

Backward with Humble Shame We Look*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

Backward with humble shame we look,
 On our original;
 How is our nature dash'd and broke
 In our first father's fall!

To all that's good, averse and blind,
 But prone to all that's ill;
 What dreadful darkness veils our mind!
 How obstinate our will!

How strong in our degenerate blood,
 The old corruption reigns,
 And, mingling with the crooked flood,
 Wanders through all our veins!

Wild and unwholesome as the root
 Will all the branches be;
 How can we hope for living fruit
 From such a deadly tree?

What mortal power from things unclean,
 Can pure productions bring?
 Who can command a vital stream
 From an infected spring?

Yet, mighty God, thy wondrous love
 Can make our nature clean,
 While Christ and grace prevail above
 The tempter, death, and sin.

The second Adam shall restore
 The ruins of the first,
 Hosanna to that sovereign power
 That new-creates our dust!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Tried with Fire: Death and Its Brood***Kevin T. Bauder*

God did not create human beings to suffer or die. Nothing in the Bible teaches that pain had any place in the world God made. God fashioned humanity, both male and female, as part of His good creation. He gave them His blessing. He put them in a place of shelter and provision. He understood and provided everything that was good for them.

In return, He required only one thing: that Adam, and later Eve, would not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. Why this restriction? Surely not because anything was wrong with the tree or its fruit! The Bible observes that, “the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). No, the problem lay in the meaning of the eating. For Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree would signify that he was rejecting God’s judgment of the good and seizing the right to judge what was good (or bad) for himself. For Adam to seize this right could only mean that he saw the Creator as untrustworthy. It would constitute a declaration of independence from the true and living God.

God is the source of all life. Anything that lives derives its life from Him. To declare independence of the Creator is to separate one’s self from life. No wonder that God warned that the penalty for disobedience would be death. God’s threat was no curmudgeonly wish to deny Adam a legitimate pleasure. Instead, it was fair warning against a penalty that would be both a judicial condemnation for and a natural consequence of Adam’s disobedience.

In the end, Adam and Eve allowed the whisperings of the tempter to outweigh the command of God. They ate the fruit, expecting to become wise and to know good and bad for themselves. It was a wretched choice. They gained nothing good. The only part of the tempter’s promises that they actually experienced was a direct and personal knowledge of the bad.

Every aspect of their being was corrupted by their choice. They could no longer enjoy direct and easy communion with God; instead, they fled from His presence (Gen 3:7-11). They began to view each other as competitors, leading to suspicion and the potential for abuse (Gen 3:12, 16). With the sen-



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tence of death arose the beginning of human pain (Gen 3:15-16). The created order was cursed and altered so that it no longer functioned according to its intended purpose; a destructive element was introduced (Gen 3:17-18). Sorrow, pain, and hard labor became part of the human experience (Gen 3:17-18).

A couple of conclusions can be drawn from Genesis 3. First, the death penalty that God pronounced upon Adam worked at more than one level. The sentence clearly involved more than the death of the body. The judgment of Genesis 3 weaves several concepts together. These include alienation from God, alienation between humans, the corruption of human moral nature, the disordering of the created world, and the introduction of suffering and hard labor to human experience.

Second, all of these calamities began with the fall. None of them existed before that time. All were imposed because of Adam's sin. They were either the penalty for or the outgrowth of human disobedience. If Adam had not eaten the fruit, then none of these bad things would have happened. Creation would not have been spoiled. We would not grow jealous or suspicious. We would never see each other as enemies. We would not experience grief, pain, hardship, or death. Most of all, we would enjoy God's blessing as we walked with him in transparent trust.

The moralistic principle, which sees every calamity as the result of specific sin, is mistaken and unbiblical. The Bible does not permit us to infer that those who suffer are necessarily being punished for vice, just as it does not permit us to infer that those who rejoice are necessarily being rewarded for virtue. Some people (infants, for example) experience pain and death, even though they have never committed any personal sins. Neither prosperity nor suffering is proportioned to present righteousness.

On April 12, 2019, Emmanuel Deshawn Aranda seized a five-year-old boy—a perfect stranger—and threw him from a third-story balcony at the Mall of America. By his own admission Aranda intended to murder the child, who suffered broken arms and legs in addition to massive head trauma. Amazingly, the boy survived. When we ask why a child should have to endure such horrors, one of the crassest possible answers is that he was somehow a worse person than his assailant. This child was not being punished for his sins.

Even so, every instance of human suffering stems from Adam's wretched choice. Adam's revolt was what made Emmanuel Aranda's hate possible. It was what brought pain into the world, from the garden of Eden all the way down to the Mall of America. Every bit of human trauma, anxiety, contempt, alienation, grief, torment, and death can be traced to that fateful choice. We suffer because our first father brought sin into the world, and with sin came death.

If we are at all thoughtful we have to ask, "How can this be fair? How can God force all humans to suffer because of something (however wrong) that Adam did?" The writers of the Bible were aware of that question. The Bible provides the answer.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
