

WHY EVIL WAS PERMITTED⁺

THE HARMONIOUS CO-OPERATION OF THE CREATOR'S WISDOM, JUSTICE, LOVE AND POWER WITNESSED THEREBY

EVIL is that which produces unhappiness; anything which either directly or remotely causes suffering of any kind—*Webster*. This subject, therefore, not only inquires regarding human ailments, sorrows, pains, weaknesses and death, but goes back of all these to consider their primary cause—sin—and its remedy. Since sin is the cause of evil, its removal is the only method of permanently curing the malady.

No difficulty, perhaps, more frequently presents itself to the inquiring mind than the questions, Why did God permit the present reign of evil? Why did he permit Satan to present the temptation to our first parents, after having created them perfect and upright? Or why did he allow the forbidden tree to have a place among the good? Despite all attempts to turn it aside, the question will obtrude itself—Could not God have prevented all possibility of man's fall?

The difficulty undoubtedly arises from a failure to comprehend the plan of God. God could have prevented the entrance of sin, but the fact that he did not should be sufficient proof to us that its present permission is designed ultimately to work out some greater good. God's plans, seen in their completeness, will prove the wisdom of the course pursued. Some inquire, Could not God, with whom all things are possible, have interfered in season to prevent the full accomplishment of Satan's design? Doubtless he could; but such interference would have prevented

⁺ See *The Old Theology* No. 74; also, MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. I, CHAP. VII: [A117].

the accomplishment of his own purposes. His purpose was to make manifest the perfection, majesty and righteous authority of his law, and to prove both to men and to angels the evil consequences resulting from its violation. Besides, in their very nature, some things are impossible even with God, as the Scriptures state. It is 'impossible for God to lie'. (Heb. 6:18). 'He cannot deny himself' (2 Tim. 2:13). He cannot do wrong, and therefore he could not choose any but the wisest and best plan for introducing his creatures into life, even though our short-sighted vision might for a time fail to discern the hidden springs of infinite wisdom.

The Scriptures declare that all things were created for the Lord's pleasure (Rev. 4:11)—without doubt, for the pleasure of dispensing his blessings, and of exercising the attributes of his glorious being. And though, in the working out of his benevolent designs, he permits evil and evildoers for a time to play an active part, yet it is not for evil's sake, nor because he is in league with sin; for he declares that he is 'not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness'. (Psa. 5:4.) Though opposed to evil in every sense, God *permits* (i. e., does not hinder) it for a time, because his wisdom sees a way in which it may be made a lasting and valuable lesson to his creatures.

It is a self-evident truth that for every right principle there is a corresponding wrong principle; as, for instance, truth and falsity, love and hatred, justice and injustice. We distinguish these opposite principles as *right* and *wrong*, by their effects when put in action. That principle the result of which, when active, is beneficial and productive of ultimate order, harmony and happiness, we call a *right* principle; and the opposite, which is productive of discord, unhappiness and destruction, we call a *wrong* principle. The results of these principles in action we call *good* and *evil*; and the intelligent being, capable of discerning the right

principle from the wrong, and voluntarily governed by the one or the other, we call virtuous or sinful.

This faculty of discerning between right and wrong principles is called *the moral sense*, or *conscience*. It is by this moral sense which God has given to man that we are able to judge of God and to recognise that he is good. It is to this moral sense that God always appeals to prove his righteousness or justice; and by the same moral sense Adam could discern sin, or unrighteousness, to be *evil*, even before he knew all its consequences. The lower orders of God's creatures are not endowed with this moral sense. A dog has some intelligence, but not to this degree, though he may learn that certain actions bring the approval and reward of his master, and certain others his disapproval. He might steal or take life, but would not be termed a sinner; or he might protect property and life, but would not be called virtuous—because he is ignorant of the moral quality of his actions.

God could have made mankind devoid of ability to discern between right and wrong, or able only to discern and to do right; but to have made him so would have been to make merely a living machine, and certainly not a mental image of his Creator. Or he might have made man perfect and a free agent, as he did, and have guarded him from Satan's temptation. In that case, man's experience being limited to good, he would have been continually liable to suggestions of evil from without, or to ambitions from within, which would have made the everlasting future uncertain, and an outbreak of disobedience and disorder might always have been a possibility, besides which, good would never have been so highly appreciated except by its contrast with evil.

God first made his creatures acquainted with good, surrounding them with it in Eden; and afterward, as a penalty for disobedience, he gave

them a severe knowledge of evil. Expelled from Eden and deprived of fellowship with himself, God let them experience sickness, pain and death, that they might thus forever know evil and the inexpediency and exceeding sinfulness of sin.

By a comparison of results they came to an appreciation and proper estimate of both; 'And the Lord said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil'. (Gen. 3:22) In this their posterity share, except that they first obtain their knowledge of evil, and cannot fully realise what good is until they experience it in the Millennium, as a result of their redemption by him who will then be their Judge and King.

The moral sense, or judgment of right and wrong, and the liberty to use it, which Adam possessed, were important features of his likeness to God. The law of right and wrong was written in his natural constitution. It was a part of his nature, just as it is a part of the divine nature. But let us not forget that this image or likeness of God, this originally law-inscribed nature of man, has lost much of its clear outline through the erasing, degrading influence of sin; hence it is not now what it was in the first man. Ability to love implies ability to hate; hence we may reason that the Creator could not make man in his own likeness, with power to love and to do right, without the corresponding ability to hate and to do wrong. This liberty of choice, termed free moral agency, or free will, is a part of man's original endowment; and this, together with the full measure of his mental and moral faculties, constituted him an image of his Creator. Today, after six thousand years of degradation, so much of the original likeness has been erased by sin that we are not free, being bound, to a greater or less extent, by sin and its entailments, so that sin is now more easy and therefore more agreeable to the fallen race than is righteousness.

That God could have given Adam such a vivid impression of the many evil results of sin as would have deterred him from it, we need not question, but we believe that God foresaw that an actual experience of the evil would be the surest and most lasting lesson to serve man eternally; and for that reason God did not prevent but permitted man to take his choice, and to feel the consequences of evil. Had opportunity to sin never been permitted, man could not have resisted it, consequently there would have been neither virtue nor merit in his right-doing. God seeketh such to worship him as worship in spirit and in truth. He desires intelligent and willing obedience, rather than ignorant, mechanical service. He already had in operation inanimate mechanical agencies accomplishing his will, but his design was to make a nobler thing, an intelligent creature in his own likeness, a lord for earth, whose loyalty and righteousness would be based upon an appreciation of right and wrong, of good and evil.

The principles of right and wrong, as *principles*, have always existed, and must always exist; and all perfect, intelligent creatures in God's likeness must be free to choose either, though the right principle *only* will forever continue to be active. The Scriptures inform us that when the activity of the evil principle has been permitted long enough to accomplish God's purpose, it will forever cease to be active, and that all who continue to submit to its control shall forever cease to exist. (1 Cor. 15:25, 26; Heb. 2:14.) Right-doing and right-doers, only, shall continue forever.

But the question recurs in another form: Could not man have been made acquainted with evil in some other way than by experience? There are four ways of knowing things, namely, by intuition, by observation, by experience, and by information received through sources accepted as positively truthful. An intuitive knowledge would be a direct

apprehension, without the process of reasoning, or the necessity for proof. Such knowledge belongs only to the divine Jehovah, the eternal fountain of all wisdom and truth, who, of necessity and in the very nature of things, is superior to all his creatures. Therefore, man's knowledge of good and evil could not be intuitive. Man's knowledge might have come by observation, but in that event there must needs have been some exhibition of evil and its results for man to observe. This would imply the permission of evil somewhere, among some beings, and why not as well among men, and upon the earth, as among others elsewhere?

Why should not man be the illustration, and get his knowledge by practical experience? It is so: man is gaining a practical experience, and is furnishing an illustration to others as well, being 'made a spectacle to angels'.

The severity of the penalty was not a display of hatred and malice on God's part, but the necessary and inevitable, final result of evil, which God thus allowed man to see and feel. God can sustain life as long as he sees fit, even against the destructive power of actual evil; but it would be as impossible for God to sustain such a life everlastingly, as it is for God to lie. That is, it is *morally impossible*. Such a life could only become more and more a source of unhappiness to itself and others; therefore, God is too good to sustain an existence so useless and injurious to itself and others, and, his sustaining power being withdrawn, destruction, the natural result of evil, would ensue. Life is a favour, a gift of God, and it will be continued everlastingly only to the obedient.

No injustice has been done to Adam's posterity in not affording them each an individual trial. Jehovah was in no sense bound to bring us into existence; and, having brought us into being, no law of equity or justice binds him to perpetuate our being everlastingly, nor even to grant us a

trial under promise of everlasting life if obedient. Mark this point well: The present life, which from the cradle to the tomb is but a process of dying, is, notwithstanding all its evils and disappointments, a boon, a favour, even if there were no hereafter. The large majority so esteem it, the exceptions (suicides) being comparatively few; and these our courts of justice have repeatedly decided to be mentally unbalanced, as otherwise they would not thus cut themselves off from present blessings. Besides, the conduct of the perfect man, Adam, shows us what the conduct of his children would have been under similar circumstances.

Many have imbibed the erroneous idea that God placed our race on trial for life with the alternative of *eternal torture*, whereas nothing of the kind is even hinted at in the penalty. The favour or blessing of God to his obedient children is life—continuous life—free from pain, sickness and every other element of decay and death. Adam was given this blessing in the full measure, but was warned that he would be deprived of this ‘gift’ if he failed to render obedience to God—‘In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying, thou shalt die’. He knew nothing of a *life* in torment, as the penalty of sin. Life everlasting is nowhere promised to any but the obedient. Life is God’s gift, and death, the opposite of life, is the penalty he prescribes.

Eternal torture is nowhere suggested in the Old Testament Scriptures, and only a few statements in the New Testament can be so misconstrued as to appear to teach it: and these are found either among the symbolisms of Revelation, or among the parables and dark sayings of our Lord, which were *not understood* by the people who heard them (Luke 8:10), and which

seem to be but little better comprehended today.* ‘The wages of sin is death’. (Rom. 6:23.) ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die’.—Ezek. 18:4.

Many have supposed God unjust in allowing Adam’s condemnation to be shared by his posterity, instead of granting each one a trial and chance for everlasting life similar to that which Adam enjoyed. But what will such say if it now be shown that the world’s opportunity and trial for life will be much more favourable than was Adam’s; and that, too, *because* God adopted this plan of permitting Adam’s race to share his penalty in a natural way? We believe this to be the case, and will endeavour to make it plain.

God assures us that as condemnation *passed upon* all *in* Adam, so he has arranged for a new head, father or life-giver for the race, into whom all may be transferred by faith; and that as all *in* Adam shared the curse of death, so all *in* Christ will share the blessing of life, being justified by faith in his blood. (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19.) Thus seen, the death of Jesus, the undefiled, the sinless one, was a complete settlement toward God of the sin of Adam. As one man had sinned, and all in him had shared his curse, his penalty, so Jesus, having paid the penalty of that one sinner, bought not only Adam, but all his posterity,—all men—who by heredity shared his weaknesses and sins and the penalty of these,—death. Our Lord, ‘the *man* Christ Jesus’, himself unblemished, approved, and with a perfect seed or race in him, unborn, likewise untainted with sin, gave his *all* of human life and title as the full *ransom-price* for Adam and the race or seed in him when sentenced. Having thus fully purchased the lives of Adam and his race, Christ offers to adopt as his seed, his children, all of Adam’s race who will accept the terms of his New Covenant and thus by faith

* See the pamphlet: ‘What Say the Scriptures About Hell?’ explaining every passage of Scripture in which the word ‘hell’ occurs. Read online at: www.millennialdawn.faith.

come into his family—the family of God—and receive everlasting life. Thus the Redeemer will ‘see *his seed* [as many of Adam’s seed as will accept *adoption*, upon his conditions] and prolong his days [resurrection to a higher than human plane, being granted him by the Father as a reward for his obedience]’, and all in the most unlikely way: by the sacrifice of life and posterity. And thus it is written: ‘As all in Adam die, *even so* all in Christ shall be made alive’. *Corrected translation*, 1 Cor. 15:22.

The injury we received through Adam’s fall (we suffered no injustice) is, by God’s favour, to be more than offset with favour through Christ; and all will sooner or later (in God’s ‘due time’) have a full opportunity to be restored to the same standing that Adam enjoyed before he sinned. Those who do not receive a full knowledge and, by faith, an enjoyment of this favour of God in the present time (and such are the great majority, including children and heathen) will assuredly have these privileges in the next age, or ‘world to come’, the dispensation or age to follow the present. To this end, ‘all that are in their graves... shall come forth’. As each one (whether in this age or the next) becomes fully aware of the ransom-price given by our Lord Jesus, and of his subsequent privileges, he is considered as on trial, as Adam was; and obedience brings lasting life, and disobedience lasting death—the ‘second death’. Perfect obedience, however, without perfect ability to render it, is not required of any. Under the New Covenant⁺ the members of the Church during the Gospel age, have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them by

⁺ Reads: ‘Covenant of Grace’ in VOL. I, CHAP. VII. See: ‘The Author’s Foreword’ in VOL. VI—‘*The New Creation*’. It reads, in part: ‘Inadvertently, the name New Covenant, which belongs to God’s dealings with the world during the Millennium, has been used in respect to the Covenant which is now in operation during this Gospel Age with the Church. Our Covenant, of course, is a new covenant in the sense that it is different from the Jewish Covenant of Mt. Sinai, but it is not THE New Covenant. The Church’s Covenant is referred to in the Bible as a “Covenant by Sacrifice.” The keeping of these matters in mind will be of benefit to the readers of this Volume’.

faith, to make up their unavoidable deficiencies through the weakness of the flesh; and this same grace will operate toward ‘whosoever will’ of the world during the Millennial age. Not until physical perfection is reached (which will be the *privilege* of all before the close of the Millennial age) will absolute moral perfection be expected. This new trial, the result of the ransom and the New Covenant, will differ from the trial in Eden, in that in it the acts of each one will affect only his own future.

But would not this be giving some of the race a *second* chance to gain everlasting life? We answer—The *first* chance for everlasting life was lost for himself and all of his race, ‘yet in his loins’, by father Adam’s disobedience. Under that original trial ‘condemnation passed upon all men’; and God’s plan was that through Christ’s redemption-sacrifice Adam, and *all* who lost life in his failure, should, after having tasted of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and felt the weight of sin’s penalty, be given the opportunity to turn unto God through faith in the Redeemer. If anyone chooses to call this a ‘second chance’, let him do so: it must certainly be Adam’s second chance, and in a sense at least it is the same for all of the redeemed race, but it will be the first individual opportunity of his descendants, who, when born, were already under condemnation to death. Call it what we please, the facts are the same; viz., All were sentenced to death because of Adam’s disobedience, and all will enjoy (in this life or the next) a *full opportunity* to gain everlasting life under the favourable terms of the New Covenant. This, as the angels declared, is ‘Good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people’. And, as the Apostle declared, this grace of God—that our Lord Jesus ‘gave himself a *ransom for all*’—must be ‘testified’ to all ‘in due time’. (Rom. 5:17-19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6.) Men, not God, have limited to the Gospel age this chance or opportunity of attaining life. God, on the contrary, tells us that the Gospel age is merely

for the selection of the Church, the royal priesthood, through whom, during a succeeding age, all others shall be brought to an accurate knowledge of the truth and granted full opportunity to secure everlasting life under the New Covenant.

But what advantage is there in the method pursued? Why not give all men an individual chance for life now, at once, without the long process of Adam's trial and condemnation, the share by his offspring in his condemnation, the redemption of all by Christ's sacrifice, and the new offer to all of everlasting life upon the New Covenant conditions? If evil must be permitted because of man's free moral agency, why is its extermination accomplished by such a peculiar and circuitous method? Why allow so much misery to intervene, and to come upon many who will ultimately receive the gift of life as obedient children of God?

Ah! that is the point on which interest in this subject centres. Had God ordered differently the propagation of our species, so that children would not partake of the results of parental sins—weaknesses, mental, moral and physical—and had the Creator so arranged that all should have a favourable Edenic condition for their testing, and that transgressors only should be condemned and 'cut off', how many might we presume would, under all those favourable conditions, be found worthy, and how many unworthy of life?

If the one instance of Adam be taken as a criterion (and he certainly was in every respect a sample of perfect manhood), the conclusion would be that none would have been found perfectly obedient and worthy; because none would possess that clear knowledge of and experience with God, which would develop in them full confidence in his laws, beyond their personal judgment. We are assured that it was Christ's knowledge of

the Father that enabled him to trust and obey implicitly. (Isa. 53:11.) But let us suppose that one-fourth would gain life; or even more, suppose that one-half were found worthy, and that the other half would suffer the wages of sin—death. Then what? Let us suppose the other half, the obedient, had neither experienced nor witnessed sin: might they not forever feel a curiosity toward things forbidden, only restrained through fear of God and of the penalty? Their service could not be so hearty as though they knew good and evil; and hence had a full appreciation of the benevolent designs of the Creator in making the laws which govern his own course as well as the course of his creatures.

Then, too, consider the half that would thus go into death as the result of their own wilful sin. They would be lastingly cut off from life, and their only hope would be that God would in love remember them as his creatures, the work of his hands, and provide another trial for them. But why do so? The only reason would be a hope that if they were re-awakened and tried again, some of them, by reason of their larger *experience*, might then choose obedience and live.

But even if such a plan were as good in its results as the one God has adopted, there would be serious objections to it.

How much more like the wisdom of God to confine sin to certain limits, as his plan does. How much better even our finite minds can discern it to be, to have but one perfect and impartial law, which declares the wages of wilful sin to be death—destruction—cutting off from life. God thus limits the evil which he permits, by providing that the Millennial reign of Christ shall accomplish the full extinction of evil and also of wilful evil-doers, and usher in an eternity of righteousness, based upon full knowledge and perfect free-will obedience by perfect beings.

Those who can appreciate this feature of God's plan, which, by condemning all in *one* representative, opened the way for the ransom and restitution of all by *one* Redeemer, will find in it the solution of many perplexities. They will see that the condemnation of *all* in one was the reverse of an injury: it was a great favour to *all* when taken in connection with God's plan for providing justification for *all* through another one's sacrifice. Evil will be forever extinguished when God's purpose in permitting it shall have been accomplished, and when the benefits of the ransom are made co-extensive with the penalty of sin. It is impossible, however, to appreciate rightly this feature of the plan of God without a full recognition of the sinfulness of sin, the nature of its penalty—death, the importance and value of the *ransom* which our Lord Jesus gave, and the positive and complete restoration of the individual to favourable conditions, conditions under which he will have full and ample trial, before being adjudged worthy of the reward (lasting life), or of the penalty (lasting death).

In view of the great plan of redemption, and the consequent 'restitution of all things', through Christ, we can see that blessings result through the permission of evil which, probably, could not otherwise have been so fully realised.

Not only are men benefited to all eternity by the experience gained, and angels by their observation of man's experiences, but all are further advantaged by a fuller acquaintance with God's character as manifested in his plan. When his plan is fully accomplished, all will be able to read clearly his wisdom, justice, love and power. They will see the justice which could not violate the divine decree, nor save the justly condemned race without a full cancellation of their penalty by a willing redeemer. They will see the love which provided this noble sacrifice and which highly

exalted the Redeemer to God's own right hand, giving him power and authority thereby to restore to life those whom he had purchased with his precious blood. They will also see the power and wisdom which were able to work out a glorious destiny for his creatures, and so to overrule every opposing influence as to make them either the willing or the unwilling agents for the advancement and final accomplishment of his grand designs. Had evil not been permitted and thus overruled by divine providence, we cannot see how these results could have been attained. The permission of evil for a time among men thus displays a far-seeing wisdom, which grasped all the attendant circumstances, devised the remedy, and marked the final outcome through his power and grace.

* * *