

THE TRANSMISSION OF SIN

How is it that Adam's sin has ruined the race? What is transmitted that constitutes all his descendants sinners? It is surprising how many discordant theories are offered in explanation of this fact. At least six are recognized by name in works on theology, yet it is admitted that not one of these is satisfactory. All are based on the misapprehension and mistranslation of a single phrase. Correct that, and the whole subject becomes luminous and difficulties vanish as the mists before the morning sun.

In Romans 5:12 we read that "through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, *on which* all sinned . . ." The usual rendering, "*for that* all have sinned," reverses the divine statement, and has led to a radical misconception of the truth as to sin, as a principle of action. The mistake is much the same as that made by evolution, which confuses creation with the present course of nature. It is true that death came into the world through one sin at the first, but it is not true that sin is the source of death to Adam's descendants. In their case it is *death* which is inherited, and this not only makes them sin once, but constitutes them sinners.

TWOFOLD EXPERIENCE OF DEATH

We can see the difference between sin as a single act and the principle of sin very clearly in Adam's case. Let us note most carefully the penalty which God attached to Adam's transgression. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Not a word is said of a

change in his nature. All the penalty imposed was a two-fold experience of death. The Hebrew for “surely die” is usually given as “dying thou shalt die.” The present state of our investigations in Hebrew grammar leads us to render it “to die you shall be dying,” which is certainly most concordant with the facts and the truth now being recovered. Adam was *dying*—the process which continued throughout his life; *to die*—the fact which was its climax at the close. This interpretation is fully confirmed, not only by the experience of Adam, but by that of all his posterity. Humanity is now a dying race. Their lives not only culminate in death, but they are vitiated by the gradual operation of death from birth to dissolution.

When Adam sinned and saw the sad consequences of his offense, why did he not cease sinning? Why did he not learn the lesson his one transgression taught? We find that Adam, instead of fleeing from further errors, made more mistakes continually. One sin does not, in itself, constitute a sinner, but the one sin of Adam evidently led to his becoming such. Death entered through the one sin, and *death* it was that made him a confirmed sinner. He no longer needed a temptation from without. He did not require a prohibition from God. All he did was done in error simply because he had lost the vital force which alone could keep him in the path of rectitude.

A DEVITALIZING PROCESS

It is not *sin*, but *death* which came through to all mankind. All efforts to explain how sin came through, which do not recognize death as the medium of transmission, lead men to flounder in bogs and quagmires of thought from which the most eminent theologians have found no way of escape. Adam was not threatened with becoming a sinner if he sinned. He was warned that it would bring death. And this death it was that made him a sinner. So

with his posterity. They inherit mortality, a dying which ends in death, a devitalizing process. They are born to die, and this it is which debars them from acts of righteousness. This it is which constitutes them sinners. This is the “depravity” which makes men go contrary to conscience and against their nature.

Death, not sin, has passed through into all mankind, on which all sin. Death, according to the usual rendering of Romans 5:12, does not come until men have sinned. Yet an infant may die before it becomes conscious. The sinning spoken of here is the act, not the fact. To give the act of sinning as a reason why death came through to all mankind does not tell us how sin is transmitted. We wish to know why we commit this first act of sin and all those that follow.

This passage is often twisted to read, “for that all sinned *in Adam*.” This may have some truth in it, but such a meaning cannot be extorted out of the words. It must be imposed upon them. “All sinned” is an exceedingly simple, self-evident statement, requiring no explanation, no theory to support it. Not so with “all sinned in him.” This must be further explained by the doctrine of “federal headship” and involves endless problems such as the age of responsibility. The phrase “for that” can never be legitimately extracted from the Greek words ON WHICH. They point to the effect, not the cause. All sinned because death passed through to all.

How simple and satisfactory when we read aright! Death passed through to all mankind, *on which* all sinned. *Death* is the channel of sin. Death came through to all mankind. All men are mortal. Sin is a by-product of mortality. The transmission of death by generation presents no problems. It is simply the lack of sufficient life, a deficiency in vitality, of all that flows from the life abundant. We are severed from the Source of life. Men are denied access to the tree of life. They are wanting of the glory of God.

THE EFFECT OF MORTALITY ON ADAM

Let us not miss the simple lesson and striking contrast found in Adam's first sin and in his subsequent life of sin. We know that the first sin came from without. But the temptation was not repeated. Adam probably would not have yielded a second time. Nevertheless, Adam kept on sinning. He made futile efforts to conceal his shame. He hid from Yahweh. He felt himself a sinner. No cause whatever can be found for this course except the words of Yahweh Elohim. The penalty of his sin was death. Death began its operation the very day he ate of the forbidden fruit. And this death it was which led him from one sin to another, so that sin was not merely an isolated act, past and gone, but a present fact, full of sorrowful insistence.

There is no scriptural warrant for any change in Adam's nature. God was very explicit. The thing at stake was *life*. It was not necessary to say to Adam that he would become a sinner, for that is involved in death. Adam became just like his descendants, once death had entered.

SIN REIGNS IN DEATH

We all know that sin leads to death. But that the action is reciprocal, so that death is the cause, not merely of acts of sin, but of the practice and principle, which makes us sinners, has been practically lost to us because our translators gave it no place if they could help it. The apostle tells us that sin reigns *in* death (Rom.5:21), but they changed this to *unto* death, thus spoiling the sense and the figure at one stroke. Sin's sovereignty is not *unto* death but *in* death. Death is the sphere of its sway, the only territory which yields homage to its horrid tyranny.

Let us not lose the force of this figure. Where death is, there sin is supreme. The process of dying, which we call life, produces that predilection to err which is called sin, and puts all under the absolute despotism of Sin. Apart

from a new *life* no sinner can escape servitude from this master. Hence we read the glorious contrast: "thus grace, also, should be reigning, through righteousness, for eonian *life* through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom.5:21).

We press the absolute tyranny of Sin in its own territory, death, not only for its own sake, but to impress the far more potent fact that Grace also is a tyrant, not one whit less securely seated than Sin. O, that the saints would only acknowledge its sway and bow to its beneficent despotism! We all allow Sin's sovereignty, but how few glory in the Grace that utterly displaces it?

Once we have established the close connection between death and sin and the vital relation between life and righteousness, many a passage of Holy Writ will be suffused with added light. Life, eonian life, is practically synonymous with salvation from sin. Life and incorruption go hand in hand (2 Tim.1:10). Those whose names are in the book of life have no part in the second death (Rev.20:15). The resurrection of *life* includes deliverance from all the penalties and disabilities of sin. Life in Christ is all we need. Sin, sorrow, and suffering will cease for us when we are made alive. When death is abolished, sin in fact as well as in act, will be banished from the universe.

OUR LORD'S VITALITY

That which especially distinguished our Lord and Saviour from those about Him was the possession of superabundant life. They were mortal, drifting to their graves. He was so suffused with life that He could lavish His vitality on others. Should they touch a leper, they would be unclean. His touch would cleanse the leprosy. So great was His vital force that He not only stayed the ravages of death before dissolution, but actually recalled a putrid corpse to life. The first Adam became a living soul; He was a life-imparting Spirit.

It is only as we realize that the intense vitality of the Son of God was the basis of His sinlessness and righteousness and holiness, that we are in a position to contemplate the awful significance of His death. As death was not operating in Him, He never should have died. Only His own voluntary act and the violence of His enemies could open the portals of death for Him. But it was not death alone but the attendant consequences which He dreaded. This it was that drew drops of blood from His brow, that set His will at variance with His Father.

The suffering of the Son of God is not our subject at this time. All we wish to point out is the channel through which sin is transmitted. It not only comes to us through death, but so also it came to Him, when He canceled it.

DEATH ABOLISHED

The glorious harmony of this foundation truth with God's great ultimate will be apparent to all who believe in the abolition of death and the vivification of all. If sin can operate only through death it will surely disappear when death vanishes. It will have no channel through which to reach men and no sphere in which to operate. All that will be left of it will be the delicious relief of its absence, and the deep, abiding appreciation of the love that could use it to reveal its overwhelming tide of affection.

The transmission of sin is a matter of paramount importance in the knowledge of God's ways. If sin or a “sinful nature” is inherited, as usually taught, it gives rise to many perplexing problems which are not solved for us in the Scriptures. It makes the whole subject of sin inexplicable, and darkens the resurrection. But if death, or rather dying, mortality, is transmitted, all of these problems vanish. This is why the rendering *on which* is so vital and valuable, in place of the usual *for that* (Rom.5:12).

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