

The Consequences of Man's Fall

Man alone was created in the image and likeness of God. Although his created nature as image-bearer facilitates his role as vice-regent over the works of God's hands, the fundamental reason for it is God's intention that man would live in intimate communion with Him. For in order for man to commune with God as a son to a Father, it was necessary that he bear in himself divine qualities according to the capacity of a created being. *And because man was both designed and destined for intimacy with his Creator, he can only find true fulfillment and self-realization within the context of that relationship. It is this foundational truth that makes intelligible the temptation concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* For it reveals that the enlightenment and fulfillment Adam and Eve believed they would obtain through moral and ethical independence was the greatest of deceptions. What they thought would perfect their lives as image-bearers instead brought the death of alienation from themselves and God. Rather than "finding" themselves they irrecoverably died to themselves.

Thus the Fall represents a *cataclysmic and comprehensive anti-climax*: man sought illumination and gained darkness; he sought an ascent toward God and gained estrangement; he sought self-fulfillment and gained self-desolation; he sought an enhanced happiness and gained inescapable misery; he sought true life and found death. The horrific anti-climax of the Fall is unfolded in the Scripture in terms of *innate* and *judicial* consequences, and it is under those two heads that it will be examined.

- 1) The **innate consequences** incurred by Adam and Eve all fall under the summary result that the Scripture refers to as *death*. God had warned them that in the day they ate of the forbidden tree they would surely die, and that consequence befell them apart from any judicial action on God's part.
 - Man's *life* is bound to the principle of *self-consistency* - man being who he is - and this is only realized in his intimate fellowship with God in the context of perfect harmony of the divine and human mind, heart, and will.
 - Consequently, man's assertion of his own will in independence from God ends his life and replaces it with *death*. When Adam and Eve forfeited their proper relation to the God whose image they bore they forfeited *themselves*, since their intimate submission to their divine Creator and Father was the basis for their accurate self-knowledge and sense of self-identity. Ironically, the *emergence* of self spells the *death* of self.

This alienating and isolating "death" that began with the exercise of personal independence would later manifest itself in expulsion from the garden-sanctuary, physical death, and finally the "second death" that Paul refers to as "*everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power*" (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; cf. also Matthew 25:31-46; Ephesians 2:11-12, 4:17-19). Hell's great torment is not physical punishment, but existence forever in the misery of isolation from the life of God, and therefore estrangement from oneself.

- a) The first innate consequence associated with death was *the perversion of the divine image* in man. The serpent had promised Eve (and through her Adam) that eating from the forbidden tree would make them more like God. The great irony of his temptation is that, in one sense, his promise was fulfilled. They did come to know good and evil and so gain something peculiar to God, but that knowledge came at the expense of becoming evil themselves. The result was that they disfigured and perverted the divine image that made them uniquely like their Creator. Their obtainment of the knowledge of good and evil, which they believed would enhance their “Godlikeness,” instead devastated it.

“Fallen man has become godlike in the sense that, now knowing both good and evil, he has to distinguish between them. But his godlikeness is a perverted godlikeness, for now that his life is based on the devil’s lie he calls good evil and evil good. The perversion of his judgment is the evidence of his fallenness...Man knows good and evil in a manner altogether contrary to God’s knowledge of good and evil. His discernment is inverted as well as perverted.” (Philip Hughes, opt. cited)

The perversion of the divine image brought not only the decimation of their likeness to God, it also devastated their *humanity*. For since man is in himself the image of God, to the extent that he becomes less like God he also becomes less like himself. This is why the philosopher could rightly observe that most people live lives of quiet desperation. The balance of humanity consists of those who are either openly desperate or still holding to the delusion of self-fulfillment in the context of self-alienation.

- b) The second consequence of their actions was the initiation of human *shame*. No sooner were their eyes opened than Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness (3:7). This must not be interpreted as indicating that they were for the first time able to see their own physical nakedness. It is not that they were previously unaware that they had no clothing; they had been aware but had felt no shame (2:25). For their nakedness was symbolic of their *innocence*; Adam and Eve were unashamed because they had nothing to hide. But now their innocence had been replaced by the sophistication of a new insight, and with their newly opened eyes they were able to perceive their own guilt. The result was the emergence of the human sentiment of *shame* and the compulsion to conceal themselves.

This need was first expressed in their making loin coverings in order to “hide” from one another, and second in their hiding from God among the trees of the garden (3:8). The One in whose image they had been made, and whose presence had previously brought them fulfillment and great delight, was now terrifying to them (3:10). Adam and Eve had desired independence and had obtained it. But the independence they gained was estrangement born of guilt and expressed in isolation, fear, and mistrust.

In their folly they thought they could hide from God, yet He immediately “finds” them and when He does *He himself clothes them*. This was clearly an act of condescension, but more importantly it represented God’s communication to man that there is no way back to innocence. By making clothes for Adam and Eve the Lord indicated His agreement with them that their shame was legitimate, but also that it was *irreversible*; they did indeed need to be covered. Their action had brought about a true transformation, just not the transformation they sought. There was now no way to go back; they must go forward. Because their hope could not rest in the past, they were compelled to look to the future; the sole means of restored innocence was divine intervention. As God had covered their shameful nakedness at the beginning, so He would cover it at the end.

Thus God’s entrance into the garden following their sin represents the first act of divine *grace*. This grace is seen first in God’s *pursuit* of them; though Adam and Eve tried to flee and hide from Him, the Lord sought them out (3:9). Secondly, grace is evident in His making garments for them (3:21); *God sought them that He might cover them until the day when He would cleanse and clothe them with His own righteousness*. And so from that point forward the whole history of humanity is the history of redemption. History is the methodical outworking of God’s purpose to bring man back to His garden-sanctuary. He would do so by restoring him to his created identity through transforming union with a new Adam - a Man who as perfect image-bearer is also the uncreated God of the image.

- c) Adam’s and Eve’s sense of shame and covering of themselves points to the third consequence of their action, namely *mutual alienation*. They were not simply alienated from God; they were alienated from each other. This can be inferred from their hiding their bodies from one another, but is made explicit by the way Adam responded to God’s questioning. For when confronted with his actions, his response was to blame the woman, even as the woman would later blame the serpent (3:11-13). *Indeed, it could not have been otherwise, for when self is exalted to the place of God, all others are relegated to a place of subservience and personal utility. Everything and everyone serves the ultimate - although perhaps unconscious - end of facilitating one’s own perceived good.*

And since this dynamic characterizes every person as he stands in relation to all others, the inevitable result is the universal enmity of alienation, hypocrisy, manipulation, flattery, suspicion, conspiracy, strife, contention, and all other forms of selfish expression that define human existence. So it was with the “enlightened” man and woman; when confronted with their own wrongdoing they immediately blamed someone else. As human conflict - personal, communal, or national - is the expression of the innate principle of “self as god,” and as this is the very essence of sin, so all conflict among and *within* men can be traced to the episode in the garden.

2) The second category of consequences is **judicial**, in that they resulted from God's direct acts of cursing.

- a) The first judicial consequence fell upon *the serpent*. He had been introduced as having preeminence with respect to the other creatures of the field (3:1); now he was to be cursed more than all of them (3:14). The serpent's cursed status was to be made evident to all by his crawling on his belly and eating dust. The creature that had been "higher" than the others was now the lowest of them all. And so already with this pronouncement there is the indication that man's sin implicated the whole created order, but the exact nature of those implications awaited God's curse on the man.

This aspect of the serpent's curse has led many to conclude that serpents did not originally crawl along the ground as they do now. But God's curse does not necessitate that the serpent was not initially "serpentine"; it is likely that God simply intended for that *created* quality in the serpent to now be associated with his accursed state. Forever he was to be viewed as a slinking, dust-eating creature, brought low under God's righteous judgment. This view is supported by the fact that the cursing of the *human* enemies of God's theocratic kingdom (Psalm 72:1-20) - which judgments typify His eschatological judgment of men and Satan himself - is referred to under this same symbolism (Micah 7:1-17; Isaiah 49:1-26, 65:1-25).

The second aspect of God's curse on the serpent pertained to the introduction of enmity between the woman and the serpent, and between his seed and her seed (3:15a). *This facet of his cursing is of crucial importance, for it establishes the fact that from that point forward there was to be a division of humanity expressed in two distinct categories of men.* They were to be divided into the **seed of the woman** and the **seed of the serpent**. Although at this point the distinction between the two lacks clarity, this theme is progressively developed in Genesis, being itself the foundational basis for the book's "generations sections" structure.

- The division in humanity would occur with the two brothers, Cain and Seth, and from there Genesis traces the two lines, focusing on the Sethite line and the emergence of the patriarchs as those upon whom God's kingdom was to be constructed.
- As a "kingdom prologue," Genesis ends with the promise of the kingdom still prominent and the patriarchal community awaiting its coming. The promise to Abraham would be fulfilled, but not until the Deliverer came. With Moses, then, came the inception of the kingdom, and it was brought to its pinnacle of realization under David. In turn, David received God's promise that the Israelite kingdom was only a foreshadow and type; David's future seed would build the Lord's house and reign over His kingdom forever.

More specifically, a *particular* seed of the woman would sustain a wounded “heel” at the hand of the serpent, but he would prevail to wound the serpent’s head with a deadly blow (3:15b). When it is understood how the two lines of humanity progress, with the Sethite line reaching its ordained destiny in the singular Seed of the woman, the importance of this curse-prophecy becomes apparent. With the advent of Jesus of Nazareth - the promised Son of Abraham and Son of David (Matthew 1:1) - the two categories of mankind are brought to their fullest disclosure and definition:

- The *seed of the woman* are those who are united to her preeminent Seed; accordingly, they share in His triumphal work of crushing the serpent’s head (Romans 16:19-20; Revelation 12:10-11). All others are the *serpent’s seed*, so that Jesus appropriately identified those devoid of true faith in Him as *sons of their father the devil* (despite their descent from Abraham) rather than sons of God (cf. John 8:31-47; 1 John 3:1-12). In this way He showed that sonship as a biblical principle is first of all *functional* and only secondarily *ontological* (related to one’s essential being). For this reason a “worthless fellow” was referred to as a “son of worthlessness” (Judges 19:22, 20:13; cf. also Matthew 23:15, 29-32).
- As well, these two “seeds” are associated with two distinct habitations: the city of *Jerusalem* and the city of *Babylon*; the city of *Zion* and the city of *Destruction* (Isaiah 19:16-25; Hebrews 12:18-24; Revelation 16:17-19, 18:1-24, 21:1-22:5; etc.). As expected, the one is associated with God’s habitation and the other with outer darkness that is separation from His life and light (Matthew 8:10-12, 22:1-13, 25:14-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10).

b) The second judicial consequence was directed toward *the woman*.

- First of all, God cursed the one domain that belongs exclusively to women. Eve misused her co-dominion (1:28) by violating Adam’s headship, and the result was that her unique arena of dominion became a source of her affliction and sorrow (3:16a). She was to be cursed in the bearing of children. In this way Eve is shown to be *uniquely* and *personally* cursed for her actions, and not cursed simply by her association with the man from whom she was taken.
- Further, Eve’s act of usurpation in assuming headship over Adam was to be the basis for the second aspect of her cursing; *her desire would be for her husband, but he would rule over her* (3:16b). Though this “desire” is sometimes interpreted in terms of a sorrowful longing because of unrequited love, the sense actually is *negative* and refers to a characteristic compulsion by which Eve would be driven to exercise dominion over her husband (cf. 4:7).

The language of God's pronouncement is important, for it indicates that the woman is not to be viewed as a victim of circumstance or driven to her domineering attitudes and actions by the man or other factors outside of herself. Her desire for dominion proceeds out of her own cursed femininity. She actively wrested headship in the first instance, and so it would be from that time forward.

c) Third, God's judicial curse was directed to *the man* (3:17-19).

- First and foremost, *Adam was cursed because he listened to his wife* (3:17a). In this way the first sin reflected a reversal of God's created order. Man was to be head of the woman, and together they were to exercise dominion over the earth and its creatures. But they disregarded that design: Eve had subjected herself to the serpent (a creature of the field) and Adam had subjected himself to her. This process also reveals that sin arises when man defers to the *creature* rather than the *Creator*, whether the "creature" is other people, other ideas, or most especially, himself.
- Because he is God's vice-regent and head over all His works, the created order finds its relation to God through man. As a result, *the earth also bore the consequence of Adam's rebellion*. God had previously intimated that the whole creation under the sun was to be cursed (3:14), and now He was making that reality explicit (3:17b-18). As His image-bearers and "lords," Adam and Eve had exercised their dominion as a perfect expression of God Himself. For this reason the earth's relationship with man had been one of harmonious, eager servitude and fealty; now it would rise up against him as a rebellious adversary.

The once cooperative ground would only yield man's sustenance through great exertion on his part; at every turn it would resist him with thorns and thistles (cf. Ezekiel 2:1-6). Note that this language - like that of light and darkness, the serpent eating dust, and the seed of the woman and serpent - takes on profound spiritual significance in the balance of the Scripture. From the point of God's pronouncement, thorns, thistles, briars, etc. are used as symbols for the cursed state of the physical creation (Isaiah 5:1-7, 7:17-25, 32:1-20, 34:1-13; Jeremiah 12:1-13; Hosea 10:1-9; cf. also Hebrews 6:1-8). This is the reason that the Old Testament describes God's coming kingdom in terms of the *absence* of thorns and thistles: the promised kingdom to be inaugurated with the coming of Yahweh's King would involve a comprehensive renewal of the created order proceeding upon the satisfaction of divine justice and the overturning of the curse (cf. Isaiah 55:1-13; Ezekiel 28:20-26).

- Moreover, the ground that man was to subdue would now subdue him; it would swallow him up and consume his flesh (3:19). And yet, the principle of *physical death* that makes all earthly labor vain also opened the way for deliverance from the curse and its *eternal death*. ***Death, too, is the servant of the sovereign God; it, too, serves the eternal and good design of God, namely His glorious deliverance of His creation in His great work of redemption.*** In a marvelous way God determined that death would serve as the instrument of its own destruction and the reintroduction of life (1 Corinthians 15:53-58; Revelation 20:11-21:8).

- d) In God's final act of judicial condemnation He drove Adam and Eve from the garden and stationed His cherubim at its entrance to prevent their reentry (3:22-24). They had desired the freedom to act independently of their God and Father, but that independence meant the loss of His fellowship and life. Thus they were expelled from God's paradise-sanctuary and cut off from the tree of life that stood in its midst. Guilt had made a separation between God and His image-bearers, and no human device could undo it. Only a new creation, with a new covenant man - a new Adam - at its head could bring humanity back into God's sanctuary.

Overarching all of these consequences is the implication that man's *death* - as the summary consequence of his rebellion - *precludes all hope of peace*. Peace is the perpetual "holy grail" of mankind, but it is as illusive and illusory as it is precious. For man's condition is defined by estrangement from God, which means that, as the divine image-bearer, he is also alienated from himself and his fellow human beings. Furthermore, since he no longer knows himself, having forsaken the knowledge of the God in whose image he was created, man's inevitable exercise of dominion is misguided and perverted. Hence, he also lives in alienation from the earth. His existence is one of isolation and unqualified enmity: men live in perpetual conflict with God, themselves, other people, and the world they inhabit, making the story of human existence the story of the calamity of death. *In the truest and fullest sense, fallen man has no peace and no rest; neither does he have any avenue to obtain them, for he cannot escape himself.*

For this reason the theme of *peace* is central to the Old Testament's promise and developing portrait of the kingdom. In glorious wisdom the promise was germinated in the seedbed of God's catastrophic curse upon mankind, and from there it grew, along with the hope of peace, through long ages under the Creator's meticulous oversight and direction. As surely as man had brought desolation to the creation through his own pride and folly, God would bring restoration and peace through His own power and mercy.

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this."