

It's In The Genes

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It started on Sunday after we dropped the girls off in High Springs, FL for FC camp. As we were driving on toward Lakeland, FL, Carina noticed a few bumps on my left arm. They looked rather like little bug bites—nothing to be worried about.

By Monday evening, they were showing up on my right arm also. By Tuesday evening, the bumps had turned red and splotchy, and Carina started making jokes about leprosy. Should I start saying, “Outcast! Unclean!” when others approached?

By Thursday, we were talking about having a doctor take a look. The splotchy bumps had spread to my shoulders, chest and legs, and it was becoming increasingly difficult not to scratch them.

On Saturday, having made it home from Florida, I finally gave in and went to the doctor. The verdict was not leprosy or flesh eating virus. The doctor identified my spots as contact dermatitis—either poison ivy or poison oak. I told the doctor that I had been in the woods to drop off the kids at camp, but I hadn't actually handled anything. How could I have gotten infected and gotten it that bad? The doctor replied that some varieties are actually airborne, and if the season is right, and you are sensitive enough, you can get poison oak without even touching a single plant, which is what appears to have happened in my case.

Who do I have to thank for this hyper-sensitivity to poison oak? The answer is my mom. She was so sensitive that when we lived in North Florida in my childhood, she couldn't even walk into the woods without coming out scratching.

Poison oak is in my genes. I have inherited the problem from my mother, and as I get older, it is only going to get worse. There are some things that are programmed into our genes.

Some people believe that sin is one of these inherited conditions. David wrote, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Some have interpreted this verse to mean that the guilt of sin is inherited, passed from parent to child at the moment of conception. This view contradicts other clear passages that teach that the guilt of sin is not inherited.

Ezekiel wrote, "The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, 'What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'? 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel' (18:1-3). Ezekiel spends the bulk of the chapter refuting the idea that children bear the guilt of their parents. He begins the discussion and concludes it with the phrase, "The soul who sins shall die" (vs. 4 & 20).

Given the clear language of Ezekiel, some adopt a more conservative view of David's words in Psalm 51:5, affirming that the sin in David's conception was adultery. David's mother was being unfaithful to Jesse. Although this view does clear the apparent contradiction between Psalm 51 and Ezekiel 18, it scandalizes David's mother unnecessarily.

What we sometimes fail to consider is the fact that David was writing poetry in Psalm 51, and poetry often includes figurative language.

David used a similar figure in Psalm 58:3, saying, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." Consider these words carefully. Are wicked men literally born speaking lies? Are wicked men literally born speaking at all? The answer to both questions is "No." David is employing hyperbole—obvious and intentional exaggeration to make a point. The point in Psalm 58 is that some men are so wicked they seem to have been practicing wickedness from birth. The point in Psalm 51 is the same.

Psalm 51 was written after David's sin with Bathsheba, when David felt utterly oppressed by his sin. He wasn't blaming his mother ; he was acknowledging his own guilt. He wrote in Psalm 51:4, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight; That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge." David's mother may not have been perfect, but David, not she, was responsible for the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba.

In this regard, we are all like David (Romans 3:23). We may blame our parents for our faulty genes. We may suffer the consequences of choices they have made, but we do not bear the guilt of their sins.

I may get my sensitivity to poison oak from my mother, but the worst of my maladies, the affliction of sin, comes from my own poor choices.