

The Consequences of the Fall of Man

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Man, as created, was good. God created man in His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Well, then, if God created man good, how comes it that all men now are bad? How did sin pass into all mankind? What caused this stupendous change from good to bad?

Sin came into the world through the sin of Adam. Adam's descendants do not begin life sinless as he began it. They begin it tainted in some way or other with the sin that Adam committed. If Adam transgressed, he was to die. Death was to be the punishment of disobedience. Well, he did transgress. What then happened? Was Adam the only one who died? Did his descendants begin where he began? Did they have placed before them all over again that same alternative between death and life that was placed before Adam? The Book of Genesis indicates the contrary very clearly. No, the descendants of Adam already, before they individually made any choices at all, had that penalty of death resting upon them.

What, then, does that mean? Adam was the divinely appointed representative of the race. If he obeyed the commandments of God, the whole race of his descendants would have life; if he disobeyed, the whole race would have death. I do not see how the narrative in the Book of Genesis, when you take it as a whole, can mean anything else.

That view of the matter becomes more explicit in certain important passages of the New Testament. In the latter part of the fifth chapter of Romans, in particular, the Apostle Paul makes it plain. "Through one trespass," he there says, "the judgment came unto all men to condemnation" (Romans 5:18). "Through the one man's disobedience," he says in the next verse, "the many were made sinners." In these words and all through this passage we have the great doctrine that when Adam sinned he sinned as the representative of the race, so that it is quite correct to say that all mankind sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. There is a profound connection between Adam and the whole race of his descendants.

God said to Adam that if he disobeyed he would die. What is the meaning of that death? Well, it includes physical death; there is no question about that. But, alas, it also includes far more than physical death. It includes spiritual death; it includes the death of the soul unto things that are good; it includes the death of the soul unto God. The dreadful penalty of that sin of Adam was that Adam and his descendants became dead in trespasses and sins. As a just penalty of Adam's sin, God withdrew his favor, and the souls of all mankind became spiritually dead. The soul that is spiritually dead, the soul that is corrupt, is guilty not only because of Adam's guilt but also because of its own sin. It deserves eternal punishment.

The doctrine of the wrath of God is not a popular doctrine, but there is no doctrine that is more utterly pervasive in the Bible. Paul devotes to it a large part of three chapters out of the eight chapters in his great Epistle to the Romans which he devotes to the exposition of his message of salvation, and he is at particular pains to show that the wrath of God rests upon all men except those who have been saved by God's grace. But there is nothing peculiar in that great passage in the first three chapters of Romans. That passage only puts in a comprehensive way what is presupposed from Genesis to Revelation and becomes explicit in passages almost beyond number.

Does the teaching of Jesus form any exception to the otherwise pervasive presentation of the wrath of God in the Bible? Well, you might think so if you listened only to what modern sentimentality says about Jesus of Nazareth. The men of the world, who have never been born again, who have never come under the conviction of sin, have reconstructed a Jesus to suit themselves, a feeble sentimentalist who preached only the love of God and had nothing to say about God's wrath. But very different was the real Jesus, the Jesus who is presented to us in our sources of historical information. The real Jesus certainly proclaimed a God who, as the Old Testament which he revered as God's Word says, is a "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; compare Hebrews 12:29). Very terrible was Jesus' own anger as the Gospels describe it, a profound burning indignation against sin; and very terrible is the anger of the God whom He proclaimed as the Ruler of heaven and earth. No, you certainly cannot escape from the teaching of the Bible about the wrath of God by appealing to Jesus of Nazareth. The most terrible even among the Biblical presentations of God's wrath are those that are found in our blessed Savior's words.

Where do you find the most terrible descriptions of hell in the whole of the Bible? It is Jesus who speaks of the sin that shall not be forgiven either in this world or that which is to come; it is Jesus who speaks of the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched (Mark 9:48); it is Jesus who has given us the story of the rich man and Lazarus and of the great gulf

between them (Luke 16:19-31); it is Jesus who says that it is profitable for a man to enter into life having one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire (Matthew 18:9). It appears in the Sermon on the Mount; it appears of course in the great judgment chapter, the twenty-fifth of Matthew; it appears in passages too numerous to mention. It is not somewhere on the circumference of his teaching, but is at the very heart and core of it.

I do not believe we always understand quite clearly enough how great is the divergence at this point between the teaching of Jesus and current preaching. Men are interested today in this world. They have lost the consciousness of sin, and having lost the consciousness of sin they have lost the fear of hell. They have tried to make Christianity a religion of this world. They have come to regard Christianity just as a program for setting up the conditions of the kingdom of God upon this earth, and they are tremendously impatient when anyone looks upon it as a means of entering into heaven and escaping hell.

I have mentioned the Biblical teaching about hell simply because it is necessary in order that you may understand the Biblical teaching about sin. The awfulness of the punishment of sin shows as nothing else could well do how heinous a thing sin really is in the sight of God.

I have tried to present to you in outline something like the whole picture — man guilty with the imputed guilt of Adam's first sin, man suffering therefore the death that is the penalty of that sin, not only physical death but also that spiritual death that consists in the corruption of man's whole nature and in his total inability to please God, man bringing forth out of his corrupt heart individual acts of transgression without number, man facing eternal punishment in hell. That is the picture that runs all through the Bible. Mankind, according to the Bible, is a race lost in sin; and sin is not just a misfortune, but is something that calls forth the white heat of the divine indignation. Before the awful justice of God no unclean thing can stand; and man is unclean, transgressor against God's holy law, subject justly to its awful penalty.

As I try to present that picture to you, I think you as well as I are impressed with the fact that the men of the present day for the most part will have none of it. They will not admit at all that mankind is lost in sin. I remember a service that I attended some years ago in a little church in a pretty village. The preacher was distinctly above the average in culture and in moral fervor. I do not remember his sermon (except that it was a glorification of man); but I do remember something that he said in his prayer. He quoted that verse from Jeremiah to the effect that the heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9), and then he said in his prayer, as nearly as I can remember his

words: "O Lord, thou knowest that we no longer accept this interpretation, but now think that man does what is right if only he knows the way." Well, that was at least being frank about the matter. We have a good opinion of ourselves these days, and if so, why should we not let the Lord in on our secret? Why should we go on quoting with a sanctimonious air confessions of sin from the Bible if we really do not believe a word of them? I think the prayer of that village preacher was bad — very bad — but I also think that perhaps it was not so bad perhaps as the prayers of those preachers who have really rejected the central message of the Bible just as completely as he had and yet conceal the fact by the use of traditional language. At least that prayer raised the issue clearly between the Biblical view of sin and the paganism of the modern creed, "I believe in man."

At the very foundation of all that the Bible says is this sad truth — that mankind is lost in sin. The Bible teaches, we have observed, that every man comes into the world a sinner. It is against that doctrine that the chief attack has been made; and I want to say a few words to you about the attack in order that the Bible doctrine which is attacked may become the more clear. The attack has come to be connected with the name of a British monk who lived in the latter part of the fourth and the early part of the fifth century after Christ. His name was Pelagius. In contravention of the Biblical doctrine, Pelagius said that every man, far from being born with a corrupt nature, begins life practically where Adam began it, being perfectly able to choose either good or evil.

The Bible plainly teaches that sinful actions come from a corrupt nature of the man who commits them, that individual wrong choices come from the underlying state of the person who engages in them. A man is morally responsible for wrong choices springing out of his evil nature, and he is responsible for the evil nature out of which those wrong choices spring. Sin is not just a matter of individual actions. Both the bad actions and also the bad state from which the bad actions come are sin.

I am going to quote one passage from the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and then I am going to ask you whether that one passage does not sum up the teaching of the whole Bible on this point. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good: or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12:33-35) In the light of these words of Jesus, so simple and so profound, how utterly shallow the whole Pelagian view of sin is seen to be! According to Jesus, evil actions come from an evil heart, and both the actions and the heart from which they come are

sinful.

That view is the view of the whole Bible. There is in the Bible from beginning to end no shadow of comfort for the shallow notion that sin is a matter only of individual choices and that a bad man can, without being changed within, suddenly bring forth good actions. No, the Bible everywhere finds the root of evil in the heart, and by the heart it does not mean just the feelings but the whole inner life of man. The heart of man, it tells us, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and because of that, man is a sinner in the sight of God. An evil man inevitably performs evil actions; the thing is as certain as that a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit: but the evil man performs those evil actions because he wants to perform them; they are his own free personal acts and he is responsible for them in the sight of God.

The Bible from beginning to end plainly teaches that individual sins come from a sinful nature, and that the nature of all men is sinful from their birth. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" — these words of the Fifty-first Psalm summarize, in the cry of a penitent sinner, a doctrine of sin that runs through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Upon that Biblical view of sin depends also the Biblical view of salvation. Does the Bible teach that all Christ did for us is to set us a good example which we are perfectly able to follow without a change of our hearts? The man who thinks so is a man who has not come even to the threshold of the great central truth which the Scriptures contain. "Ye must be born again," said Jesus Christ (John 3:7). There is no hope whatever for us until we are born again by an act that is not our own; there is no hope that we shall really choose the right until we are made alive by the Spirit of the living God.

Nothing that fallen and unregenerate men can do is really well-pleasing to God. Many things that they do are able to please us, with our imperfect standards, but nothing that they do is able to please God; nothing that they do can stand in the white light of His judgment throne. Some of their actions may be relatively good, but none of them are really good. All of them are affected by the deep depravity of the fallen human nature from which they come.

That brings us to another aspect of the great Biblical doctrine of depravity. It is found in the complete inability of fallen man to lift himself out of his fallen condition. Fallen man, according to the Bible, is unable to contribute the smallest part of the great change by which he is made to be alive from the dead. Men who are dead in trespasses and sins are utterly unable to have saving faith, just as completely unable as a dead man lying in a tomb is unable to contribute the slightest bit to his resurrection. When a man is born again, the Holy Spirit works faith in him, and the man contributes

nothing whatever to that blessed result. After he has been born again, he does cooperate with the Spirit of God in the daily battle against sin; after he has been made alive by God, he proceeds to show that he is alive by bringing forth good works: but until he is made alive he can do nothing that is really good; and the act of the Spirit of God by which he is made alive is a resistless and sovereign act.

Man, according to the Bible, is not merely sick in trespasses and sins; he is not merely in a weakened condition so that he needs divine help: but he is dead in trespasses and sins. He can do absolutely nothing to save himself, and God saves him by the gracious, sovereign act of the new birth. The Bible is a tremendously uncompromising book in this matter of the sin of man and the grace of God.

The Biblical doctrine of the grace of God does not mean, as caricatures of it sometimes represent it as meaning, that a man is saved against his will. No, it means that a man's will itself is renewed. His act of faith is his own act. He performs that act gladly, and is sure that he never was so free as when he performs it. Yet he is enabled to perform it simply by the gracious, sovereign act of the Spirit of God.

Ah, my friends, how precious is that doctrine of the grace of God! It is not in accordance with human pride. It is not a doctrine that we should ever have evolved. But when it is revealed in God's Word, the hearts of the redeemed cry, Amen. Sinners saved by grace love to ascribe not some but all of the praise to God.

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