

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Capacity to sin

Capacity to sin - posted by Chosen7Stone (), on: 2003/12/24 16:39

Here's a weird question, but I'm sure I'm not the first -- just, use Bible verses if you claim to have the answer, please. Do the mentally handicapped or retarded have the capacity to sin?

Re: Capacity to sin - posted by philologos (), on: 2003/12/24 17:20

Mary
this is a question close to my heart. I have a 30 year old daughter with a mental age of about 2 years. Our family has been involved in 'special education' for many years. I have just recently relinquished a 7 year directorship of Prospects the leading UK Christian charity working with adults with 'learning disability' (the current 'politically correct' language)

As far as I am aware there is not a single reference to such people in the Bible. So we have to examine what we understand about 'responsibility' for all individuals. I know several people with 'learning disabilities' who have a living faith in Christ and who came to Him conscious of their sin. The difficulty is that the terms (mental handicap, learning disability) have such wide parameters. Some have no means of communication, but that doesn't mean their spirits cannot respond to God. Others are very able to take responsibility for their lives in every area.

The Prospects charity has a special section called 'Causeway Prospects' which has special devotional items for people with learning disabilities, including some in Makaton (sign language). If you are interested a perusal of their website might be helpful for you.

In a nutshell, I would say that the kind of language used of children and the 'age of responsibility' would have its equivalent in people with learning disability. In other words, when a person (any person) is able to make informed choices. We have spent a fair bit of time on other threads discussing the nature of sin and sins, but in my view the essence of sins is a clash of wills; man's and God's.

Re: Capacity to sin - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2003/12/24 20:08

This is a question of interest to me personally because I also have a mentally handicapped child.

I think the answer is difficult because I believe it depends on whether the person truly understands right from wrong.

Ezekiel 18:4 *Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*

The last part of that verse tells us that the soul that sins shall die. I don't believe a person can sin who doesn't know right from wrong. Consider that when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (right and wrong), they immediately realized their sin. Only a person who understands right from wrong understands sin. Even man's laws take into account the ability of a person to know right from wrong.

As Ron said there is no Scripture that specifically deals with this issue so anything I say on this matter is really little more than conjecture. God is sovereign and has the right to do what he pleases but I don't believe that the God revealed in the Bible would sentence those who don't know right from wrong to hell.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by Chosen7Stone (), on: 2003/12/24 21:50

Wow, guys -- these responses were both quick and really good. Thanks for the link to Prospects, too. :-) I do know a bit about sign language -- it's one of my minors at college -- and I think I've always had a place in my heart for those with "learning disabilities".

Ron (philologos), I think your comparison to children and the "age of accountability" is the track my mind was taking. And just as with any human, I agree that it would be a case-by-case scenario in God's eyes, based on their level of understanding. Just as we can't group all lawyers or brunettes to be judged as a whole, we can't heap all with disabilities into a pile to be judged as a group either.

I know that God is just, and sometimes I think I see more light in those with mental handicaps than those who call themselves Christians. :-) I trust Him.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2003/12/24 23:15

Quote:
-----I do know a bit about sign language -- it's one of my minors at college -- and I think I've always had a place in my heart for those with "learning disabilities".

I kinda have the same heart in some ways. When I was choosing what to do in college, it was either 'desktop publishing' (computers) or 'Child and Youth worker' (working with children). That child and youth program included a lot of working with disabled or needy children. I went to work with computers but in my heart I still have a heart of servanthood for people. When I was saved I started right away working with kids clubs at our church, and ending up leading them for awhile.. what great memories and times :-D

Re: - posted by -David, on: 2004/1/12 21:26

The problem with the "age of accountability" reasoning is that while it may be true God judges us each according to the light received, that doesn't necessarily mean he will ignore the sin each of us are automatically born into regardless of mental ability. We are all sinners and no matter what the mental ability we are all deserving of death and hell. So since all are automatically born into sin and deserving of death and hell what role does age play in being accountable for something all are automatically guilty of just upon birth? A mentally impaired person and a person without hindrance are equally born into equal condemnation aren't they? I think the only role age or mental faculties can play in judgment of the lost is the role of punishments severity in regard of awareness of premeditation of sin.

If mental abilities or lack thereof can lighten the load of sin and its demand of justice then what about those who live a full mentally aware life paying no regard to Christ or their sin only to become impaired later in life due to Alzheimer's or some other injury or disease? Would their injury, disease or mental faculties somehow negate the sin they are lost in?

-David

Re: original sin and/or original guilt - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/13 4:08

David
The question of 'original' (or as I prefer 'congenital') sin has had its own thread previously, so I won't try to repeat it here. It can be found under 'Original Sin'. and at an earlier thread with the same name (these became separated)

As you have raised the question I wonder if you would say what you think the 'condemnation' is into which we are born. Let me say, to clarify, that I know that the scripture plainly teaches it to be so. My question is, what is the sentence? What is the condemnation? I do believe in congenital sin but not congenital guilt. This is the point at which the previous thread on Original Sin paused.

The Alzheimer sufferer of your question would, presumably, have previously reached an age of discretion when they became accountable for their own behaviour?

Re: Capacity to sin - posted by -David, on: 2004/1/15 21:49

"My question is, what is the sentence? What is the condemnation? I do believe in congenital sin but not congenital guilt. This is the point at which the previous thread on Original Sin paused."

The sentence is death and that not only includes physical but also spiritual as in eternal separation from a Holy God.

"The Alzheimer sufferer of your question would, presumably, have previously reached an age of discretion when they became accountable for their own behaviour?"

Where though does the Bible teach any "age of accountability"? You can't find it taught in the Scriptures. The only thing you can find is that from birth all are sinful and rightly condemned to hell. It is from this condemnation that Christ saves us. I would say however that there does appear to be reasons to believe that somehow children do make it into Heaven such as with David and his child;

2 Sam 12:22 He said, "While the child was {still} alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.'

2 Sam 12:23 "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."

I; being human and sinful cannot explain the incredible unmerited Grace and Mercy our Holy God gives freely to those whom He freely chooses according to His own good pleasure. I won't even dare to try and explain why or how God deals with the death of a child as well as that child's eternal condition.

If God is to be God then there must be things we cannot ever understand in our sinful state, God does not ask us to be able to explain His every action, reaction and decision. God does not feel obligated to inform us of all He does and why or how He does it. If we cannot be humble and say "I just do not have the answer" at times then God would not be God.

-David

Re: - posted by PreacherJury (), on: 2004/1/16 13:15

I would have to say that the age of accountability issue is a demonstration of the mercy of God -- His lovingkindness. This does not throw His holiness out of the window. As for those that become mentally impaired later in life, they had the opportunity to accept Christ, but chose to reject Him. They will still be held accountable for their conscious decision against Christ.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/16 13:29

I wrote:

"My question is, what is the sentence? What is the condemnation? I do believe in congenital sin but not congenital guilt. This is the point at which the previous thread on Original Sin paused."

David wrote:

The sentence is death and that not only includes physical but also spiritual as in eternal separation from a Holy God.

Hi David,

Does that mean every single person who has been conceived? How would that affect the child who dies at, say, 10 days before birth? and 2 days old? and 2 years? and 10 years? and 20 years?

If there is a different answer to any of these ages, the next question is 'what changed?'

You're quite right that the Bible doesn't use the phrase 'age of discretion'. But there is a concept which indicates that our 'age' has something to do with the way God holds us accountable. Notice in this quote how God did not hold a certain group accountable, although everyone else was held accountable.

Deuteronomy 1:39 Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had not

o knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

It is the reasoning behind this verse that caused me to use the phrase 'age of discretion'. It was just a form of theological shorthand.

Re: - posted by -David, on: 2004/1/16 21:09

philologos said:

"Does that mean every single person who has been conceived? How would that affect the child who dies at, say, 10 days before birth? and 2 days old? and 2 years? and 10 years? and 20 years?"

Wouldn't congenital sin demand automatic congenital guilt? How can one be convicted by God of a wrong but not guilty of it? Do you believe God is a respecter of persons simply based on the age at which they die? Age plays no role in salvation, a person is not born or conceived into salvation, they are born into sin. The question of what happens to the child who dies at birth or at a young age is not something God felt obligated to tell us.

philologos said:

"You're quite right that the Bible doesn't use the phrase 'age of discretion'. But there is a concept which indicates that our 'age' has something to do with the way God holds us accountable. Notice in this quote how God did not hold a certain group accountable, although everyone else was held accountable."

One question is if children, infants and even those who are still in the womb possess no guilt of sin then why is it possible for them to die or get sick? A sinless creation would not die or get sick unless sin has entered it.

I would ask you to consider the following passages;

Prov 20:11 It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself If his conduct is pure and right.

Ps 51:5 ¶ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Ps 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.

1 Cor 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

As far as those who are mentally impaired; would they be impaired at all if we were not born in sin? Did they sin in the womb which then caused them to possess the guilt associated with it? No, the guilt is a "just" guilt which all of us possess and all were born in.

The Bible for the most part seems to remain silent on the matter with few exceptions which would indicate that children who do die a premature or early death do make it to heaven somehow. This is where I said man is not able to know how God works in every matter and some things just must remain a mystery this side of heaven. I would agree that the Bible does make indications that children do make it to heaven such as with David and his son. It is by the pure unmerited Grace of God that any of us are saved. I am content in not knowing all the answers, it is in this lack of "total" knowledge that we can even more so appreciate God and grow in faith.

-David

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/16 23:16

David

Neat, how do you do those pagewidth dividing lines? Very helpful in a longer post.

you wrote Wouldn't congenital sin demand automatic congenital guilt? How can one be convicted by God of a wrong but not guilty of it?

I think we are getting to the heart of it here. What is our definition of guilt? Here's my background understanding. Guilt is 'blame worthiness'. It is how I stand in God's assessment. Here is where we probably differ... I think it is as result of my action for which I am personally accountable. to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin James 4:17

I believe that Adam's sin allowed Sin to enter. (Rom 5:12) Please notice my 's' and 'S'. Sin brought Death with it in the day of the transgression. Adam Died the moment he sinned although his body survived his Death for hundreds of years. Because Adam's sin was unique, as the head of the race, its consequences were unique. It is instructive to note that although Eve transgressed first, her transgression did not open the door to Sin, only Adam's did this. God had said to Adam, in the day thou eatest.... When Eve transgressed there was no immediate consequence for Adam, but when Adam transgressed Eve Died. This is why I don't like the term 'hereditary sin'. If it were hereditary it would not have 'passed to Eve' as she was already here. I don't think Sin is hereditary but I do believe we are born with it, hence my congenital. Somehow Eve remained in Adam even when she was separated from him physically, so that she was impacted by his action, but not him by hers. I was in Adam, as a human being, not from the moment of my birth but from the moment of Adam's creation. It is a creation fact that every member of the human race was in Adam from the very beginning.

Adam's sentence was instantly carried out, he Died, because I was in him when it happened I Died too. The consequence is that at my birth I was already Dead. This is the 'condemnation' in my understanding.

Adam's sin when brought in Sin had consequences for the whole physical creation. Death was reflected in death. The fact of children dying who have not committed personal transgression (measurable by the law Rom 5:14) is positive proof that Adam's transgression brought Sin in the world. it passed through (there and then) to all men

There is more, as you can guess, but I will pause for your comments on this.

Re: - posted by -David, on: 2004/1/17 16:13

philologos said:

"Neat, how do you do those pagewidth dividing lines? Very helpful in a longer post."

Hold down the shift key and use the "minus sign / Underscore" key after the zero on most keyboards.

philologos said:

"I think we are getting to the heart of it here. What is our definition of guilt? Here's my background understanding. Guilt is 'blame worthiness'. It is how I stand in God's assessment. Here is where we probably differ... I think it is as result of my action for which I am personally accountable. to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin James 4:17"

I agree that that would be where we differ, I would define guilt in the case of sin to be that which we are born into and rightly deserve.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It is being born again which I feel removes the guilt we already possess from conception. We are conceived by two sinners (man and woman) and therefore;

Ps 51:5 ¶ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

philologos said:

"It is instructive to note that although Eve transgressed first, her transgression did not open the door to Sin, only Adam's did this. God had said to Adam, in the day thou eatest.... When Eve transgressed there was no immediate consequence for Adam, but when Adam transgressed Eve Died."

I'm not sure I follow what you mean... In Gen 3:3 Eve is aware that God said "You shall not eat from" when being tempted by the serpent. So just because it does not state God informed her individually as He did with Adam (before Eve) it doesn't mean she was never informed. The opposite is made clear in Gen 3:3, she did know God said not to eat of that tree.

Gen 3:3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'

Also I'm not sure if you mean that if Adam did not sin as Eve did then do you believe sin would have died with Eve? I think the problem here is that we're looking at this from our human stand-point, we are not divine, sovereign, omnipresent, etc... God may very well have remained silent until they both sinned since He knew it was going to happen to begin with. So your question is sort of saying "why didn't God jump out right when Eve sinned before Adam sinned too?" well that is a question related to predestination and the sovereignty of God but it is also the start of questioning the intent of God. God obviously knew both would sin before either were ever even created. I would say this is one of those questions we can debate but never fully know the answer to on this side of heaven.

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

Gen 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;

Gen 3:3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"

philologos said:

"The fact of children dying who have not committed personal transgression (measurable by the law Rom 5:14) is positive proof that Adam's transgression brought Sin in the world. it passed through (there and then) to all men"

From the overall appearance of your above post I would absolutely agree, there is no demand for a personal first sinful "action" by the child who is still in the womb in order for that child to be in a current state of sin within the womb. However LOL, I am not entirely sure I fully comprehend your "s" and "S" since it is very hard to convey a detailed meaning with words and no audible "emotion" such as hearing emphasis placed on the words spoken. I feel I need to ask you to better explain the big "S" and small "s" before you hold me 100% to agreeing with your above post.

Here is what I feel the Bible does make clear, Adam was created, then Eve was created from Adam, for Adam (Eve was in Adam). Eve was tempted by the serpent, Eve sinned as did Adam since the Bible says he was with her when she took the fruit and ate it. It wasn't like Eve had to go hunt Adam down a few minutes later, Adam was right there with her.

Gen 3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make {one} wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

There is no noticeable lapse in a major quantity of time between Eve taking a bite and Adam taking a bite, she may very well of taken one fruit for her and one for him and they bit at the same time. It just doesn't go into THAT amount of detail since all we need are the basic facts.

Anyway, they both willingly sinned at approximately the same time and actual sin was realized, whereas before actual sin there was only the potential for sin. This was all obviously done within the Sovereignty of God otherwise it would not have happened at all.

Once sin was actualized by man, God actualized the penalties or wages of sin. In the human view of this the long road to redemption began.

This can be an extremely long topic since most of it seems to be laying on the definition of the "will", I say the will with respect to human will is not so much a individual part of man but rather the desire(s), thought(s) and action(s) of the whole man. Human will is nothing more than a "container word" in which we place the definition for the desire(s) of man. The actual individual parts of man are what is used to bring about the potential for the "will" of man. It is often said "He lacks the will to do" well he isn't lacking a individual part of humanity, he's lacking the drive to define or drive to conceive what he as an individual wants. The reality of realized desire for what a person "wants" can be said to be their "will".

Adam and Eve were convinced it was ok to eat from the tree, they then wanted to eat from it since the new information they received from the serpent (You will be as God) made their desires increase. They fulfilled their desires and sinned. I'm not sure how much better I can word my views LOL this is extremely tricky and hard to keep it from sounding like I'm saying something I do not "will" or "intend" to. Either way, this discussion alone makes you realize just how feeble we really are. God truly is immeasurable!

-David

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/18 14:10

Hi David

I'll just go to the heart of this, and will post separately on the difference between sins and Sin.

I don't think the Bible teaches that Original Sin comes from our parents (I don't think that is what David is referring to in Ps 51). I don't think it teaches that it comes from Adam and Eve; it teaches that Original Sin comes from Adam. It passed through to the whole human race the moment it arrived in Adam.

This is why Christ came as the Second Adam or the Last Man. This is why Paul can say that Adam is a 'figure of him that was to come' ie Christ. Adam was the federal head of our race. We were all in him from the beginning; we share his likeness and character. When his character changed the effects, Death 'passed' (Aorist, completed action) immediately into all men. I didn't die when I was conceived or born, I died when Adam died.

Sin was clearly pre-Adamic, which is why Pauls tells us that it did not come into being with Adam's disobedience, but 'entered' through that 'one' transgression. Paul constantly refers to the singularity of the offence which brought in Sin and Death. It was like no other, not even Eve's.

God held Adam responsible for what happened to the race. If you have access to a KJV read Gen 3 to see how the emphasis singles out Adam; cursed is the ground for 'thy' sake. It was Adam who was banished from the garden. I know Eve went with him but the chapter constantly focuses on Adam's culpability. Paul distinguishes the 2 sins again in 1 Tim 2:14 when he writes Adam was not deceived, but the woman having been deceived was in transgression (the article is missing in the Greek).

Satan's conversation was with Eve, but his constant use of the plural "ye" shows that Adam was present when this conversation took place, and it is Adam who is held responsible.

Christ is the beginning of a new humanity. Regeneration puts me into Christ and as part of the new creation 'old things have passed away' all things have become new. Adam's one disobedience 'constituted' a changed humanity. Christ's one act of obedience will result in many being 'constituted' righteous. This is not righteousness imputed, but imparted.

anyway, enough to think on for now...