

Man's Ruin

God, having created man, for man's good, for man's companionship, then formed woman (Gen. 2:18-23). The man and the woman were to live in a state of bliss (Gen. 2:24-25), governed by God's command:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 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' (Gen. 2:15-17).

Alas, despite this express command with its clear, attendant warning, man fell:

When the woman saw that the tree [that is, the tree, the fruit of which God had expressly commanded them not to eat] was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and... (Gen. 3:6-7).

That is to say, that, as God had warned the man and the woman, when they sinned by breaking God's commandment, they brought upon themselves the inevitable consequences of which they had been warned. Not only did they come to know that they had sinned, but they felt guilty about it, and, their eyes being opened to their shame, they tried to hide their sin from each other, and from God.

All was vain (Gen. 3:7-14).

As they had been warned, God called them to account and formally pronounced judgment upon them:

Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the

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ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:17-19).

Let me summarise thus far:

Man was created.

Man was created unique.

Man was privileged.

Man was given responsibilities.

Man was placed under the commandment of God.

Man was warned of the consequences of sin, defined as the breaking of God's command.

Man fell – and reaped the consequences: an awakened conscience, a sense of guilt, fear, shame and misery, leading to evasion, attempting to hide from God, but all in vain: Adam and Eve were now under the judgment of a threefold death – immediate spiritual death, eventual physical death, and, if dying unreconciled to God, eternal death.

Moreover man now had to live, not in a paradise, but in a fallen, hostile world. As in Genesis 3:17-19, just quoted, Adam, by his sin, dragged all creation down with him. Thus Paul could speak of:

...the sufferings of this present time... For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it... [in] bondage to corruption... The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Rom. 8:18-22).

This brings us to the crux, the cardinal issue, in this matter of man's sin. We need to be clear as to how – precisely – Adam's sin affected humanity. Adam fell into sin and ruined himself: he, himself, came under the wrath of God for his sin, yes. But his disobedience and its consequences were far, far more serious and far-reaching than that. Adam's sin had a dire effect on all his posterity, the entire human race:

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Sin came into the world through one man [that is, Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... Death reigned... Many died through one man's trespass... Judgment following one trespass brought condemnation... Because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man... One trespass led to condemnation for all men... By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners... Sin reigned in death (Rom. 5:12-21).

By a man came death... In Adam all die... (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

This is the key point. Adam sinned, and by his sin, by that one act of disobedience, he ensured that all his descendants would be constituted accountable sinners under the wrath of God.

What does this mean? How does it show itself?

Paul opened his classic statement of the natural condition of every human being as a sinner under the wrath of God thus:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18).

Because he is a sinner, the natural man 'suppresses the truth'. What truth? Paul spelled it out:

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 honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about

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God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen...

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Rom. 1:18-32).

Let me take the liberty of putting the apostle's words into the present tense:

By their unrighteousness, the unregenerate suppress the truth... They do not honour God as God or give thanks to him, but they become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts are darkened. Claiming to be wise, they become fools, and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images... They exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator... They do not see fit to acknowledge God... [They have] a debased mind... They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

This is the condition of every man or woman by nature; every human being is in this appalling state,¹³ in this condition from conception. This is what David meant when he confessed:

I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me... Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps. 51:3-5).

As Eliphaz put it to Job:

What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? (Job 15:14).

The Psalmist declared:

¹³ In order not to extend this booklet, I simply state that Christ – by virtue of his virgin birth – is the only exception.

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The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth (Ps. 58:3).

Getting back to where we left off in Romans, as Paul went on to show, all men without exception stand guilty and condemned before God (Rom. 2:1 – 3:23). In short:

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10-11,23).

That is, all of us have sinned in Adam and are thus constituted sinners. We demonstrate this by committing our own sins. As Paul reminded the believers at Ephesus:

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 (Eph. 2:1-3).

Referring to natural men, speaking of ‘the futility of their minds’, the apostle declared:

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (Eph. 4:17-19).

As he reminded Titus:

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another (Tit. 3:3).

Here is the merest sample of relevant scriptures making the same point:

The hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Eccles. 9:3).

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Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?
Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil
(Jer. 13:23).

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick;
who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9).

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from
within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual
immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness,
deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these
evil things come from within, and they defile a person
(Mark. 7:20-23).

None are exempt:

Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34).

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes
judgment (Heb. 9:27).

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John
5:19).

This is how Adam left the human race. This is what man's
ruin means. Everyone of us is born in this condition.

No wonder, then, as Christ told Nicodemus:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot
see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless
one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the
kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh,
and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel
that I said to you: 'You must be born again' (John 3:3-7).

Nothing less will do!

As Joseph Hoskins put it:

*Sinners! this solemn truth regard;
Hear, all you sons of men!
For Christ the Saviour has declared:
'You must be born again'.*

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*Whate'er might be your birth or blood,
The sinner's boast is vain;
Thus says the glorious Son of God:
'You must be born again'.*

*Our nature totally depraved,
The heart a sink of sin;
Without a change we can't be saved,
'You must be born again'.*

*That which is born of flesh is flesh,
And flesh it will remain:
Then marvel not that Jesus says:
'You must be born again'.*

This is the need. Is there any hope of it?