

An Examination of the
The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man
and The Doctrine of Original Sin

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TH741

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Introduction

This paper addresses two theological works with an aim toward interacting with the doctrines presented therein as well as methods of applying said doctrines to modern life. The first of these works is a book by Dutch Theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708) titled The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man. The second work under consideration is Jonathan Edwards' treatise entitled The Doctrine of Original Sin.

Herman Witsius' The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man

Biographical Information – Herman Witsius

Before an analysis of Witsius' work ensues, it is only fitting that a brief bit of biographical information be provided. Herman Wits (his name would later be Latinized as Witsius) was born on February 12, 1636, at Enkhuizen in Holland. His father, Nicholas Wits, was quite well known in Enkhuizen, having served more than twenty years as an elder as well as having been a member of the local city council. Herman's maternal grandfather, Herman Gerard, pastored the Reformed church in Enkhuizen for thirty years and was so revered that Witsius was named after him. This, according to Beeke and Pederson (2006), was "with the prayer that he might emulate his godly example" (p. 807).

Witsius began to learn Latin at five years of age. Sensing his nephew's gifts, Herman's uncle, Peter Gerard, began to tutor him. By age fifteen, now studying theology in Utrecht, Witsius was fluent in Latin and could read and write in both Greek and Hebrew. He would later gain fluency in Syriac and Arabic as well. Among the greatest influences on Witsius during his adult years was his pastor in Utrecht, Justus van der Bogaerdt. As Beeke and Pederson (2006) relate, "...van der Bogaerdt's preaching and fellowship brought him experientially to understand

the difference between theological knowledge gleaned from study and the heavenly wisdom taught by the Holy Spirit through communion with God, love, prayer, and meditation” (p. 809).

In 1657, Witsius was ordained into the ministry at Westwoud where he was especially fruitful in his catechizing of young people. As beneficial as this particular ministry was, however, Witsius had also encountered considerable difficulty stemming from his congregation’s ignorance of their Reformed heritage. The particular problems faced by the young minister would be addressed in his first book, *‘t bedroefde Nederlant* (The Sorrowing Netherlands).

Witsius married Aletta van Borchorn in 1660. Miss van Borchorn’s father was a local merchant and an elder in Witsius’ church. The couple enjoyed twenty-four years of happy marriage and had five children.

Considered by many to be his *magnum opus*, The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man is invaluable in helping the reader understand the federal theology of the seventeenth century. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), Witsius’ purpose in writing this book was “to promote peace among Dutch theologians who were divided on covenant theology. He sought to be a theologian of synthesis who strove to lessen tension between the Voetians and the Cocceians” (p. 816). This work is divided into four books. Book One consists of 120 pages and is entitled, “The Covenant of Works.” Book Two, spanning 118 pages, is titled, “The Covenant of Redemption, or The Covenant of Grace from Eternity Between the Father and the Son.” Book Three, consisting of 295 pages, is titled “The Covenant of Grace in Time.” Book Four, titled “Covenant Ordinances Throughout the Scriptures” is 356 pages in length.

Before any meaningful study of Witsius’ work can be undertaken, one must first answer the inevitable question: What is covenant theology? Blackburn, Chantry, Fryer, Malone, Puls, & Taylor (2013) offer a concise but adequate definition as follows:

Covenant Theology, simply stated, is the view of God and redemption that interprets the Holy Scriptures by way of covenants. The Bible knows of only one Savior. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, there is only one way of salvation: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The triune God is a covenant God who deals savingly with humanity through covenants... Though there is much discussion of the definition of a covenant, a divine covenant denotes a solemn arrangement divinely imposed, which places binding obligations upon the parties of the covenant. It is in this way that salvation is worked out in human history. (p. 17)

And why should one study covenant theology? First and foremost, covenant theology must be the subject of serious study simply because the entire counsel of the word of God is most effectively represented and expressed in terms of God's covenants with man. In the second place, a return to an understanding of covenant theology is especially needful in a day and age in which dispensational theology has found a quite comfortable home in the majority of the evangelical non-Protestant churches of our day.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect, not upon his entire work, but particularly on Witsius' treatment of God's covenants with man in Book One of this monumental two volume work with a special emphasis on the more salient points therein.

The author begins his work with several general observations on the economy of the divine covenants. The first of these general observations addresses the importance of the Word of God alone as the final authority on these matters. To this end, Witsius (1677) writes:

Whoever attempts to discourse on the subject and design of the Divine Covenants, by which eternal salvation is adjudged to man, on certain conditions equally worthy of God and the rational creature, ought, above all things, to have a sacred and inviolable regard to the heavenly oracles, and neither through prejudice nor passion, intermix any thing which he is not firmly persuaded is contained in the records which hold forth these covenants to the world. (p. 41)

Defining the Terms

Covenants themselves are variously defined in Scripture. In the Old Testament, for example, the word בְּרִיתָּהּ (*berith*) is predominantly used to refer to: (1) an immutable ordinance

made about a thing, (2) a unilateral promise made by God, or (3) a precept. In the New Testament, the most oft-used Greek word translated as “covenant” is διαθήκη (*diatheke*), which is variously used to denote a testament, a law or rule of life, an engagement, agreement, or confederacy. The act of making of a covenant is also expressed in different ways. The Hebrews, for example, referred to the practice as “striking” a covenant. This, the author suggests, probably refers to the ancient ceremony involving the ratification of covenants by the slaying of animals. Covenants are also expressed by the “passing in the middle” between the divided parts of a slain animal. Feasts were also often used for the ratification of covenants (e.g., Gen. 26:30, 31:54; 2 Sam. 3:20). Witsius goes on to explain the significance of these covenant practices. The cutting asunder those animals used in making covenants signified the fate of those who would break a covenant made with God. This stark reality is reflected in Jer. 34:18-20:

I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when* they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

The Romans also observed a ceremony in which those passing between the parts of the sacrificed animal thus formed lasting bonds of confederacy and friendship. As the author is quick to interject, however, those rites initiated by God were “still more noble and divine” explaining that:

They who made covenant with God by sacrifice, not only submitted to punishment, if impiously revolting from God, they slighted his covenant; but God likewise signified to them, that all the stability of the covenant of grace was founded on the sacrifice of Christ, and that the soul and body of Christ were one day to be violently separated asunder. (p. 45)

The Nature of God’s Covenants with Man

Having provided these general observations concerning covenants, Witsius describes the nature of the covenants of God with man. He begins with a definition:

A covenant of God with man, is an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness; including a commination of eternal destruction, with which the contemnor of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished. (p. 45)

The covenant of God, the author continues, consists of three things on the part of God: First, a promise of consummate happiness in eternal life. Secondly, God's covenant includes a designation and prescription of the condition or conditions by which man acquires a right to the promise contained therein. Thirdly, God's covenant always involves a penal sanction against those who do not meet the stated condition(s) prescribed.

Scripture reveals two covenants of God with man: A covenant of works (also known as the "Covenant of Nature" or the "Legal" covenant) and the Covenant of Grace. The apostle Paul mentions both of these covenants in Rom. 3:27 arguing, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of *works*? No, but by a law of *faith*" (emphases added). The condition of both of these covenants, Witsius observes, is the same: perfect obedience to the Law. Why? Because "it would have been uncharacteristic of God to admit a man to a blessed communion with Him, but in the way of unspotted holiness" (p. 49). The Covenant of Works, as the label implies, is a covenant requiring that works be performed unto salvation. The Scriptural basis for the Covenant of Works is found in Rom. 10:5, "The man which doeth those things shall live by them." The basis for the Covenant of Grace, on the other hand, is found in Rom. 10:11, "Whosoever believeth in Him, shall not be ashamed." As Witsius indicates, there is agreement between these two covenants in that (1) the contracting parties are the same: God and man, (2) In both covenants, the promise is the same (eternal life), (3) the condition is the same, viz. perfect obedience to the Law, and (4) Both covenants have the same end which is God's glory. There

are, however, significant differences between the covenants as well. In the first place, man's relationship to God is different under each covenant. Under the Covenant of Works, for example, God relates to man as the supreme law-giver whereas, under the covenant of grace, God is seen as an infinitely merciful God who dispenses salvation to His elect according to His wisdom and justice. In the interest of necessary clarification for the reader, it must be stipulated that these differences do not reflect or necessitate any change in God Himself, rather they reflect the way in which man relates to Him. Such a suggestion of said change would ostensibly strip Him of His immutability. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and *unchangeable* (emphasis added), in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Secondly, under the Covenant of Works, there was no mediator while, under the Covenant of Grace, Jesus Christ serves in this capacity. Thirdly, under the Covenant of Works, man was to perform with perfect obedience. Under the Covenant of Grace, this perfect obedience is performed by the Mediator, Jesus Christ. The fourth notable difference between the covenants of works and grace is that, under the former, man works in exchange for salvation. Such an arrangement of course does not preclude man's glorying in himself as the result of having faithfully discharged his duties. In the covenant of grace, man enjoys salvation only on the basis of the Mediator's merit. In the fifth place, under the Covenant of Works, man is required to meet a condition, which, upon successful completion thereof, entitles him to the reward. Conversely, in the covenant of grace, man's salvation depends wholly on the finished work of Christ. Sixthly, the end of the Covenant of Works was the manifestation of God's holiness, goodness, and justice as revealed in His perfect law and His promise of salvation to those who sought Him with their whole heart. The end of the covenant of grace is the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6).

Before continuing, it is critical that the reader consider the way in which the covenants of works and grace have been variously (and erroneously) interpreted over the years. Despite the fact that Scripture declares throughout that salvation has always been, and will always be on the basis of God's grace alone, through God-given faith alone, in Christ alone, considerable confusion yet abounds when it comes to understanding the distinctions between the covenants of works and grace. In the minds of many there is a certain discontinuity between the two covenants. This seeming discontinuity has no doubt been fueled by the prevalence of dispensational thought, which has, regrettably, made inroads into a vast number of both individual churches and whole denominations. While a comprehensive treatment of this subject falls outside of this paper, a brief discussion is warranted.

Approximately 130 years ago, a revolutionary new way of studying theology began making inroads into the church at-large. The beginnings of this then new style of theology are usually associated with the Plymouth Brethren in the UK and the teachings of John Nelson Darby. The Plymouth Brethren movement was, among other things, a reaction against the church of England, primarily in the area of ecclesiology. Darby in particular developed some rather unique ideas regarding the interpretation of Scripture and believed that more emphasis should be placed on prophecy and the second coming of Christ. This "Darbian" brand of theology would later become known as Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism's meteoric rise in popularity is largely attributed to the involvement of evangelical heavyweights such as D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, C.I. Scofield, and W.J. Eerdman, all of whom were destined to become Dispensationalism's greatest advocates. So pervasive was their influence that, today, the vast majority of Baptist churches (as well as most other non-Protestant churches) are dispensational in their thinking. And what are the doctrinal dangers posed by Dispensationalism? Again, while a

full treatment of this subject is well beyond the scope of this paper, one such danger accompanying Dispensational theology is its teaching that God's dealings with man can be denoted by seven separate periods of time (or dispensations) during which God provides various *tests* for man in the area of sin and human responsibility. Of course, man fails each test until God finally arrives at a workable solution to man's sin problem (the sending of Himself in human flesh to accomplish the work of salvation). Other doctrinal dangers (among many) associated with Dispensational theology include the following: (1) Dispensational theology presents a God of discontinuity versus continuity. In other words, God has no consistent, uniform plan for the redemption of man; He is instead obliged to resort to plan A, plan B, plan C, etc. in hopes that something "works"; (2) Dispensational theology presents man himself as being different over time, forcing God to react or adjust according to those differences; (3) Given that, according to Dispensational theology, Israel and the Church constitute two entirely different peoples of God with two different destinies, God must be a respecter of persons. Incidentally, it is this contention which undoubtedly led uber-dispensationalist John Hagee (2007) to famously declare that Jesus did not come to earth to be the Messiah of the Jewish people because they are already His people by birthright; (4) Dispensational theology strips God of His sovereignty and forces Him to act, not in a way that transcends or overrules man and his sinful inclinations but in a way that caters to them; (5) Dispensational theology threatens God's omniscience. If God continues to "test" man with the introduction of subsequent dispensations, then God must not know Himself what the outcome of each test will be. If He does, however, know the outcome then He is presented as a capricious God who simply delights in toying with His creation. Only covenant theology (which was held nearly universally by the vast majority of credible theologians prior to 1883) provides the lens of continuity through which our immutable God must be viewed.

Witsius proceeds with his examination of the covenant of works with an explanation of its contracting parties, the conditions prescribed, the promises attached, and the threatening or penalty for non-compliance. Each of these will be examined individually in what follows.

The Parties of the Covenant of Works

The parties involved in the covenant of works were God and Adam. God, naturally, serves as the sovereign authority that not only establishes the parameters of the covenant but also prescribes the penalty which follows disobedience (i.e., death). Adam was related to the Covenant of Works in two ways: (1) As man (individually) and (2) as the head or federal representative of *all* mankind. With regard to the former, Adam was created as one who both delighted in God (in all of His Trinitarian fullness) and sought to honor and glorify Him perpetually. God had given Adam certain revelation about Himself, not only in nature, but via direct revelation as well (e.g., an awareness of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, of his wife's creation, and of the triune Godhead). One of the most oft-recurring questions about Adam is whether or not he was truly characterized by righteousness and holiness. The author does a quite masterful job of answering this. Insofar as righteousness is defined as "right works," Witsius argues, Adam was indeed righteous. This does not mean, however, that Adam was thus entitled by those "right works" to eternal life. On the contrary, since he was still in the probationary phase of his existence, "the jury was still out," as it were, with regard to his final disposition. Simply stated, Witsius observes that "the right to life rests wholly on the righteousness and merits of Christ; things entirely without us" (p. 56). This of course comports perfectly with the assertion of the apostle Paul in Phil. 3:8-9, who regarded everything as loss:

"...because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain

Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...”

Paul also made a very similar statement in Gal. 2:16 writing:

“...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

On another contemporary note, despite the crystal clear teaching of the Word of God relative to the doctrine of Christ’s imputed righteousness as an indispensable component to man’s salvation, there are many who reject the idea that man requires an alien righteousness, insisting that his own righteousness is sufficient. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, teaches that “...the formal cause of justification does not consist in an exterior imputation of the justice of Christ, but in a real, interior sanctification effected by grace, which abounds in the soul and makes it permanently holy before God.” In other words, Christ’s imputed righteousness is simply not sufficient for salvation. On the contrary, according to this view, all who are sanctified by God are provided with a righteousness of their own whereby they may be commended to God. Lest one accuse this writer of a particular and expected bias against the Roman Catholic Church in this regard, there are also those within Protestant evangelicalism who hold to an equally erroneous view of the importance of imputed righteousness. As recorded by Johnson (2012), celebrated erstwhile Anglican bishop (and one of the leading proponents of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul”) N. T. Wright, has espoused the view that:

“Justification” in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God’s eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of His people. In Sanders’ terms, it was not so much about ‘getting in,’ or indeed about ‘staying in,’ as about ‘how you could tell who was in.’ In standard theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.

As Johnson (2012) concludes, "...in Wright's estimation, justification is an ecumenical and ecclesiological issue, not a soteriological one." Contrary to this obviously mistaken notion, the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ brings into much sharper focus both the real tragedy of Adam's fall (his forfeiture of any righteousness of his own) and, as a consequence of his being the federal head of all mankind, our own innate standing before God in which we are similarly devoid of any personal righteousness with which we might commend ourselves unto God for salvation. The author views this predicament as "that beautiful opposition of the first and second Adam, which Paul pursues at large [in] Rom. 5:15ff" (p. 58). He writes:

For, as the second Adam does, in the Covenant of Grace, represent all the elect, in such a manner that they are accounted to have done and suffered themselves, what he did and suffered, in their name and stead: so likewise the first Adam was the representative of all that were to descend from him.

As Witsius insists, there is not one among the entire human race who could argue that, "placed in the same circumstances with Adam, he would have better consulted his own interest" (p. 59).

Adam, after all, was gifted immeasurably with wisdom, holiness, a desire for true happiness, and an acceptance of "the miseries denounced by God against the sinner." And yet he still fell prey to the temptations of the seducer. Since that time, Witsius maintains, every man has given ample proof through his own actions that he prefers his own lust to the will of God and earthly things to those of heaven. These manifestations render the man of today on an equal par with him who ate of the forbidden tree.

The Law or Condition of the Covenant of Works

Witsius proceeds from his discussion of the parties of the covenant of works to the covenant's Law or condition. The Law of the covenant is two-fold: (1) The law of nature, and (2) The symbolical law (symbolized by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. With regard to the law of nature, this is the law that is inscribed by God onto man's conscience. It is therefore

bound by divine authority. The law of nature is also classified as one of God's communicable perfections. In other words, the reason we see a common belief (even among the heathen) in the difference between right and wrong is because, at creation, a knowledge of God's morality was imparted to every man who has been made in His image. This law of nature is also "the same in substance with the Decalogue" (p. 62). What this means is that it is very much still in force. As

Witsius observes:

The same law therefore was in force before the entrance of sin and, if duly observed, had the power of giving life. Besides, God in the second creation inscribes the same law on the heart, which in the first creation he had engraved on the soul. For what is regeneration, but the restitution of the same image of God in which man was at first created?" (p. 63)

In summary, Witsius concludes three things concerning the law of nature: (1) That it flows from the nature of God and man that some law be prescribed to man, (2) This law is to be the rule and standard, not only of our actions, but also of our nature, and (3) That the most universal precepts in this law are founded on the nature of God.

The second aspect of God's Law of the Covenant is the symbolical law. This law is revealed in Gen. 2:16-17:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

According to Witsius, there are three things worthy of particular note in the symbolism employed in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. First, he argues, it is not certain whether this tree was a single tree or whether an entire species was intended. Secondly, the author points out that the particular prohibition in this passage seemingly served two purposes: (1) It would be used by God to "try and know whether man would continue good and happy 'by being obedient,'" and (2) It would serve to remind man of the blessings of being obedient or, if

disobedient to God's command to not eat thereof, it would remind him of the condemnation he had brought upon himself. Regarding the former, it must be noted that Witsius is not suggesting that God did not know whether man would in fact continue in obedience. To do so would not only effectively strip God of His sovereign omniscience (God's knowledge is not based on foresight but on divine prescience), it would also corroborate the dispensationalist's notion that Adam's "failing the test of obedience" forced God to respond with "Plan B" in His "attempts" at rescuing mankind from sin (which would of course strip God of His sovereign immutability as well). Witsius cites God's trying of Hezekiah in 2 Chron. 32:31 as a proof text for his contention maintaining that God tried Hezekiah "that he might know all that was in his heart." The author's rationale must echo the sentiment of the venerable John Gill (1763) who provides much needed clarity on this passage writing, "...not that *God* might know, who knows all things, unless spoken of him after the manner of men; but rather that *Hezekiah* might know the pride lurking in his heart, and other sins which escaped his notice..." (emphasis added). Simply stated, the Covenant of Works was not designed as a means of informing an omniscient God of anything, rather, it was intended to convey to man the true nature of His Creator and to reveal to *him* His sovereign plan. Lest the reader of this paper feel that its writer is being presumptuous in pretending to know Witsius' mind, his conclusion is based on Witsius' own language in chapter eight of this work:

Since therefore Christ was foreknown from eternity, as one to be slain for the sins of men, man's sin was also necessarily foreknown... And if foreknown, it was also *predetermined*; thus Peter, in the place just quoted, joins together the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Nor can God's prescience of future things be conceived, but in connection with his *decree* concerning them... From all this may be inferred by a plain consequence, that man could not but fall on account of the infallibility of the divine prescience, and of that necessity which they call a necessity of consequence; for it is inconsistent with the divine perfection, that any decree of God should be rendered void, or that the event should not be answerable to it... God Himself has ratified the stability of His purposes by an oath, the more certainly to declare the immutability of His counsel,

Heb. Vi. 17. “The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, ‘Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have *purposed*, so shall it stand.’” (emphasis added) (p. 141).

The Promises of the Covenant of Works

The Covenant of Works is also characterized by the promises attached thereunto.

Contrary to the Socinians’ denial that the Covenant of Works contained any such promises but only contained “threatenings and terrors” (p. 71), Witsius astutely observes that God doesn’t desire to be served in vain. Obedience to His commands will not go unrewarded. As the writer to the Hebrews declares in this regard, “. . . he that comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” The author also deduces that the tree of life in the Garden of Eden would have been of no use if not considered to be a seal of God’s promise of life.

Additionally, the author maintains, had there been no promise of God, there would have been no hope for mankind. Such is certainly the condition of those outside of the household of faith (Eph. 2:12) but not God’s elect.

What sort of promises did God make to Adam? First of all, God promised Adam eternal life as a result of obedience to His Law. Although, as the apostle Paul writes in Rom. 8:3, God did what the Law could not do “in that it was weak through the flesh,” had sin never entered into the picture, that same Law could have indeed brought the obedient man that eternal life. As Witsius observes, “If Adam therefore had persevered in obedience, the law would have brought him to that same inheritance, which now in Christ is allotted not to him that worketh, but to him that believeth” (p. 74). On a personal practical note, this writer must admit that he finds such hypothetical arguments utterly unnecessary. When discussing God’s dealings with man, any language which includes phrases such as “could have” or “might have” have the potential to “muddy the waters,” so to speak with regard to the absolute sovereignty of God. “Exhibit A” in this regard might very well be the emphasis that Arminians and others place on the *sufficiency*

versus *efficiency* of Christ's blood in the atonement. His atoning blood, they'll argue, "could have" atoned for the sins of every man, woman and child who will ever live. That point, however well intended it may be, is rendered moot when one considers that the atonement did not make salvation merely *possible* for everyone, but made it *certain* for those whom the Father elected from before the foundation of the world. In a similar vein, given that God's salvific plan was formulated in that great inter-Trinitarian counsel in eternity past (in which the second Person of the Godhead was designated as the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world), any suggestion that Adam could have kept the Law of God is similarly rendered moot by the sheer fact of God's immutable fiat decree. In short, had perfect obedience actually been within even the remotest realm of possibility for Adam then it could be argued that the possibility also existed for God's eternal decree to be thwarted. This sort of speculative argumentation must of course, for reasons that should be obvious to the reformed reader, be rejected at all costs.

The Penal Sanction in the Covenant of Works

The fourth and final component to the Covenant of Works that Witsius addresses is the penal sanction that came about as the result of Adam's disobedience. And what was this sanction? In a word: death. Socinus and others, the author observes, made the absurd claim that death came to man, not as the result of Adam's disobedience, but simply as a natural occurrence. God's own words in this regard could not be clearer (Gen. 2:17): "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Once again, Dr. Gill (1763) is helpful noting that:

...man became at once a mortal creature, who otherwise continuing in a state of innocence, and by eating of the tree of life, he was allowed to do, would have lived an immortal life; of the eating of which tree, by sinning he was debarred, his natural life not now to be continued long, at least not for ever; he was immediately arraigned, tried, and condemned to death, was found guilty of it, and became obnoxious to it, and death at once began to work in him.

Witsius continues in his insistence that Adam's death was not "natural" by arguing that "the sin here expressed is a violation not of the natural, but of the symbolical law, given to man for the trial of his most perfect obedience" (p. 82). And, as a consequence of Adam's sin, seeing that he is the federal head of the entire human race, death came to all of his posterity. As the apostle Paul notes in Rom. 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..."

And what kind of death was prescribed as the penal sanction for the breaking of the Covenant of Works? That physical death was in view here is patently obvious as Adam indeed died and, in like manner, his posterity followed suit. What is perhaps not as clear (at least to some) is that spiritual death became a reality as well. As a spiritual being, Adam was created to know and enjoy God to the fullest. When he sinned, however, he forfeited this privilege, dying a spiritual death and rendering himself as well as his posterity to be at enmity with God. This enmity would be characteristic of every man unless and until God, by His grace and through the omnipotent agency of His Holy Spirit, would be pleased to restore his spiritual life through regeneration. As Paul explained to the Ephesians in Eph. 2:1-5:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ—by grace you have been saved... (emphasis added)

In addition to the physical and spiritual death resulting from Adam's sin, Witsius also addresses another death that will be suffered by those who, upon their physical death, remain spiritually dead: eternal death. He describes this death as follows:

The preludes of [eternal death] in this life are the terrors and anguish of an evil conscience, the abandoning of the soul, deprived of all divine consolation, and the sense

of the divine wrath, under which it is miserably pressed down. There will ensue upon this the translation of the soul to a place of torments (Luke 16:23-25) where shall be the hiding of God's face, the want of his glorious presence, and a most intense feeling of the wrath of God, forever and ever, together with horrible despair, Rev. 14:11. (pp. 87-88)

The Sacraments of the Covenant of Works

Following a rather lengthy treatment of God's holiness and justice as a means of explaining the strict penalty of death for those in disobedience to the Covenant of Works (the rehearsal of which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper), Witsius goes on to discuss the sacraments of the Covenant of Works. He begins this by pointing out:

It hath pleased the blessed and almighty God, in every economy of His covenants, to confirm, by some sacred symbols, the certainty of His promises, and, at the same time, to remind man in covenant with Him of his duty; to these symbols ecclesiastical practice has long since given the name of sacraments. (pp. 104-105)

These sacraments, the author maintains, serve four purposes: (1) They represent visible reminders of God's greatest blessings; (2) They tend to confirm the believer's faith; (3) They provide man with a tangible means of "foretasting" God's blessings which will one day become reality having been divorced from the outward signs themselves, and (4) The sacraments of the Covenant of Works serve continually to remind man of his duty before God. The author also lists four symbols under the Covenant of Works. These include Paradise, the Tree of Life, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Sabbath. He then proceeds to explain, first, what each of these symbols "signified and sealed to man, with respect to God" (p. 105) and, secondly, what duty and obligation they were intended to remind man of.

Paradise

The first symbol presented for the reader's consideration is Paradise. It was, as Witsius states, "a garden and a most agreeable enclosure, planted by God Himself, toward the east, in Eden" (p. 106). It was a fertile place which is due, in part, to its location at the confluence of the

Euphrates and Tigris rivers, not far from Mesopotamia in a region that would later be aptly named “the Fertile Crescent.” The significance of Paradise can be seen, first, by its pleasantness. This pleasantness was intended to instill in man the idea that he could expect an even more pleasant place where, instead of enjoying God through His creation, he would enjoy His immediate presence. In short, Paradise was but a shadow or type signifying the place of eternal rest for God’s people: heaven. And what duty or obligation did Paradise remind man of? In the first place, it reminded him that he should not seek for his ultimate good and felicity in a place which, as wonderful as it most certainly was, nevertheless contained various imperfections. Man, for example, was still required to eat, drink, sleep, and walk, each of which were reminders that a more perfect estate awaited him. Secondly, man was required to cultivate and keep the garden. This was intended to convey to man that God took no pleasure in laziness or idleness, but in industry. In other words, for man to continue in his enjoyment of God’s providence and manifold blessing, he must continue to work for it.

The Tree of Life

The second symbol considered by Witsius is the Tree of Life. Once again, whether this was a single tree or an orchard of trees cannot be determined by the Scriptural evidence. It is also unclear whether the tree (or “trees,” as it were) had any medicinal significance. This of course seems unlikely given that man was not afflicted with any sickness or disease prior to the fall. Witsius mentions this no doubt in response to the Socinian error which suggested that Adam, by partaking of this tree’s food, would have prolonged his life even beyond the years allotted him by God had God not deprived him of the opportunity to do so. So, why was the Tree of Life so named? The author conjectures as follows. In the first place, the Tree of Life signified the Son of God, especially with regard to His being “the life of man in every condition, and the fountain of

all happiness” (p. 112). The tree also signified the pleasures of divine love. And what duty did the Tree of Life remind man of? First, its beauty served to remind him of the perfections of the Son of God, “whose brightest vision was one day to complete his happiness” (p. 113). Secondly, man’s duty toward the tree required him to enjoy it as a testimony to his communion with the Son of God. Thirdly, the tree was to remind man of his responsibility to be as a tree of life to his wife and posterity, “by giving them holy advice and example, as a plant of the garden of God” (p. 113).

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

There was also another tree in the Garden: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As has been previously pointed out, this tree was designed to remind man of his probationary existence in the Garden. This, the author maintains, is perfectly consistent with the idea that the tree was also a symbol of the Covenant of Works. God’s prohibition from eating of the fruit of this tree signified His absolute dominion over man while simultaneously instilling in him an expectation of another world to come in which nothing desirable would be forbidden him. That this tree was called the Tree of the Knowledge of *Good* and *Evil* is worthy of brief consideration as well. It was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good because if man obeyed according to the probationary precept to which he was obliged, he would consequently know the good which accompanies such obedience (e.g., his continued stay in the Garden and God’s gracious providence). The tree was also called the Tree of the Knowledge of Evil. This signifies that should man disobey, he would be “doomed to the greatest calamity, the exceeding evil and wretchedness of which he should at last know by experience” (p. 114). And what was the duty and obligation of man with respect to this tree? That he should contemplate and desire good; that he should know that true happiness was not to be placed in sensual things alone; that he would

recognize the absolute Lordship of God; that he would acknowledge that only through perfect obedience would he enjoy real happiness; and, finally, that he should be perpetually in awe of his God.

The Sabbath

In addressing the fourth symbol or sacrament in the Covenant of Works, the Sabbath, the author devotes an entire chapter. While an exhaustive treatment of Witsius' observations falls well outside the scope of this paper, a brief discussion is warranted nonetheless. The author focuses his discussion on the Sabbath on three things: First, he considers whether the sanctifying and blessing of the seventh day should be applied to the first day which immediately followed upon the six days of creation. Concerning this, Witsius readily acknowledges that there has been considerable dispute among the divines and yet, at the time of his writing, the matter had not been fully settled in the minds of everyone concerned. This, however, did not deter him from making his own astute observations. The first observation he makes is that God's resting on the Sabbath was much more than a mere pattern to be observed by the Jews. On the contrary, God set this day apart as a perpetual Sabbath "for all ages to come" (p. 118). Having done so, man is duty-bound, on the first day following God's creative work, to cease from all regular employment and worldly enjoyments in order to serve God fully. The reader will note carefully that Witsius does not opine concerning whether this "first day" was a Saturday or a Sunday, only that (as Calvin and others) the principle of "one day in seven" (indeed recognized by the church for centuries as the "first day") is to be, in perpetuity, set aside for the purpose of corporate worship among the saints.

In the second place, Witsius discusses the nature of the first Sabbath. As mentioned previously, the Sabbath is a day of rest. As God rested from His works, so is man required to rest

from his own. God also sanctified the Sabbath. To sanctify, the author indicates, is “to set apart something for the worship of God” (p. 120). Similarly, man is to set this day apart for worship. God also blessed the seventh day. This means that not only did He declare it to be blessed and happy as a day of rejoicing, He also intended for man himself to be blessed by the enjoyment thereof. Quoting “the ancient Hebrew doctors,” Witsius observes that “blessing and sanctifying redound to the observers thereof, that they may be blessed and holy themselves” (p. 120).

Thirdly, and lastly, the author points out in what respect the Sabbath can rightly be referred to as a Sacrament. According to Ferguson and Wright (1988), a Sacrament is almost universally believed to be “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” Given this definition, one can certainly appreciate Witsius’ consideration of the Sabbath as such, however, it must be noted that there are many (including those within this writer’s particular denomination), who insist that the Sabbath is not a Sacrament but an ordinance of the local church. Be that as it may, Witsius (convincingly) insists that there is sufficient Scriptural warrant to view the Sabbath as a Sacrament. Unfortunately, any further investigation into his support for this falls beyond the scope of this paper.

The Violation of the Covenant of Works by Man

In chapter eight of Witsius’ work, he addresses the violation of the Covenant of Works by man. The author begins this section by pointing out that man’s sin was not limited to his eating of the forbidden fruit, rather, in doing so, he became guilty of violating the whole Covenant of Works through this singular act of disobedience. Although a singular prohibition was given (i.e., “Do not eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”), the violation thereof constituted “a kind of complication of many crimes” (p. 135).

Witsius continues with a comprehensive examination of Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden, placing special emphasis on the subtleties of Satan's methodology. In short, Satan, as the master manipulator, raised sufficient doubt in Eve's mind concerning the validity and veracity of God's prohibition against eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The author's primary emphasis in this particular chapter is on God's sovereign involvement in Adam's fall (which has already been addressed at considerable length in this paper).

The Abrogation of the Covenant of Works

In the final chapter of Book One, Witsius discusses God's abrogation of the Covenant of Works. To "abrogate" is to abolish, do away with, annul, or repeal by an act of authority. In this last chapter, the author seeks to answer the question concerning whether or not God made void or abrogated the Covenant of Works as a result of its violation by sin. To this end, he begins by establishing several important presuppositions. In the first place, he suggests, it is heretical to maintain that man is not required to be obedient to the right and supremacy of God. This is simply in keeping with the hierarchy that exists in man's relationship with God wherein God is supreme and man is subject. Secondly, Witsius notes, if the sinner deserving of God's punishment was somehow free from the law, there could no longer be any possibility of his sinning as the law reveals and defines sin. In the third place, all sinners would therefore be equal and subsequently punished equally. This, the author maintains, is contrary to both sound reason and scripture. Fourthly, according to Gal. 3, those who are without Christ are still breakers of the covenant of works because every man's obligation remains perfect obedience to the entire Law of God.

The author goes on to cite the view of Arminius which can be summarized in the following points: (1) Arminius believed that man's disobedience (and subsequent fall) resulted in

God's forfeiture of his right to rule over man. Arminius reasoned thusly: First, when man is in Sin, he is not in covenant with God (i.e., there is no contract between God and man by which God can require obedience). Secondly, Arminius argued, as the result of sin, God deprived man of the ability and power to fulfill the law. This, he maintained, rendered God powerless in enforcing his requirement for man to do so. In the third-place, Arminius insisted that the sinner simply could not be required to keep the law since he is unable to comply with God's commandment that he love, Honor, and adore Him. Any law keeping by such a one who could not even meet this most basic requirement would pose a truly unbecoming scenario.

Witsius, of course, provides in-depth responses to each of these Arminian suppositions, however, due to the limited scope of this paper, the writer would simply observe that Arminius' conclusions (as seems to be quite common throughout his entire theological corpus) are woefully lacking in actual Scriptural authority. This writer would, however, remind the reader that, despite said Scriptural backing, Arminius' teaching persists in the church at large to this day. Indeed, there are many within modern Evangelicalism who share many of Arminius' erroneous conclusions concerning God's absolute right to rule over what he has created. The Arminian idea that God is powerless to override man's alleged "free will" is simply one of the major tenets in their man-centered soteriology. The prominence of anti-Lordship teaching and belief is also a key indicator of the remaining presence of Arminian belief in a great number of churches. The current climate of Arminianism among Christians today is no doubt tied directly to the erroneous Arminian suppositions that Witsius addresses in this chapter.

With regard to the question of whether or not the covenant of works has been abrogated, The author maintains that this is true only in part. Most of the covenant of works is indeed immutable. For example, despite his disobedience to God's law, God still demands obedience

simply by virtue of his being man's creator. As the author states, "whoever is exempted from the authority of the Creator is under the authority of none, is that his own disposal; in fine, is God. Four to be at one's own disposal, is to be God. Ah! How ridiculous is this!" (p. 155). Thus "man, even after the violation of the covenant, continued down, not only to obedience, but to a perfect performance of duty" (p. 156). As Paul the apostle stated in Gal. 5:3 with regard to those outside of the covenant of grace, "they are debtors to do the whole law." In addition to the immutable nature of God's sovereignty as creator and man's being thus bound to perform his law perfectly, the penalty for the violation thereof is likewise immutable (p. 158).

Given that these three things: the law, the promise, and the penalty are without change and remain vital ingredients in God's covenant of works, one may be inclined to conclude that there is no possible abrogation thereof. While it is certainly true that each of these three ingredients remain as necessary elements of the covenant of works, this does not necessarily mean that there has been no abrogation of the covenant. As Witsius concludes, "Though the abrogation of the old [covenant] does not necessarily infer the substitution of a new; yet the substitution of a new [covenant] does certainly import the abrogation of the old" (p. 158). So then, in what way has the covenant of works been abrogated? First it was abrogated in the sense that God has declared that no man, by virtue of this covenant, can ever have friendship with Him or obtain salvation. The apostle Paul speaks to this very thing in Gal. 3:21 saying, "if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law." Secondly, the covenant of works has been abrogated in the sense that it is never to be renewed.

Witsius' work continues in Book II where he addresses God's Covenant of Grace and is further continued in Volume II of his entire work on the subject of God's Covenants with man.

Jonathan Edwards' The Doctrine of Original Sin

Biographical Information – Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is believed by many to have been America's greatest theologian and philosopher. In fact, to this day, insist that he was the greatest intellect to have ever graced American soil. He is also considered to be the last of the Puritans. As Beeke and Pederson (2006) remark, Edwards "was a powerful force behind the First Great Awakening, as well as a champion of Christian zeal and spirituality. Both Christian and secular scholarship concur on his importance in American history" (p. 193). Born on October 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Connecticut, Jonathan was the only son of eleven children born to Timothy Edwards and Esther Stoddard. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1720, graduating at the top of his class. Edwards began his ministerial career in 1722 in New York City, however, at the urging of his father, he returned to Connecticut in 1723 where he would finish his Master's degree at Yale. Speaking at the commencement, Edwards' titled his address, "A Sinner is Not Justified before God except through the Righteousness of Christ obtained by Faith." The following November, he accepted a call to the parish church at Bolton, not far from Hartford. In 1727, Edwards married Sarah Pierrepont. The couple had eleven children.

Jonathan Edwards was both prolific and extremely influential in both preaching and the written word. As Marsden (2003) asserted, "At least three of his many works – Religious Affections, Freedom of the Will, and The Nature of True Virtue – stand as masterpieces in the larger history of Christian literature" (p. 1). In addition to writing countless works on various theological topics, he was also a tireless preacher. Without a doubt, his most famous sermon was preached on July 8, 1741 at Enfield, Connecticut approximately one year into the Great Awakening of that period. The title of this sermon, based on Deut. 32:35, was "Sinners in the

Hands of an Angry God.” Its impact was astounding. As recorded by Beeke and Pederson (2006), a witness wrote

“Before the sermon was done, there was a great moaning and crying throughout the whole house. What shall I do to be saved? Oh, I am going to hell! Oh, what shall I do for Christ?” Edwards asked for silence, but the tumult increased until Edwards had to stop preaching. (p. 199)

In 1758, Edwards became the president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton. After only a few months there, he died of complications from a smallpox inoculation.

Original Sin: A Controversial Doctrine

One would think that the crystal clarity of God’s word on the subject would be sufficient to quell any lingering denials of the doctrine of Original Sin. They remain, however, some who yet insist that man is born in an innocent state. One Alfred T. Overstreet, for example, writes:

Very mistaken men teaching monstrous doctrine: that little babies open their eyes in this world as centers, under the wrath of God, and condemned to the everlasting punishment of hell... I want to present more than 100 texts from the Bible that show that little babies are created upright and then the image and likeness of God, and that it is impossible for them to be centers until they have reached the age of accountability and know the difference between good and evil.

Edwards dealt with very similar sentiments during his own day. While there were no doubt more detractors, in his preface to this important work, Edwards expresses his intent to defend the doctrine of Original Sin primarily against the writings of two men: a Dr. Turnbull (a reference to one George Turnbull (1698-1748), Scottish philosopher and theologian) and a Dr. Taylor (a reference to one John Taylor (1694-1761); English dissenting preacher and theologian), “but especially the latter. Indeed, Dr. Taylor has written two books in which he denied this doctrine” (p. 5). It is with one of Dr. Taylor’s works in particular that Edwards takes up his cause saying:

I have closely attended to Dr. Taylor’s “Piece on Original Sin,” in all its parts, and have endeavored that no one thing there said, of any consequence in this controversy, should

pass unnoticed, or that anything which has the appearance of an argument, in opposition to this doctrine, should pass unnoticed, or that anything which has the appearance of an argument, in opposition to this doctrine, should be left unanswered. (p. 6)

Edwards' Two-fold Aim

Edwards' aim in writing this great treatise on the doctrine of Original Sin was twofold: (1) as a particular answer to Dr. Taylor, and (2) as a general defense of the doctrine itself. Part One of this work consists of various evidences for Original Sin drawn from both observation and experience, from Scripture, as well as the assertions of opposers. The author begins by providing a very concise but clear definition of "Original Sin" as "the innate sinful depravity of the heart." It is also to be understood, not only as the manifestation of man's natural depravity but, equally importantly, as the result of the imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity. Both of these statements, the author maintains, were opposed by Dr. Taylor as well as others who shared his erroneous views of this doctrine. In the first place then, Edwards considers the question concerning whether or not any evidence actually exists which proves that the heart of man is, by nature, disposed to corruption and evil. Those of Edwards' day who denied this believed that such evil and corrupt tendencies were far and away the exception rather than the norm among mankind. As the author notes, many believed "that good preponderates and that virtue has the ascendant." In arguing to the contrary, Edwards observes that the appearance of good and virtue are actually the byproducts of the sovereign grace of God which operates to prevent the evil that abides in man's heart by nature from coming to fruition. He writes:

Grace is sovereign, exercised according to the good pleasure of God, bringing good out of evil. The effect of it belongs not to the nature of things themselves, that otherwise have an ill tendency, any more than the remedy belongs to the disease; but is something altogether independent on it, introduced to oppose the natural tendency, and reverse the course of things. (p. 8)

Original Sin and the Justice of God

As Edwards point out, the primary argument made by those opposed to the doctrine of Original Sin is really against the justice of God; “both in this objection against the imputation of Adams sin, And also against it’s being ordered, that men should come into the world with a corrupt and ruined nature, without having merited the displeasure of their creator by any personal fault.” The notion that man is born in innocence, and that he is not a center until such time as having reached the “age of accountability,” simply flies in the face of several pivotal passages in Scripture. For example, in Romans 5:12 Paul unambiguously declares, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...” in the Old Testament, in Psalm 51:5, David also acknowledged that he was “conceived in sin” saying, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” The venerable John Gill provides some very helpful insight here saying:

This cannot be understood of any personal iniquity of his immediate parents; since this respects his wonderful formation in the womb, in which both he and they were wholly passive, as the word here used is of that form; and is the amazing work of God himself, so much admired by the Psalmist; and cannot design any sinfulness then infused into him by his Maker, seeing God cannot be the author of sin; but of Original Sin and corruption, derived to him by natural generation: and the sense is, that as soon as ever the mass of human nature was shaped and quickened, or as soon as soul and body were united together, sin was in him, and he was in sin, or became a sinful creature.

Apart from the scriptural evidence supporting the doctrine of Original Sin, this can also be seen quite clearly in an experimental fashion. As Edwards asserts:

Mankind are all naturally in such a state, as is attended without fail, with this consequence or issue; that they universally run themselves into that which is, in effect, their own utter eternal perdition, as being finally accursed of God, and the subjects of his remediless wrath through sin. (p. 9)

Truth *and* Consequences

The author then proceeds to defend this proposition by first considering the truth therein and then by showing the consequences thereof. To this end, Edwards insists that only two things

should be made manifest: one is the fact that all men born into this world are born as sinners and thus indeed commit those sins to which they are, by nature, inclined, and two, that all sin is deserving of the wrath of God and will in fact be so punished if not for the interposition of divine grace to prevent it.

In support of the first part of the aforementioned proposition, Edwards adds even further scriptural support did that previously supplied by this writer. In 1 Kings 8:46, for example, it is written, "...there is no one who does not sin." Similarly, in Ecc. 7:20, Solomon declares, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." In Ps. 143:2, David acknowledges that "...no one living is righteous before [God]." In Rom. 3:10, 23, the apostle Paul similarly states, "None is righteous, no, not one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Finally, in 1 Jn. 1:8-10, the apostle writes:

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.

In addition to these helpful passages, the universality of man's sin nature can be seen in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Not only is the universality of sin itself addressed in Scripture, we also learn that said sin "deserves and justly exposes [mankind] to everlasting destruction under the wrath and curse of God..." (p. 10). Gal. 3:10 is particularly expressive of this: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.'" In the following verse, Paul makes his own case for the universality of this principle as well inferring that "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" (a statement mirroring a previous declaration made in Gal. 2:16). Paul's stipulation is clear: every man is, by nature, a sinner and as such, every man is under the curse of God. This is also a point clearly made by Jesus Himself

in John 3:18 wherein He says to Nicodemus, “Whoever believes in [God’s only Son] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe is condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (emphasis added). Edwards’ opponent, Dr. Taylor, evidently agreed with these conclusions, at least in a cursory way. God’s law, he maintained, does in fact require perfect obedience. Should the law be abrogated in any part, Taylor reasoned, then there would indeed be, in some instances, transgressions of the law and yet without the associated guilt of sin. In fact, he argued, the abrogation of the law is simply not possible owing to its being “the truth, everlasting and unchangeable” (p. 11). In short, Taylor himself agreed that all of mankind does, in some degree, transgress the law and that all such transgressions of the law, no matter how seemingly small, were deserving of eternal death. Additionally, Taylor argued, this sentence of the law is “just and righteous, agreeable to the truth and the nature of things” (p. 11).

Man’s Natural Tendency to Sin Examined

Having established both in Scripture as well as in his opponents own words that all men are under the influence of sin and therefore subject to eternal death, Edwards turns his attention to proving that the aforementioned truths are the result of something going before, namely, the natural tendency which produces sin and evil. He begins by defining the word “tendency” as “a prevailing liableness or exposedness to such or such an event” (p. 13). He further elaborates on this by saying:

Where we see a stated prevalence of any effect there is a tendency to that effect in the nature and state of its causes... the natural dictate of reason shows, that where there is an effect, There is a cause, and a cause sufficient for the effect; because if it were not sufficient, it would not be effectual. (p. 13)

Once again, Edwards is able to prove, not only from Scripture, but from both nature in itself as well as in Dr. Taylor’s own writings, that all men everywhere have (and have always had) a

natural tendency or proneness to sin. It must be understood that this proneness is innate and does not arise from any particular circumstances.

Edwards goes on to further expose the inconsistencies in Dr. Taylor's position by pointing out that, According to Taylor, the soul takes on a sin nature when it is infused into the body which then pollutes the body, resulting in the ascension of sensual appetites. However, Edwards asks, who made this polluted body? God did. And if it is not the body itself which is polluted and prone to sin, then it must be the soul itself. And who created the soul? God. As Edwards observes, "[Man's sinful indulgences] are either from the body which God hath made, or otherwise a proneness to sinful indulgence is immediately and originally seated in the soul itself..." (p. 16).

Man's Natural Inclination

The author then moves to consider yet another important facet of the doctrine of Original Sin which is closely related to what has gone before. This is posed in the form of a question which can be paraphrased thusly: in determining whether or not man's nature is indeed depraved and ruined, we need not ask whether he is inclined to perform as many good deeds as bad ones, but to which of these he is more inclined in accordance with his nature. In other words, is man more inclined to exhibit a natural state of "innocence, righteousness, and favor with God" (p. 16) or is he more inclined to exhibit a natural state of "sin, guiltiness, and abhorrence in the sight of God" (p. 16)? the answer to this question is extremely well reasoned by the author as he clearly indicates that this matter has little to do in rating man's good deeds against his evil deeds. What is more, he contends, if this was in fact a suitable test to determine man's innate disposition, it would still be unreliable as it fails to take into account the actual heinousness of sin before a thrice-holy God. In fact, one sent among millions of good works is sufficient to merit the

displeasure and subsequent wrath of God. Cleverly, Edwards likens this idea to a ship that is to cross the Atlantic that has been deemed seaworthy but only for part of the journey. The possibility or tendency for said ship's catastrophic failure effectively renders the entire journey far too hazardous to undertake. As Edwards puts it, "there is an infinite demerit in all send against God, which must therefore immensely outweigh all the merit which can be supposed to be in our virtue" (p. 17). He also astutely observes:

He who commits any one sin, has guilt and ill so great, that the value and merit of all the good which it is possible he should do in his whole life, is as nothing to it... thus, whatever acts of virtue and obedience a man performs, yet if he trespasses in one point, is guilty of any the least sin, he – according to the law of God, and so according to the exact truth of things, and the proper demerit of sin - is exposed to be wholly cast out of favor with God, and subject to his curse, to be out early and eternally destroyed. (p. 18)

Incidentally, Edwards point out, "this has been proved and shown to be the doctrine which Dr. Taylor abundantly teaches" (p. 18). On a contemporary note, this writer is amazed at the prevalence and longevity of this erroneous notion that God is little more than a divine scorekeeper who grants eternal life to those whose good works outweigh their bad works. In short, Edwards argues, the value and merit of all of man's good actions bear no proportion to the heinousness of sin:

He that in any respect or degree is a transgressor of God's law, Is a wicked man, yea, wholly wicked in the eye of the law; all his goodness being esteemed to nothing, Having no account made of it, when taken with his wickedness. (p. 18)

These simple yet profound truths render absolutely absurd the notion that man's prevailing innocence and good works are somehow able to counteract the effect of his sins. As Edwards cleverly observes, this is the equivalent of declaring an adulterous wife "innocent" simply because she proves herself faithful to her husband most of the time.

The Immediate Manifestation of Sin

In the next section of Edwards work, he posits that man's sinful nature can be observed, not only in light of the fact that all men are thus prone to it, but in the immediacy in which sin appears. Sin is not, as some suppose, a learned trait. Even among the most dutiful and devout Christian parents, the sins of their children are readily apparent from the earliest age. What is more, not only is sin immediate in its manifestation, it is also continually on display. "The only reason," Edwards states, "that can be given why sinning must be immediate at first, is that the disposition is so great that it will not suffer any considerable time to pass without sin..." (p. 20). Additionally, it only stands to reason that since we see sin abiding and remaining in the hearts of the best of men on earth, sin must be in man's natural predisposition.

Sin Preponderates

The author then goes on to overturn his opponents' argument that "good preponderates" among mankind. On the contrary, he observes, there is much more sin than righteousness among men "not only as to weight and value, but as to matter and measure" (p. 22). This can be shown in a number of ways. For example, one of the greatest requirements of God's law is that man love him with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind. And yet, even as the most virtuous man would have to admit, he simply does not love God as he ought. And if this is true of even the virtuous man, how much true or is it of many more who are less virtuous?

Additionally, Edwards stresses the point that the innate corruption of man can also be seen in his "extreme degree of folly and stupidity in matters of religion" (p. 26). Man is ever so prone, the author writes, to exceeding stupidity with regard to those things concerning his duty and primary interest. His proneness to idolatry, at the expense of eternal matters, for example, is evidence of this stupidity. Even those who have, by God's grace, been delivered and preserved from idolatry, he writes, often relapse into it requiring "divine gracious interposition" in order to

recover. “That men should forsake the true God for idols,” argues Edwards, “is an evidence of the most astonishing Folly and stupidity” (p. 26). This is corroborated by God Himself who says in Jer. 2:12, 13:

Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

This is also reflective of the apostle Paul’s teaching in Rom. 1:18-21 in which he points out:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Edwards thus concludes that if man has indeed been given sufficient light from creation so as to know what his duty to God is, then his inability to act accordingly must be “A moral inability, consisting in a desperate depravity, and most evil disposition of the heart” (p. 28).

Man’s Utter Disregard for His Eternal State

A second example of the innate or natural stupidity of man can be seen in his utter disregard for his own eternal state. This, the author points out, is even more stop machine given that they live under the Gospel. And what does this have to do with the subject at hand? Quoting from Locke, Edwards explains:

Were the will determined by the views of good, as it appears in contemplation... it could never get loose from the infinite eternal joys of heaven, once proposed, and considered as possible; the terminal condition of a future state infinitely outweighing the expectation of riches or honor, or any other worldly pleasure, which we can propose to ourselves; though we should grant these the more probable to be obtained.

Stated more concisely, if man was, by nature, inclined to good and not evil, His thoughts would naturally and consistently be turned to that which is the ultimate good: the prospect of heaven.

This, of course, is not the case at all, Which is further proof of man's sin nature.

One of the most convincing arguments that Edwards makes against Dr. Taylor's insistence that all men are, by nature, good, possessing sufficient light wherewith to avoid any and all temptations to evil, comes by way of an examination of Dr. Taylor's own words to the contrary. As Edward indicates, Dr. Taylor was very quick to point out that no man has the right to judge whether another man be good or bad. And yet Dr. Taylor does this very thing when he judges that Christians in general are those who "err in their hearts, and have not known God's way" (p. 32) and that "the generality of Christians are the most wicked of all mankind" (p. 32). In contemplating this further, this author sees no small bit of irony in the fact that many of those whose constant sanctimonious refrain is "judge not lest ye be judged" have little problem admitting (many of them with great pride) that they are literalists in their approach to what they contend is indeed the inerrant and infallible word of God. How truly sad it is for them to make this admission and, At the same time, demonstrate such a want of Scriptural literacy. Although throughout God's word, it can be clearly demonstrated that all men are, by nature, sinners and deserving of God's wrath, anyone who appeals to such clear teaching is, in their minds, guilty of unfairly judging his fellow man. In the eighth section of Edwards' work, the author points to yet another evidence for Original Sin, namely, that the natural depravity of man can be seen in the absence of any positive effect resulting from the great means that have been undertaken to promote virtue in the world. This certainly brings to this writer's mind that it is indeed impossible to "legislate morality." As the author indicates, "the world has been so generally, so constantly, and so exceedingly corrupt, notwithstanding the various, great, and continual means

that have been used to restrain men from sin, and promote virtue and true religion among them” (p. 37). According to Dr. Taylor, the consequences of Adam’s sin (e.g., sorrow and death) were not intended to be punishments but favors brought on them “as a benevolent father...to restrain [Adam and Eve] from sin...to induce them to be moderate in gratifying the appetites of the body; to mortify pride and ambition...” (p. 37). And were these means successful? Hardly. Instead, the world grew even more corrupt than before. As Edwards observed, “The whole world, for ought appears, continued obstinate, and absolutely incorrigible; so that nothing remained to be done with them, but utterly to destroy the inhabitants of the earth; and to begin a new world...” (p. 37). As the author concludes, all efforts undertaken by man in order to curb his innate sinful tendencies have failed. This failure certainly stands to reason given the fact that even the provision of the gospel of Jesus Christ – the lone God-ordained remedy for man’s sin and its consequences – has not deterred any but God’s elect. As the author points out, “though there was a glorious success of the gospel amongst [the Gentiles]; yet probably not one in ten of those that had the gospel preached to them embraced it. The powers of the world were set against it, and persecuted it with insatiable malignity” (p. 44). It was this realization that prompted Dr. Taylor to propose that “there is need of a new dispensation; the present light of the gospel being insufficient for the full reformation of the Christian world, by reason of its corruptions” (p. 45). In this writer’s estimation, this reveals that Dr. Taylor obviously had far greater troubles than with his misunderstanding of the doctrine of Original Sin. His paradoxical statements lead this writer to believe that Taylor lacked even the most fundamental grasp of, among other things, the workings of God’s sovereign effectual grace. This certainly does, however, make sense given his unwavering insistence that man is not, by nature, a sinner.

Evasions of the Arguments for Original Depravity

Edwards continues his examination of his opponent's views on Original Sin by considering the various evasive tactics employed by Dr. Taylor in his denial of it. The first of these evasive measures is Dr. Taylor's reasoning that since neither Adam nor the angels were, by nature, sinners, it does not necessarily follow that the sin of Adam's posterity would be the result of original or innate sin. Edwards, of course, argues that although Adam and the angels were indeed "without a previous fixed disposition to sin," this in no way weakens "the arguments brought to prove fixed propensity to sin in mankind, in their present state" (p. 48).

The second evasive tactic employed by Dr. Taylor is his insistence that man's sin is not the byproduct or result of any natural propensity but stems from his free will. Edwards easily deflects this evasion by asking a simple series of what should be rhetorical questions:

[How does it come] to pass that mankind so universally agree in this evil exercise of their free will? If their wills are in the first place as free to good as to evil, what is it to be ascribed to, that the world of mankind, consisting of so many millions, in so many successive generations, without consultation, all agree to exercise their freedom in favor of evil? If there be no natural tendency or preponderation in the case, then there is as good a chance for the will being determined to good as to evil. If the cause be indifferent, why is not the effect in some measure indifferent? If the balance be no heavier at one end than the other, why does it perpetually preponderate one way? How comes it to pass, that the free will of mankind has been determined to evil, in like manner before the flood and after the flood; under the law and under the gospel; among both Jews and Gentiles, under the Old Testament, and since then, among Christians, Jews, Mahometans; among papists and Protestants; in those nations where civility, politeness, arts, and learning most prevail, and among the Negroes and Hottentots in Africa, the Tartars in Asia, and Indians in America, towards both the poles, and on every side of the globe; in greatest cities and obscurest villages; in palaces and in huts, wigwams, and cells under ground? Is it enough to reply, it happens so, that men everywhere, and in all times, choose thus to determine their own wills, and so to make themselves sinful, as soon as ever they are capable of it, and to sin constantly as long as they live, and universally to choose never to come up half way to their duty? (pp. 49-50)

The obvious purpose of these questions is to illustrate the folly of one's believing that such "coincidences" are either plausible or even remotely possible. Edwards thinks not.

The third evasive tactic employed by Dr. Taylor is his belief that the corruption of mankind is not the result of a depraved nature but merely a bad example. Edwards deals with this erroneous supposition much in the same way as the previous one, insisting that “If the propensity of man’s nature be not to evil, how comes the current of general example, everywhere, and at all times, to be so much to evil” (p. 51)? The informed reader will no doubt recognize this as well as the previous notion as quite similar to the teaching of Pelagius who, according to Olson (1999), believed:

We all tend to sin due to the bad examples shown us by our parents and peers...If we sin [argued Pelagius], it is because we choose willfully and knowingly to sin [but]... there is no inborn bent or predisposition to sin. There are only sinful examples that lure people to sin. Metaphorically speaking, for Pelagius sin was a social disease, not a genetic one. (p. 269)

The fourth evasion cited by Edwards is the idea that man is not necessarily born in sin but experiences the development of “animal passions” as he grows older. It is also believed that what appears to be natural soon is merely the result of a lack of emphasis on virtue. If parents were more attentive in attempting to curb the tendency of their children towards sinful actions there would be far less sin in the world. Edwards, however, dismisses this notion on the grounds that it does not adequately prove that man’s natural tendency or propensity is the catalyst for the universal display of sin in mankind.

The fifth type of evasion employed by those to deny Original Sin is the suggestion that sin is only present as a test of man’s virtue. In other words, through the conflict that sin presents, man’s virtue is refined. As Dr. Taylor remarked:

Without a right use and application of our powers, were they naturally ever so perfect, we could not be judged fit to enter the kingdom of God – this gives a good reason why we are now in a state of trial and temptation, viz. to prove and discipline our minds, to season our virtue, and to fit us for the kingdom of God; for which, in the judgment of infinite wisdom, we cannot be qualified, but by overcoming our present temptations. (p. 55)

As before, this innovation is easily dealt with when one considers that there still must be a natural prevailing tendency to the sin that is allegedly designed to refine man's virtue.

Universal Mortality Proves Original Sin

Edwards also cites universal mortality as proof for Original Sin. If man was actually devoid of Original Sin and born in a state of innocence than the death of infants would simply be inconsistent with the character of God. How so? Because death is, pure and simple, the result of sin (Rom. 5:12, "...sin entered into the world and death by sin;). As the author points out, "death is spoken of in Scripture as the chief of calamities, the most extreme and terrible of all natural evils in this world" (p. 56). For Edwards' opponent, death is seen as a great benefit as it "increases the vanity of all earthly things" and tends "to excite sober reflections, and to induce us to be moderate in gratifying the appetites of the body, and to mortify pride and ambition, etc." (p. 58). If this is true, the author argues, then "is it not strange that it should fall so heavily on infants, Who are not capable of making any such improvement of it" (p. 59)? Dr. Taylor even went so far as to suggest that the death of infants may be for the correction and punishment of parents. Edwards insists that such teachings are not only logically inconsistent in light of scripture, but are also contrary to the Gospel.

Adam and Eve and Original Righteousness

In the next portion of this important work, Edwards shifts his focus to the question of whether Adam and Eve were created with original righteousness. Interestingly Dr. Taylor rejected this teaching as well. It is here that Taylor's errand presuppositions come into even sharper focus. As this writer has alluded to previously, the root or systematic cause of Dr. Taylor's erroneous views centers on his understanding of God's absolute sovereignty. As Edwards point out:

Dr. T.'s grand objection against this doctrine, which he abundantly insists on, is this: that it is utterly inconsistent with the nature of virtue, that it should be concreated with any person; because, if so, it must be by an act of God's absolute power, without our knowledge or concurrence; and that moral virtue, in its very nature, implies the choice and consent of the moral agent, without which it cannot be virtue and holiness: that a necessary holiness is no holiness. (p. 63)

In like manner, Edwards observes, the aforementioned Dr. Turnbull insisted that "it is necessary to the very being a virtue, that it be a link to our own choice, and diligent culture" (p. 64). To this, Edwards replies:

If a virtuous disposition or affection is before its acts, then they are before those virtuous acts of choice which proceed from it. Therefore, there is no necessity that all virtuous dispositions or affections should be the effect of choice: and so, no such supposed necessity can be a good objection against such a disposition being natural, or from a kind of instinct, implanted in the mind in its creation. (p. 64)

What Kind of Death?

Next, Edwards discusses the kind of death threatened to Adam and Eve should they eat of the forbidden fruit. Was this death, as Dr. Taylor surmises, strictly the end of physical life or is something else meant by? One can certainly appreciate Edwards' astute deduction that if life and death are opposites, then the particular quality or type of age should also be opposites. It is clear from Scripture that God's promise or reward to Adam, should he have been able to abstain from even eating the forbidden fruit, was eternal life. Given this, it only stands to reason that the penalty for his having disobeyed was eternal or spiritual death.

The Extent and Ramifications of Adam's Death

The author continues by asking and answering the question of whether or not God's threatening of death for eating the forbidden fruit was intended to extend to Adam's posterity. Of course, as the reader might suspect, Edwards' opponent denies this. As the apostle Paul, however, under inspiration, makes quite clear in Romans 5:19, "...by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners..."

Old Testament Evidence Proving the Doctrine of Original Sin

In the next section of his treatise, the author addresses the key Old Testament passages which prove the doctrine of Original Sin. While an exhaustive treatment of Edwards' particular observations concerning each of these passages is beyond the limits of this ever-lengthening paper, the writer has simply elected to provide a sampling of them and allow them, upon examination by the reader, to stand for themselves. These verses include Ps. 14:2, 3:

The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good; no, not one.

Edwards also cites Ps. 4:2 and Ps. 57:4, both of which identify sin as a thing that belongs to men, as of the human race, as sons of men. Jer. 17:5, 9 is also another example of this teaching in Scripture. In verse 5, it is said, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man." Why? Verse 9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" One of the more compelling Scriptures cited by the author in this regard is Job 15:14-16:

"What is man, that he should be clean? And he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight: how much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water!"

New Testament Evidence Proving the Doctrine of Original Sin

Edwards also brings to bear many of the New Testament Scriptures which prove the doctrine of Original Sin, beginning with the account of Nicodemus' encounter with Christ in Jn. 3:6 wherein Christ says, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." As the author indicates, in the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans, the terms *flesh* and *spirit* are clearly set in opposition, the flesh symbolizing man's sinful predilection and the spirit representing that part of man which has been made alive in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul also speaks of this opposition between the spirit and the flesh in Gal. 5:16 saying, “Walk in the spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” John also addresses the spiritual component in 1 John 3:23, 24 writing, “And that we should love one another, as He gave us commandment; and he that keeps His commandments, dwells in Him and He in him: and hereby we know that He abides in us, by the spirit that He has given us.” Likewise, in chapter 4, verses 12 and 13, we read, “If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us: hereby know we, that we dwell in Him, because he has given us of his Spirit.” As Edwards clearly indicates, this opposition between man’s flesh (i.e., his natural state) and spirit (i.e., his condition following rebirth) are simply further proof that man is, by nature, a sinner.

In the remainder of Edwards’ treatise on Original Sin, the author provides even more in-depth observations on a few of the key Scriptures used to defend this important doctrine. Most of what he writes in this latter section of his work has already been addressed previously so this writer has elected to refrain from further comment at this time.

Concluding Thoughts

Witsius and Edwards have made tremendous contributions to our understanding, not only of these critically important doctrines, but many others as well. When one seriously considers the state of modern evangelicalism, it is not at all difficult to see that the study of the works of these luminaries is most necessary if the church is to stave off what is, in this writer’s humble opinion, a growing theological/doctrinal famine. May God continue to use them in His sovereign preservation of those who believe and faithfully labor for the kingdom and cause of Jesus Christ.

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