

The Augsburg Confession

Article 2

Article 2 of the Augsburg Confession deals with the fundamental problem faced by the human race - sin. The existence of sin cannot be denied by any reasonable person since it is abundantly evident in the world around us. Yet in spite of this evidence of sin, the Biblical teaching concerning sin continues to be denied by many in our age, making this article just as valuable today as it was in 1530.

The Cause of Sin

Scripture clearly reveals the cause of sin in the world. When God created the world and man, they were created perfect. After the work of creation was completed on the sixth day we read: ***“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).*** But this world would not remain perfect for long. Scripture attributes the cause of sin to Satan who tempted Adam and Eve to disobey the command of God, bringing about “the fall” (Genesis 3). This was the most devastating event in the history of the world, because it would affect the lives of all people from that time forward. The account found in Genesis 3 is God’s own record which reveals to us the source of sin in this world, and sets the background for the rest of Scripture and gives it purpose.

The Definition of Original Sin

In this article of the Augsburg Confession, the reformers make a distinction between Actual Sin (sins actually committed) and what is called Original Sin (sin which we have inherited). Very few people deny actual sin, but many deny original sin. In this article original sin is described:

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of original sin is clearly taught in Scripture. Sin is not a product of our environment or something we grow into with age, but is a “disease” we are born with.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image: ***“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).***

The image of God consists of:

- True righteousness, and holiness (Ephesians 4:24);
- Perfect knowledge (Colossians 3:10).

Consequences of Original Sin

But after the fall, when Eve bore a son, we are told that he was not born in the image of God, but was born in the likeness of his (now sinful) father: ***“And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (Genesis 5:3).*** Seth inherited his father’s sinful nature, just as we all have.

When God destroyed the wicked world through the flood, He said: ***“I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21).***

David declares that our struggle with sin starts when life begins: ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).***

The result?

- All people are born with sin.

“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one’” (Romans 3:10-12).

“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).

- All people have a natural inclination to do evil.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8).

- Without Spiritual rebirth sinners stand condemned before God.

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

“Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (John 3:5-6).

- The punishment for sin is eternal death.

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

False Teachings concerning Original Sin

The Reformers continued: *Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and other who deny that original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ.*

Pelagians - followers of a British monk who taught that man’s nature is not depraved since the fall, but is in a state of moral indifference. Pelagius taught that we are born without virtue or vice, though capable of both, depending solely on the will of the individual.

- Unitarians - teach that good is inherent in all people.
- Quakers - teach that all human beings can choose between the good and evil inside them - everyone has the power to choose good over evil if they really want to.
- Mormons - do not believe in original sin, and teach that human beings are not inherently evil.

Semi-Pelagians - hold that free will was only partially impaired by the fall, so that salvation depends on grace and the correct use of our natural powers.

- Roman Catholics - teach salvation by works (see *Apology*).

Arminians - followers of Arminius who taught that humans beings can and must aid in their own conversion (called synergism).

- Synergism is taught by the majority of Protestant churches today (for example: Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists) who are well known for their “decision theology”.

The Importance of the Doctrine of Original Sin

Any teachings which minimize the problem of our sinful state or elevate the power of the human being to save himself undermines the work of Christ for our salvation. The false teachings above, in one way or another, all destroy the Scriptural teaching of GRACE ALONE (cf. Ephesians 2:1-10). The Biblical teaching of sin and our total inability to save ourselves is an essential part of God’s plan of salvation, because it reveals to us our great need for salvation through Christ. If we are without an inclination to sin, and are able to save ourselves with God’s help, it would have been foolish for God to send His Son!