

# Do Humans Have ‘Sinful (Literal) Flesh?’

By Raymond C. Faircloth

## The Background and Questions Raised

The general teaching of many churches is that, at the point of Adam’s fall, God changed Adam’s flesh to be **sinful flesh** which would then be inherited by his descendants. This teaching, hinted at by Tertullian (220) and developed by Augustine (354-430) became known as the ‘original sin’ doctrine and even after the Reformation variations of this doctrine have been taught. The teaching raised the problem concerning Jesus’ sinlessness as described in the Scriptures. The post-apostolic church circumvented this problem by positing the idea of the Immaculate Conception. This is the teaching that Mary was conceived without stain or original sin so that Jesus would be born without original sin. Other religious groups teach that only the male genetics have an effect upon the sinfulness of the baby conceived. So because God was Jesus’ Father Jesus was sinless and Mary’s genetics had no effect in the conception.

NOTE: A different definition of ‘original sin’ makes it refer to the fact of Adam’s original sin without reference to its consequences.

### LOGICAL CONCLUSION

Some Christian groups have seen that the logical corollary to the sinful flesh concept is that Jesus, too, must have had sinful flesh because he was born of Mary, who had inherited sinful flesh from Adam. However, because the Scriptures teach that Jesus committed no sin and was sinless it became necessary to teach that Jesus’ **nature** must be distinguished from his **character** so that his nature was that of sinful flesh and his character was sinless. The purpose of this study is to show that “the sinful flesh” concept does not, in fact, fit the biblical data.

## The Arguments for the ‘Sinful Flesh’ Concept

1. All of creation was changed after Adam sinned:
  - ❖ “**Cursed is the ground** ... It will produce thorns and thistles *for you*” (*Gen. 3:17-19*).
  - ❖ “For the creation was **subjected to futility** ... in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay...” (*Rom. 8:19-22*).
2. Most Bible translations of **Romans 8:3** render the Greek phrase as ‘*sinful flesh*.’
3. “He made him who knew no sin **to be sin** on our behalf...” (*2 Cor. 5:21*).  
This text is understood to mean that Jesus was made sin at conception and so had sinful flesh.
4. **Romans 7:7-25**. This appears to describe Paul’s inability to do good because of a law of sin in his body.

However, do the Scriptures make the above distinction between Jesus’ **nature** and his **character** in relation to sin? For this study we use the term ‘nature’ in its ontological sense as meaning physical substance.

### THE NECESSARY QUESTIONS

In answering the above question we need first to answer the following questions:

- How was Adam’s body constituted at his creation? Was he imperfect or perfect; perishable (corruptible) or imperishable; mortal or immortal?
- How did “the tree of life” affect his longevity?
- Did God change his body so that his flesh was now sinful? Or:
- Did his sin cause a change in his relationship with God?
- Did this change affect his body so that his flesh became susceptible to illness?
- What was the penalty for his sin?
- When should the sentence upon Adam have been carried out?
- How did all of this affect his progeny and in particular Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus himself?

## Adam Was Created Flawless but Perishable and Mortal in His Nature

- ❖ “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was **very good**” (*Gen. 1:31*).

God’s original creation would indeed have been flawless. God did not make things that were imperfect because God is “*the Rock, [whose] work is perfect*” (Deut. 32:4). So although this certainly doesn’t mean that Adam could do things beyond normal human ability it does mean that genetically he must have been without the human physical flaws that we now see. For instance, he would have had a perfect working immune system and perfect working body parts, both internally and externally. So, natural death results for humans because their bodies are corruptible i.e. perishable. This is because they are subject to the law of entropy, whereby everything must eventually break down. So Adam was either:

1. Perishable when he was created, or
2. His nature was changed to make him perishable at the time he sinned.

Although permanent access to “the tree of life” meant living indefinitely for Adam, imperishability/immortality is what is promised only to “the New Creation” not to the original human creation. So the second position is not the biblical position. This means that Adam was perishable and so was also mortal. Therefore, as part of the natural system his body would have eventually started to break down had it not been for his access to “the tree of life” thereby preventing this process. So the phrase “very good” could not have meant that he would have been immortal and so not having been subject to death in the fullness of time without such access to “the tree of life.” Furthermore, the “tree of life” also held promise of immortality for Adam and Eve while they were under probation.

## Adam and Eve Almost Certainly Ate From the “Tree of Life”

- ❖ “And Yahweh God caused to grow every tree *that* was pleasing to the sight and good for food. And the tree of life *was* in the midst of the garden, *along with* the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ... And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “From every tree of the garden *you may freely eat,* <sup>17</sup>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*” (*Gen. 2:9, 16, 17 LEB*).

Because only “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was forbidden to them, and because they were told that they were “*free to eat from any tree of the garden*” it is almost impossible that they didn’t eat from “*the tree of life* in the midst of the garden.” Continued access to it would have maintained their life indefinitely and as non-aging. Furthermore, the fruit of this tree also symbolized immortal life and their eating of it while on probation held out **the hope** of that regenerated life (1 Cor. 15) provided **they maintained their right relationship with God** i.e. kept His command. So, it appears that if Adam and Eve had remained obedient when tested by the Serpent they would then have been granted immortal life i.e. changed from corruptible (perishable) to imperishable.

### AFTER THEY SINNED

- ❖ “And Yahweh God said, “Look—the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil. *What if* he stretches out his hand and takes also from **the tree of life and eats, and lives forever?**” ... <sup>24</sup>So he drove the man out, and placed cherubim east of the garden of Eden, and *a flaming, turning sword* to **guard the way to the tree of life**” (*Gen. 3:22, 24 LEB*).

The *NIV Genesis Application Commentary* p.170 states:

We should view the tree of life as having fruit that extends life rather than instantly grants immortality...We must understand the statement in 3:22 that they might “live forever” in light of two caveats. (1) If the fruit effectively extended life, then regular access to the tree could extend life indefinitely, thus eventuating in virtual immortality. That is different from thinking that one bite of the fruit would bring instant immortality. (2) Careful study of the term that the NIV translates “forever” has demonstrated that it is not an abstract term, suggesting infinity or eternity per say, but characterises something as being open-ended, with no anticipated ending built in. It is better translated “perpetual life,” suggesting that the fruit constantly counteracts any ageing.

Because eating from “the tree of life” gave perpetual life, God’s denying of it to Adam removed his hope of being the one through whom mankind could live “forever.” So after their sin the normal process toward their natural deaths began. However, the promise concerning the seed of the woman as bruising the Serpent’s head (3:15) and the clothing of them with animal skins as indicating prospective atonement would give them hope for the future.

### Adam Transgressed a Law so the Penalty Is a Legal One

- ❖ “...where there is no law there is no transgression” (*Rom. 4:15*).
- ❖ “...but sin is not counted where there is no law” (*Rom. 5:13*).
- ❖ God’s law for Adam was in this case the one command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. So the condemnation of Adam was a **legal one**. This is why the Scriptures use metaphorical legal commercial terminology such as “sold under sin,” “redeem,” “ransom,” “purchase,” “condemnation,” “acquittal” e.g.:
- ❖ “...for you were **bought at a price**” (*1 Cor. 6:20*).
- ❖ “I am a creature of flesh and blood, **sold as a slave to sin**” (*Rom. 7:14*).  
*It was Adam who sold his progeny into slavery to sin by his becoming alienated from God.*
- ❖ “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me **free from the law of sin and death** (*not the Mosaic Law*)” (*Rom. 8:1, 2*).

Humans do not inherit a physical “law of sin and death” they are born under it because by definition it is a legal matter.

### Proposals Regarding How and When Adam ‘Surely Died’

- ❖ “And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “From every tree of the garden *you may freely eat*,<sup>17</sup> 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**” (*Gen. 2:16, 17<sup>LEB</sup>*).

Several proposals have been made regarding Adam’s living to 930 years of age even though he was told he would die in the day he sinned:

1. That the reference was to Adam’s **spiritual death** which occurred on the 24-hour day he sinned. His spiritual death was as a result of his breaking of the relationship with God and so becoming **alienated from Him**.
2. That the day was a **1,000 year long day** and so Adam, in dying at 930 years of age, died a natural death within it and this was entirely the penalty.
3. That because the phrase “**in the day that**” means “when,” it was at the approximate time of Adam’s banishment from the garden, thereby denying him access to “the tree of life,” which brought about his death because the **dying process began** then and culminated in actual death at 930 years of age.
4. That Adam was legally to die a **permanent death** “when” he sinned but God showed mercy (*Jas. 2:13*) and forbearance (*Rom. 3:25, 26*) to him and his progeny and so *deferred the punishment giving a reprieve* so that he lived long enough to bring the human family into existence and so that he could take advantage of God’s future **plan of redemption** through Christ (*Gen. 3:15*) and receive forgiveness at his resurrection.

### Reasons Why “Surely Die” Did Not Refer to Spiritual Death

Although Adam and Eve certainly damaged their relationship with God by their disobedience it does not appear from the account that they became totally **alienated from God** or that they necessarily died spiritually. This is born out by the facts that:

- God still spoke to them after they had sinned (3:11).
- Only the Serpent was directly cursed (3:14).
- God made the veiled promise of future redemption as involving the woman (3:15).
- Their sons made sacrifices - perhaps instructed of this requirement by Adam and Eve.

However, in spite of these details, it is likely that spiritual death was not even what God had in mind when he warned them of the consequences of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The warning concerned death and Adam and Eve knew only of one kind of death—literal physical death. There is no mention of the concept of spiritual death in the Genesis account.

## Reasons Why “Surely Die” Involved a Warning of Immediate Permanent Literal Death

# 3 would mean that only the **dying process** was the penalty for his sin. However, ‘to die means cessation of life. Prior to the sin of Adam and Eve there is no mention of or even any hint of resurrection to future life. So the phrase “**surely die**” (Lit. “to die you will die”) meant permanent death. Also this phrase appears in 11 later passages (e.g. Gen. 20:3-7; Num. 26:65; 1 Sam. 14:39, 44; 1 Sam. 22:16-18; 2 Sam.12:14; 1 Kings 2:37-42; 2 Kings 1:4, 6; 2 Kings 1:16, 17; Jer. 26:8-19; Ezek. 3:17-21; 33:8-15). In every case the circumstances show the meaning of “surely die” as a reference to the legal certainty of death—a **judicially executed death**, rather than to accidental or natural death. Also, in some cases the phrase “surely die” is contrasted with “surely live” as meaning that one will not be executed. So God’s warning to Adam was of a **legal sentence of permanent death**.

### “**IN THE DAY**” MEANS EITHER “WHEN” OR WITHIN A 24 HOUR DAY

The proposal by some, that by applying the thoughts of Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 the day was a **1,000 year long day** and so Adam died a natural death within ‘the day,’ is not correct. The phrase “in the day” in Genesis cannot mean a gradual process over a long period of almost a 1,000 years because of the way the word ‘day’ (Heb. *b’yom*) is used in Genesis when dealing with Adam and Eve:

- ❖ “For God knows that **in the day** you *eat of it your eyes will be opened*, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” ... *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 coverings” (*Gen. 3:5, 7*).
- There was only one specific 24 hour day in which they first ate this fruit.
- Clearly their eyes were not opened hundreds of years later, neither were their eyes gradually opened over such a long period of time.
- None of the activities that take place in this account would make any sense if ‘day’ didn’t mean literal time as we use it e.g.:
- ❖ “Then they heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden *at the windy time of day*. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden” (*Gen. 3:8 LEB*).

So when God warns: “for **in the day** that you eat from it you will **surely die**” (*Gen. 2:17*) He cannot be meaning that at some distant future time Adam would die, but neither could he have meant on the particular 24hour day because the penalty was not inflicted on them when he spoke to them in the garden *in the cool of the day*. The warning is that “when” Adam sinned he would die. This still leaves us with the problem of understanding how Adam could have lived on until he was 930 years old.

## Adam and Eve’s Recognition of Their Sin

Genesis 3:7-11 shows Adam and Eve’s recognition of the gravity of their disobedience inasmuch as now they needed to hide from God and knew that they were naked before Him i.e. were now conscious of their sin. This indicates the resulting guilty conscience and shame for what they had done. Perhaps they repented; but this is not stated.

## God’s Mercy and Forbearance Deferred the Permanent Death Sentence Until Redemption Became Available

To repeat the fact that when God warned: “for **in the day** that you eat from it you will **surely die**” (*Gen. 2:17*) He meant that on the very day that Adam sinned he would die. However, the Scriptures describe God as One who is entitled to change His mind over certain matters (*Rom. 9:14-16*) because he is merciful and forbearing:

- ❖ “**Mercy triumphs over judgment**” (*James. 2:13*).
- ❖ “...the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as *a sacrifice of atonement*, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in **his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished**—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:24-26 NIV*).

If God had shown no mercy and forbearance (*restraint*) and had immediately carried out the stated sentence of permanent death upon Adam he would have died on the exact day he sinned. Furthermore, God, in His mercy and forbearance toward Adam and those “in Adam” “*had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.*”

#### MERCIFUL PROSPECTIVE REDEMPTION

**However**, because of God’s mercy and forbearance He allowed Adam to live on for about 900 years more albeit without access to “the tree of life”, and informed him that:

- ❖ “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, **till you return to the ground**, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (*Gen. 3:19*).

So Adam’s *natural dying process*, which had previously been forestalled by his having access to the “tree of life,” was now to take effect by his being denied access to “the tree of life.” By this first action God was mercifully deferring the execution of the sentence of permanent literal death so that Adam was provided with:

1. Enough time to bring the human family in his loins into existence. Without this merciful allowance there would have been **no human race** through Adam.

In spite of this merciful provision for Adam the actual penalty of permanent death still stood. Yet God’s mercy for Adam extended beyond this first action of a deferred sentence giving further deferment so as to allow for him to have:

2. The opportunity to take advantage of God’s *plan of redemption* through Christ (*Gen. 3:15*) at the future resurrection either of life or of judgment (*John 5:29*) so that the sentence of permanent death for Adam might not be carried out at all.

All of these facts show that natural death was not the death sentence incurred by Adam or his progeny. Yet, by being “in Adam” they too are subject to the sentence of permanent literal death unless they take advantage of God’s *plan of redemption* through Christ (*Gen. 3:15*).

## God’s Merciful Provision of a Substitute

#### IT IS THE *SHEDDING OF BLOOD* THAT COVERS SIN

- ❖ “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (*Heb. 9:22 ESV*).

This means that the execution of a substitute was required to pay the penalty that Adam incurred. This was foreshadowed by the execution of animals as sacrifices since the time Adam and Eve sinned (*Gen. 3:21*).

#### THE NEED FOR A SUBSTITUTE

The event recorded in *Genesis 3:21* was the beginning of human recognition that a substituting sacrifice was needed to deal with the unpaid penalty of Adam and all who were “in Adam” at the time. However, that substituting sacrifice—**Jesus**—**did not pay the price by a natural death** but rather **by his voluntarily submitting to a humanly inflicted and unjust death sentence**. So when the sacrifice was made by Jesus he didn’t make it to prevent us from dying naturally but from perishing forever. The real triumph of Jesus by his sacrifice was to make it possible for mankind not to be hurt by the second death (*Rev. 20:6, 14*), which is the actual penalty for Adam’s sin. Up to now no-one has actually permanently perished:

- ❖ “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that **if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all...**” (*2 Cor. 5:14, 15*).

*This is not to say that all men appropriate to themselves the benefits of Christ’s substituting for Adam’s death penalty.* NOTE: This substitutionary arrangement was not an appeasing of a so-called angry God.

#### A BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION OF SUBSTITUTION

When Abraham took Isaac to Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice a ram was provided by God to substitute for Isaac. In this illustration:

1. **Abraham** with the knife raised pictured *God's legal right* to execute the death penalty upon Adam.
2. **Isaac** was a type of *Adam and all who were "in Adam" as sinners* and so deserving of immediate execution of the death penalty. Isaac's **removal from the altar** pictures God's mercy and forbearance by *deferring the death penalty*.
3. Finally, **the ram** is provided by God as a substitute for Isaac and pictures—*Jesus mercifully provided* by God as the **substitute** for Adam and those "in Adam."

#### Problems with the Claim That Natural Death Was the Penalty for Adam

- If Adam paid for his sin (including all who were in his loins) when he died naturally at 930 years of age why should it have been necessary for Jesus to pay also? *Yet Jesus paid the actual* penalty that Adam incurred—so the natural death of Adam cannot have been that penalty.
- When Jesus paid the actual penalty that Adam incurred he was physically put to death just as Revelation 13:18 speaks of him as being "*slain*" with reference to the required substitute. This does not indicate a natural death but the purposeful taking of life.

#### Problems with the Claim That Natural Death Was the Penalty for Adam's Progeny

- Whenever there was very serious wrongdoing in Israel the Mosaic Law prescribed a penalty of judicial death by execution. Natural death could not be a penalty.
- If natural death is 'the wages of sin' then God must be unjust because both those "in Christ" and those still "in Adam" suffer this same penalty and so those "in Christ" haven't really had their sins forgiven and are still under condemnation because they still die and their flesh is still corruptible. Yet Christians are stated to be not still condemned according to Romans 8:1.
- The incorrigibly wicked are promised "the second death", so if natural death is the punishment then they get punished twice. Even human law doesn't punish a person twice for the one crime.

#### What Was the Change Adam Experienced after He Transgressed?

##### THE EATEN FRUIT DID NOT CHANGE ADAM'S FLESH

The command from God was to ascertain Adam's obedience to Him and not as a warning that the fruit of the tree contained something detrimental to his or Eve's physical well-being.

##### DID GOD CHANGE ADAM'S FLESH TO "SINFUL FLESH?"

If this were so then God would have become the source of all the sin in the world. This concept would nullify the statement that "God is Love" and bring into question God's justice.

##### SIN IS AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT

Because sin is disobedience, an act of rebellion or the transgression of a law; it cannot be a literal element within the physical organism, and so cannot be physically inherited by one's offspring. Of course the impulses to sin lie within a person's mind and such was the case with Adam before he sinned. So there could not have been a change in Adam's actual flesh after he sinned that now gave him literal sinful flesh. NOTE: There is no Scripture that says Adam's "sin" was passed down from generation to generation. Romans 5:12 says that "death" was passed from Adam to all generations.

##### NO STATEMENT THAT ADAM CHANGED FROM IMPERISHABLE TO PERISHABLE

There is no statement in the Genesis account or the rest of the biblical record that there was a change in the flesh of humans because of their disobedience. Adam did not disobey and then become a sinner with 'sinful

flesh’—he was a sinner from the moment he disobeyed. Furthermore, there is no biblical statement that infers that Adam’s flesh became sinful flesh. The very reverse of such a change from imperishable to perishable is the promise for Christians (1 Cor. 15:54).

#### *THE ONE SIN BROKE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD*

The prime change that occurred was in Adam and Eve’s relationship with God. They **became legally alienated** from Him because of their disobedience to God’s only law given to them. This was a **legal or judicial change**. So Christadelphian teaching has *confused human character for physical human nature*. The NIV notes give the definition of sin as:

The universal human condition of broken relationship with God involving the missing the mark or falling short of God’s intention for human life and breaking God’s instructions for life; remedied by belief in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and lord of life.

Nevertheless, it is individual acceptance of Jesus’ ransoming sacrifice that now reconciles men to God:

- ❖ “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him **to reconcile to himself** all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace **through his blood**, shed on the cross”  
(Col. 1:19, 20 NIV).

#### *NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF A DAMAGED RELATIONSHIP*

It is known that an unhappy emotional state has damaging effects upon the physical body. This was likely the case with Adam and Eve and therefore weakening the body so that in time it became susceptible to illness. Such negative changes in the body cells at the DNA level would then be passed on to offspring and so creating the unhappy state that mankind finds itself in today.

### Mankind Is Still in the Image of God

- ❖ “For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since **he is the image and glory of God**; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7).

Although man now “falls short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) he nevertheless still is “the image and glory of God.” How could this possibly be if his flesh was full of sin?

### Was Creation Dramatically Changed After Adam Transgressed?

- ❖ “...his invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever **since the creation** of the world (Gk. *Kosmos* = mankind), in **the things that have been made**” (Rom. 1:20).

Hence there has been no dramatic change since the completing of creation of mankind. Everything about our planet is basically as it was made in the beginning apart from the damage done by mankind over the millennia. So God’s “invisible attributes” were seen at creation just as they are seen today.

#### *AN ORIGINAL WORLD WITHOUT DECAY IS ILLOGICAL*

If such a world existed then all cells would not break down and so it would be impossible for any creature to eat or breathe or excrete or to shed surface skin etc.

#### *OBJECTION 1:*

According to Genesis 3:17-19 didn’t the cursing of the ground change all of nature so that decay was introduced for the first time?

- ❖ “To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it,” **Cursed is the ground** because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce **thorns and thistles** for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:17-19).

*REPLY:* This was a cursing of the ground pronounced only upon Adam as a punishment so that he would barely be able to produce food. This was not a universal curse lasting up to the present time. Separately and later **the ground for Cain was cursed** for him only further showing that the curse on the ground for Adam was for him personally:

- ❖ “And now you [*Cain*] are **cursed from the ground**, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength”  
(*Gen. 4:11, 12*).

Such cursing of the ground did not occur elsewhere. Certainly at later times the ground produced abundantly e.g. Canaan (the spies report in Numbers 13:27) and Joel’s description of the land as being like the Garden of Eden (Joel 2:3). So the language concerning the curse of the ground for Adam is not suggestive of any such significant change to the rest of the physical world. Adam and Eve’s suffering because of thorns, thistles, sweat and **increase in childbirth pains** was as a result of being thrown out of Eden and losing access to the ‘*tree of Life*.’ If Eve had had a child before she sinned, she would have experienced childbirth pains, but now they were to be increased.

NOTE:

- The removal of the curse from the ground in the time of Noah probably concerned the damage caused by the Flood (Gen. 8:21) and was not connected to Adam’s situation.
- The “curse” mentioned in Revelation 22:3 (KJV, NASB) is better translated as “anything accursed” and has nothing to do with the cursing of the ground placed upon Adam.

*OBJECTION 2:*

Didn’t all of creation become subjected to futility and decay **because of Adam and Eve’s sin** according to Romans 8:19-22?

- ❖ “For the creation (Gk. *ktisis*) waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was **subjected to futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the **bondage to decay** and obtain the freedom of **the glory** of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been **groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now**”  
(*Rom. 8:19-22*).

*REPLY:* The creation (Gk. *ktisis*) spoken of here is a reference to mankind as is the case in 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15 and Colossians 1:23. The passage in Romans 8 does not say that this condition came about as a result of the ‘fall’ of mankind. Rather it speaks of “*the pains of childbirth until now*,” meaning ‘for all times up to now’ and indicating that mankind has symbolically been the unborn child waiting to become the child born “**in glory**.” Adam was never ‘in glory’ even though God declared everything perfect. This indicates that the **bondage to decay** was from the beginning which is also what the **second law of thermodynamics** tells us i.e. everything breaks down. This must have been the case for Adam otherwise he would not have been able to eat. Because Adam, in a state of probation, failed to maintain sinlessness, he made mankind’s ‘**groaning**’ significantly worse. Ecclesiastes 1:4-10 is a commentary on Genesis 1 and 2 concerning this ‘futility’/‘vanity’ that existed from the beginning:

- ❖ “...there is **nothing new** under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See it is new’? **It has been already in the ages before us**” (*Ecc. 1:10*).

## Sin and Temptation Should Not Be Confused

Temptation is often confused with sin. Without real temptation there would be no character development. However, sin is an act of disobedience—it is rebellion against God, which is an abstract concept. So because it is an act it is not a literal physical substance or an element that could be transferred from one person to another genetically or otherwise. Therefore, Adam did not have the substance of his flesh changed so that it moved from being sinless to being sinful. Adam was capable of experiencing temptation and, in fact, succumbed whilst in his pristine state. This disposes of the notion that people sin because they have inherited in their flesh a predisposition to sin. People sin because, like the perfect Adam, they have natural impulses and free-will. These impulses are good for humans until they go beyond the bounds of their God-given use at which point sin occurs. The person succumbs to the temptation because of their own wrong desires (James 1:13-15) and a disregard for obedience to God. Yet, in principle there is no sin which humans cannot resist if their desire to please God is strong enough to overcome their character flaws. Yet the reality is that all succumb at times (1 John 2:1) when temptation is too strong.



## The Interlineal Translation of Romans 8:3

- ❖ “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of **sinful flesh**, on account of sin: He condemned *sin in the flesh...*” (*Rom. 8:3 KJV, NASB, and most others*).

The phrase **sinful flesh** occurs just this once in the standard translations of the Bible and can easily be construed as if referring to literal flesh that is inherently and genetically sinful. However, it is recognized by scholars that it is dangerous to build any doctrine from a single phrase especially when the concept of that doctrine is not given anywhere else in the Scriptures. This is the case with the “literal flesh as full of sin” teaching, that is, that such a concept is not described in any terms whatever in the rest of the Scriptures. Furthermore to grasp what is really meant in the original Greek it is also necessary to understand what is actually meant by the term “flesh” in this Scripture.

### THE WORD FOR ‘SINFUL’ IS NOT IN THE GREEK TEXT OF ROMANS 8.

In the translation by Benjamin Wilson, set alongside his interlinear, he renders this phrase as “Flesh of sin” which is exactly what the word-for-word of the Greek text says. Additionally, from the Greek text in all other interlinears the English adjective ‘**sinful**’ (Gk. *hamartolos*) does not occur in Romans 8:3, but rather the actual word-for-word phrase is “**flesh of sin** (Gk. *sarkos hamartias*)” with sin being a *noun*. In all instances in the interlinears of the NT the word *hamartias* means “sin” and never ‘sinful.’

### “FLESH OF SIN” DOES NOT MEAN “SINFUL FLESH”

‘Sinful flesh’ means ‘flesh full of sin.’ But the word-for-word phrase “flesh of sin” means “**sin’s flesh**” or “**flesh belonging to sin.**” This is because the phrase is grammatically in the genitive to show possession. And so JAT Robinson, in *Wrestling with Romans* (p. 94), expresses it in English as “**flesh which belonged to sin.**” This is why **Romans 8:3** is translated in the Holman Christian Standard Bible as: “...sending His own Son in **flesh** like ours **under sin’s domain**, and as a sin offering...” Also C.K Barrett in his commentary on Romans translates Romans 8:3 as: “...sending his own Son in the form of **flesh which has passed under sin’s rule...**”

### EXAMPLES OF GRAMMATICAL PARALLELS

- In *Romans 6:6* the phrase “**body of sin**” occurs in the KJV and most other translations. Here it is not translated as ‘sinful body’ because it is recognized as being grammatically in the genitive (possessive), as with Romans 8:3. The grammatical structure is virtually identical (Gk. *soma tes hamartias*) word-for-word “body of the sin” and so meaning “**the sin’s body**” or “**body belonging to the sin.**” So Romans 6:6 is rendered in the HCSB as:
  - ❖ “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that *sin’s dominion over the body* may be abolished...”

NOTE: Romans 6:6 in the NAB incorrectly uses the phrase: ‘our sinful bod(y)ies.’

- *Romans 7:23 and 25*: The word-for-word is: “**the law of the sin**” (Gk. *to nomos tes hamartias*) which again is in the genitive to show possession and is generally translated as “the law of sin” or “sin’s law” but never as ‘sinful law.’
- *2 Corinthians 2:12*: The word-for-word is: “the gospel of the Christ (Gk. *to evangelion tou Christou*).” Again because this is in the genitive it means that it is “the gospel belonging to Christ” or “Christ’s gospel” which is how it is expressed in the KJV: “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach **Christ’s gospel.**”  
Also the section of Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon that contains Romans 8:3 defines *hamartias* as “a destructive evil power, sin.”

### “FLESH” MEANS ‘HUMANITY IN WEAKNESS’

“Flesh” in the Scriptures is a reference to man/humanity in weakness. So Barrett explains that in Romans:  
Flesh (*sarx*) in theological use does **not** refer to the **material constituent** of human existence but to the manner of human existence as it has, since the entry of sin, come in fact to be (p.147 of his commentary).

So the phrase in 8:3 simply means “humanity belonging to sin” or “**humanity under the dominion of sin**” or “**humanity under sin’s rule**” and does not mean that we have or Jesus had “sinful literal flesh.”

THE SECOND PHRASE IN 8:3 means that Jesus “**condemned sin in humanity.**” Or NLT says “declared an end to sin’s control.” So the Scriptures speak neither of ‘sinful flesh’ nor of ‘sinful bodies,’ but rather of “humanity under the dominion of sin” and “*the body* under the dominion of *sin.*”

*WAS JESUS BEING UNFAIR?*

❖ “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed **evil thoughts**, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (*Mark 7:21-23*).

If man had ‘sinful flesh’ it would be very unjust of Jesus to have condemned the unlawful practices of many individuals because they would not have been able to resist such conduct. Yet Jesus showed that many were also good, which would be impossible if they all had so-called ‘sinful flesh’: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things ...” (*Matt. 12:35*). *So clearly Jesus was not condemning human nature but sin which is a transgression of law.*

### Was Jesus “Made to Be a Sin-Offering”?

*2 Corinthians 5:21:*

“For our sake he **made him to be sin** (Gk. *harmatia*), who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This text is understood to mean that Jesus was made sin at conception and so had sinful flesh. However, the Greek word *harmatia* can mean either ‘sin’ or ‘sin-offering’ according to context and usage. In context the Hebrew word *chattath* in Leviticus 4:24 meaning “sin-offering” is translated in the Greek LXX as *harmatia*. It was the LXX that the New Testament writers mainly used. Also, Christ’s death is spoken of as a sin-offering” (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; John 1:29; Isa. 53:6, 10).

NOTE: In the Hebrew there is no word for ‘offering’ but is literally expressed as “the ram the sin, the lamb the sin” etc. This is obviously meant to mean that these animals were to be sin offerings.

### Did Romans 7:7-25 Actually Apply to Paul as a Christian?

The foundation for our understanding of Romans 7 as applying to Paul before becoming a Christian is laid in chapter 6:

Verses 1 and 2: “**Are we to continue in sin** that grace may abound? By no means! How can **we who died to sin** still live in it?”

Verse 4: “we too might walk in **newness of life.**”

Verses 6 and 7: “We know that our old self was crucified...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has **been set free from sin.**”

Verse 14: “For **sin will have no dominion** over you...”

Verses 17 and 18: “you who **were once slaves of sin** ... having been set free from sin,...”

Verse 22: “But now that you have **been set free from sin...**”

THE CONTEXT in Chapter 7: Verse 5: “For while we were living in the flesh...” This past tense statement further shows that the description through to verse 25 concerns a person prior to becoming Christian and so living without God’s help. So in relation to the struggle with sin, Paul in this chapter was not speaking of himself as a Christian i.e. one who is “in Christ.” Rather he was describing the struggles of **a man still sold under Adam’s sin**, and in his excellent work *Wrestling with Romans* leading theologian JAT Robinson states that:

It is not Paul as a Jew, nor Paul as a Christian but Paul as a mere man (*ego anthropos*), facing the law by himself, in his own resources: ‘Miserable creature that I am, who is there to deliver me from this solidarity in death to which the flesh is subject? God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ p. 90.

So Paul, who as a Christian, is not referring to himself as having those struggles as described in Romans 7:7-25, rather he immediately makes the contrast with the very different situation of a man “in Christ” (Rom. 8:1-5) who no longer has such struggles. If this were about so-called ‘sinful flesh’ then Paul’s actual body would have changed at the moment he became a Christian to being one of sinless flesh.

*WHAT ABOUT VERSES 17 AND 18?*

- ❖ “So now it is no longer I who do it, but **sin that dwells within me**. For I know that nothing good lives **in me**, that is, **in my flesh**.”

Here Paul is showing that when actuated by the mind of flesh i.e. the sinful character, he would be allowing sin to rule his mind. In his new condition, however, this does not apply to him because as Romans 6:16 shows he is not under the dominion of sin. Because “flesh” means weak human character in an unredeemed state, there is no meaning here of sin living in Paul’s literal flesh.

Verse 25: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am **a slave** to the law of God, but **with my flesh, to the law of sin**.” *So only in his unredeemed state i.e. “my flesh,” was Paul “a slave...to the law of sin.”*

## Facts about Christians That Prove the ‘Sinful Flesh’ Concept to Be Unbiblical

*SET FREE FROM SIN*

- ❖ “Therefore **do not let sin** reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. **Do not offer the parts of your body to sin**, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For **sin shall not be your master**, because you are not under law, but under grace ...<sup>18</sup>You have been **set free from sin** and have become slaves to righteousness” (*Rom. 6:12-14, 18*).

If the sinful flesh theory were true then it would be impossible for Christians to obey this admonition. How could they be “set free from sin” and yet not at that moment have sinless flesh?

*SET FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH*

- ❖ “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me **free from the law of [Adam’s] sin and death [judicial execution]**” (*Rom. 8:1, 2*).

*Because Christians still die this Scripture could not be true if there were such a thing as sinful flesh.*

*PASSED FROM DEATH TO LIFE*

- ❖ “I [*Jesus*] assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will **not come under judgment** but has passed from [*judicial sentence of*] death to life” (*John 5:24*). *Yet our flesh has not changed, which it would do if we had the so-called ‘sinful flesh.’*

## Does ‘Unclean’ Refer to ‘Sinful Flesh’?

- ❖ “And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should **not call any person common or unclean**” (*Acts 10:28*).

Clearly, it couldn’t be Gentiles and yet not Jews who had such unclean sinful flesh, if such a concept were true. The defilement was of a legal nature not a physical one.

- ❖ “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your **children would be unclean**, but as it is, **they are holy**” (*1 Cor. 7:14*).

In the thinking of some Christians “uncleanness” refers to having “sinful flesh.” However, because a spouse and children may be made clean, and yet they are still physically the same as before, there cannot be the concept of ‘sinful flesh.’

## Adam Is the Head of Mankind “Sold Under Sin” (Rom. 7:17)

- ❖ “For as **in Adam** all die, so also **in Christ** all will be made alive” (*1 Cor. 15:22*). *The “in Adam” statement is the same as the statements concerning Levi as paying tithes to Melchizedek when he was still in Abraham’s loins (Heb. 7:9,10).* So the reason why all of mankind are under “the law of sin and death” is that all were in Adam’s loins at the time he rebelled against God.

*ALL ARE IMPRISONED IN SIN UNDER THE CURSE OF THE LAW*

- ❖ “For God has **consigned all to disobedience**, that he may have mercy on all” (*Rom. 11:32*).
- ❖ “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture **imprisoned everything under sin**, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (*Gal. 3:19-22*).

Regarding Galatians 3:22 the *Word Biblical Commentary* states:

That he [*Paul*] had in mind Deut 27:26 rather than Ps 143:2 is made more probable by the fact that **the function of the law** is under discussion, and so a passage from the Pentateuch would be most appropriate. Furthermore, such an implied reference would then make (“under sin”) to be equivalent to (“under a curse”) of 3:10, which is not at all unlikely and would bring matters into perspective ... Paul is then saying *that a primary function of the Mosaic law was to bring all humanity under the curse of the law*. So reaching back to the expression “because of transgressions” in v 19 and combining that with the statement “**confined all things under sin**” here in v 21, we can say that Paul saw the law functioning in a negative fashion vis-à-vis God’s promise: it brought about a knowledge of sin, perhaps even an intensified knowledge by actually increasing sin, and it brought condemnation by bringing all humanity under its curse...

### Adam’s One Sin Brought Condemnation to All Who Are “in Adam”

Adam sinned while in the “very good” state so there was no need for God to increase Adam’s ability to sin by introducing a physical element into his flesh so as to make it into ‘sinful flesh.’ However, because Adam’s potential offspring were all “in him” at the time “all sinned.”

- ❖ “Therefore, just as **sin** came into the world through one man, and [*judicial*] **death** through sin, and so **death spread to all men** because **all sinned** [*under Adam*]**—for sin** indeed was in the world before the law was given, but **sin** is not counted where there is no law. Yet **death reigned** from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like **the transgression of Adam**, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like **the trespass**. For if *many died* through **one man’s trespass**, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that **one man’s sin**. For *the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation*, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, **death reigned** through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 5:12 -17*).

The phrase “*many* died” = “death spread to all men.” C. K. Barrett’s *The Epistle to the Romans* states: “This inclusive use of ‘many’ is Hebraistic; in Old Testament usage ‘many’ often means not ‘many contrasted with all’ but ‘many contrasted with one or some’” p.107.

NOTE: The word “trespass” is used, thus showing Adam’s sin to be wilful.

### Can no Individual Be Ethically Upright?

#### *Romans 3:9-20*

- ❖ “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

Paul is here quoting from the following Old Testament Septuagint passages: Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ps.10:7; Proverbs 1:16; Isaiah 59:7, 8, and Psalm 36:1. I have presented three examples to show that, when viewed in context, these verses cannot be taken to apply to every individual of humanity as basically wicked because Paul's quoted verses are in the context of those who are godless and are contrasted with "the generation of righteous" i.e. God's own people:

- ❖ "*The fool* says in his heart, "There is **no God**." They are corrupt. They do abominable deeds. There is none who does good. <sup>2</sup>Yahweh looks down from heaven upon the children of humankind to see whether there is one who has insight, one who cares about God. <sup>3</sup>All have gone astray; they are altogether corrupt. There is not one who does good; there is not even one. <sup>4</sup>All who do evil—do they not know, *they* who **eat my people as though** they were eating bread? They do not call on Yahweh. <sup>5</sup>There *they are very fearful* because God *is* with **the generation of the righteous**. <sup>6</sup>You would put to shame *the* plan of *the* poor, because Yahweh *is* his refuge. <sup>7</sup>*Oh that from Zion would come salvation for Israel!* When Yahweh returns the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be happy" (*Ps. 14:1-7 LEB*).
- ❖ "Hear, my son, your father's instruction...if sinners entice you, **do not consent** ... <sup>16</sup>for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood." (*Prov. 1: 8, 16*).
- ❖ "Look! The hand of Yahweh is not too short *to save*, and his ear is not *too dull to hear* ...<sup>7</sup>Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; devastation and destruction *are* in their highways. <sup>8</sup>They do not know *the* way of peace, and there is no justice in their firm paths. They have made their paths crooked for themselves; everyone *who walks* in it knows no peace ... <sup>15</sup>and truth is missing, and **he who turns aside from evil** *is* plundered. And Yahweh saw, and it was displeasing in his eyes that there was no justice" (*Isa. 59:1, 7, 8, 15 LEB*).

When the context of the other verses that were quoted by Paul is examined it will be seen to provide a similar result showing that those who are godless and corrupt do evil things to God's righteous people "**the upright of heart**" (Ps. 36:10), and "he murders **the innocent**" (Ps.10:5). So clearly Paul is presenting just one side of this matter, a technique he uses in other parts of Romans. Therefore he has a different purpose in making these quotations—one which concerns Israel, inasmuch as corporate Israel can no longer rely on its special relationship with God as separated from the 'depraved' Gentile world. So Paul's use of the quotations in support of his argument is not for the purpose of attempting to prove that all individuals are so depraved that none can play their part in response to God's call, and so become of "the righteous generation." Yet, although man now "falls short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23*) he nevertheless still is "the image and glory of God (*1 Cor. 11:7*)." How could this possibly be if his flesh was full of sin?

### Rescue Comes Through Jesus as One Who Was Not "in Adam"

- ❖ "Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, '*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God*'" (*Luke 1:34, 35*).

#### GOD'S NEW ADAM

Jesus' descent from David, Abraham and Adam was only from Mary by means of her female genetics (Luke 3). However, the human male genetics were provided miraculously by God, as holy spirit overshadowed Mary, and so Jesus, although fully human, was not directly connected back to Adam. This made Jesus a new creation—a mark two human. This "overshadowing" by holy spirit/power of the Highest is parallel to the "hovering" of the spirit in Genesis 1 and so produces a new Adam. Jesus was literally begotten by God (Matt 1:18), and as "the last Adam" was a second "holy" human Son of God directly created by God. So Jesus was not "in Adam," and so was not subject to the death sentence on Adam and all his progeny.

#### RESCUED BY A NEW ADAM

Jesus, therefore, was the equal of the pre-transgression Adam in terms of his ability to be the substitute to pay the penalty for the sin we all bear from Adam:

- ❖ "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so **by the one man's obedience** the many will be made righteous" (*Rom. 5:19*).

Because Adam had sinned he could not have paid for the one trespass. Otherwise, the debt would have been paid when Adam did die naturally. This applied also to Adam's direct progeny. So in God's wisdom and mercy He has provided one who was not "in Adam," but rather one who was begotten by God. In this way Jesus could act as the substitute for Adam and for all who are "in Adam":

- ❖ "...now once at the end of the ages, He has appeared **to put away sin** by the sacrifice of Himself ... so Christ was offered once **to bear the sins of many**" (*Heb. 9:26, 28*).
- ❖ "...who Himself **bore our sins in His own body** on the tree, that **we, having died to sins**, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (*1 Pet. 2:24*).

The phrase "our sins *in His own body*" does not mean that our sins were in Jesus' flesh. Rather this is similar to the substitutionary scapegoat annually carrying the sins of the people away.

### Christians Are No Longer Under the Death Penalty

- ❖ "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of **sin [under Adam]**—, **which leads to [judicial] death**, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who **were once slaves of sin** have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having **been set free from sin [under Adam]**—, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is **death**. But now that you have been **set free from sin** and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the **wages of sin [under Adam]**—is **death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 6:16-18, 21-23*).
- ❖ "For **while we were living in the flesh [weak human nature, in contrast to living in the spirit]**, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit **for [judicial] death**. ... <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will **deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God** through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (*Rom. 7:5, 24, 25*).

In all the above instances Christians have been "set free from sin" and yet they still currently die a natural death. Also "*the judgment following [Adam's] one trespass [that] brought condemnation*" has been lifted for Christians by faith in Christ's sacrifice. Individuals have a choice to not be "slaves of sin" and therefore to have the "**death [that] reigned through that one man**" removed. So, it is evident that the death mentioned in Romans 8: 1, 2 and John 5:24 is not natural death:

- ❖ "We know that we have passed from **[judicial] death** to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother **abides in [judicial] death**" (*1 John 3:14*).

#### REDEMPTION IS A PRESENT REALITY FOR CHRISTIANS

- ❖ "...knowing that you were not **redeemed** with perishable things like silver or gold from your *futile way of life inherited from your forefathers*, but **with precious blood**, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (*1 Peter 1:18, 19 NASB*).

This redemption and reconciliation mean that Christians are no longer under condemnation for Adam's sin: "Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me **free from the law of sin and death [judicial execution]**" (*Rom. 8:1, 2*). So the condemnation to the death penalty is removed for individuals the moment they demonstrate their faith and obedience to God and to Christ.

### Repercussions of the Sinful Flesh Concept

If God implanted sinful flesh into Adam or in some way changed him physically/genetically so that this sinful flesh was then transmitted to his descendants thereby making mankind now have sinful flesh, then:

1. God Himself would be responsible for all the sin in the world.
2. God could not, in justice, hold us responsible for our sins and so He would have no right to punish us.

3. The fully human Jesus could not then be without sin. He could not even redeem himself (Ps. 49:7). Yet the Scriptures declare him to be without sin in both character and nature i.e. to be “holy.”
4. How could we be made “the righteousness of God” if Jesus’ sacrifice was of a body made of sinful flesh?
5. When one eats the bread and drinks the wine at the Lord’s Supper one would be eating a figuratively sinful body and drinking figuratively sinful blood.
6. Jesus could not legitimately advocate that we “be perfect (complete), as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).
7. We would not see any evidence of goodness or morality in the unbelieving world.

### If the Debt of Adam’s Sin is repaid why do we still Sin?

The Bible says very little regarding the connection between the sin committed by Adam and our personal sins. And yet it is:

- ❖ “...*the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*”  
(1 John 1:7-10).

So *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states: “For sin is in fact defeated. Its presence and action in the Christian are only the death throes of a mortally wounded foe.” Volume 4, p. 525.

### How Are Sin and Poor Health Connected?

The Bible says almost nothing regarding the connection between the sin committed by Adam and poor health. Nevertheless, when Jesus healed people of their sicknesses and infirmities sometimes he would say “your sins are forgiven.” Does this mean that such sicknesses and infirmities are inherited because of Adam’s sin? Possibly but only in part!

#### *INTERNAL DISHARMONY*

When Adam and Eve sinned, and thereby broke their relationship with God by sin, their minds and therefore their bodies would have been affected negatively and so possibly producing disharmony in their genetic makeup. This may then have been inherited by their children and passed on generation by generation. Sometimes the forgiveness that Jesus gave when healing a person was most probably for the personal sins of the individual. These sins disrupt one’s harmony with God and therefore create further disharmony in the mind/body. However, Jesus seems to indicate that personal sin is not always the cause of sickness:

- ❖ “As he [*Jesus*] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, **who sinned**, this man or his parents, that he was *born blind*?” Jesus answered, “It was **not that this man sinned, or his parents**, but that the works of God might be displayed in him”” (*John 9:1-3*).

#### *THE GENETIC LOAD*

Although human genes have biological systems to deal with mutations from genetic copying errors or radiation (almost always harmful) to a certain extent, some mutations still accumulate in the human population. These mutations are often carried as “hidden genes” (recessives) that are difficult to eliminate by selection, so they tend to build up in populations. This build-up of mutations with time is called ‘the genetic load’ and accounts for many of the health problems that are passed on within families. As shown earlier this has nothing to do with the sin of Adam, but is simply part of ‘human make-up.’ This is why the earliest descendants of Adam and Eve could marry their close relatives (e.g. Cain’s marrying his sister), whereas with the progression of time such marriages generally produced significantly damaged offspring.

#### *ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS*

Most other illness is due to environmental factors because of mankind’s carelessness with waste products and chemicals.

## Answers to Further Scriptures Appealed to for Proof of the 'Sinful Flesh' Concept

### 1. DOES SIN DWELL IN ONE'S FLESH?

- ❖ "Now then it is no more I that do it, but **sin that dwelleth in me**. For I know that **in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing**: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but **sin that dwelleth in me**" (*Rom. 7:17-20*).

As shown earlier under the subheading: "DID ROMANS 7:7-25 ACTUALLY APPLY TO PAUL AS A CHRISTIAN?" Paul was not speaking of himself as a man still sold under Adam's sin. Nevertheless, because "flesh" means weak human character in an unredeemed state, there is no meaning here of sin living in anyone's literal flesh.

### 2. ARE BABIES LIARS FROM BIRTH?

- ❖ "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray **from birth**, speaking lies" (*Ps. 58:3*).

This cannot be literally true because babies do not speak and therefore cannot "be speaking lies." Rather this verse shows that those born into an environment where lying is the norm are, as a generalization, likely to grow up "speaking lies." If this verse meant that all children had sinful flesh then Jesus would not have said that "the kingdom of heaven" belongs to such ones as "little children." Neither would the children of a believing parent be "holy."

### 3. DOES "SHALL DIE" REFER TO NATURAL DEATH?

- ❖ "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: **the soul who sins shall die**" (*Ezek. 18:4, 20*).

This is not a general statement about the human race (*contrast verses 9 and 21*), but refers to any individual who sins by rejecting God and therefore receives the due death penalty. The phrase "shall die" cannot mean natural death which is also the lot of 'the soul who does not sin.' Verse 20 shows the personal responsibility each one has concerning his personal sins

### 4. ARE WE PHYSICALLY "MADE SINNERS"?

- ❖ "...by the one man's disobedience the many were **made** (Gk. *kathistemi*) **sinner**s, so by the one man's obedience the many will be **made righteous**" (*Rom. 5:19*).

The word 'made' is in the sense of 'appointed.' So humans are not literally genetically **made** sinners.

### 5. DOES "SHARING IN FLESH AND BLOOD" = SINFUL FLESH?

- ❖ "Since therefore the children **share in flesh and blood**, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil..." (*Heb. 2:14*).

To "**share in flesh and blood**" simply means that Jesus was born human and that he experienced "the same things" that all humans experience. There is nothing here to imply that Jesus had sinful flesh.

### 6. CLEAN FROM UNCLEAN?

- ❖ "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one ...<sup>14</sup> What is man, that he can be pure? ...<sup>4</sup>...How can he who is born of woman be pure?" (*Job 14:4; 15:14; 25:4*).

The 'uncleanness' here does not refer to that which is physical, but rather to the moral sense and so does not describe the quality of human flesh. In Israel individuals were clean or unclean according to the Law (not just physical cleanness). Only when one becomes right with God, through Jesus, does one become clean. On this issue The Apostle Peter conceded because, as he said: "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (*Acts 10:28*).



## Summary

THE ABOVE SCRIPTURAL AND LOGICAL INFORMATION HAS SHOWN THAT:

1. Adam and Eve were created as perishable and mortal, but perfect creatures.
2. “The tree of life” was freely available for Adam/Eve to eat from. Continued access to it would have maintained their non-aging life indefinitely. Also as a symbol of their right relationship with God during their probation, it gave them hope of immortal life which would have been granted them had they maintained their obedience to God’s one command.
3. No bodily physical change took place after Adam and Eve sinned in the sense of God’s implanting of ‘sinful flesh’ in them. So babies are not born with ‘sinful flesh.’
4. The changes that took place for Adam and Eve concerned:
  - Their damaged relationship with God.
  - Their loss of access to the tree of life leading to eventual natural death.
  - Therefore their loss of hope to be the ones through whom mankind gains immortality.
  - Cursed ground to cultivate.
5. No change took place to all of nature because of the curse on the ground that Adam would have to cultivate.
6. Adam’s judicial death sentence was of physically permanent death which was deferred by God’s mercy so that he was allowed to live out his natural life while being denied access to “the tree of life.”
7. This deferment allowed Adam to produce the beginnings of the human race.
8. Adam’s permanent death penalty was, by God’s mercy, further deferred until the time substitution (Gen. 3:15) was made by Christ and applicable at Adam’s resurrection.
9. Adam’s offspring were “in him” at the time of his sinning and so warrant the same judicial penalty of permanent death. They were “sold under sin” but did not inherit sin in their literal flesh.
10. Adam’s sin was not the direct genetic cause of human sickness or natural death.
11. Because sin is not inherent within our flesh it becomes a matter of our choosing to give in to our ungodly thoughts and impulses and then to sin personally.
12. We must then repent for those sins because we are personally responsible.
13. The ‘sinful flesh’ concept may simply be used as a convenient excuse for one’s failings rather than understanding that these are character traits that one should struggle against in attempting to overcome them.

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