

## THE SIN OF ADAM

THE oft-repeated question, “Could not God have prevented Adam’s sin?” may be answered with an emphatic “Yes!” More than that, God could have created him incapable of sin, but He did not only make it possible for him to offend, but impossible for him to do otherwise. Adam transgressed at the first test. We need have no hesitancy in believing that Adam, like all his posterity, was locked up in stubbornness, that he might come within the range of God’s mercy (Rom.11:32).

### GOD’S INTENTION

With all reverence we must insist that, if it was God’s purpose and intention to make Adam sin-proof, then not only Adam, but God Himself, has failed. If an inventor builds a machine which breaks at its first trial we do not hesitate to call him a failure. Furthermore, if the first attempt was so unfortunate, what ground have we to confide in His future efforts?

That God could have a man able to stand, not merely the mild temptation of the garden, but the severest strain of sin, is convincingly exemplified in the case of Christ. Nay, here He had a Man able, not only to live unsullied in a scene of sordid sin, and suffer its presence in others, but to bow to the will of God and suffer the degradation and moral infamy consequent upon His taking the place of sin itself, and come through unstained and spotless in God’s sight.

Had Adam never sinned he would have been a neutral,

a sentient clod unfit for the full companionship of his Creator. Of one thing we may be sure. He would never have known evil. And we may be equally sure that he never would have known good. He would not curse God for sin, neither would he thank Him for His beneficence nor adore Him for His grace. He would have utterly failed to fulfill the purpose of His creation. We must always remember that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had a double function. No one forgets that it brought the knowledge of *evil*. But it was primarily the tree of the knowledge of *good*. Adam had no appreciation of the good by which he was surrounded. Having known nothing else, it was not good to him. He received it as a matter of course, without a thankful thought.

Adam could have lived on indefinitely in such an unappreciated paradise, but only with untold loss to himself and to his Creator. All that he saw was God's hand; His heart was veiled. Some means must be found to rouse Adam's affectionate response to the Divine yearnings. He must learn to appreciate good. How shall this be done?

#### THE TREE

It is a notable fact, and full of significance, that the tree of which Adam ate was no afterthought with God. Adam's ignorance of good did not lead to its planting. It was already grown and bearing fruit. Moreover, it was not hidden in some distant corner, in an impenetrable thicket, unapproachable and forbidding. It was in the very midst of the garden, accessible, and desirable in every way. If it was simply a question of keeping Adam from eating its fruit, it could easily have been removed. Far simpler yet, it need never have been planted. God alone was responsible for all the accessories in Adam's transgression.

But it is of still greater significance that it combined in itself two inseparable functions. Perhaps we would have

preferred one tree to teach the knowledge of good, and another to initiate into the knowledge of evil. But this is impossible in the very nature of things. We may strive to conceive of light apart from darkness, but it proves impossible. Light may drive out all darkness, yet its realization depends on its opposite. So good cannot be known by human beings, apart from evil.

#### EVIL IS NOT ETERNAL

The function of evil in the world is to impart an appreciation for the good. It is God's background on which He will paint the highlights of His grace. We do not say that evil is necessary for the *existence* of good, for then it would be primeval in its origin and eternal in its stay. Evil is a lesson which, once learned, will not need repetition. By its blackness it will brighten the beams of eternal bliss long after it has passed out of existence.

#### ADAM, A TYPE

Furthermore, Adam, so long as he was alone, before Eve was given him as a helpmeet for him, made no mistake. Adam was not seduced by sin. He was not deluded by the tempter (1 Tim.2:13,14). It was far from a mere excuse when Adam said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Rather, he deliberately involved himself in her sin and transgression and offense. In this he was a type of the Second Man, Who knew no sin, yet became sin for love of His own. It was a mistake for him to hearken to his wife, yet it was a profound proof of his affection, for he chose to be with her in sin and all its consequences, rather than to be alone in impeccable solitude.

Nor was the woman's defense a mere excuse. By creation she was not the equal of the tempter. Left to herself she would probably never have thought of disobedience. The

great point in man's primal mistake which we must not miss is this, that both Adam and Eve were sinless within, and would never have made their mistake apart from influences from without. Over these they had no control. We realize in ourselves that Adam's sin has put mankind into a place where sinfulness is thrust upon men even before they have a will. So Adam was surrounded by forces which overpowered him.

#### SEEMING CONTRADICTION

The position that Adam's sin fulfilled God's underlying purpose in creation, seems to conflict with the charge that he should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The same seeming contradiction runs through the entire range of Scripture, but may be seen most clearly in the cross of Christ. No one would think of absolving His murderers on the ground that it was God's will that He should suffer. There can be no doubt that all they did was in accord with the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), formed eons before they had any existence (*cf* 1 Peter 1:19,20). But they did not understand His purpose and acted entirely independent of it. The great glory of God's wisdom is displayed in the way He works out His will by means of the ignorance and opposition of His enemies. Christ crucified shows the utter futility of opposing God, for He has our measure and knows what we will do, and has planned accordingly. Let us always keep God's purpose distinct from the process used in its accomplishment.

Some will say then that God gave Adam a prohibition that he might break it. Just so. Later on He gave Israel a law, through Moses. They, too, thought He meant them to keep it, and in a fatal moment of self-confidence, promised to do so. But we are distinctly told that it was given for an entirely different object—that the offense shall be increasing (Rom.5:20). Had it been kept it would have defeated

the end for which it was designed. Like the law laid down for Adam, it was accompanied by a curse. Blessing comes through the curse, and not through the keeping of law.

It will be evident, then, that the presence of sin in the universe is not a mistake on God's side, but a part of His plan for reaching the hearts of His creatures. The moment that we seek to shift the responsibility for sin from His shoulders to that of any of His creatures, whether Satan or Adam, then we do indeed involve Him in sin, and a way that strikes at the foundation of all future bliss. If a single one of His creatures ever disappointed the purpose of its being and escaped His control, what will hinder a still more serious revolt? Then God will be dethroned, and chaos rule and ruin.

#### SIN'S PLACE IN GOD'S PURPOSE

But we must not be satisfied with tracing sin back to the purpose of God, without discovering something of its place in that purpose, for it is this that gives Him glory and brings blessing to our hearts. If God only *permitted* evil and sin, the plain inference would be that it is a hindrance, rather than a help, in His administrations. Furthermore it would imply that His heart was not in it, and expected nothing from it.

Just as the nature of sin sets our minds at rest regarding its source, so the nature of God heals our hearts as to its object. Now that we know *how* sin entered, it is not difficult to discover *why* it came. It was deliberately introduced by God in order to form a foil for the display of His character and attributes. He planted the tree, He gave the woman, He introduced the serpent. All of the factors which influenced Adam to sin were, directly or indirectly, from His hand.

But His wisdom and His purpose is most clearly seen in the qualities with which He invests the sin even before it

has been committed. Is it intended to reveal His justice? Then He must make it the breaking of a prohibitory law. Is it planned to display His affection? Then He must make it a breach of fellowship. It is because Adam's sin, or mistake, was at the same time a transgression and an offense that it becomes the means for the revelation, not merely of His hand, but of His head and of His heart.

#### SIN IS FAILURE

Keeping before us our accurate definition of sin, we would actually incriminate God, that is, charge Him with failure, if we should insist that Adam's sin was independent of His plan and purpose. If it was God's intention that Adam should continue sinless, if God created Him with the supposition that he would remain holy, then He made a grave mistake, or a sin. But if Adam, in his sin, fulfilled God's purpose, then the very sin of Adam proves the sinlessness of God.

We are sure, then, that sin, or failure, never had any place in God Himself. But we can only maintain this position so long as we acknowledge that it has a place in His purpose. If it is an intruder, unwanted, disconcerting, eternal, then the greatest mistake of all was to "allow" it to enter the universe.

Sin, we repeat, is failure. If God wills the salvation of all, and, because of forces outside Himself, is unable to accomplish the desire of His heart, but plunges the vast majority, or even a remnant, into endless agony, that would not only prove the sinfulness of His creatures, but it would demonstrate to the whole universe that He had come short of the goal He had set for Himself.

#### SIN FOR SIN

In man's vain philosophy wrong is righted by right. But doing right is neutral. The man who pays all his bills

promptly does not expect that to settle an old debt. The bookkeeper who makes a mistake is not relieved by the correctness of all the rest. If the mistake has passed beyond recall, he may still be able to adjust matters by making another error to counterbalance the former. In God's great account book the sins of His creatures are more than overbalanced by the One Who was made *sin* for us, though He knew no sin.

We cannot "atone for past misdeeds by living an upright life." The Israelite was given no work to cover his sin. A just law already demanded all that he could do. His sins must be met on entirely different grounds. Hence they were transferred from him to an animal which had nothing against it. The outpouring of its soul in the appointed manner on God's altar, made a covering for the soul of the offerer, and swung the scales of justice back to a balance. Not that it actually accomplished this. No animal can substitute for a man.

Man's greatest offense more than corrects his minor mistake in Eden. Do we fully realize that, so far as man is concerned, we owe all we have in Christ to a sin unutterably more awful than Eden's transgression? Do we appreciate the fact that not a single great deed or good act ever brought us blessing at all to be compared with man's most malignant sin? Regarded strictly from the human standpoint, the crucifixion of Christ must stand unparalleled in the annals of sin. Yet it is this sin which settles the score of Adam and his descendants and which will bring untold blessing in its train.

We are not seeking to exonerate Pilate, or the priests, or the Pharisees, or Judas. We are not trying to excuse the people. Our vocabulary is not capable of expressing our utter contempt of their cowardice, our horror of their hypocrisy, our loathing of their disloyalty, our shuddering at their shameful sin. But this only accentuates our adm-

ration of the inimitable wisdom of God, which uses such men and such material for the removal of all sin. Viewed from the human side they are fiends incarnate: from the divine viewpoint they are God's appointed priests, slaying the Sacrifice upon the brazen altar.

#### THE PLACE OF SATAN

Satan, indeed, was the chief instigator in this murder. As in the case of Adam, it is impossible to prove that a single human actor in this scene would have performed his part unless he had been impelled from without. No one can read Pilate's words without acknowledging that he did not desire to have a hand in this unjust deed. He was compelled by the priests, the Pharisees, and the populace. These, in turn, were doing the behest of the Slanderer whose children they were. Judas was actually obsessed by Satan before he dared to commit his foul offense.

#### THE CROSS BRINGS UNMEASURED BLESSING

If it must needs be that offenses come, truly it must needs be that this offense of the cross should occur. Surely, if we can see sin nowhere else in God's light we can see it here in its true eternal intent, the medium of unmeasured blessing to the unnumbered millions of God's creatures for all time. And there could be no cross apart from man's supreme sin.

They knew not what they were doing. Had they known the monstrous mistake they were making they would never have had a hand in His murder. It was necessary that they should be ignorant. And if it was essential that ignorant ungodly men commit the sin of all sins in order that the foundation stone of future bliss be securely laid, can we not see in this a great example of the method by which God will transmute all sin into eventual good?

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