

## Are children born sinful?

Rev. John Belden

I have to admit I feel a little timid writing this article. It's one thing to call grownups sinners. But I'm walking where angels fear to tread when I start talking about children.

Let me assure you that my children hold a very special place in my heart. I remember the birth of my first child well. It's a girl! She looked so helpless, adorable, and perfect.

But looks were deceiving. She was helpless and adorable. It soon became clear, however, that God's Word was more accurate than my sentimentalism. She wasn't quite perfect. Not only did she get her daddy's eyes; she got her daddy's sinful nature, just like I got mine from my parents.

The apostle Paul traces all sin to our first parents: "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The Church throughout history have called this original sin. It's not a popular doctrine, even among many professing Christians. But experience has shown that to ignore this Biblical truth is not wise.

In the Old Testament, God told Noah that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). David, who was a man after God's own heart, said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). In Isaiah 48:8, God rebuked the sins of His people, saying "For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb." Sin is not something that people acquire along the way. It has its beginning "from the womb."

Experience also confirms this. Did you have to teach your child to lie? My teacher had to pound algebra into me (even then I never quite got it). But we become skilled at lying without any schooling at all. What about selfishness? Why do you think children seem to learn certain words better than others, like "mine!" and "no!" and "me!?" Or what about defiance? What is the first thing a two-year-old does when you tell him not to touch something?

Many parents believe their child somehow avoided this corruption. What this usually means is that the parents have shaped their lives around the child's wants. They get along fine because they never cross the child's will. This works well as long as he wants things like ice cream and toys. But when Junior gets bigger and wants sex and drugs, things become a little more complicated. When parents refuse, Junior rebels. They realize that somewhere along the way his cute little "no" turned into rebellion. His harmless "mine" turned into a defiant demand.

At this point, many parents will ask, "What happened? Why did he change?" He didn't change. You have been letting him have his way since he was little. His sins have gone unchallenged. As he grew up, his sins grew up. Now, instead of candy, he wants car keys. He got the candy every time he wanted it. Why can't he get the car keys?

No, in reality YOU changed. You realized too late that you cannot give him everything he wants. Failing to see this as sin then makes it hard to deal with it as sin now. To him, this is like changing the rules in the middle of the game. And he's angry! He throws the same tempter tantrum he threw when he was two. It worked then, why shouldn't it work now?

Where did all this begin? Psalm 58:3 says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." He didn't suddenly "get mean." He didn't turn wicked over night. It started the moment he was conceived. You left him to himself too long. And "a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15).

According to the Bible, they didn't go astray when they fell in with the wrong crowd. Nor when he first took drugs or when she was fourteen and started liking boys.

They were born with original sin. You were not wise to ignore it.

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