of the flesh is flesh") and in the consistent biblical testimony that human beings are sinful from conception (Psalm 51:5) and from the womb (Psalm 58:3). The fallen human nature, bearing both original guilt and original corruption, is transmitted to every child born of human parents through the natural process of generation. The implication for Christology is critical: if original sin is transmitted through natural generation from a human father, Christ's birth from a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit without a human father (Luke 1:35), is the specific mechanism that exempts Him from the inheritance of Adam's guilt and corruption. The Virgin Birth is not merely a miraculous sign; it is the doctrinal guarantee of the Incarnate Son's sinlessness.
The Virgin Birth and Sinlessness of Christ	The miraculous conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, without the participation of a human father (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:34–35), which is the specific mechanism ensuring that the eternal Son of God, in taking on human flesh, was not subject to the transmission of original sin that occurs through natural generation from a human father. The angel's declaration to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35, NASB 1995), establishes the causal connection: because the conception is by the Holy Spirit rather than by natural generation, the child will be holy. Christ's sinlessness is attested throughout the New Testament (2 Corinthians 5:21: "He knew no sin"; Hebrews 4:15: "without sin"; 1 Peter 1:19: "without blemish"; 1 John 3:5: "in Him there is no sin"). His sinlessness is both the precondition of His substitutionary atonement

Term	Definition
	(only a sinless sacrifice can bear the guilt of the sinful) and the ground of the righteousness that is imputed to believers in justification.
Infants and Original Sin	The Reformed position, maintained against both the Pelagian denial of original sin and any sentimental assumption that infants are innocent, that infants genuinely inherit both original guilt and original corruption from conception and are therefore genuinely guilty before God from the moment of their existence. Psalm 51:5's "in sin my mother conceived me" places the sinful condition at the moment of conception; Psalm 58:3's "the wicked are estranged from the womb" places the expression of sinful nature from the moment of birth; and Ephesians 2:3's "by nature children of wrath" (tekna phusai orgēs) applies the wrath-deserving condition to all without exception as a matter of nature rather than personal choice. The phrase "by nature" is decisive: the guilt and the corrupted condition are not the product of personal sinful choices but of the sinful nature inherited from Adam. The pastoral response to infant sin is not the denial of the guilt but the confident proclamation of the grace that addresses it: God is able, in His sovereign mercy, to regenerate and save infants who die in infancy through the blood of Christ.
The Hope for Infants Who Die in Infancy	The pastoral-theological position, affirmed with varying degrees of confidence across the Reformed tradition, that elect infants who die before reaching the age of accountability are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ through the Spirit's regenerating work, on the basis of God's sovereign election and the all-sufficient atonement of Christ. The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 (Chapter 10, Paragraph 3) states: "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit." The biblical ground for this hope includes: (1) 2 Samuel 12:23's account of David's confidence about his deceased infant son ("I will go to him"), suggesting David had genuine hope of reunion with his son in the presence of God; (2) the character of God as one who is "richly merciful" and whose "compassions never fail"; and (3) the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for all whom God sovereignly chooses to apply it to, regardless of age. The position maintains the seriousness of original sin (infants genuinely need the gospel's provision) while affirming the scope of divine mercy (God is not limited in His application of Christ's atonement to those who have reached the age of conscious faith).
The Universality of Sin (Romans 3:23)	The biblical teaching that every human being without exception (except Jesus Christ, who is fully human but not a member of Adam's covenantal line through natural generation from a human father) is a sinner: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NASB 1995). The universality of sin is attested in both Testaments: Solomon's prayer at the Temple dedication, "There is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46, NASB 1995), acknowledges even among the covenant people of Israel the universal reality of personal sinfulness. Paul's comprehensive indictment in Romans 3:10–18 ("There is none righteous, not even one") establishes the universality as a matter of present anthropological reality, not merely a risk or tendency. The universality of sin is the specific ground of the universality of the need for the gospel: because all have sinned, all need the atonement; and because the atonement is sufficient and freely offered, all are called to repentance and faith.
The Testimony of Experience	The observation, common to every culture and every generation of parents, that children do not need to be taught selfishness, anger, deception, and rebellion, these behaviors emerge spontaneously from the earliest age as the natural expression of a sinful nature operating at full capacity before the restraints of socialization and moral formation have begun to take effect. The testimony of experience is not a proof of original sin in the full doctrinal sense, doctrine is established by Scripture, not by observation, but it is a powerful and universally available confirmation of what Scripture teaches about the inborn character of sin. Every parent who has observed a toddler's unprompted and energetic assertion of will, selfishness, and deception has observed the testimony of experience that Psalm 58:3's "the wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth" describes. The testimony confirms that sinful behavior does not arise from learned imitation (the Pelagian

Term	Definition
	account) but from the expression of an inherited sinful nature operating from the earliest moments of moral awareness.
Flesh Begets Flesh (John 3:6)	Jesus' statement to Nicodemus in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (NASB 1995), is the New Testament's most compressed statement of the principle that natural generation produces natural (and, in the Fall's aftermath, fallen) human nature, while spiritual regeneration produces the new spiritual nature that the new birth creates. The "flesh" of verse 6 is not merely physical matter; it is the fallen human nature in its entirety, the comprehensive condition of the person who exists in Adam's line apart from the Spirit's regenerating work. The principle establishes the necessity of the new birth (verse 7: "You must be born again") precisely because natural generation produces nothing other than the fallen flesh-condition: no amount of natural generation can produce the spiritual nature that the Kingdom of God requires (verse 5). The verse is the New Testament's most concise statement of the mechanism of original sin's transmission: the flesh (fallen human nature) is all that natural generation from human parents can produce.
By Nature Children of Wrath (Ephesians 2:3)	Paul's description of the pre-conversion condition of all human beings in Ephesians 2:3: "among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (NASB 1995). Three specific dimensions of the phrase carry crucial theological weight. First, "by nature" (phusei), the wrath-deserving condition is not the product of personal sinful choices but of the nature that has been inherited from Adam; it is the condition of every person as a matter of what they are by birth, not merely of what they have done by decision. Second, "children of wrath" (tekna orgēs), the wrath is the specific, deserved response of the holy God to the sinful nature and its expressions; it is not arbitrary divine displeasure but the just consequence of the covenantally transmitted guilt and corruption. Third, "even as the rest", the condition is universal; no human being is exempt from the by-nature wrath-deserving condition that Adam's transgression has produced in all his posterity.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that original sin is genuinely inherited from Adam through natural generation and is therefore the actual, present, from-conception condition of every human being, including infants. This conviction is not a pastoral obstacle to be softened; it is the specific theological ground from which the most important pastoral comfort, that God's grace is sufficient for those who cannot exercise faith for themselves, becomes intelligible. If infants have no sin, they have no need of grace; and if they have no need of grace, the comfort available to parents who lose infants is not the comfort of the gospel but merely the comfort of supposed innocence. The Reformed position offers more: the comfort of a grace that is sovereign, comprehensive, and able to address precisely the condition that the doctrine has honestly named.

We must also believe in the genuine and comprehensive sinlessness of Jesus Christ as the specific, necessary precondition of His substitutionary atonement. The Virgin Birth is not merely a miraculous sign appended to the Incarnation as an optional wonder; it is the specific doctrinal mechanism that secured the sinlessness that the atonement required. A sinful Christ could not bear the guilt of others; only the sinless One who "knew no sin" could be "made sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that sinners could "become the righteousness of God in Him."

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of sin's inborn character should produce in the believing heart a specific humility about one's own moral condition and a specific gratitude for the grace that addressed it. The person who genuinely receives Psalm 51:5's confession as her own, who acknowledges that the sinfulness she is dealing with in her own life today has its roots not in the specific choices of her adult life but in the nature she inherited from conception, is the person for whom the gospel's provision of the new birth (John 3:6–7) is not a pleasant religious option but the specific, necessary, life-giving answer to a condition she did not choose and cannot reverse by moral effort. And the gratitude that flows from that recognition is not the mild appreciation of one who has received a helpful religious resource but the overwhelmed wonder of one who was "by nature a child of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3) and has been "made alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5).

For those who have lost children in infancy or early childhood, the appropriate desire is the specific, David-modeled hope of 2 Samuel 12:23: not the sentimental certainty that all infants are automatically saved, but the faith-grounded, grace-trusting confidence that the God of sovereign mercy is able to do what David believed He would do, to receive the child who cannot come to Him and to bring the parent who loves that child to the place where the child has gone. This hope is the right hope: not grounded in the child's innocence (which the doctrine cannot sustain) but in the God's sovereign, Christ-secured, Spirit-applied grace (which the 1689 Confession's affirmation sustains with theological care).

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Psalm 51 in its entirety as a personal liturgy of confession, allowing David's specific confession of inborn sinfulness (verse 5) to frame your own acknowledgment of the condition that underlies every specific sin you confess. Note the specific requests David makes: the washing of iniquity and cleansing from sin (verse 2), the creation of a clean heart and the renewal of a steadfast spirit (verse 10), the restoration of the joy of salvation (verse 12). These requests correspond precisely to the doctrine of original sin and its gospel remedy: the washing addresses the guilt, the created clean heart addresses the corruption, and the restored joy addresses the experiential consequences of the condition that verse 5 has named. Use Psalm 51 as a pattern for the kind of confession that genuinely engages not only specific sinful acts but the inherited sinful condition from which those acts flow.
- Study the specific New Testament texts that attest to Christ's comprehensive sinlessness: 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26–28; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 3:5; John 8:46. For each text, identify: (a) the specific language used to describe Christ's sinlessness; (b) whether the sinlessness is described as behavioral (no

specific sinful acts) or constitutional (no sinful nature) or both; and (c) the specific soteriological function that the sinlessness serves in the context of each passage. The cumulative survey will establish that Christ's sinlessness is not a peripheral doctrinal assertion but the specific, repeated, theologically essential qualification that makes His substitutionary atonement logically coherent.

- Develop a pastoral response to the specific scenario of a parishioner who has lost an infant or young child and who is asking whether her child is with God. The response should: (a) take seriously the doctrine of original sin and avoid the sentimental claim that infants are innocent and automatically saved; (b) draw on 2 Samuel 12:23's account of David's hope and the 1689 Confession's affirmation of the elect infant's salvation; (c) ground the hope in the sovereign grace and the comprehensive atonement of Christ rather than in the child's supposed innocence; and (d) offer the specific, theologically grounded, gospel-rooted comfort that the Reformed position makes available. Practice articulating this response in language that is both theologically precise and pastorally accessible.
- Reflect on the doctrine of natural generation as the mechanism of sin's transmission in relationship to the doctrine of the new birth. John 3:6 establishes that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh", that natural generation from fallen human parents produces fallen human nature. John 3:5 and 3:7–8 establish that entrance into the Kingdom of God requires the new birth "of water and the Spirit." Read these two passages together and write a brief paragraph that: (a) names the specific problem that natural generation creates (flesh begets flesh; the fallen nature is all that natural generation can produce); (b) names the specific solution that the new birth provides (the Spirit's creative work produces the new spiritual nature that natural generation cannot); and (c) draws the specific evangelical implication (every person born of natural generation needs the new birth; therefore every person needs the gospel).
- Pray for three specific people in your pastoral sphere whose doctrinal or experiential engagement with original sin most urgently needs the specific pastoral attention this lesson's content provides: one person who is minimizing the seriousness of sin (and needs the honest Hamartiological account of Psalm 51:5 and Ephesians 2:3); one person who is despairing over the depth of her remaining sin (and needs the hope of the gospel's provision for the condition that the doctrine names); and one person who is grieving the loss of an infant or young child (and needs the theologically grounded, grace-rooted comfort of 2 Samuel 12:23 and the 1689 Confession). For each, write a specific prayer that names the specific theological need and asks the God of sovereign grace to supply it through the specific provision that this lesson has identified.

Key Texts: *Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Ephesians 2:3; John 3:5–8; Romans 5:12–14; Romans 3:23; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 1:18–20; Luke 1:34–35; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26–27*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, how would you have answered a grieving parent who asked whether her infant who died was with God? Would you have offered the comfort of the child's innocence (the sentimental account), the comfort of uncertain divine mercy (the non-committal account), or the comfort of the sovereign grace of the God who saves elect infants through Christ (the Reformed account)? How has the lesson's engagement with 2 Samuel 12:23, Ephesians 2:3, and the 1689 Confession changed, refined, or confirmed your prior pastoral approach to this question?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Psalm 51:1–7 and identify the specific vocabulary David uses to describe sin in this passage. What is the specific confession of verse 5 (“I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”), and what does the use of the passive voice (“was brought forth,” “conceived”) establish about the character of the sinful condition David is confessing, is he confessing a condition he chose or a condition he inherited? What does the placement of the sinful condition at conception (“in sin my mother conceived me”) establish about the point in David's existence at which the sinful condition began? And how does verse 10's request for a “clean heart” relate to the inborn corrupt heart of verse 5, is the clean heart something David can produce by moral effort, or must it be a divine creative act?
3. Read Romans 5:12–19 and trace the specific argument Paul develops about the relationship between Adam's sin and the universal human condition. What does verse 12 establish about the mechanism by which death spread to all (“death spread to all men, because all sinned”)? What does verse 14's “death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” establish about the basis of the death that reigned, is it death as the consequence of personal sins or death as the consequence of the inherited condition from Adam? And how does verse 18's contrast (“through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men”) establish the parallel structure between the Hamartiological problem and the Soteriological solution?
4. Read John 3:1–10 and identify the specific argument Jesus makes about the necessity of the new birth. What does verse 6's principle (“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”) establish about what natural generation produces? What does the necessity of the new birth in verse 7 (“You must be born again”) establish about the adequacy of natural generation to produce what the Kingdom of God requires? And what does verse 8's description of the Spirit's sovereign freedom (“The wind blows where it wishes... so is everyone who is born of the Spirit”) establish about the character of the new birth, is it the product of the human will's decision or the Spirit's sovereign creative action?
5. Read Ephesians 2:1–5 and identify the specific dimensions of the human condition that Paul describes in verses 1–3. What does “by nature children of wrath” (verse 3) add to the description that “dead in your trespasses and sins” (verse 1) already provides? Specifically, what does the word “nature” (phusei) establish about the ground of the wrath-deserving condition, is it a condition that has been acquired through personal choices or one that is constitutional (a matter of what one is by nature)? And how does the “even as the rest” at the end of verse 3 establish the universality of the condition without age qualification?
6. Read the account of Christ's conception and birth in Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–38. What is the specific mechanism of the conception in both accounts (the Holy Spirit, not natural generation from a human father)? What does Luke 1:35's “for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” establish about the connection between the miraculous conception and the holiness of the child, does the verse present the holiness as a consequence of the divine sonship alone, or as a consequence of the miraculous mode of conception? And how does this causal connection illuminate the relationship between the Virgin Birth and the sinlessness of Christ as doctrines that are theologically interdependent rather than merely historically coincidental?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. Psalm 51:5 has been a cornerstone of the doctrine of original sin across the history of the church. Some interpreters, however, have read the verse as a statement about the sinfulness of the conception itself (that the sexual act by which David's parents conceived him was sinful) rather than as a statement about the sinful condition David inherited from conception. Evaluate both readings. Which reading is more consistent with the broader biblical testimony about the goodness of human sexuality within marriage (Genesis 2:24; Hebrews 13:4)? And which reading most naturally fits the context of the Psalm as a whole, which is David's confession of his own sinfulness rather than a critique of his parents' behavior?
8. The lesson presents the testimony of parental experience, the observation that children exhibit sinful behavior spontaneously before it could have been learned by imitation, as a powerful confirmation (though not the primary ground) of the doctrine of original sin. Evaluate the role that experiential testimony should play in doctrinal confirmation. Is there a legitimate place for experiential observation in confirming biblical doctrine? How does the use of experiential testimony as confirmation differ from the use of experience as the primary or independent ground of doctrine? And what specific cautions should govern the appeal to experience in doctrinal argument?
9. The lesson presents the Virgin Birth as the specific doctrinal mechanism that secured Christ's exemption from original sin transmitted through natural generation from a human father. Evaluate the theological adequacy of this explanation. Does the absence of a human father explain why original guilt was not imputed to Christ (if federal headship is the mechanism of imputation, the absence of a human father who stands under Adam's covenant would explain the exemption)? Does it explain why original corruption was not inherited (if the corruption is transmitted through natural generation involving a fallen human nature, the Spirit's creative action bypassing this mechanism could explain the exemption)? Are there aspects of the explanation that remain theologically unclear?
10. The 1689 Confession's affirmation that "elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit" makes the salvation of infants who die contingent on election rather than asserting universal infant salvation. Evaluate the theological reasoning behind this limitation. Is the limitation to "elect infants" theologically necessary (would the alternative be a form of universalism with respect to those who die before the age of accountability)? And what is the pastoral response to a grieving parent who asks "But how do I know if my child was elect?", does the Reformed position have an adequate pastoral response to this question, or does the uncertainty about election in the individual case undermine the pastoral comfort the position is designed to provide?
11. The lesson distinguishes between original guilt (the forensic liability imputed from Adam's transgression) and original corruption (the inherited pollution of human nature). Evaluate whether both dimensions of original sin are equally important for the doctrinal and pastoral purposes the lesson identifies. If only original corruption were inherited (and original guilt were not imputed), would the doctrine of original sin still provide an adequate account of the human condition? And if only original guilt were imputed (without the accompanying inheritance of a corrupted nature), would the doctrine still provide an adequate account of the universal need for regeneration and the new birth?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The doctrine of sin's inborn character, that every person is sinful from conception, sinful from birth, sinful by nature, has specific implications for the way parents understand and respond to the sinful behavior of their children. Apply this doctrine to parenting: how should the knowledge that a child's selfishness, anger, and deception arise from an inherited sinful nature (rather than from environmental factors alone) shape: (a) the parent's emotional response to the child's sinful behavior (neither surprise nor despair, but honest engagement with a real condition that requires the gospel's provision); (b) the parent's approach to discipline and moral formation (addressing not merely the behavior but the heart from which the behavior flows, Matthew 15:18–19); and (c) the parent's evangelistic engagement with her own child (introducing the child to the gospel's provision for the specific condition that the doctrine of original sin names)?

13. The lesson identifies the specific pastoral scenario that makes the doctrine of infant guilt and the hope for infants who die most urgent: the grieving parent who has lost an infant or young child and who needs a theologically grounded comfort rather than a sentimental one. Reflect on a specific instance in your pastoral experience (or one you can anticipate) in which this pastoral need arose or will arise. What specific elements of this lesson's content would you bring to that specific pastoral situation? How would you articulate the comfort of 2 Samuel 12:23 and the 1689 Confession in language that is both theologically precise and pastorally accessible? And how would you handle the question of election (the 1689 Confession's "elect infants") in a way that provides genuine hope without generating additional theological anxiety in an already grief-stricken parent?
14. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth as the mechanism of Christ's sinlessness is one of the most frequently denied or minimized doctrines in contemporary liberal theology. Evaluate the specific consequences that follow from the denial of the Virgin Birth for the doctrines of sin and atonement. If Christ was conceived through natural generation from a human father, what specific problem does the doctrine of original sin's transmission create for His sinlessness? And what specific problem does the absence of His sinlessness create for the substitutionary atonement? Use the theological connections this lesson has established to articulate why the defense of the Virgin Birth is not merely a defense of a miraculous biographical detail but a defense of the specific doctrinal structure that the atonement requires.
15. The lesson's treatment of infant guilt maintains both the seriousness of original sin (infants genuinely inherit guilt and corruption) and the sovereign sufficiency of grace (God is able to save whom He will, including those who cannot exercise conscious faith). Assess how fully your own pastoral theology maintains both sides of this balance. Do you tend to minimize infant guilt (in the direction of the sentimental account that renders the grace unnecessary) or to withhold the pastoral comfort of sovereign grace (in the direction of a theological precision that leaves grieving parents without hope)? What specific theological and pastoral disciplines would help you maintain both the honest Hamartiological account and the generous Soteriological comfort that the Reformed position makes available?
16. The lesson closes by identifying the specific pastoral purpose that the doctrine of original sin's transmission serves: establishing not only the universality of the human need for the gospel but the sovereign sufficiency of the grace that addresses it in cases where the ordinary means of faith cannot operate (as in the case of elect infants who die before reaching the age of conscious faith). Reflect on how this specific doctrinal content enriches your understanding of the gospel's scope. Does the 1689 Confession's affirmation that the Spirit "worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth" expand your sense of the divine grace's reach beyond the boundaries of explicit, age-conscious saving faith? And how does this expansion serve the specific pastoral purposes of this lesson?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer with a slow, meditative reading of Psalm 51 in its entirety, receiving each verse as the personal confession and personal petition of the person who has genuinely understood the doctrine of original sin in its fullest Hamartiological depth. Read verse 5's "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" not as a historical description of David's origin alone but as the specific, personal, first-person confession of your own condition from conception: the sinfulness that the specific sins of your specific life express is not merely the accumulated result of personal choices but the expression of an inherited nature that was disordered before the first specific choice was made. Allow this recognition to produce the specific humility of one who knows that the condition she is confessing precedes her and exceeds her capacity to reverse by any natural means. Then receive verses 10–12's petitions as the gospel's answer to the inborn condition verse 5 has named: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... restore to me the joy of Your salvation." The created clean heart is the new birth of John 3:6–7, the Spirit's sovereign creative act that produces what natural generation cannot: a nature that is genuinely clean, genuinely new, genuinely oriented toward the God from whom the fallen nature was constitutively turned away.

Pray in two specific movements corresponding to the two primary pastoral applications this lesson has identified. First, pray for the members of your congregation and your broader sphere of ministry who are most in need of the honest Hamartiological account of the inborn character of sin, those who are minimizing their own sinfulness or their children's sinfulness by attributing sinful behavior to environmental factors, inadequate parenting, or cultural influence rather than to the inherited sinful nature that Psalm 51:5 and Ephesians 2:3 name. Pray for the specific illumination of the Spirit that would bring these specific persons into honest engagement with the condition the doctrine describes: not to produce despair but to produce the gospel-seeking urgency that the honest diagnosis generates. Name specific persons. Identify the specific form that their minimization of original sin takes. And ask the God who sees the heart (Jeremiah 17:10) to do the specific work of Spirit-illuminated self-knowledge that the confession of verse 5 requires.

Second, pray for the specific persons in your pastoral care who are most acutely in need of the pastoral comfort of the hope for infants who die: parents who have lost infants or young children and who are carrying the weight of either theological uncertainty about their child's destiny or sentimental comfort that is not theologically grounded. Pray with the specific confidence of David's "I will go to him": the confidence of a person who trusts the sovereign grace of the God whose mercy is not limited to those who can consciously invoke it, and whose Spirit works "when, and where, and how he pleaseth." Ask the God who saved David's infant son to give the specific parents for whom you are praying the same quality of confidence that David expressed, the confidence not of certain knowledge about the specifics of divine providence but of the well-grounded hope of those who know the character of the God who saves. And pray that the specific, gospel-rooted, grace-grounded comfort of this lesson would reach these specific parents through the specific ministry of the specific pastor who is interceding for them now.

Close with Ephesians 2:1–10 read as the comprehensive movement from the full Hamartiological account of original sin's consequences to the full Soteriological account of the grace that addresses them. Read verses 1–3 as the personal application of this lesson's doctrine: "I was dead in my trespasses and sins... I was by nature a child of wrath." Allow the full weight of the "by nature" to settle: this is not a condition I chose but one I inherited, from conception, by natural generation from Adam's fallen line. And then receive verses 4–5 as the gospel's sovereign, merciful, unilateral answer to the condition verses 1–3 have named: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ." The "but God" is the specific pivot from Hamartiology to Soteriology, from the inherited death-condition to the gifted life-condition, from the by-nature children of wrath to the by-grace children of God. And the "even when we were dead" is the specific affirmation that the divine initiative did not wait for the first stirring of life in the dead; it acted while the condition was exactly what the doctrine of original sin describes: dead, enslaved, corrupted, guilty, deserving wrath. To the God who acts while we are dead, who creates the clean heart that natural generation could not produce, who saves the elect infant who cannot exercise the faith that natural

generation has rendered impossible, who overcomes by sovereign grace what natural generation has transmitted by natural consequence, to Him be the glory forever. Soli Deo Gloria.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.”

Ephesians 2:4–5, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Psalm 51:1–12; 58:3; Ephesians 2:1–10; John 3:1–10; Romans 5:12–19; Romans 3:10–23; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26–27

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com