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# The Origin of Sin

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Moses Hoge

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FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS  
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## MOSES HOGE

Moses Hoge (1752–1820) studied at Timber Ridge academy, Virginia, and in 1780 became a candidate for the ministry, having received his theological instruction from William Graham and James Waddell, a blind minister. In 1781, he was ordained pastor of a Presbyterian church in Virginia, where he served as a missionary for five years, followed by a twenty-year ministry at Shepherdstown in Jefferson County. From 1806 until his death he was president of Hampden-Sydney College, where he also served as professor of divinity for the last eight years of his life. In 1820, he died in Philadelphia while serving as a delegate to the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly.

Hoge published two books during his life, both polemical in nature. After his death, a volume of his sermons was published (1821), from which this sermon is taken. Hoge excelled as a preacher; his friend, John Randolph, said that Hoge was the most eloquent preacher he had ever heard.

## The Origin of Sin

*"By the disobedience of one  
many were made sinners."*

— Romans 5:19

The truth that the Great Creator and Lord of the universe must love righteousness and hate iniquity is too evident to be called in question. But man, his highly favored creature, is in a state of sin and misery. How shall we account for this? Could this be his original state? Can it reasonably be supposed that so unholy and unhappy a creature as man now is could originally proceed from the pure hands of a beneficent Creator? Polluted streams might as soon originate from a fountain of the purest water. How then shall we account for the present state of human nature? Will the greatest phi-

losophers afford us any assistance in this interesting inquiry? No, my brethren: "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21) nor the origin of moral evil. None of the pagan philosophers can inform us how man became the degenerate, guilty creature he now is. But the mystery is unfolded in the Holy Scriptures. "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29). Or, to use the language of the text: "By the disobedience of one many were made sinners."

Man in his first and best estate was, indeed, a glorious creature. His understanding was comprehensive and correct, his will and affections were pure and holy, and his conscience was in a state of perfect tranquility and peace. Nothing unholy met with the approbation either of the understanding or the heart. In a word, man was originally made in the image of God his Maker—holy in his humble measure as God is

holy. But by disobedience—by voluntary apostasy and revolt—this image has been marred. The natural faculties do indeed remain entire, but on their spiritual level, at least, they are greatly impaired. With apostate man, God is no longer the object of supreme regard. It is not from the enjoyment of God that he expects his highest happiness, but from the world—from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” (Lam. 4:1). The crown is fallen from our heads.

But let no arrogance of man presume to impeach the divine procedure in this instance. “For as by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many were made righteous.” I shall endeavor to establish the proposition that “by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners.”

By *sinners* we are not, it appears to me, to understand the apostle to mean actual

transgressors. It is by our own transgressions that we become such. Should any, however, be disposed to take it that way it would not materially alter the state of the case under consideration. For, if many become actual transgressors in consequence of their relation to Adam, they must inherit from him a depraved nature. This is certainly the doctrine of the Scripture. In the prosecution of this subject, I shall endeavor to show that human nature is in a state of deep depravity or degeneracy, and that this should be ascribed to the disobedience of Adam.

1. *Human nature is in a state of depravity*, and this will, I think, appear with sufficient evidence from the following passages of Scripture: “God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). “The heart is deceitful

above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). “I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 53:2–3). “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified” (Ps. 143:2). “God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29). “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). “The carnal mind is enmity against God.... So then they that are in the flesh

cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8). “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19).

To repeat all the texts of Holy Scripture that might be introduced to the same purpose would be a difficult task. The passages already quoted appear to me to be abundantly sufficient! When taken in union, they appear so very plain as not to need any comment. Many ingenious but very unnatural criticisms are, I well know, employed by those who oppose this humbling doctrine to elude the force of the above and similar proofs of human depravity. I shall therefore produce a few arguments in its defense which cannot so easily be eluded.

1. The gospel of Christ is uniformly represented in the sacred Scriptures as good

news or glad tidings. Why? Is it good news for innocent persons to be informed that it would be in their power to obtain pardon which they do not need? Is it good news to someone in perfect health to be informed that he is allowed free access to a skillful physician, for the healing of diseases from which he is entirely free? Is it good news to a man that owes nothing to anyone that an opulent and generous friend is able and willing to cancel all his debts? Surely not. If mankind is not in a state of sin and misery, to hear of the toilsome life and sufferings and death of the Son of God would be afflictive in the extreme. The fact that Someone so illustrious should abase Himself so low, and endure such exquisite and protracted agonies in vain, would be sufficient to cast a gloom over the face of the universe. If we are not guilty, we do not need pardon and consequently cannot need a Savior either to procure or dispense it. If we are not guilty, "Christ is dead in vain" (Gal.

2:21). And is it possible for anyone who believes in the divine mission of Jesus Christ thus to blaspheme the wisdom and love of God his Maker?

2. The doctrine of regeneration furnishes another irresistible evidence in support of the proposition of the text. No doctrine is more clearly taught or more strongly inculcated than the absolute necessity of regeneration or a change of heart in order to salvation. Our Savior expressly assures us that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Now, unless we are in a state of depravity, this requisition must be not only unnecessary but also quite absurd. If, by nature, we are the children of God and in a state of complete innocence, nothing would be necessary in order to our complete and everlasting happiness, except that our innocence be preserved untainted. Surely the wisdom of God could readily adopt every requisite measure for this purpose.

In that case, there would be no occasion for either regeneration or a Savior.

3. The scriptural doctrines of human inability, and the absolute necessity of supernatural grace in order to our deliverance from the pollution and power of sin, furnish another source of plain and conclusive arguments to establish the depravity of human nature. What are we to understand by this inability? Any want of natural power to execute the hearty purposes of the mind? No; it is the lack of a will. It is the lack of a heart—natural faculties are not lacking. We have understanding, we have a will, we have affections; we have every faculty which the love and the service of God require, had we only the heart to exercise them. And since no man has such a heart by nature—since it must be obtained, if obtained at all, from God through mere grace—it evidently follows that no man is now in a state of unsullied innocence by nature. In other words, we are all by

nature in a state of depravity and guilt. Thus we see that the various offices of the Holy Spirit—His enlightening, sanctifying, and invigorating influences—as well as the doctrine of salvation by supernatural grace all conspire to establish the mortifying truth contained in our text.

But if the express testimonies of the Holy Scriptures confirmed by the most important doctrines of the gospel be thought insufficient to establish the universal degeneracy of our nature, turn your eyes upon the system we inhabit and say, “Is it credible that such an imperfect and perishable system was intended to be the abode of man in a state of perfect obedience? Why such incessant labor for a subsistence, which might have been afforded by the spontaneous productions of a fertile soil? What are we to think of poisonous plants and venomous snakes? What is the meaning of earthquakes, famines, desolating volcanoes, and pestilence? Surely nothing but sin could arm

the elements against our peace. What are we to think of the numerous and sore afflictions of this life? Can it be just to afflict the innocent? Are not these afflictions striking evidences of human guilt? So they appear to me. However, I will readily acknowledge that they are not, in my opinion, the most conclusive in this interesting case. No; it is not so much poisonous plants or all the convulsions of the world of nature as the envenomed tongue, the contagions of vice, and the moral desolations of sin that appear to form the most irresistible evidence of human depravity. What is the earth itself but a great Aceldama: a field of blood? Surely, when the streams are thus polluted, the fountain cannot be pure.

*O shame of men*

*Devil with devil damned firm concord hold,*

*Men only disagree of creatures rational,*

*Waiting each other to destroy.*

Can such creatures be in a state of unsullied purity? It is impossible. Do we

even need such a variety of evidence in so plain a case? Careful attention to what passes in our own hearts might, it appears to me, be abundantly sufficient. Who is most disposed to oppose this doctrine? The most upright of the sons of men, the genuine Christian, whose heart burns with love to God and with the most generous benevolence to his fellow man? No, my friends. Of all men on earth, he has most humbling views of his own natural depravity. Most sensibly does he feel and most pathetically does he lament a law in his members warring against the law of his mind. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24) No, it is the man whose heart is not right with God who is most disposed to question his own depravity. A little attention to what passes in his own heart might readily convince him of his error.

Let us endeavor to form the least imperfect, since we cannot form perfect,

ideas of the attributes of God our Maker. There is no one in heaven or on earth who may be likened unto Him. If all the wisdom and the virtues of all men and all angels were united in one person, it would fall infinitely short of the perfections of God. What then ought we to think of a heart in which there is no love to God—no love to infinite amiableness? Is it possible that such a heart should retain the original traces of the image of God? It is impossible. Such a heart must most assuredly be sadly disordered, desperately wicked. And such is the heart of every man by nature.

Take a view of the general conduct of our fellowmen upon the earth. What is the chief object of their pursuit? The favor of God their Maker? No, it is for the most part some earthly good—very often some hurtful vanity under the name of good. When the laws of God come in competition with some earthly delight—I might say, when the laws of

God and His honor come in competition with some guilty passion—the latter is commonly preferred to the former. Is a stronger evidence of human depravity necessary?

Why do any ever set themselves in opposition to the laws of God? They are all holy, just, and good. Is it possible for any man who would rather violate the divine law and consequently set himself in direct opposition to God's holy government than deny himself a sinful gratification to have a good heart? Surely not. When this is the case, there can, morally speaking, be "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" (Isa. 1:6). When this is the case, "the whole head [must] be sick, and the whole heart faint" (Isa. 1:5).

Do these arguments appear weak and inconclusive? No one, it is hoped, will undertake to say that enmity to God—or the lack of love to Him, which is the same thing—is not a sufficient evidence of

moral depravity. This would itself form an irresistible evidence of the fact. Were not the mind miserably blinded and the heart sadly disordered by sin, it would be impossible for anyone to entertain a doubt in so plain a case.

Is anyone disposed to question it? Let him carefully attend to the various exercises and all the most affectionate desires of his own mind. Is it natural and easy for you or for me to seek our supreme happiness in God our Maker, and the sublime exercises of devotion? It is not. The flesh lusts against the Spirit, even in the consecrated heart of a Christian; this is to him a satisfactory evidence of the reverse. With respect to those who expect their chief happiness from earthly enjoyments, this circumstance alone ought to convince them that they cannot possibly have the shadow of a claim to untainted innocence. To love the creature more than the Creator must certainly be exceedingly criminal and can be nothing

less than idolatry. Whatever we love most and from which we expect our chief happiness, must be our god. Now may I not be permitted to ask every individual: Do you find it easy and natural to delight in the God of heaven as your chief good? Is it natural and easy for you to love Him supremely and your neighbor as yourself? If so, it must certainly be equally so to obey His laws, for they are all holy and good, the copy of His holy perfections. Is there then no instance in which you find it difficult to render a perfect obedience to the law of your Maker? No instance in which you omit known duty or do what you know to be wrong? I cannot suppose that any will undertake to answer in the affirmative. Conscience, if suffered to speak out, will tell every man that he is a sinner, a grievous offender. What a miserable condition!

Is this really the state of human nature? What a solemn, overwhelming reflection! What if we should die in this

state, with a heart set in opposition to God our Maker and utterly disqualified for happiness in a future life? Here there may be some satisfaction in the gratification of carnal appetites and the exercises of the most impious affections. But this will not be the case in a future state! There no objects of sensual desire exist. The impious and unsocial affections will indeed have in a future state the most unconfined career. But this will be no satisfaction, no advantage to the wicked; it will be a great aggravation to their misery. If the man who now ventures to blaspheme his Maker saw what a great and just God he is setting at defiance, the view would be overwhelming. If the malicious and unjust perceived in their extent the consequences of their crimes upon their own peace and happiness even in this life, they would shrink from them with horror. In a future state, the darkness resting upon the atrocity of guilt will be dispersed, and that

God whom he has offended will be exhibited to the transgressor's astonished view, and all the horrible consequences of his crimes seen throughout an endless duration.

Though it will be readily acknowledged that man is now in a state of sin as well as misery, yet it may be alleged that human depravity is not natural—that it is the result of bad example or a defective education. That much of the wickedness on earth ought to be ascribed to these sources will readily be conceded. But why is it that bad examples are generally so much more efficacious than good? Are not reason and conscience and genuine honor and happiness, both in this life and that to come, on the side of virtue? Most undoubtedly they are. How then does it happen that the former has prevailed in every instance? If man were merely the creature of education and example, our youth would be uniformly virtuous when these are good; they would fear

God and obey His holy laws. But do we not clearly see that children enjoying all these advantages manifest the same evil natural dispositions with others? This is too evident to be denied, and consequently a sufficient refutation of the vain pretence under consideration. No, it is not entirely from education or example that we derive our wicked propensities. These may increase them, and too often do; but to ascribe their origin to this source is to set at defiance the evident results of universal experience, as well as the express declarations of the Holy Scriptures. Children who have the best example set before them from their very infancy discover the same natural aversion to God and godliness, the same perverseness, the same irregularities of the passions with others. This is a striking and resistless evidence that human depravity is not to be ascribed to bad example or defective education.

2. I have already observed that by the term *sinner*s in our text we are to understand not actual transgressors, but depraved creatures. It is not the sin of Adam but our voluntary transgression that constitutes us actual sinners. By the transgression of our federal head, we are constituted sinners by nature—or, in other words, we are in a state of depravity, prone to evil and averse to good. Not that there is an original propensity to evil as such in apostate man, antecedent to any choice made by the mind, or that anyone is forced to choose evil in preference to good contrary to his will; rather, such is the present constitution of human nature that earthly things are preferred to spiritual. We are all naturally disposed to prefer, as our chief good, the world and its enjoyments to God Himself, the author of our being and of all real happiness.

But how, it will be said, is anyone to

blame for acting agreeably to the nature he received from his Creator? How can it be just to inflict upon us punishment for any transgression or crime that we did not personally commit?

These objections, it must be acknowledged, are very plausible at first view. I hope, however, to convince every intelligent and attentive hearer that they are by no means insurmountable. Here I must be permitted to take it for granted that moral as well as natural evil is now in the world. This is a fact that cannot be called in question, for it is a fact confirmed by daily and incontestable experience, as well as by the infallible decisions of the Holy Scriptures. This being admitted, it will follow that the believer is not exclusively obliged to account for the present state of apostate man. Do any who admit the depravity of human nature, and yet object to the Scripture account of that tragic event, furnish us with a better? They cannot. I imagine no one will

undertake this. Do they then intend to impeach the justice or the goodness of their Maker? Surely, if it be just for God to bring us into existence in our present state of depravity, without any regard to the transgression of a federal head and representative, it could not be unjust to create man originally in a state of perfect holiness and to suffer our whole race to fall from that to our present state. Without any impeachment either of the justice or the goodness of our Creator, my objectors must believe we are actually made in this. It is so evident as to need neither proof nor illustration. Thus we see how easy it is to stop the mouth of every critic of this dispensation, mysterious as it may appear at first.

Since we know it to be a fact that man is in a state of depravity, and since the Holy Scriptures have assigned for this fact the only reason which has ever been produced, will we try to reject this account because it contains something we cannot

comprehend? That every moral agent should undergo a trial before admission into a state of immutable happiness is nothing more that ought to be expected. Nothing surely can be more reasonable than that there should be a correspondence between the conduct and the state of a moral agent in all the periods of his existence. Endless happiness must certainly be a strong expression of the approbation of the great Creator, but it is impossible for Him to approve of any obedience that is not perfectly voluntary. It is therefore undoubtedly proper that every moral agent should be placed in a state which will afford an opportunity of rendering or refusing this obedience to the Great Sovereign of the universe. This was the case with respect to angels as well as men.

Now a trial must imply the possibility of transgression and revolt. If it is impossible for a creature to transgress the law of God, he cannot in a strict and proper

sense be said to be on trial at all. Angels or men cannot be in a state of trial, in a strict and proper sense, had a divine influence been afforded which would have rendered it impossible for them to sin. Why then should it be thought strange that man should have become a transgressor? That the great Creator could not have prevented this unhappy event, we are far from suggesting; but this we may affirm: that no advantage or assistance man had a right to expect was withheld. At the same time that he was left to the freedom of his own will, everything was done which was best to be done in order to prevent his apostasy. Nay, we may without presumption go farther and say that it was better that man should apostatize than that recourse should have been had to any measures not employed to prevent that tragic event. But let none presume from this representation to conclude that it was therefore best that man should sin. This will by no means follow

from the statement of the case now given. To say that man has in this instance done best, because it was better that Heaven should permit his revolt rather than use measures which His unerring wisdom did not employ to prevent it is absurd in the extreme. In this way, every transgression, the most enormous not excepted, that has ever been committed on earth might be justified. But I must not take up time refuting sentiments at once so impious and absurd.

But why should we suffer in consequence of the transgression of our first parent for a crime that we did not personally commit? I answer because we are the descendants of an apostate parent—especially because that parent was constituted our federal head and representative. Look around, my friends, on the face of the earth. Do you not often see children suffer in consequence of the ignorance, the indiscretion, the follies, the vices, and sometimes the diseases

of their parents? This cannot be denied. These sufferings, in many instances at least, are evidently inflicted by the God of heaven in the ordinary course of His providence. This is the same thing as to say that it is just. Why then may not the children of an apostate parent likewise be punished for the transgression of that parent? No good reason can possibly be assigned why this may not be the case. With abundantly more reason it appears to me that this may be done, for our first parent was also our federal head and therefore what he did, as our representative, naturally falls on us. Consider all the various forms of representative agency, and you will find the interests of the represented involved in the conduct of their representative. I trust it will not be objected by the ignorance, the impiety, or the petulance of anyone that we did not choose Adam as our representative. No one will imagine that the Great Creator's right to govern us derives from us. He

made us, not we ourselves, and therefore He must undoubtedly have a right to dispose of us according to His pleasure. Does this seem hard? It ought not to be, but a great privilege; He is pleased to pay a particular attention both to our temporal and everlasting interests.

What reason have we to imagine that, had we been left to stand or fall for ourselves, we should have acted a better part than our first father did? None at all that I can perceive; and if not, no injustice has been done us by appointing him our federal head and representative. Had it been otherwise—had we been left to stand or fall for ourselves—in the provision originally made for our first parents by the covenant of grace, we could not have had any interest. This reflection ought to reconcile each of us to this dispensation of divine providence. But, if any should be disposed still to demur, let me ask: Suppose it were in your power to be in a state of perfect innocence, as Adam originally

was, and to be permitted to undergo a trial of perfect and perpetual obedience for yourselves, but without any prospect of pardon through a Mediator should you fail in a single instance. Would you prefer this to your present state, your present prospects of life and salvation through Jesus Christ? No matter how great our transgressions may be, pardon is offered to us in the most eligible terms which imagination can devise: “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). No hard or unreasonable conditions are imposed on us—nothing but what is in our interest as well as is our duty to comply with. In a word, the way of gospel salvation is perfectly suited to our inability to do good as well as our guilt. Is there an individual who would prefer the way of life by the works of the law to these prospects? I can scarcely think so. And if not, we certainly ought not to object to the dispensation under consideration. Instead of finding fault, we ought to be thankful for the

grace of the gospel—very thankful that since “by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners; by the obedience of one, many were made righteous.”

Do not imagine, however, that the dispensations of gospel mercy are introduced to justify the conditions of the covenant of works. Does the penalty denounced against transgressing or apostate man imply anything unjust? No; not in a single instance. You will readily agree that we could have no meritorious claim to heaven on account of any obedience we could render. The Great Creator might undoubtedly at any time recall His own gift, life itself, even though that life had not been forfeited by sin. Nor could anyone have a meritorious claim to perfect happiness on account of his obedience to the divine law.

Whatever the goodness of God may lead us to expect, it seems utterly impossible that any obedience performed by us should entitle us to perfect happiness.

If our enjoyments rise above our sufferings, existence is a blessing. And this, it appears to me, is all that even an innocent creature could claim from the justice of his Creator. Does the awful denunciation of death consign to endless misery any who have not committed actual sin? I can find no evidence of this. Does it then consign the actual transgressor to any unjust or unnecessary punishment? By no means. Every man's capacity and state, advantages and disadvantages, will be taken into view, and none will be either unjustly or unnecessarily afflicted in any instance. This would have been the case had a Savior never appeared to justify an individual of our guilty race. Will this not be sufficient to silence every objection to the covenant that the God of Heaven was pleased to enter into with man, His creature?

But the gospel, though not necessary to justify the law of innocence, must by all means be taken into view, in order that

we may form just ideas of the measures it has pleased the beneficent Creator to employ for our good. We must not imagine that the plan of salvation through a Redeemer was introduced after the fall of man to counteract the unexpected inroads of moral evil upon the happiness of moral agents. No; it originated in the councils of eternity, and must consequently have been as much a part of the plan divine wisdom formed for the government of the world as the ordinances of heaven and the laws of nature. Now, if you take away any part of this plan, can you affirm with certainty any other part of it? Had the way of salvation through an almighty Redeemer been no part of this plan, what evidence have we that such a creature as man would ever have been brought into existence? None at all that I can perceive. And if not, how futile, not to say presumptuous, must it be for us to dictate how, in case mankind should be brought into existence,

he would have been disposed of by the wisdom of his Maker? It is enough for us to know that as "by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous." Or, in other words, life and death are set before us in the gospel. If we choose life, we shall never die. Upon the infatuated transgressor who refuses life, who refuses to be saved in the way of the gospel, no unrighteous or unnecessary punishment will be inflicted. Let us then embrace this glorious overture, and all will be well. We will arise to a state of blessedness more exalted and more perfect than we lost in Adam: we shall dwell forever in the paradise of God.



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