

“Things Written Aforetime”

“You Shall Surely Die”

In the Garden of Eden, when God gave the command to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He warned Adam and Eve, “...in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). We conclude that He meant “spiritual death,” because Adam and Eve lived, physically, for a long time after their sin. So, spiritual death is the condemnation for sin. A man can live physically, while at the same time being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

By his sin, Adam set the precedent which introduced this punishment for it. Paul confirms this, by saying, “Therefore, as through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Romans 5:12). When I sin, today, I have followed in the pattern of Adam’s sin, and must be punished by the same means, death.

When Paul was describing the spiritual deterioration of those who “refused to have God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:28-32), he concluded that “they that practice such things are WORTHY OF DEATH.” In his list of sins in this passage, those who were merely envious, boastful, and disobedient to parents were as worthy of death as murderers and inventors of evil things. No distinction was drawn, because all deserved the same punishment, death. When one of the angels who poured out the bowls of wrath in Revelation 16 saw the result, he exclaimed to God, “Righteous art thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink: THEY ARE WORTHY.”

Our natural reaction to this might be that God is too severe in requiring the punishment of death for sin. We make our judgments by a more moderate standard, and decide that a little envy, for instance, should not be condemned with the same severity that murder should be. After all, the murderer takes a life, but the envious person is simply *negatively ambitious*.

What we do not realize in all of this is that God is trying to show His attitude toward sin. He is not trying to reflect our standard, but is establishing His own! When Paul considered this problem, he learned the lesson, and passed it on to us. He tells us

that Law serves the purpose of causing us to know what sin is, However, because we have this knowledge, we grow more aware of the sins we commit. What brings it home to us most effectively, finally, is the fact that the Law condemns sin, and pronounces the sentence of death. Paul says, in the Spirit, “So...the law is holy, and the commandment (is) holy, righteous and good. Did then that which is good (the law) become death to me? God forbid! But SIN, that it might be SHOWN to be SIN, by working DEATH to me through that which is good; —that through the commandment SIN BECOME EXCEEDING SINFUL” (Romans 7:12-13).

The fact that God pronounces the sentence of death for sin, and makes no distinction between sins in regard to this condemnation, helps us to realize the exceeding sinfulness of all sin. If the punishment is severe, it is evidence of the extreme offense of sin, in the mind of God.

When we consider again the sin of Adam and Eve, we have two ways to consider it. In the eyes of men, all they did was to eat of a fruit that was not good for them. In the eyes of God, however, their action was one of rebellion. In one sin, they turned from their creator to obey Satan. As if that were not bad enough, they sought to attain prerogatives that belonged exclusively to God. A God of the stature of our Creator cannot endure such offenses, and His punishment of Adam and Eve, and all subsequent sinners, teaches us to re-evaluate His authority, so that we respect His commands.

We cannot escape the fact that we, like all men, have sinned, and that we may still stand under the condemnation of death. With the death-row atmosphere of such knowledge, any sinner must seek to escape through an appeal to the mercy of God. Adam and Eve had only the consolation of futile sacrifices of animals, whose blood could never “take away” sins (Hebrews 10:4). Their confidence in being forgiven had to be placed in the same event that benefits ours, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This escape plan is cause for great thanksgiving, as the Apostle Paul said, “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Let every sinner therefore come to realize the SINFULNESS OF SIN, as can be known by its punishment, DEATH! Let us avoid all sin, as we would the plague.

Holiness is much needed in the church, today. The sinfulness of professing Christians has brought great shame on the church, on Christ, and on the cause of Christ. Let us take a long cautious look at the punishment for sin, the next time we are tempted.