

# Landon - Sharp Debate on the Nature of Man

**David Landon** (Reformed Presbyterian Church)

and

**Keith Sharp** (Church of Christ)

## *Propositions*

**The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning and able to choose either salvation or condemnation.**

*Affirm:* Keith Sharp

*Deny:* David Landon

**The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature totally depraved.**

*Affirm:* David Landon

*Deny:* Keith Sharp

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# Affirmative

## Keith Sharp

I appreciate David Landon for being willing to defend his belief in inherent total depravity. Whereas I strongly disagree with his doctrine, I consider him a friend and respect his scholarship and ability. I'm confident he will well represent the beliefs of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. In this article my purpose is to offer scriptural proof of my proposition.

Proposition: The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning and able to choose either salvation or condemnation.

### Definitions

The phrase "by inherent nature innocent of all sin" means we receive an undefiled body from our parents and an undefiled spirit from our Father. One's "nature" is his essential character or constitution. To "choose" is to freely select between different and competing possibilities.

### Explanation

The last two clauses of the proposition affirm that people inherently possess free will. If we by inherent nature cannot keep from sinning and cannot choose to believe, we do not possess free will. The Westminster Confession of Faith thus defines free will:

*God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.* (Chapter XI, Article 1)

This is what I mean by "free will." I affirm that men by inherent nature still possess the same ability Adam was created with to freely choose either good or evil, belief or unbelief, obedience or disobedience, life or death.

### Questions

- (1) Do we by inherent nature have free will?
- (2) What passage teaches that Adam lost the ability to choose good over evil by his sin?
- (3) Is it just to charge children with the guilt of their parents' sin?
- (4) Is it just to punish people for doing what they by inherent nature cannot keep from doing?
- (5) Is it just to punish people for failing to do what they by inherent nature lack the ability to do?

### What Are the Issues?

I do not deny that all people sin - we do (Romans 3:23), that the consequences of our sins affect our children - they may (Exodus 34:6-7), that Adam's sin brought physical death on all mankind - it did (1 Corinthians 15:22), that some are so depraved they cannot keep from sinning - they are (2 Peter 2:12-14), or that some have such

hardened hearts they are incapable of coming to Christ - they do (Matthew 13:13-15).

What are the issues? Are people by inherent nature sinners? Do we inherit the guilt of Adam's sin? Are all born spiritually dead? Are we by inherent nature incapable of avoiding sin? Are we inherently unable to believe in and obey the Lord? I answer "NO!" to each of these questions.

The issues involve not only the nature of man but the nature of God. I affirm that man by inherent nature possesses free will and that God is just. This debate will demonstrate that the denial of my proposition is a denial of human free will and of divine justice.

### **Proof of Proposition**

#### **All Men Are by Inherent Nature Innocent of All Sin.**

**Genesis 6:9** Noah is the father of mankind, just as much so as Adam (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God."(Genesis 6:9) If we inherit Adam's sin, why don't we inherit Noah's justice, perfection and walk with God?

#### **Jeremiah 19:1-6**

The inhabitants of Judah sacrificed their sons and daughters to Baal (Jeremiah 7:30-32; 32:35; cf. Psalm 106:36-38). The children they sacrificed were "innocents." (Jeremiah 2:34; 19:1-6; Psalm 106:38). Therefore, little children, whose nature is inherited, are innocent.

#### **Ezekiel 18**

The Jews in Babylonian exile accused God of punishing them for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:1-2). God replied that each one would be held accountable for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:3-4). The divine principle of justice is "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezekiel 18:19-20) This is because the ways of the Lord are fair (Ezekiel 18:25-29). The term "fair" is translated "just" in the New International Version. According to God Himself, to accuse Him of imputing the sin of the father to the son is to accuse Him of being unjust! God says not to accuse Him of imputing the sin of the father to the son (Ezekiel 18:3-4). He says He does not impute the sin of the father to the son (Ezekiel 18:20). Thus, we do not inherit the sin of father Adam.

#### **Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17**

To enter the kingdom of heaven, one must be converted (turn) and become like a little child. Either little children are innocent or one must become totally depraved to enter the kingdom.

#### **1 Corinthians 14:20**

We are to be like little children in evil (1 Corinthians 14:20; New American Standard Bible). Arndt and Gingrich thus define "evil":

*badness, faultiness. 1. in the moral sense-a. Depravity, wickedness, vice gener. Opposed to virtue.... be a child as far as wickedness is concerned*

*i.e., have as little wickedness as a child 1 cor 14:20...." (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 397; cf. Acts 8:22; James 1:21)*

Little children, whose nature is inherited, are either innocent of wickedness (depravity), or Christians are to be wicked, depraved.

### **Hebrews 2:17**

"[I]n all things He had to be made like His brethren." This included His spirit, for He worshiped and trusted God, activities that necessarily involve the spirit (Hebrews 2:11-13). Whatever we are by nature, the Son of God became in nature. Either we are by inherent nature free from the guilt of sin, or Jesus was by inherent nature totally depraved.

### **All Men Are by Inherent Nature Able to Avoid Sinning.**

#### **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**

Moses assured Israel they were able to keep the law of God (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). But to do so, they had to carefully, diligently observe all God's commandments always with all their hearts and souls (Deuteronomy 5:29,32; 11:13; 31:12). God is just. He has never given any man a law he could not keep.

#### **The Example of Jesus**

Jesus Christ "condemned sin in the flesh" in that He demonstrated, by living His entire life as a man without sin, that God is just in condemning us for our sins (Romans 8:3; cf. Matthew 12:41-42; Hebrews 11:7). He was made like us in all things (Hebrews 2:17). He "was in all points tempted as we are." (Hebrews 4:15; cf. Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:15-17) He was tempted as man, not as God (James 1:13). He lived in a terribly wicked generation (Matthew 12:41-45; 17:17; 23:33-36). He knew nothing that enabled Him to avoid sin that we cannot know (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 5:17). He lived His entire life without a single sin (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26-27; cf. John 8:46). We are to live as He did (Luke 6:40; 1 Peter 2:21-22; 1 John 2:6). Thus, we have the ability to keep from sinning.

#### **1 John 5:3**

God's commandments "are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3) To be burdensome is to be "*difficult to fulfill*." (Arndt and Gingrich. 133) If the Lord's commandments are not difficult to fulfill, obviously people can obey them. Sin is a violation of God's commandments (1 John 3:4). Thus, men are able to avoid sinning.

#### **Commanded Not to Sin**

We are commanded not to sin (John 5:14; 8:11; Romans 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:34; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:21-22; 1 John 2:1,6). God does not demand of us what we cannot do (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 25:14-30). In other words, if I ought, I can. Therefore, men are born with the capability of avoiding sin.

### **All Men Are by Inherent Nature Able to Choose Either Salvation or Condemnation.**

#### **Lord's Command**

The Lord commands all people to choose Him (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Joshua

24:15; Isaiah 56:1-5; Revelation 22:17). God does not demand of us what we cannot do (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 25:14-30) Therefore, all people inherit the ability to choose Him.

### **Lord's Call**

The Lord graciously calls all people to come to Him (Isaiah 1:16-20; 45:22; Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 22:17). The Lord calls us by the gospel (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Either all men are by inherent nature capable of answering the gospel call and coming to God, or the gospel call is nothing more than a cruel taunt to lost sinners unable to respond in obedient faith.

### **Conclusion**

Each part of the proposition has now been sustained by argumentation from the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning and able to choose either salvation or condemnation. We cannot blame our sins on God or Adam. They are our own fault, for we did not have to commit them. We are all by inherent nature capable of believing in and obeying Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God, we have free will, and God is just.

# Negative

David Landon

I appreciate Keith's kind opening remarks in his first essay. I also consider him a good friend.

I will begin by answering Keith's questions, as a clear understanding of the answers will resolve, at the same time, the greater part of his following proofs.

**Answer to 1st question:** As I anticipate a future debate on the subject of free will, I will here only say that I agree with the Westminster Confession's definition. Our wills are not forced; God neither constrains us to do evil, nor does He restrain us from doing good. The word good needs to be defined. Calvinists do not deny fallen man's ability to do things that are relatively good, Luke 11:13. It is the ability to do any "spiritual good accompanying salvation" (WCF 9:3) that we deny. I would ask Keith if he agrees with our confession's statement (9:5) that in heaven our wills shall be "immutably free to do good alone?" If glorified saints cannot choose sin, why are we charged with denying free will when we say that fallen man cannot choose good?

**Answer to 2nd question:** Keeping in mind our definition of the word good, I might well ask what passage does not teach that Adam lost ability to do good. The entire body of Scripture proceeds on the supposition that Adam, together with his posterity, fell from original innocency and became dead in sin. In Adam's case, we see this immediately after the fall when, hiding from God, he self-righteously attempted to cover his own nakedness, Gen.3:7,8.

**Answer to 3rd question:** No, unless the children are justly chargeable with the sin of the parents,- which is what we affirm. But, to clear this, consider:

- A. Scripture teaches a two-fold tie between Adam and his posterity. First, a natural tie. He was the root of all men, "(God] hath made of one blood all nations," Acts 17:26. Secondly, there is a covenantal tie. Adam is our representative head, Rom.5:12-19. Reformed writers have always stressed both these ties. Neither tie, of itself, could justly involve us in Adam's sin. Not the natural tie, for, while we may have descended from Adam, we did not actually participate in his transgression. The natural bond alone cannot involve us in the original apostacy. Nor can the representative tie alone, for that would have been an arbitrary imposition by God had it not been grounded on the natural.
- B. It follows from this that the covenant of works that involves us in Adam's sin was wrought upon principles of equity and justice. The representative is grounded upon the natural tie. Because Adam was our root, God made him our head.
- C. "God is good." We view this covenant with Adam therefore as not only just, but

benevolent as well. Only God knows the depths of this mystery, but it may very well be that this arrangement has secured the salvation of the greatest possible number of men. It may, in fact, have been the case that had each man stood for himself, none would have been saved. Adam, being made upright ( Eccl.7:29) was certainly a fit representative. God also, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to accomplish our salvation according to the principle of representation. As what happened to Adam happened also to us, so too, all that happened to Christ is reckoned as having happened to His people.

**Answer to questions 4&5:** We must make a distinction between natural and penal inability. There was, originally, a natural ability in our race to please God. Adam forfeited that by his transgression. We now labour under a penal inability. Presbyterian theologian James Thornwell writes, "To creatures in a state of apostacy actual ability is not, therefore, the measure of obligation. They cannot excuse themselves under the plea of impotency when that very impotence is the thing charged upon them," ( works vol.i.p.398 ). Nor is this impotency positively imposed by God; it is the result of the negative agency of God withdrawing His Spirit.

#### **Answers to Keith's proofs**

**Genesis 6:9** Noah is never said to be our representative. Show me a text that says, "In Noah, shall all be made alive," and I will believe it.

**Ezekiel 18** This passage, Keith tells us, is all about the divine principle of justice, and so it is. But, strictly speaking, justice admits of no exceptions. In other words, if this passage makes no allowance for the imputation of Adam's sin, neither does it for the notions of grace and mercy. If Keith asks, "where is original sin in this passage?" we would ask in turn, "where is the gospel?" Let the reader carefully reflect upon this point when considering Keith's response. Once allow the premise that this passage admits no exceptions whatever, then all must proceed upon principles of strict justice and we are yet under the law.

That being said, we go on to say that the passage really makes for our case, for we have said all along that Adam's sin was our sin. Not that we actually and individually committed his sin. In that respect it was his alone. But it was ours originally for we, as a race, were in his loins when he fell. "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners," Rom.5:19.

Innocency of children: ( Jer.19:1-6; Matt.18:1-4; ICor.14:20, etc.). All confusion on these texts can be avoided simply by keeping in mind the distinction between original and actual sin. Infants are innocent of actual sin, never having committed any. But nowhere are they said to be free from that original sin of our race. This distinction is brought out clearly in Psalm 51. David had committed the actual sins of adultery and murder but, in seeking to discover the fountain of these, he professes the sinfulness of his very nature. Psalm 51:5.

Example of Jesus: The theology that teaches that we are born innocent, and that the

example of Jesus is given us to demonstrate that we can remain so, leads to this conclusion: Christ need not have died. This is not merely my own opinion; Paul writes, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law," Gal.3:21. And then Christ is dead in vain, Gal.2:21.

We confess that Jesus had our nature and was tempted as we are, but we look elsewhere to find the reasons for His sinlessness. We find, first, that He was born of a virgin and, while Luke traces His genealogy back to Adam, yet, in a sense, it was only "as was supposed," Luke 3:23. Our Lord was never "in Adam." Had He been so. He would have, on that account, been liable to death for, "in Adam all die," I Cor.15:22.

Secondly, Christ never had a human person but was, rather, a Divine person and a Divine nature united to a human nature. In every respect, therefore, it could be said of Him to Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

**I John 5:3** I agree that the commands of God are not burdensome to those to whom John is writing. And that is brethren, beloved, and little children, designations John uses at least ten times in the first four chapters. The very next verse shows why God's commandments are "not difficult" to regenerated believers, "For whatever is born of God overcometh the world." They that are born of God have a spiritual delight in the law of God (Rom.7:22) and thus, to them, God's commands are not burdensome.

The Lord's commands and call: The essence of Keith's reasoning here is that God's commandments prove responsibility and that, in turn, proves ability. God, says Keith, "does not demand of us what we cannot do." To see how this logic works itself out, consider the following biblical example: "Lazarus, come forth." Here, then, is a clear and direct command to one of God's servants. Lazarus, having been commanded, was not only responsible to obey but, according to Keith's theology, able to. Keith, to be sure, will say that Lazarus had to first receive life before he could obey the command and that is certainly true;- but that is our position. Responsible because commanded, but able only after receiving life. We are all, by nature, "dead in trespasses and sins," Eph.2:1.

**Conclusion:** It is in faithfulness to the Scriptures that we teach that men are not able, of themselves, to do anything spiritually good. It is a "cruel taunt" to preach only half the truth; to tell men to "turn from your transgressions," Ezk.18:30, but not to tell them that God is able to turn them, Jer.31:18. To command dead men to make themselves new hearts, Ezk. 18:31, but not to acquaint them with the God who will do this for them, Ezk.36:26. Cruel taunt, to preach a gospel that commands all men (as our Lord commanded Lazarus) to come forth, but gives no life to enable them to come.



# Response

Keith Sharp

Thanks, Dave, for a tough but good spirited discussion. Thanks, readers, for studying the debate.

"Free will" is "... neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil." (**Westminster Confession of Faith**, Chapter XI, Article I) "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation...." (Ibid, Article III) This plainly denies free will. Heaven will be free from temptation to sin, because the tempter will be in hell (Revelation 20:10).

"What passage teaches that Adam lost the ability to choose good over evil by his sin?" Dave cited only Genesis 3:7-8, which teaches Adam hid from God through fear, not self-righteousness (verses 9-10). Neither this passage nor any other teaches either Adam or his descendants lost the ability to choose saving good.

"Is it just to charge children with the guilt of their parents' sin?" Dave replied, "No, unless the children are justly chargeable with the sin of the parents, - which is what we affirm." Is that "Yes" or "No"? "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No." (2 Corinthians 1:18) It is unjust to charge children with their parents' sins (Ezekiel 18). If Adam is the exception, God perpetrated an injustice that adversely affects all mankind. Divine justice allows mercy because the sacrifice of Christ satisfied the just demands of the law (Romans 3:21-26), but God is never unjust (Psalm 92:15).

Dave contends God justly charges us with Adam's sin because we are from Adam by natural descent and have with him "a covenantal tie," making Adam our "federal head." This is human wisdom, not divine revelation (Colossians 2:8). The Scriptures nowhere teach God made a covenant with Adam involving all mankind. But what if He did? The Lord made a covenant with Noah and all his descendants to perpetual generations (Genesis 9:8-17). All mankind are descended from Noah. Why isn't Noah our "federal head" through whom we inherit righteousness and perfection? (Genesis 6:9; 7:1) All died "because all sinned" (Romans 5:12), not because "all sinned in Adam." Christians freely choose to accept the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice (Revelation 22:17). What infant chose Adam to be his representative?

Regardless of tortuous, philosophical distinctions in kinds of inability, to punish people for doing what they by inherent nature cannot keep from doing or to punish them for failing to do what they by inherent nature cannot do is unjust. Is spanking a tiny baby for soiling its diaper just? Is punishing a new born for failing to walk just? We are asked to believe a just God casts people made in His own image into eternal torment for doing what they by inherent nature cannot keep from doing and for failing to do what they by inherent nature cannot do. God's holy nature is our standard of morality (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:13-16). Why do Calvinists call what would be gross, even criminal, injustice in us holiness in God?

How could we sin in Adam but not actually sin? Babies are innocent. If they inherit Adam's sin, they're not innocent. Calvinists can't have it "Yes and No."

We need Christ because we have sinned (Romans 3:23). If we are inherently unable to keep from sinning, God would be unjust to punish us and would owe us pardon. Thus, Calvinism nullifies divine grace. The law could not give life (Galatians 3:21), for it had no sacrifice that would take away the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:4), but it could have maintained life had those under it kept it (Galatians 3:12).

Dave contends Adam was the "supposed" father of Jesus. The "supposed" father was Joseph (Luke 3:23). Jesus descended from Adam through Mary. If the virgin birth means Jesus was not "in Adam," why do Calvinists misuse Job 25:4 to try to prove inherent sin? "Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman?" Was Jesus born of a woman? (Genesis 3:15) Was Mary "in Adam"? If Jesus was not from Adam, He wasn't a man, since all men are from Adam (Acts 17:26).

Of course Jesus was "in Adam" and thereby liable to physical death (1 Corinthians 15:22). How else could He, "who alone has immortality" (1 Timothy 6:13-16), die for us? (Hebrews 2:14,17)

The Calvinist, just as some of my brethren, argues: "...Christ never had a human person but was, rather, a Divine person and a Divine nature united to a human nature." Jesus, the fully divine Son of God (Hebrews 1) was and is a man (Acts 2:22; 1 Timothy 2:5), made in all points as we are, body, soul and spirit, i.e., fully human (Hebrews 2:5-18). He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Dave assumes and asserts the dogma that we have to be regenerated to keep God's law. This makes God unjust for condemning billions of sinners to hell, whereas they inherently lack the ability to obey Him.

Had Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth, failed to give him the ability to do so, then condemned him for disobedience, He would have been unjust.

To be "dead in sin" means to be separated from God (Ephesians 2:1-3,11-12). The saved have "died to sin" (Romans 6:2) but can respond to Satan's appeal to sin (James 3:2). The lost are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) but can respond to the Lord's invitation (Matthew 11:28-30).

Calvinists tell men to believe and obey, yet teach that they cannot unless God gives them the ability and that God will not give this ability to many. **Thus, they make the gospel a cruel taunt to lost sinners unable to respond.** God's Word has the power to convert the soul (Psalm 19:7).

Man is not inherently depraved. Rather, The Scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature innocent of all sin, able to avoid sinning and able to choose either salvation or condemnation.

# Affirmative

David Landon

'The scriptures teach that all men are by inherent nature totally depraved.'

The first part of our proposition reads: The Scriptures teach. The difficulty here is knowing where to start. The doctrine is so pervasive that if we are careless we will pass over texts that are eloquent testimonies to this doctrine. Consider, for instance, Rom.7:7 - "I had not known sin...except the law had said Thou shalt not covet." Why is Paul, in this verse, careful to single out the tenth commandment as the particular one by which the knowledge of sin came to him? We often view sin merely as isolated acts of disobedience rather than as a root problem of the heart. The tenth commandment exposes this aspect of our heart. Paul did not have an adequate view of sin until the Holy Spirit enabled him to see the utter corruption of his heart. Paul, in Rom.7, realized what Jeremiah meant when lamented, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." We see this desperate wickedness immediately after the fall when Adam and Eve hid from God and, covering their nakedness, refused to accept blame for their actions. Their very first son commits murder. By Gen.6:5 we read that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Only evil continually is what the nature of man is apart from the grace of God. This enmity against God does not start at some supposed age of accountability but is "from the womb," Ps.58:3. David traces it back even earlier-to conception, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my Mother conceive me," Ps.51:5. John Calvin, commenting on this passage, notes that David "is here brought, by reflecting on one particular transgression, to cast a retrospective glance upon his whole past life, and to discover nothing but sin in it." David, says Calvin, is not shifting blame here, but rather, "refers to original sin with the view of aggravating his guilt, acknowledging that he had not contracted this or that sin for the first time lately, but had been born into the world with the seed of every iniquity." Consider, finally, the first three chapters of Romans, and the sobering summary statement in 3:10-18. The conclusion of the whole is that not a single person seeks after God, vs. 11. This is in direct opposition to all those theologies that represent all men as being hungry for God and seeking Him.

Secondly, our proposition states that it is by inherent nature that we are sinners. Scripture teaches that all men are united to Adam, that he is the root and representative of all humanity. He was, in other words, a public person. Had Adam remained upright his posterity, along with him, would have received the blessing of life. When he fell we fell in him. Paul, in 1 Cor. 15 reckons all men as either in Adam or in Christ. In vs 47 Adam and Christ are called, respectively, the first man and the second man. The contrast between these two men clearly points to the motif of federal headship. These two men represent their respective seed; the old humanity in Adam, and the new humanity in Christ. There is no man before Adam; he is the first man, vs 47. There is no man between Adam and Christ, for Christ is the second man,

vs 47. There will be no man after Christ; He is the last Adam, vs 45. Paul, speaking of the issues of life, death and the resurrection demonstrates that all men are either in Adam by natural generation or in Christ by the grace of regeneration.

The same language is used by Paul in Romans 5:12-19. The apostle sets forth Adam and Christ as heads over their respective people. Regarding Adam, Paul seems to have in view the same sin when, in vs. 12 he writes "all sinned" and, in verses 15-19 he refers to the one sin of Adam. There is a solidarity existing between Adam and all other men with the result that the sin of the one is, at the same time, regained as the sin of all. Notice, in this connection, the abundance of causal particles- it is by one man, vs. 12; through the offense of one, vs. 15; it was by one that sinned, vs.16; by one to condemnation, vs.16; by one man's offense, vs.17; by the offense of one, vs. 18; and by one man's disobedience, vs. 19. This is clearly the language of cause and effect. Sin, death, and condemnation in the human race are said to be the direct effects of Adam's sin, offense, and disobedience.

Jesus is the head of the new humanity. The elect, those who are said to be in Christ, receive the benefits of His redemption. Negatively, they no longer have their sins imputed to them, Rom.4:8. Positively, they are accounted as perfectly righteous, Rom.5:17.

There are great dis-similarities in this passage, "But not as the offense, so also is the free gift," vs.15. They are a different number that are represented by these two Adams. The first Adam represents the entire human race, "By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation," vs.18. Those represented by Christ are not all men but the elect only, "they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness," vs. 17. There is a great dis-similarity in this "abundance of grace." Adam committed one sin and condemnation came upon all men, but with Christ it is of many offenses unto justification. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, vs.15,16,20.

That this interpretation of Rom.5:12-21 is true is proved thus: by the objection raised in the first verse of the next chapter and by the way that Paul answers it. "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" We who hold to the great Pauline doctrines of free grace and imputed righteousness have always had to answer this charge of antinomianism. We preach that God justifies the ungodly, Rom.4:5. The objection that most naturally comes in at this point is, "If that is true, it matters not how we live; God will save us anyway." This is precisely the objection that Paul has to answer. It ought to be observed that Paul does not answer as a Pelagian, Arminian, or Roman Catholic would, namely, to say that if we continue in sin we are in danger of losing our salvation. These theologies, because of their emphasis on human merit, are never charged with antinomianism. Paul answers the charge against his gospel by bringing in the doctrine of our union with Christ. We are no longer in Adam. That old man has been crucified with Christ, 6:6. We are now in Christ; so much so in fact, that it can be said that we died, were buried, and were raised to life in Christ. We have been taken entirely out of the realm of sin and death and have been placed in this new realm of

life and grace.

Our proposition, in the third place, affirms that the sin of Adam has resulted in the Total Depravity of the human race. It is not meant, by total depravity, that all men are as bad as they can possibly be. Nor does it mean that all men are equally corrupt. What we mean by total depraved is that there is, by virtue of our fall in Adam, a principle of sin introduced into our very nature. This principle of sin evidences itself in the mind, in the affections, and in the will. First of all, in the mind, there is what we call the noetic effect of sin. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom.8:7. Paul, writing to the Ephesian Christians, reminds them that they all had once walked according to the course of the world, fulfilling the lusts of the mind,2:3. In Eph.4:17-18, Paul exhorts his readers not to walk as the unbelieving Gentiles did, "in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened." This principle of sin also manifests itself in the affections. Fallen man loves his sin. One of the evidences, in fact, that a man has become a Christian is that he has "crucified the flesh with the affections," Gal.5:24. No man can do this apart from the grace of regeneration for, men, by nature, "love darkness rather than light." Jn3:19. Lastly, and most tragically, this corruption of our nature evidences itself in the will. God made man upright, Eccl.7:29. Of every tree in the garden, God said to Adam, you may freely eat, Gen.2:16. Man after the fall can no longer wills that which is spiritually good. "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness," Rom.6:20. Man, after grace, can will to do good, being made willing by the work of the Holy Spirit, Phil.2:13. A darkened mind, sensual affections, and a stubborn will always concur in keeping men from coming to Christ, and makes necessary the work of the Holy Spirt in regeneration, whereby He enlightens the mind, gives us a new heart, and renews our will.

In conclusion, I would ask the following question of Keith,- Please give an adequate explanation for the universality of sin and death.

# Negative

**Keith Sharp**

I congratulate my friend David Landon. Although I believe his proposition is false, he has done as good a job as I have seen to attempt to support his position from the Scriptures. My task now is to demonstrate he has misused those passages.

His misuse of Ecclesiastes 7:29 exemplifies his entire fallacy.

*Truly, this only I have found:  
That God made man upright,  
But they have sought out many schemes.*

The use of the plural pronoun "they" in the third line of the verse proves that by "man" Solomon means all mankind. God made us all "upright," just as God's servant Job (Job 1:1,8; 2:3). "But they have sought out many schemes." They weren't born sinners; they sinned.

"Please give an adequate explanation for the universality of sin." We sin for the same reasons Eve did (2 Corinthians 11:3; cf. Genesis 3:6; 1 John 2:15-17; James 1:13-15). Eve, being created directly by God, was perfect in body, soul and spirit (Genesis 2:21-22). One hundred percent of the first generation on earth, namely Adam and Eve, sinned. If Dave will tell us why that entire generation sinned, he will have told us why all since except Jesus have sinned. Generations since have faced two mitigating factors: we are born into a sinful world (Psalm 51:5), and we do not face immediate punishment for our sins (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

We agree that sin springs from and reveals the heart (Romans 7:7; cf. Matthew 15:19-20). Dave must prove we inherit sinful hearts. But Paul says he "was alive once without the law." (Romans 7:9) This obviously refers to a state of innocence before the age of accountability. When was Paul alive without the law?

Jeremiah 17:9 refers to the stubborn, sinful hearts of idolatrous Judah (verses 1-4). They were not born with evil, stubborn hearts but made them that way (verses 5,23; cf. 7:26; 19:15).

Dave recites the litany of sins from Adam to Noah and concludes all are inherently totally depraved. All he proved is that all sinned, which is not at issue.

Yes, Cain committed murder, but God commanded him to "rule over" sin and avoid that awful crime (Genesis 4:6-7). God doesn't command us to do what we cannot do (1 John 5:3). Thus, Cain could have avoided sin. If Cain's sin proves inherent depravity, why doesn't Abel's faith prove inherent righteousness? (Hebrews 11:4) The first generation after the fall was not totally depraved.

Moses accuses the generation of the Flood,, "every intent of the thoughts of his heart

was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5) This was because "all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth." (Genesis 6:12) They weren't born corrupt; they "corrupted their way." If this means all are corrupt, then, to be just, God should destroy each generation before and since as He did that generation.

Psalm 58:3 says they "go astray"; it doesn't say they are "born astray." The wicked of the text speak lies, but infants cannot speak. They have "teeth," which newborns don't have (Psalm 58:6). If the fact men are "estranged" from God "from the womb" proves the doctrine of inherent depravity, then does Psalm 22:10 prove David was born righteous? He states:

*I was cast upon You from birth.  
From My mother's womb  
You have been My God.*

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

David wrote this, of whom God said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22) Many years after David had become a child of God, even a prophet of God, he committed the sins he here confesses. Was a man after God's heart so corrupt in body, soul and spirit, that he could not keep from sinning and couldn't even will to do God's will? In this very psalm David was seeking God with a sincere, penitent heart (verses 1-4). I think the best explanation of Psalm 51:5 is that David, without trying to excuse his sins, which he had repented of and freely confessed, was noting a mitigating factor. The world into which he was born was a sinful world, making it more difficult to avoid such sins.

In Romans 3:9-19 Paul charges all are "under sin." (verse 9) Why? "They have all turned aside." They weren't born aside; they turned aside. "There is none who does good, no, not one." It's not how they were born; it's what they do. Do infants practice deceit with their tongues? Is the "poison of asps under their lips"? Is a little baby's "mouth ... full of cursing and bitterness"? Are the feet of infants "swift to shed blood"? Are "[d]estruction and misery ... in their ways"? Are they even capable of fearing God? Why are "all under sin"? "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Men are sinners because they sin. They don't sin because they're sinners. Sin is no part of our inherent nature. It is what we do.

Dave asserts, "Paul, in 1 Cor. 15 reckons all men as either in Adam or in Christ." He does not! "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22) The same "all" who die through Adam shall be made alive through Christ. If all mankind die spiritually because Adam sinned, then all mankind lives spiritually because of Jesus' resurrection (what the context discusses). The implication of the Calvinistic misuse of this passage is universalism.

Dave has read Romans 5:12-19 through the veil of Calvinism, and it has blinded him to plain statements in the passage. All men died "because all sinned"(verse 12), not

because "all sinned in Adam." Death reigned even "over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam."(verse 14) If Calvinism is true, all "sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam," for, according to Calvinism, we all sinned in Adam. Adam violated a direct command of God. (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:7) The majority from Adam to Christ sinned by violating their own consciences. (Romans 2:14-15) The same "all" condemned in Adam have "justification of life" in Christ (verse 18). If all men die unconditionally in Adam, all are justified unconditionally in Christ. If verse 19 teaches one sin made all sinners (universal condemnation), it also teaches one free gift makes all righteous (universal salvation). The dissimilarity between the offense through Adam and the gift through Christ is not the number of people potentially affected but the effects. One resulted in death; the other in life (verse 15). Paul teaches guilt by Imitation not Imputation.

Dave thinks because people charge that Calvinism seeks to guarantee eternal life without compliance to the law of God that Paul's defense of the gospel in Romans 6 is a defense of Calvinism. Dave forgets that Paul's detractors were self-righteous Jews (Romans 2:17-20). They failed to comprehend the heart of the gospel, forgiveness to the undeserving through divine grace (Romans 3:21-28). Calvinists also fail to comprehend that, though we must obey God to be justified (Hebrews 5:8-9; James 2:24), yet our obedience earns us nothing (Luke 17:10). In fact, in Romans 6 Paul specifically warns of the danger of a child of God dying spiritually through disobedience (verse 16). Neither Romans 5 nor Romans 6 is a haven for Calvinism.

Certainly those with a carnal mind cannot obey God (Romans 8:7). But the passage doesn't teach we're born that way; Calvinists just assume it. In fact, some who have been regenerated have carnal minds (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 4:15; 6:9-11). Were they unable to will to follow Christ? We choose whether to have a carnal mind or a spiritual mind. (Galatians 6:7-8)

Dave just assumes and asserts that Ephesians 2:3; 4:17-18 and Galatians 5:24 teach we are inherently corrupt. If Ephesians 2:3 addresses inherent nature, then little children who die in their infancy suffer eternal torment, for the subjects of this passage were "children of wrath," a Hebraism for those consigned to the wrath of God. Have infants "given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness"? (Ephesians 4:19) Galatians 5:24 specifically says that those who belong to Christ "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Calvinists say sinners can't do this; God has to do it for them.

Yes, those outside Christ are servants of sin (Romans 6:20). A child of God can voluntarily become a slave of sin (verse 19), and a sinner can voluntarily become a slave of righteousness (verses 17-18). It is a matter of free will: "to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey." (verse 16)

Philippians 2:13 doesn't even mention the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit regenerates us through the Word (1 Peter 1:23).

**The Scriptures do not teach inherent total depravity.**



# Response

David Landon

**The universality of sin.** This is the effect for which I had asked Keith an adequate explanation. His answer is twofold,-

First, we are told that we sin as Eve did. Men are born in the same state as our first parents, innocent, perfect, and equally able to choose good or evil. But this cannot be an adequate explanation; if the nature and will of man were truly set in an equiponderancy, having no natural bent either towards sin or holiness it is inconceivable but that some among mankind would choose never to sin. A constant effect argues a constant cause, a cause necessarily in our very natures and not, as the second part of Keith's answer has it, the mitigating factor of a sinful world. Jesus was born into this sinful world and yet never sinned. An adequate cause of a universal effect can admit no exceptions; especially when the sinlessness of that one exception can be accounted for by the circumstances of His birth. We conclude, "God made man upright, but they [Adam and Eve, or all mankind in their representative Adam] have sought out many inventions."

**Romans 7:9** I assure Keith that the supposed state of innocence and age of accountability that he finds so "obvious" here have not been so obvious to others who see here only a reference to that time in Paul's life when he was confident that he was righteous [alive] by virtue of his obedience to the law, Phil.3:6. When he was enabled by the Spirit to see the true nature of the law sin revived and he died.

Much of what Keith writes in his first negative can be reduced to the following two statements: "[sin] is what we do" and "God doesn't command us to do what we cannot do." The first sentiment expresses the view of the Pharisees, which was rebutted by our Lord in Matthew 5-7. The second, which may be put in the form of an aphorism, "if I ought, I can" may be a fine piece of philosophy but it will never be good theology. Scripture teaches both responsibility and (because of sin) inability.

**Psalm 58:3** This text, Keith reminds us, does not say that the wicked are "born astray." But we are curious,- would he believe it if it did? For David, in Psalm 51:5, goes beyond merely born when he cries, "in sin did my mother conceive me." The answer Keith returns to this passage is remarkable. It seems that David, though seeking God with "sincere, penitent heart," is yet "noting a mitigating factor." I agree with Keith that David is coming to God with a sincere and penitent heart. I will go further; I believe that God has given to the church, in this psalm, a model of what true repentance looks like. What then is this mitigating factor, and what part does it play in sincere repentance? The mitigating factor model of repentance is displayed in Genesis 3:12&13,- "The woman you gave me, gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." A good example this, of the many inventions our first parents sought out as a cloak for their sin.

That the "all in Christ" of 1 Corinthians 15 refers not to all men universally (as the "all in Adam" does) is demonstrated from the limiting phrase in verse 23, "they that are Christ's."

Keith suggests that the veil of Calvinism has blinded me to the plain statements of Romans 5:12-19. The apostle Peter, on the other hand, mentions certain "things hard to be understood," (2 Peter 3:16) that our "brother Paul" has written. Peter may have had this text from Romans in mind. It has certainly engaged the thinking of some of the greatest minds in church history, and can hardly be considered plain. Concerning this "veil of Calvinism,"- there is probably no charge more common against Calvinists than that they are influenced more by systems, creeds, and personalities than by the Scriptures. ( As if no one has ever read the Bible through the veil of Pelagianism.) I did not embrace Calvinism either because I found it plain, or that it received the support of certain famous men, but because it is taught in the Scriptures.

**Romans 6:** It is a good indication that our gospel is true if the objections raised against it are the same that Paul had to answer, whether those objections are brought by self-righteous Jews or Pelagians. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" is the constant charge leveled against Calvinism, and our answer to it is Romans 6. I will leave it to men wiser than myself to reconcile Keith's statements, that the heart of the gospel is "forgiveness to the undeserving" and yet, "we must obey God to be justified" and, in spite of this, "our obedience earns us nothing."

**Romans 8:5-9** divides all men into two companies,- they that are carnal and those that belong to Christ. They that are carnal cannot obey God. There is not the least suggestion in this text of a third category of men, this "we" of Keith's, who are able to choose between carnality or spirituality. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, does not use the word carnal in the absolute sense in which he used it in Romans, but in a restricted way, as a rebuke to saints who, in striving and dividing, were acting as carnal men.

Calvinists do not say that God crucifies the sinner's flesh for them. However, confessing with Scripture, that a spiritually dead sinner cannot do this apart from grace, we testify to the absolute necessity of regeneration, where, by virtue of a new principle of spiritual life implanted in the heart, a new believer is enabled to obey. Only in regeneration is the sinner passive, and while the Holy Spirit makes use of the Word and our wills, it is only the free grace of God that makes them effectual.