

Deep Are the Wounds Which Sin Hath Made

Ambrose (340–397); tr. Louis Benson (1855–1930)

Deep are the wounds which sin hath made
Where shall the sinner find a cure?
In vain, alas, is nature’s aid,
The work exceeds all nature’s power.

Sin like a raging fever reigns,
With fatal strength in every part;
The dire contagion fills the veins,
And spreads its poison to the heart.

And can no sovereign balm be found?
And is no kind physician nigh
To ease the pain, and heal the wound,
Ere life and hope forever fly?

There is a great physician near,
Look up, O fainting soul, and live;
See, in his heavenly smiles appear
Such ease as nature cannot give!

See in the Savior’s dying blood
Life, health, and bliss, abundant flow!
‘Tis only this dear, sacred flood
Can ease thy pain and heal thy woe.

Sin throws in vain its pointed dart,
For here a sovereign Cure is found;
A cordial for a fainting heart,
A balm for every painful wound.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 5: The Consequences of Sin

Kevin T. Bauder

God made humans as mediatorial rulers to rule over creation. In the beginning, God made the world at a relatively lower level of order. Throughout creation week, He brought it to higher levels of order. At the end of the week, He delegated the task of further ordering creation to humans, placing the entire world under their feet (Heb 2:8a). The created world can never truly flourish without human oversight.

Nevertheless, as the writer to the Hebrews notes, humans are not presently exercising their dominion in anything like its complete form (Heb 2:8b). While vestiges of human mastery survive, the world is not flourishing. Rather, it is filled with disorder, pain, and death.

The reason for this disparity is described in Genesis 3, the story of the fall. In the original creation (Gen 1–2), God placed humans on probation. This probation consisted of a single prohibition: they must not eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). If they did eat of that tree, they would immediately pass under sentence of death.

This prohibition seems odd. Why forbid a piece of fruit? The answer lies in the significance of the tree.

On the one hand, it was a literal tree. It had literal fruit (not an apple!) that could be viewed, plucked, and eaten. At this level, God’s prohibition acted as a blunt test of obedience. To obey, humans must abstain from the fruit. To eat was to disobey God’s law and consequently to become treasonous rebels against the king who had appointed them as His mediatorial rulers.

On the other hand, the tree pointed to something more than itself. Its name implies its significance: it was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (bad). The “bad” in this designation contrasts with the “good,” and the “good” must be understood in context. Throughout creation week God declared that what He had made was good. How was it good? Not in the sense of moral rectitude, but in the sense that everything God made was useful and beneficial—specifically for humans.



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Only once did God say that something was “not good” (Gen 2:18): it was not good for the man to be alone. In other words, God perceived a void or deficiency in His creation. A good was absent. God helped the man to see the deficiency by having him classify or name the animals. This was an exercise in comparison that led the man to realize that he was one of a kind. Then God put the man to sleep, and from the man He made a woman, whom He brought to the man. The man’s reaction was ecstatic, recognizing the oneness between himself and the woman (Gen 2:23). The implication is that when the creation lacks a good, God can be trusted to supply it.

This episode provides a context for the temptation in the garden. The tree of the knowledge of good and bad was not only a literal tree but also a representative case. For humans to eat the fruit would mean that they had chosen to understand or define good and bad for themselves rather than to trust their Creator. This act would represent not only a rejection of the Creator’s law but also an attack upon His very character. Humans would be announcing that their Maker was untrustworthy, and that they were rejecting His provision of the good so they could choose the good for themselves.

When the first couple ate the fruit of the tree, they were declaring independence from God. But God is life, and to become independent of Him was to separate themselves from the source of life. How could the consequence be anything less than death?

The results of that first sin were both widespread and devastating. Two results are of special importance here. First, human sin brought death into the created order (Rom 5:12). Because humans were God’s mediatorial rulers with dominion over the world, the world was changed by human sin. It now “groans and travails” until the second coming of Jesus, when it will be restored (Rom 8:19–23). In the meanwhile, destruction, suffering, and death pervade creation. Sin has introduced a very large element of disorder into the world.

This disorder reaches into the human body itself. The first sin brought the sentence of death, and with death came everything that leads to it: debility, decay, disease, dementia. As Paul says, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). This penalty has descended upon the entire human race.

The second result of the fall affects human character, which has become twisted. As God’s vice-regents, unfallen humans were created in untried, mutable holiness. They were capable of sin but disposed toward God. Since the fall, their disposition has been reversed. They intuitively reject God, and because they reject God they cannot rightly accept those who are made in God’s image. Here is the origin of what poet Robert Burns called “man’s inhumanity to man.”

Many and sharp the numerous ills
Inwoven with our frame;
More pointed still, we make ourselves
Regret, remorse and shame;
And man, whose heaven-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,
Man’s inhumanity to man,
Makes countless thousands mourn.

As Paul puts it, humans are now “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom 1:29–32).

Every aspect of human nature has been subverted so that all people are now totally depraved. While they are still capable of natural good and not yet as evil as they could be, they nevertheless think, feel, and choose wrongly toward God. In their rebellion against God, they also think, feel, and choose wrongly toward each other and, indeed, toward the created order itself. They have become predators, exploiters in the bad sense of that term. Worst of all, they find ways to wrap their predation in the garments of virtue. They make themselves feel good about their destructive choices.

Consequently, human dominion faces a double problem. The first part of the problem is that much of the created order has slipped out of the human grasp, so that creation revolts against humans. The second part of the problem is that they too often view the created world (including each other) either as a thing to be pillaged for the satisfaction of their fallen appetites or else as a God-substitute to be worshipped in His place. Whether there is a solution to this problem will be the topic of a future essay.



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.
