

Death Through Sin – The Bible’s Story of Original Sin and the Inception of Physical Death in Eden

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THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” – Genesis 2 (NIV)

¹⁶To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” ¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. – Genesis 3 (NIV)

²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. – Genesis 3 (NIV)

Many Bible readers have developed an erroneous understanding of our punishment following man’s fall. It is the ubiquitous belief that physical death – and some believe death of any kind – was introduced with sin. Until man’s transgression, it is believed that nothing in the universe had experienced death. Plants and animals were merely a few days old and brimming with youthful life. Eden was a paradise where women would not experience pain in childbirth, and men need not toil endlessly tilling the fields, because food was plentiful.

While it is true that pain in childbirth, painful toil of the land, and the curse of thorns and thistles in our crop were the result of sin, Christians who believe that physical death was established at that time are mistaken. If it was, how do we explain the following:

1. God clearly stated that Adam would surely die after eating the

fruit, yet Adam did not physically die. We may conclude that either God lied or He was referring to something other than physical death. I believe that God was referring ONLY to spiritual death.

2. After Adam's transgression God did not want Adam to eat from the "tree of life" and live forever. This would indicate that Adam had not yet achieved physical immortality. If he had, then the tree of life's magical fruit would be of no consequence. God would not need to remove it.

ROMANS 5

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— ¹³for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. — Romans 5 (NIV)

¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. — Romans 5 (NIV)

²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Romans 5 (NIV)

Many readers have referenced the verses above – stated by Paul – to support their belief that physical death entered this universe as a judgment for man's original sin. But is this the essence of what Paul is saying? In these verses Paul is making an analogy between Adam and Jesus. Whereas Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. We can gain the following from these verses:

1. Because of Adam's transgression, death reigned. Death is like a disease that has infected all of mankind.
2. We can receive God's abundant provision of grace through Jesus. It is Jesus' righteousness that allows us to attain eternal life. He is the antidote to the disease.
3. Through Adam there is sin; through Jesus there is righteousness. Through Adam there is condemnation; Through Jesus there is justification. Through Adam there is death; Through Jesus there is

life.

4. We are justified through Christ and can receive eternal life. But what type of life is this? Most Christians believe it is both physical life and spiritual life. But clearly this can not be accurate, since we have not attained physical immortality. Either Jesus failed in His mission, or the type of death that is being discussed in Romans can not be physical death. Consequently, it must be spiritual death.

CONCLUSION

Although most Christians believe physical death began with the fall of man, it is clear from a careful analysis of Genesis 3 that the Bible was describing spiritual death. God stated very clearly that if Adam ate of the fruit he would die. Yet when Adam sinned he did not physically die, thus it was not physical death that God was discussing. In addition, there would be no reason to worry that man might eat from the "tree of life" if mankind had already achieved physical immortality.

The verses in Roman do not alter my conclusion. On the contrary, they only reenforce it. If through Jesus we can attain something that was lost with Adam's fall, then what was lost could not be physical life, since physical immortality has never been "restored" to us – regardless if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Clearly then, what Jesus has restored to us is the opportunity for eternal spiritual life. Consequently, it was spiritual death through sin – and not physical death – that infected mankind with the fall of man.