

Sin and Small Children

This is continuation of earlier related discussions on original sin and infants,

- [A Hellish Question](#)
- [A dialogue about the future of aborted babies or infants who die](#)

Part I: About Original Sin

HM wrote me as follows:

Ted,

I heard a quote from the Bible (perhaps in context it would make more sense to me) I don't remember the quote exactly but it said basically that babies were sinners even before they were born. I understand that it goes back to Adam and Eve, but it kind of upset me, because I've always thought of babies to be pure of heart and soul, and the notion that everyone is, at the core, good (or at least starts out that way) aids us in our understanding and compassion for other people. Now I'm sure that I have this out of context, and I thought you could shed some light. If you could give me a little insight I would greatly appreciate it.

Love

HM

Dear HM,

You have asked about what is known as the doctrine of "Original Sin" or "The Fall". This idea is not unique to Christianity. All ancient cultures have sought to explain the "why" of death. Not only the moment of death as in kicking the bucket or biting the big one, but how it came to be that all living things are born on their way to death. Our forefathers observed the seasons and that life was kind of cyclical yet it still had a direction. What worried our ancestors was that the world appeared to be moving towards decay, everything aged. Even though their world was unpredictable and filled with uncertainties, one thing was absolutely certain, all living things died.

Feature a bunch of shepherds sitting around the fire one evening thinking about life and one of them says, Hey, have you ever noticed that no matter how hot the water is when we make tea it always gets colder? And look at these biscuits, why aren't they fresh anymore? Another guy responds with, How about the tent or my sandals, how come everything turns to crud eventually and how come everybody grows old and dies? Do you think it's all connected? What about where you go when you die? Dead bodies turn to dust, what happens to the "me" part of us? Do we live on or? Is there a way to escape death? And what about babies?...and so on.

I can remember summer evenings laying on my back with a bunch of other kids gazing at the starry sky wondering and thinking aloud the same kind of questions. What's it all about?

Belief in a supernatural power arose as a means to avoid death and to make life predictably good, especially the end. Early religions had a way of getting out of hand. Virgins down the old volcano when the crops didn't get enough rain. The great pyramids in Egypt are a fine example of what happens when religions go mad and undertakers get control of the government's budget.

As for the Bible, babies and Christians, most people don't realize that Christians are actually adopted Jews. The Messiah or Savior who God said was going to come and put an end to death and suffering was predicted by the Prophets in the Old Testament. The present day Jews don't believe that Jesus was that Messiah and Christians believe He is. Both believe the story in Genesis is the true explanation of why everything grows old and falls apart

(including people).

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God and for a long time didn't age or die. There was no death in the world and they lived in a perfect garden. Even the animals didn't die. But to be like God, they had to have free will. Free will only exists only if there is something to choose. If they had no free will, Adam and Eve wouldn't have truly been made in the image of God because He is completely free. God, in order to make Adam and Eve in His image, had to give them something to choose. Free will has to have real life and death consequences or it would just be an experiment. So the garden had the famous "forbidden fruit" tree in it. And God said, "...From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die..." Free will came into being. Humanity can choose to obey God and live or disobey and die.

Things were fine until one day they were approached by an angel who was angry because He had lost His position as chief angel. He knew God loved His creation so he decided to do harm to Adam and Eve. He took on the disguise of a snake and cleverly made his approach by pretending that he had forgotten what God had said about that one particular tree. I have often thought that the real temptation was that he subliminally planted the idea that it was possible to lie and say, "I forgot what God said".

So here is the story of how death and everything falling apart came into the world:

(Gen 3:1-24) "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'?" And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 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, lest you die.' And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

"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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

"Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'

And he said, 'I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' And the man said, 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

"And the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly shall you go, And dust shall you eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

"To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 'Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your

face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

"Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'"therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life."

No more free lunch. On that very day death entered the world. The whole creation began to decay. Scientists measure the age of things by using the rate that carbon decays. Adam & Eve's relationship with God was broken and before long they had two sons, one of whom murdered the other one. This (and more) is called The Fall. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that if everything is turning to dust maybe death isn't fun. All the evidence says that life and death are like that old joke about the guy who fell down the elevator shaft of a very tall building. About half way down a friend shouted, "How's it going?" and as he fell past he replied, "So far so good!".

HM, this is sort of the long way around explaining what the Bible has to say about babies being sinners when they are born. We all know that babies are going to sin later without anyone teaching them how to do it. What I think you are asking is, does God hold babies accountable for being born sinners, right? The answer to that is no. He holds their parents responsible for their condition. It is Adam's fault that everybody was born under the curse of death. The real issue is how does one escape?

From reading the New Testament and from my own personal relationship with Jesus, nothing leads me to believe that He is the sort of guy who would let babies perish even though He knows they will grow up to give Him a lot of grief. It is only when we think about earning God's favor that it seems unfair that babies are born dying. No one can earn God's favor by doing good but He is willing to give His favor away to anyone who will accept it. I can't feature a baby turning down Jesus' offer to carry him into heaven. That's how I'm getting there.

Love,
Ted

Part II: Jesus and Children

Dear Ted,

Thank you for taking the time and care to answer my question. I understand that I was hearing the word "sinner" in the wrong context, with its everyday connotation rather than that in which it was written. When I heard the quote, it seemed a harsh word to use when talking about babies.

What I understand from your answer is that we are all flawed as human beings and because we have been given free will we will not always, when faced with a choice, make the correct one, and since babies are human beings they will grow up and make some bad choices. Hopefully though, we learn from bad choices and therefore become better people, and though we can never be perfect, that will count for something. Thank you for taking the time to refresh the story for me, you said that it was a round about way to answer my question, but it is important to have the whole story, to put it all in context.

I know some churches teach that people must be baptized to be spared and other churches have an even longer list of "must do" things. The church I go to teaches that children who die young, aborted babies, murdered children, etc. will go to heaven because they haven't lived long enough nor had a chance to say no to God's grace. Are children given special consideration until they begin to deliberately rebel?

Thanks,
HM

Dear HM,

These are a bunch of Bible verses about what Jesus had to say about Himself, God the Father, the kingdom of God and children. As for me, when I was twenty-nine I came to believe that Jesus was God walking around as a human being. Fully human and fully God (at the same time). It might take reading the New Testament straight through like a novel for you to get a bit of a grip on this idea if you don't grasp it already. I won't go into that right now. However, I know Him as a friend and I know that you will like Him too.

Jesus' disciples were always "discussing" which of them was going to out rank the other in the coming Kingdom of God. Most Jews were anticipating that the Messiah would come and kick the Romans out. The disciples had begun to believe that Jesus was Him, so they had a notion that because He picked them they might have some pretty good seats at the victory banquet. Unfortunately they didn't really understand what was coming and their ideas about "greatness" were quite worldly.

Life was very hard under Roman rule and there was a common saying, "The next best thing to dying young is to have never been born at all." The Romans often killed not only the conquered soldiers but the women and children as well. Wars left many street children who lived as beggars or became slaves. Jesus was very merciful and kind to children. Even though these passages are not about babies being sinners, they still reveal the heart of God towards children.

Jesus used children to teach that greatness was a humble, simple, trusting state of mind:

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mat 18:1-4).

He then taught about the virtues of being kind to children and issued a stern warning about mistreating them:

"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" (Mat 18:5-7).

How can anyone come up with a doctrine that says babies who don't undergo certain rituals (that they can't possibly understand) will perish? I would have to "despise" babies to believe that. If they are too young to act "in faith", they are also too young to "knowingly" sin. "...and whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom 14:23). God holds us accountable to whatever light we have.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." (Mat 18:10-14).

Catch that last line, "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." There are conditions, laws, and requirements all over the New Testament that say if one fails to do or believe them

they will perish. Doing them is not what is going to save me. I'm not able to do them nor am I sincere enough in my attempts to qualify as doing my best. Babies get to heaven the same way I do. By the grace of God. I don't know what is in an infant's mind. Jesus makes it sound like they know how to trust Him better than I do:

"Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' And after laying His hands on them, He departed from there." (Mat 19:13-15).

Mark's account is almost the same except that he puts even more emphasis on Jesus' outrage over His disciples blocking the children from getting close to Him. These are some of the verses that made me suspect that the children were street urchins and that was why the disciples were stopping them. They could have been orphans or the children of homeless families. There were beggars in Judea and huge crowds of the poor followed Jesus around. He loved the children and took them in His arms. This is no God who requires an offering in the form of burning babies.

"And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, 'Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.' And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them. (Mark 10:13-16).

Luke reports Jesus saying that the Kingdom of God belongs to babies. He also said that Jesus used their trusting, helpless nature as an example of how we should be towards God or we wouldn't get in to His kingdom:

"And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.'" (Luke 18:15-17).

God holds parents accountable for their children's wickedness. The Apostle Paul wrote that our heavenly Father includes children in the forgiving grace that He gives to their parents:

"And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. 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." (1 Cor 7:13-14).

Here are some other verses from Paul's letters where he uses children as examples of innocence:

"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature." (1 Cor 14:20).

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." (Eph 5:1-2).

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world..." (Phil 2:14-15).

The Apostle John wrote a letter to the early Church that, as I read it, has me wondering if he thought that children, young men, and fathers represented three levels of maturity. I always find something I haven't noticed before. The

Bible is never boring.

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (1 John 2:12-14).

When I consider the whole of what the Bible has to say, it sure looks to me like babies are born with the potential for becoming wicked people. But that doesn't make God like a street car conductor who won't let you ride unless you have a token. He is God. He can do anything He wants. Only a mechanical godless view of the universe predetermines an endless state of destruction.

This paper is a little longer than I intended, but I wanted you to see that lots of people are mistaken about how God's judgments work. All religions have what are called legalists. They are people who act like they are lawyers in the court of God. Some sound like prosecutors and some like loop-hole finding defense attorneys. Neither group are very helpful in understanding questions like yours. They seem to forget that we worship the living God. I'm not going to appear before Him choking on a mouthful of stupid excuses. Like I wrote you last time, I'm counting on Jesus to carry me in to His kingdom just like He carries the babies in.

Please do read the New Testament. The very first time I read it, I was very surprised by Jesus. He wasn't anything like I expected. I realized that if He is what God is like, then the Church has lost something really valuable. I'm sorry to say it but I can't recall a single person in the thirty years before I became a Christian that ever witnessed, testified or told me in any way, anything that would have led me to believe that Jesus was such a kind person. Not once in my pagan years did anyone tell me Jesus is Lord. I hope, for the Church's sake, that faithful sowers of His Word did tell me but that some wicked "birds" snatched the seed away.

Write if you have any more questions. Don't worry about seeming foolish. I'd be willing to bet that only about ten or twenty percent of the people who call themselves Christians understand their relationship with God.

Love,
Ted

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