

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



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Psalms 51:5 Misapplied

One of the tenets of Calvinism is that man is born totally depraved due to original sin. What is original sin? Let's allow defenders of the doctrine to tell us.

"According to the Bible when Adam, the first man, chose to sin in the Garden of Eden, sin came into the world and passed on to every person. Every child born from this point on would have a sinful nature. According to theology "original sin" is defined by two things: (1) the first sin that Adam committed. (2) the sinful nature that passed on to all mankind since Adam. This sinful nature is also referred to as depravity. The sinful nature of man simply means that all human beings are born into this world as sinners, as it says in the Psalms: 'Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me,' Psalms 51:5."

Psalms 51:5 is one of two primary passages that Calvinists use to promote their theory of inherited sin, the other being Romans 5:12-21. The idea that man is born a sinner, that is, totally depraved and incapable of accomplishing any moral good, is foundational to their doctrine. If man is not born a sinner, the entire doctrine of Calvinism is proven to be false. Let's look at Psalms 51:5 and see if it teaches what Calvinists need it to teach.

First David said that he was shaped or brought forth in iniquity. How do I know that he wasn't saying that God created him as a sinner? I know it because that doctrine would contradict scripture. Solomon wrote, *"See, this alone I found, that **God made man upright**, but they have sought out many schemes"* (Ecclesiastes 7:29). David could not have been made both upright and a sinner. Calvinists like to say that this passage is only referring to how Adam was created. However, the Hebrew word here can either refer to an individual or a species, that is, mankind (Strong). It is clear that in this passage mankind is under consideration. The New American Standard uses the word *men*. The New International Version says *mankind*, and Holman Christian Standard Bible translates the word *people*. God didn't just make Adam upright; He made all people the same way. Well then, what did David mean when He said he was brought forth in iniquity? He simply meant that he was born into a world of sin. It is no different than the statement in Acts 2:8 made by the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. They asked, *"And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"* What does it mean to be born in a tongue? It means to be born in a place where a certain language dominates. What does it mean to be born in iniquity? It means to be born in a world that is dominated by sin.

The second thing that David said in Psalms 51:5 is, "*in sin did my mother conceive me.*" Do these words prove that David, and therefore the rest of us, were born sinners or totally depraved? Not at all. This is figurative language. It might be an example of synecdoche, a literary device in which a part of something represents the whole or it may use a whole to represent a part. This again would have David saying that he was conceived at a time that the world was dominated by sin. Or it could be hyperbole, an exaggeration for emphasis. His point would then be that he was guilty of such a horrific sin that it is *as if* he was a sinner when he was conceived. Hyperbole isn't unusual in Psalms. In Psa. 58:3, David said that the wicked speak lies from birth. Since that is not literally possible, it must be hyperbole. Man lies so much it is *as if* he comes out of the womb lying. Now, if one says that the words of David must be taken literally, he is faced with the fact that if so taken, the words teach, not that David was a sinner, but that his mother was a sinner. It would be equivalent to saying, "*In drunkenness did my father beat me.*" Who is the sinner—the son that was beaten or the drunken father who beat the son? Alright then, who is the sinner in David's statement if taken literally—the son who was conceived or the mother who conceived the son? The answer is self-evident. The truth is there is nothing in Psalms 51:5 that necessitates a conclusion that man is born totally depraved, and remember, this is one of the two primary passages of Calvinism. To say that it does is to misapply the passage. In our next article, we will take up what Paul wrote in Romans 5:12-21.

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Controlling Our Temper

by R.J. Evans

Brother John Clark once related a story about a woman who told a preacher she had a bad temper, but that it was over in a minute. "So is a shotgun blast, but it blows everything to pieces," was the preacher's reply. And far too many of us who are Christians are triggered by the least little incident, frequently losing our temper. When we lose our temper, we usually do and say things in anger which we later regret. "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly" (Proverbs 14:17).

It has been said that "anger is like rain, which breaks itself upon that whereon it falls." For example, anger usually culminates in bitter words, insults, the revealing of secrets or in the breaking off of relations between two parties. Of the aforementioned, insults are probably the most frequent cause of anger. Most of us had rather be injured physically than insulted. There is something about an insult that makes us want to repay with a worse insult. How many of us possess the magnanimous spirit of Abraham Lincoln when he was insulted? It is reported that when he was told that one of his cabinet members, Edwin Stanton, called him a fool, he replied, "If Stanton says I am a fool, I had better look into the matter, for he is a wise man." No doubt that worked much better than if he would have retaliated by losing his temper, setting off a chain reaction with much more bitterness and resentment to follow. Incidentally, after Lincoln was killed, it was Stanton who remarked in subdued tones of respect, "There lies the greatest leader this country has ever known."

The Bible teaches us the importance of practicing self-control. It is listed as the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23, and among what we sometimes refer to as the "seven Christian graces" in II Peter 1:6. Self-control is one of the Christian's weapons against the world. And practicing self-

control involves controlling our temper. We must follow after Christ's example - "Who, did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:22-23). The person who continually loses his temper is like an undefended city or one in ruins. The wise man Solomon said, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). What a sign of weakness when we constantly lose our temper! And it is certainly a poor reflection of Christ in our lives when we "fly off the handle."

Christians must learn to be calm and serious. James said, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). This brings to mind the motto: "Think twice before you speak. Losing your temper, blurting out angry words, and speaking your mind excites strife. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).