

The Sovereignty of God

Appendix 2: The Case of Adam

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In our chapter on God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility we dealt only with the responsibility of man considered as a fallen creature, and at the close of the discussion it was pointed out how that the measure and extent of our responsibility varies in different individuals, according to the advantages they have received and the privileges they have enjoyed, which is a truth clearly established by the declaration of the Saviour recorded in Luke 12 :47, 48, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did not commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more".

Now, strictly speaking, there are only two men who have ever walked this earth which were endowed with full and unimpaired responsibility, and they were the first and last Adam's. The responsibility of each of the rational descendants of Adam, while real, and sufficient to establish them accountable to their Creator is, nevertheless, limited in degree, limited because impaired through the effects of the Fall.

Not only is the responsibility of each descendant of Adam *sufficient* to constitute him, *personally* an accountable creature (that is, as one so constituted that he *ought* to do right and *ought not* to do wrong), but originally every one of us was also endowed, *judicially*, with full and *unimpaired* responsibility, not in ourselves, but, *in Adam*. It should ever be borne in mind that not only was Adam the father of the human race *seminally*, but he was also the head of the race *legally*. When Adam was placed in Eden he stood there *as our representative*, so that what he did is reckoned to the account of each for whom he acted.

It is beside our present purpose to enter here into a lengthy discussion of the Federal Headship of Adam (Though there is deep and widespread *need* for this, and we hope ere long to write upon this subject in another book.), suffice it now to refer the reader to Romans 5:12-19 where this truth is dealt with by the Holy Spirit. In the heart of this most important passage we are told that Adam was "*the figure* of Him that was to come" (v. 14), that is, of Christ. In *what* sense, then,

was Adam "the figure" of Christ? The answer must be, In that he was a Federal Head; in that he acted on the behalf of a race of men; in that he was one who has legally, as well as vitally, affected all connected with him. It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus is in 1 Corinthians 15:45 denominated "the last *Adam*", that is, the Head of the new creation, as the first Adam was the Head of the old creation.

In Adam, then, each of us stood. As the representative of the human race the first man acted. As then Adam was created with full and unimpaired responsibility, unimpaired because there was no evil nature within him; and as we were all "in Adam", it necessarily follows that all of us, *originally*, were also endowed with full and unimpaired responsibility. Therefore, in Eden, it was not merely the responsibility of Adam as a single person that was tested, but it was Human Responsibility, the Responsibility of the Race, as a whole and in part, which was on trial.

Webster defines responsibility first, as "liable to account"; second, as "able to discharge an obligation". Perhaps the meaning and scope of the term responsibility might be expressed and summed up in the one word *oughtness*. Godwards, responsibility respects that which is *due* the Creator from the creature, and which the creature is under moral obligations to render.

In the light of the above definition it is at once apparent that responsibility is something that must be *placed on trial*. And as a fact, this is, as we learn from the Inspired Record, exactly what transpired in Eden. Adam was placed on probation. His obligations to God were put to the test. His loyalty to the Creator was tried out. The test consisted of obedience to his Maker's command. Of a certain tree he was forbidden to eat.

But right here a very formidable difficulty confronts us. From *God's* standpoint the *result* of Adam's probation was not left in uncertainty. Before He formed him out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, God knew exactly how the appointed test would terminate. With this statement every Christian reader must be in accord, for, to deny God's foreknowledge is to deny His omniscience, and this is to repudiate one of the fundamental attributes of Deity. But we must go further: not only had God a perfect foreknowledge of the outcome of Adam's trial, not only did His omniscient eye see Adam eating of the forbidden fruit, but He *decreed* beforehand that he *should* do so. This is evident not only from the general fact that *nothing happens* save that which the Creator and Governor of the universe has eternally purposed, but also from the express declaration of Scripture that Christ as a *Lamb* "verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). If, then, God had foreordained before the foundation of the world that Christ should, in due time, be offered as a Sacrifice for sin, then it is unmistakably evident that God had also foreordained sin should enter the world, and if so, that Adam should transgress and fall. In full harmony

with this, *God Himself* placed in Eden the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and also allowed the Serpent to enter and deceive Eve.

Here then is the difficulty: If God has eternally decreed that Adam *should* eat of the tree, how could he be held responsible *not* to eat of it? Formidable as the problem appears, nevertheless, it is capable of a solution, a solution, moreover, which can be grasped even by the finite mind. The solution is to be found in the distinction between God's secret will and His revealed will. As stated in Appendix I, human responsibility is measured by our knowledge of God's *revealed* will; what God *has* told us, not what He has not told us, is the definer of our duty. So it was with Adam.

That God had decreed sin should enter this world through the disobedience of our first parents was a secret hid in His own breast. Of this Adam knew nothing, and that made all the difference so far as his responsibility was concerned. Adam was quite unacquainted with the Creator's hidden counsels. What concerned him was God's revealed will. And that was plain! God had forbidden him to eat of the tree, and that was enough. But God went further: He even warned Adam of the dire consequences which would follow should he disobey—death would be the penalty. Transgression, then, on the part of Adam was entirely excuseless. Created with no evil nature in him, with a will in perfect equipoise, placed in the fairest environment, given dominion over all the lower creation, allowed full liberty with only a single restriction upon him, plainly warned of what would follow an act of insubordination to God, there was every possible inducement for Adam to preserve his innocence; and, should he fail and fall, then by every principle of righteousness his blood must lie upon his own head, and his guilt be imputed to all in whose behalf he acted.

Had God disclosed to Adam His purpose that sin would enter this world, and that He had decreed Adam *should* eat of the forbidden fruit, it is obvious that Adam could not have been held responsible *for* the eating of it. But in that God *withheld* the knowledge of His counsels from Adam, his accountability was *not* interfered with.

Again; had God created Adam with a bias toward evil, then human responsibility had been impaired and man's probation merely one in name. But inasmuch as Adam was included among that which God, at the end of the sixth day, pronounced "Very good", and, inasmuch as man was made "upright" (Eccl. 7:29), then every mouth must be "stopped" and "the whole world" must acknowledge itself "*guilty* before God" (Rom. 3:19).

Once more, it needs to be carefully borne in mind that God did not decree that Adam should sin *and then inject into Adam an inclination to evil*, in order that His decree might be carried out. No; "God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth *He* any man" (James 1:13). Instead, when the Serpent came to tempt Eve, God caused her *to remember* His command forbidding to eat of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil and of the penalty attached to disobedience! Thus, though God *had* decreed the Fall, in no sense was He the *Author* of Adam's sin, and at no point was Adam's responsibility impaired. Thus may we admire and adore the "*manifold* wisdom of God", in devising a way whereby His eternal decree should be accomplished, and yet the responsibility of His creatures be preserved intact.

Perhaps a further word should be added concerning the decretive will of God, particularly in its relation to evil. First of all we take the high ground that, whatever things God does or permits, are right, just, and good, simply because *God* does or permits them. When Luther gave answer to the question, "Whence it was that Adam was permitted to fall, and corrupt his whole posterity; when God could have prevented him from falling, etc", he said, "God is a Being whose will acknowledges no cause: neither is it for us to prescribe rules to His sovereign pleasure, or call Him to account for what He does. He has neither superior nor equal; and His will is the rule of all things. He did not thus will such and such things because they were right, and He was bound to will them; but they are therefore equitable and right because He wills them. The will of man, indeed, may be influenced and moved; but God's will never can. To assert the contrary is to undeify Him" (De Servo, Arb. c/ 153).

To affirm that God decreed the entrance of sin into His universe, and that He foreordained all its fruits and activities, is to say that which, at first may shock the reader; but reflection should show that it is far more shocking to insist that sin has invaded His dominions *against* His will, and that its exercise is *outside* His jurisdiction: for in such a case where would be His omnipotency? No; to recognize that God has foreordained all the activities of evil, is to see that He is the *Governor* of sin: His will determines its exercise, His power regulates its bounds (Ps. 76:10). He is neither the Inspirer nor the Infuser of sin in any of His creatures, but He *is* its Master, by which we mean God's management of the wicked is so entire that, they can do nothing save that which His hand and counsel, from everlasting, determined should be done.

Though nothing contrary to holiness and righteousness can ever emanate from God, yet He has, for His own wise ends, ordained His creatures to fall into sin. Had sin never been permitted, how could the justice of God have been displayed in punishing it? How could the wisdom of God have been manifested in so wondrously over-ruling it? How could the grace of God have been exhibited in pardoning it? How could the power of God have been exercised in subduing it? A very solemn and striking proof of *Christ's* acknowledgment of God's decretal of sin is seen in His treatment of Judas. The Saviour knew full well that Judas would betray Him, yet we never read that He expostulated with him! Instead, He said to him, "That thou doest, *do* quickly" (John 13 :27)! Yet, mark this was said *after* he had received the sop and Satan had taken possession of his heart. Judas was already prepared for and determined on his traitorous work, therefore did Christ

permissively (bowing to His Father's ordination) bid him go forth to his awful work.

Thus, though God is *not* the Author of sin, and though sin is contrary to His holy *nature*, yet the existence and operations of it are not contrary to His *will*, but subservient to it. God never tempts man to sin, but He has, by His eternal counsels (which He is now executing), *determined its course*. Moreover, as we have shown in chapter 8, though God has decreed man's sins, yet is man responsible not to commit them, and blamable because he does. Strikingly were these two sides of this awful subject brought together by Christ in that statement of His: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it *must needs be* that offences come (because God has foreordained them); *but woe to that man* by whom the offence cometh" (Matt. 18:7). So, too, though all which took place at Calvary was by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), nevertheless, "wicked hands" crucified the Lord of glory, and, in consequence, His blood has righteously rested upon them and on their children. High mysteries are these, yet it is both our happy privilege and bounden duty to humbly receive whatsoever God has been pleased to reveal concerning them in His Word of Truth.

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