Men’s Discipleship

The **doctrine of original sin** is a foundational Christian teaching that holds all humans inherit a sinful nature due to the first sin of Adam and Eve. While the **phrase "original sin" doesn't appear in the Bible**, the concept is supported by several passages throughout Scripture. Below are the **key Bible verses** often cited in support of this doctrine, grouped by theme:

Humanity's Inherited Sinful Nature

1. **Romans 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—"

2. **Psalm 51:5**

   "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

3. **Job 14:4**

   "Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!"

4. **Job 15:14**

   "What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?"

All Have Sinned

5. **Romans 3:23**

   "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

6. **Ecclesiastes 7:20**

   "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."

7. **1 Kings 8:46**

   "For there is no one who does not sin..."

8. **1 John 1:8**

   "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Effects of Adam's Sin on Humanity

9. **Romans 5:18-19**

> "Therefore as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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."

10. **1 Corinthians 15:21-22**

"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

The Need for Redemption from Sinful Nature

11. **Ephesians 2:1-3**

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... we all once lived in the passions of our flesh... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

12. **Genesis 8:21**

"The inclination of the human heart is evil from youth."

Protestant Commentaries

Romans 5:12–19

"...sin came into the world through one man..."

Protestant view:
This is *the* central text for original sin in theology. Paul shows that **Adam acted as a representative (federal head)** of humanity. His sin didn't just influence us—it **condemned** us. Just as Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to believers, Adam's guilt is *imputed* to all people.

- **John Calvin**: "The fall of Adam made us all guilty, not by mere imitation, but by propagation."
- **Martin Luther**: Saw this as proof that humans are *totally depraved* without grace.

Psalm 51:5

"Surely I was sinful at birth..."

Protestant view:
David isn't confessing a specific act here—he's **acknowledging inherited corruption**. His sin with Bathsheba was just the fruit of a deeper condition.

- **Reformers** took this verse to affirm that **sin is not just actions, but a nature** we're born with.
- **Calvin**: This verse proves we are "corrupted even before birth."

Romans 3:23 / 1 John 1:8 / Ecclesiastes 7:20

"All have sinned..."

Protestant view:
These verses reinforce that **there is no exception** to sin. Protestants argue this confirms **total depravity**—not that people are as evil as possible, but that **every part of human nature is touched by sin**.

- **Luther**: "Even the best works of man are tainted with sin."
- **Augustine** (hugely influential on Protestant thought): humanity is *massa damnata*—a mass of perdition—without God's grace.

Ephesians 2:1–3

"You were dead in your transgressions..."

Protestant view:
"Dead" doesn't mean wounded or weak. It means **spiritually incapable** of responding to God apart from divine intervention. This is key to the idea of **monergism**—that God alone regenerates us.

- **Calvin**: "We are not merely sick; we are dead."
- This passage supports the **need for regeneration** before someone can even choose Christ (contra synergistic views).

Genesis 8:21 / Job 14:4

"The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth..."

Protestant view:
These verses describe not isolated sins, but a **pervasive bent toward evil** from birth. For Protestants, this supports the idea that **sin is inherited**, not learned.

- **The Westminster Confession** (1646): "From this original corruption... proceed all actual transgressions."

Summary of Protestant Doctrine of Original Sin

Key Theme	Protestant Emphasis
Imputed guilt	Adam's guilt legally passed to all humanity (Romans 5).
Inherited corruption	All humans are born morally and spiritually corrupt (Psalm 51).
Total depravity	Every part of human nature is affected (Ephesians 2, Romans 3).
Need for grace	Salvation is *sola gratia*—by grace alone, not human effort.

Commentary from Early Church Fathers

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1. Romans 5:12 — "Through one man sin entered the world..."

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD)

View: The most influential proponent of original sin.

"All men sinned in Adam, since all were in him when he sinned." (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*)

- Augustine argued that **Adam's guilt and corrupted nature are transmitted** through human generation.
- This became foundational for Western theology, especially for **Reformed Protestants**.

Ambrosiaster (4th c.)

"In Adam all sinned... the whole mass was vitiated in its root."

- Pre-Augustinian, but echoes the **corporate fall** idea: all of humanity was "in Adam."

Psalm 51:5 — "In sin did my mother conceive me"

Augustine

"Even infants... are not free from sin, for they too are born in sin." (*Confessions*)

- He used this verse to argue that **even newborns need baptism**, a view that solidified the link between original sin and infant baptism in Western Christianity.

Tertullian (155–220 AD)

"The sins of the father are passed on to the sons."

- Though not systematized like Augustine, Tertullian believed in a **hereditary weakness** due to Adam's sin.

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3. Romans 3:23 — "All have sinned..."

Irenaeus (130–202 AD)

"Because of [Adam], all fell under death." (*Against Heresies*)

- Irenaeus focused more on **recapitulation**—Christ reliving and reversing Adam's steps—than legal guilt.
- But he agreed that **all humans share in Adam's fall and its effects**.

Ephesians 2:1-3 — "Dead in trespasses... by nature children of wrath"

John Chrysostom (349–407 AD)

"Dead means not able to help ourselves... it is grace alone that brings us to life."

- Though Chrysostom didn't teach inherited guilt, he affirmed that humans are **enslaved by sin** without grace.

Augustine (again!)

"Even infants who have not committed personal sin are still under condemnation because of Adam."

- This ties into his argument that **without baptism, infants remain under judgment**, even if they haven't sinned personally.

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5. Genesis 8:21 / Job 14:4 — "The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth…"

Origen (184–253 AD)

"Souls are tainted from birth… sin is transmitted like a disease." (*Homilies on Leviticus*)

- Origen believed in the **preexistence of souls**, so his view differs, but he still acknowledged **a kind of inherited sinfulness**.

Summary Table

Church Father	View on Original Sin
Augustine	Strongly affirmed inherited guilt and corruption.
Irenaeus	Emphasized corruption and death, less legal guilt.
Chrysostom	Focused on moral weakness and need for grace, not inherited guilt.
Tertullian	Believed in hereditary sin but didn't systematize it.
Ambrosiaster	Pre-Augustinian view of Adam's sin affecting all.
Origen	Sinful nature present at birth, but framed within a unique metaphysics.

Important Note:

The doctrine of **original sin as formalized by Augustine** was **not universal** in the early church. **Eastern fathers** (like Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Athanasius) tended to see sin more as **disease than guilt**—an inherited inclination rather than condemnation.

What Is Semi-Pelagianism?

Definition:
Semi-Pelagianism teaches that **the first step toward salvation is taken by the human will**, unaided by divine grace. Once that step is taken, **God's grace then helps and completes the process**.

In simpler terms:

"I initiate faith; God helps me continue."

How It Differs

Doctrine	Who Moves First?	View of Grace	View of Original Sin
Pelagianism	Human alone	Not necessary to begin	Denied inherited sin
Semi-Pelagianism	Human first, then God	Grace assists later	Weakened but not destroyed

Doctrine	Who Moves First?	View of Grace	View of Original Sin
Augustinianism	God alone	Grace initiates and sustains	Total depravity, grace essential

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Historical Context

- **Condemned at the Council of Orange (529 AD)**
  This local but influential council ruled against Semi-Pelagian ideas, affirming that:

  > "Faith is the **gift of God**, not the work of man's will."

- **Key Figures:**
  - **John Cassian** (often associated, though he never claimed the label)
  - **Faustus of Riez**

They rejected Pelagius's denial of original sin but **couldn't accept Augustine's harsh doctrine of total depravity** and predestination.

Why It Matters

Protestants (especially Calvinists and Lutherans) reject Semi-Pelagianism as undermining salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*), arguing that:

- Even the **desire to seek God is a result of God's grace**, not our initiative (cf. John 6:44, Romans 3:11).

Catholic theology today avoids the term "Semi-Pelagian" but also affirms that **grace precedes any good movement of the will**—a position called **prevenient grace**.

Summary:

Semi-Pelagianism teaches that **human will can make the first move toward God**, and **grace follows to assist**.
It was **rejected** by both the early church and later Protestant reformers as **undermining the necessity and sovereignty of grace**.