

BASIC DOCTRINE – THE FUNDAMENTALS

PART 6: SIN

Humankind was created in God's image and likeness, both male and female, for companionship and intimacy. They were put in a perfect paradise so that they and all of their generations that followed them would enjoy fellowship with God and with one another forever. Why do we see so little evidence of this kind of reality in the world we live in? The history of humanity records an almost unbroken record of conflict, war, and injustice with evils such as cruelty, murder, and the needless loss of life filling the news daily. Even natural disasters such as the weather seem to haunt the human race without ceasing. Why is there so much evil and death in the world, and where did it all come from?

As theologian Louis Berkhof says: "The problem and origin of evil that is in the world has always been considered as one of the profoundest problems of philosophy and theology.... The power of evil both great and universal, is an ever present blight on life in all its manifestations, and is a matter of daily experiences in the life of every man." (Systematic Theology).

Over the centuries many people have tried to give a credible response to this question. Many theories from political to psychological have been offered with varying success, but none offer a completely satisfying solution.

In the fifth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, Paul offers a simple but profound reply to our greatest conundrum when he wrote: *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned — ... by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, ... Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,”* (Rom 5:12-18)

Here, Paul brings us back to the history of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Although the world's first couple was created perfect and put in an environment needing nothing, something happened to change their life and ours. Something occurred that brought evil into the world; an evil which would pit man against his fellow man, spouse against spouse, man against his environment and even his God. And that something is sin.

The Greek word Paul uses here for sin is *'hamartia'* which means a falling away from or missing the right path. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words defines it as “a missing of the mark”.

But the question arises, what “path” or “mark” has man missed or fallen away from?

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary helps us here by defining sin as:

“Lawlessness (1 John 3:4) or transgression of God's will, either by omitting to do

what God's law requires or by doing what it forbids. The transgression can occur in thought (1 John 3:15), word (Matt 5:22), or deed (Rom 1:32)".

The Westminster Larger Catechism characterizes sin as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature."

In other words, what we have missed or fallen away from is the righteous requirements of God's law by an act of willful disobedience.

One of the implications of being created in God's image and likeness implies that we are moral beings with the capacity to make moral choices. God provided our first parents with a Garden of Eden that furnished all of their needs and was pleasant in all of its respects. But within this garden God presented them with a situation that included a choice to make.

Genesis says that "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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."

(Gen 2:8-17)

Adam and Eve had two options, a choice to make on which would determine not only their destiny but the future destiny of humankind itself. They either obey God and continue to eat of the Tree of Life or they could disobey God and eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which would mean the end of their access to the Tree of Life. Theologian J.I. Packer writes: “God set man in a state of happiness and promise to continue this to him and his posterity after him if he showed fidelity by a course of perfect positive obedience and specifically not eating from a tree described as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.

(Concise Theology).

The tree of life represented continuing obedience, trust and reliance on God which would insure both eternal life and blessing, and the other, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized disobedience and reliance on one's self will to determine what was right and wrong which would lead to death both spiritually and physically. The implications of the story are that God wanted Adam and Eve to trust Him to reveal what was good or bad for them. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they were in effect claiming that they could figure out good and evil for themselves without relying on the word of God and that they did not need a relationship with God in order to figure out the right way to live. Unsaved

humankind has been trying to do this ever since and an unbroken record of bloodshed and misery has been the result.

Under the instigation and deception of Satan, the man and woman chose to disregard and disobey God's command and partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The effects of their choice seem to be both immediate and horrific.

First and foremost the first couple was now under the condemnation and penalty of eternal judgment. This penalty would insure man's sentence of guilt and upon death the confinement into eternal hell. One may think that such a small sin does not warrant such an extreme punishment. In other words, the punishment does not seem to fit the crime. But sin, no matter the degree of its nature, is in the final analysis, treason against the command of the holy God who created them.

Adam and Eve's disobedience would also separate them and all of their offspring from the fellowship of God. The unique closeness the first couple enjoyed in the garden with God would now be exchanged for shame, fear and guilt, trying to cover themselves and hiding from the presence of God.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She

also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
(Gen 3:6-8)

Adam and Eve also experienced separation from the environment that God had endowed them with. Their dominion over the earth and harmony with nature was lost. They were expelled from the garden, and earth put under a curse to pit itself against their fight for survival.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread (Gen 3:18-19)

The man and woman were now alienated from the loving relationship they once enjoyed with each other. Instead of a close bonding the first couple engrossed themselves in self-will, blaming the other for what had happened.

The consequences of sin would even leave us at odds with and alienated from ourselves as individuals. Paul confessed: *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law*

of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members

(Rom 7:21-24)

And humankind from this point forward would also now find themselves under the influence of Satan, which is why Paul tells the Ephesians that before being saved they, *“once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.*

(Eph 2:2-3)

As a cost of what they had done, Adam and Eve found themselves separated from God, separated from their environment, separated from the loving relationship with each other, under the influence of Satan and most tragically separated from eternal life under the curse sin and death.

The fall would now, in essence, render our nature; that is, our inward moral intellect and will, into a state of what some have described as corruption. To be in corruption means that that all of our being has been touched by the power of sin and death and, so, we are unable to fulfill completely what we know to be right. Unsaved humankind does not even have much of a desire to do what is right and even saved humankind struggles with sin everyday. This is why there are no perfect Christians.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

(Gal 5:17)

It is important to understand that corruption does not mean that our personality and will are completely destroyed or utterly debase. Corruption simply means that our will, reason and moral ability have been “infected” with rebellion and, though not completely destroyed, has in essence been rendered dead so that we are unable to meet God’s holy requirements.

For the word of God says: *“There is none righteous, no, not one;” (Rom 3:10)*

and again: *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;” (Rom 3:23).*

But not only would the experience of pain and anguish of the first couple be theirs alone, but now all of their progeny would suffer the consequences of sin. Because of the nature of inheritance and the principle of headship, all of Adam’s and Eve’s children and their succeeding generations would appropriate Adam’s moral corruption and penalty of sin. Adam was humanity’s first representative, humanity’s representative head on earth, and we were all ‘in him’. Therefore we inherit, or it has been imputed to us, all that was his, for good or bad. When Adam chose to sin against God’s commandment, all of his offspring would inherit the effect. In theology this is known as original sin. In other words, his fall became our fall, his sin our sin.

“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,” (Rom. 5:18).

The idea of headship representation, that is, one individual can represent a people and the choices that representative makes affects all under him, is seen everyday in the form of representative government. It also is portrayed throughout scripture. Abraham's covenant with God was passed on to his decedents Isaac and Jacob and his decedents. In Exodus the decisions of Pharaoh in his refusal to let the Israelites go had devastating consequences for the people of Egypt.

“Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?" (Exod. 10:7)

Pharaoh was ruler and head of Egypt, and the choices he made not only effected himself but the rest of the Egyptians as well.

J.I. Packer comments on the idea of representation writing: “God made the first man the representative for all his posterity, just as he was to make Jesus Christ the representative for all God's elect (Rom. 5: 15-19 with 8:29-30; 9:22-26). In each case the representative was to involve those whom he represented in the

fruits of his personal action, whether for good or ill, just as a national leader involves his people in the consequences of his actions when, for instance, he declares war.” (Concise Theology).

Adam, by being the first man and God’s appointed representative of humanity, with all of humanity in him, passed lasting spiritual and physical consequences to all of his progeny in the choices he made. When Adam rebelled and entered into fall, all of humanity went with him.

The tragic consequences of sin are played out not only in our daily lives as individuals but humanity as well. Scripture clearly confirms this when it says: *“There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.” (Rom 3:11-12)”*

All of man’s actions, even those of with the best of intentions, now fall short of what God requires because all of man has been tainted with rebellion and sin.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Rom 5:12)

Paul encapsulates the extent of the fall on Man’s life when he wrote to the believers at Ephesus concerning their past life as a sinner saying: *An you He*

made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
(Eph 2:1-3)

We are in a desperate and hopeless situation. Unable to help or rescue ourselves and needing something beyond ourselves we cry out as Paul did when he wrote: *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* (Rom 7:24)

But then he added: *I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Rom 7:25)

God has an answer.