

Conclusion

There is a very practical side to the above discussion that affects every believer in Jesus Christ. This study has suggested a causal relationship between sin and death. Yet because of God's grace and mercy, there is another aspect to that relationship, for the Bible also presents a relationship between sin, death, and atonement.

When man fell, God cursed him with both physical and spiritual death. God took it upon Himself to provide an atonement for the original couple; He took two animals and made clothing. In order to get animal skins, the animals must have been killed. Sin always brings with it death, and this is the first recorded death. These two animals provided a blood sacrifice atoning for Adam's and Eve's sin. We are told in Hebrews 9:22, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." So a blood sacrifice is only necessary if there is sin. The rest of the Old Testament has similar treatment of sacrifice for atonement. If there was animal death before the fall of man, then God and all those who followed His pattern did useless acts. One must observe that in the atonement the animal loses its life in the place of the human. If animal death existed before the fall, then the object lesson represented by the atoning sacrifice is in reality a cruel joke.

The New Testament has one sacrifice for atonement, for Jesus Christ is called the "Lamb of God." If we believe that death has always existed, then we make a mockery of the death of Christ. This is exactly what evolution means. The atheist is at least honest about his position. We can observe this by the statement of G. Bozarth. He says: "Christianity has fought, still fights, and will continue to fight science to the desperate end over evolution, because evolution destroys utterly and finally the very reason Jesus' earthly life was supposedly made necessary. Destroy Adam and Eve and the original sin, and in the rubble you will find the sorry remains of the Son of God. If Jesus was not the redeemer who died for our sins, and this is what evolution means, then Christianity is nothing."⁹ If death is not the penalty for sin, then Christianity is meaningless. The death of Christ was made necessary because of man's sin. Man's sin brought death, which in turn brought God's Son to pay the penalty in our place.

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...If you call out for Insight...

You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
Based on Proverbs 2:3-5

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Death Before Sin?

by James Stambaugh, M.Div.*

Most people are familiar with the creation/evolution issue, yet not many people realize the importance of death to each view. The fact is that, for evolution, death is a sort of creative force. Those who believe in evolution must believe that death has always existed. This is exemplified by theistic evolutionist Dr. Howard Van Till, who says: "It is an incontrovertible scientific fact that there is a long history of life and death for period of billions of years before people like you and I appeared on earth. So physical death before the fall must be accepted as a fact of science."¹ Those who accept the Bible believe that death is a punishment for sin; death must have come into existence after Adam fell. This article is designed to provoke the thinking of God's people about the significance of death and will examine various aspects of the creation as recorded in Scripture, both before and after the fall. We will explore the state of God's original creation and the effects of God's cursing the creation, and consider the eternal state when death will be abolished.

Meaning Of "Good"

How are we to understand the original state of God's creation? Here we must explore what God meant when He declared His creation to be "very good," in Genesis 1:31. The Hebrew word for "good," like the English word, has many meanings. In fact, the Hebrew word has ten meanings.² The majority of the occurrences can mean "beautiful" or "expensive." When it is used of men, it often has moral implications. The word "good" is here modified by the word "very." "Very" occurs in the Old Testament 300 times, and carries with it the idea of a superlatives,^{3,4} Elsewhere, the phrase "very good" is used by men who have been affected by the fall of Adam. But in Genesis 1:31, the statement is made by God—the One who is perfect in all that He does. The very least one can note about God saying this of His creation is that He has given it His approval. Dr. John Davis says that the statement is according to the purpose of God,⁵ denoting that the original creation was suitable according to God's purposes. This is also noted by Nigel Cameron: "The world which God made for man to inhabit was 'very good.' It had been prepared to receive him as its crown, and the setting was constructed so as to be ideal for the probation to which

* Mr. Stambaugh is the Librarian for Institute for Creation Research (ICR).

Adam and Eve were called. The world was not created with the Fall in prospect, still less with the curse already let loose."⁶

There is not much said about the diet of man and the animals in the Garden of Eden. An integral part of the evolutionary scenario is that both men and many of their animal ancestors have always been carnivorous. Yet God said very clearly that both man and animals were only to eat plants, in Genesis 1:29. This we can see as part of being "very good," and is God's best for His creation. We are not told when animals became carnivorous, yet we do know that man was not to eat meat until after the Flood (Genesis 9:3).

This raises an interesting problem for the evolutionist. He must believe that God intended man and animals to be carnivorous, even though God's words are very clear (Genesis 1:29). He must, in all reality, call God a liar; he must say that God did not mean what He said. If men and animals were vegetarian, then the possibility of death in the original creation becomes remote.

Plants Not Alive

The above statements do not rule out death of plants. Some see this as a major stumbling block. Dr. Hugh Ross observes that plants die. He says: "Some have interpreted this verse (Romans 5:12) as implying that there was no death of any kind before the sin of Adam, and, therefore, only a few days could possibly have transpired between the creation of the first life and the sin of Adam. However, the absence of death would pose just as much a problem for three 24-hour days as it would for three billion years. Many species of life cannot survive for even three hours without food, and the ingestion of food requires at least the death of plants."⁷ This is, of course, true, except that the Bible never ascribes to plants the status of "life," (nor to the "lower" animals, for that matter).

The Bible is very clear about the nature of life. Life, according to the Bible, resides in the "soul," or the Hebrew word "nephesh." This might be equated roughly with the concept of consciousness. This quality is ascribed only to man and some animals, but never plants. The Bible is also very clear as to what happens to plants—"they wither and fade" (Isaiah 40:6-8; James 1:10) but plants never die. They have biological life, but not Biblical life. Men and animals could eat plant life without death, in Biblical terms, taking place.

Adam's Sin Brought Death

Let us consider death in God's original plan. The passages most often referred to on this topic, Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:20-26, clearly illustrate the fact that our death resulted from Adam's sin. Yet the Bible has more to say which helps us bring this issue into focus.

The wording of Genesis 2:17 is very clear—"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What did God mean by "die?" If we examine the events of the fall, we will find that Adam did not physically die when he first ate the fruit, tempting many to say that Adam fell only in a spiritual sense. But we must note two things that differentiate Adam from ourselves. First, Adam was created perfect and sinless. Second., because he was created sinless, he was not originally condemned to

physical death. When Adam ate from that tree, he truly died, just as God promised he would. He died spiritually at that moment, but he was also cursed with the ultimate reality of physical death. Physical death is the result of spiritual death, so that 930 years later, Adam's body finally caught up to his spirit.

Adam's sin had a tremendous effect on the entire world. We can see this clearly stated in Genesis 3:17,18 and Romans 8:19-21. The Genesis passage states that all creation was cursed by God for man's sake. It seems that God wanted to give the human race an object lesson. The lesson, it would appear, is to make the outer world of man like the inner world of man. Man is now a fallen sinner, and so God shows him what his spiritual state is like when he looks at nature. So when man looks at nature, he can see the glory of God, although it is veiled by the curse of sin. Such a demonstration of the results of sin should drive men back to God for His solution to sin and death.

The passage in Romans 8:19-21 confirms the thought of Genesis. In fact, these verses are Paul's commentary on Genesis 3:17, 18. Here Paul tells us that the whole of creation has been subjected to "vanity" by God because of man's sin. The word "vanity" refers to that which fails to attain its basic goal. This means "that the non-human creation has been subjected to the frustration of not being able to properly fulfill the purpose of its existence."⁸ The entire creation experienced the same fate that man did when he fell. Now, since man is the initiator of the curse on the earth, he must also somehow be the initiator of the restoration of the creation, and this is exactly what Paul is trying to tell us. God was to be glorified by the smooth running of nature. When man fell, his act brought sin and death. Therefore, if death prohibits the smooth running of nature, then death must not have been a part of God's original plan.

The Effects Of Sin Removed

Scripture plainly tells us that God will remove the effects of man's sin. This is the conclusion of Romans 8:19-21, yet we can see other passages which picture the results of God's intervention, such as Isaiah 11:6-9 and Revelation 21, 22.

The Isaiah passage clearly depicts a totally different picture of nature than we presently experience. Animals are eating only plants. Once again, there is no more carnivorous activity. Animals, even poisonous snakes, can play with infants. This is a totally different future for the world than is predicted by evolution.

The two chapters in Revelation show that after sin is vanquished, death, pain, and sorrow will also be vanquished. If this is the restoration of the creation, we are left with a plaguing question about death if we believe in evolution. Why is death being done away with? If God originally intended death to be an integral part of His creation, then God should allow death to continue into eternity. So we are left with the conclusion that death is an aberration caused by man, in God's plan.

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