

Some Answered Questions, Sin and Atonement

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Sin and Atonement

Question: In 1 Corinthians 15:22 it is written: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." What is the meaning of these words?

Answer: Know that there are two natures in man: the material and the spiritual. The material nature is inherited from Adam, while the spiritual nature is inherited from the reality of the Word of God, which is the spirituality of Christ. The material nature is born of Adam, but the spiritual nature is born of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The material nature is the source of every imperfection, and the spiritual nature is the source of all perfection.

Christ sacrificed Himself so that mankind might be freed from the imperfections of the material nature and endowed with the virtues of the spiritual nature. This spiritual nature, which has come to exist through the grace of the divine Reality, is the sum of all perfections and proceeds from the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine perfections; it is light, spirituality, guidance, exaltation, high-mindedness, justice, love, generosity, kindness to all, and charitable deeds: It is life upon life. This spiritual nature is an effulgence of the splendours of the Sun of Truth.

Christ is the focal centre of the Holy Spirit; He is born of the Holy Spirit; He has been raised up by the Holy Spirit; He descends from the Holy Spirit—that is, His Reality does not proceed from the lineage of Adam but is born of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:22 where it says: "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" is therefore as follows: Adam is commonly referred to as the "father of man"; that is, He is the cause of the material life of mankind and holds the position of material fatherhood. He is a living, though not a life-giving, soul, whereas Christ is the cause of the spiritual life of man, and with regard to the spirit He holds the position of spiritual fatherhood. Adam is a living soul; Christ is a life-giving spirit.



TRANSLATION

In this material world, man is subject to the force of instinctual desires, of which sin is the inevitable consequence, for these desires are not bound by the laws of justice and righteousness. The body of man is a prisoner of nature and will act in accordance with whatsoever nature dictates. It follows that sins—such as wrathfulness, envy, contentiousness, greed, avarice, ignorance, rancour, corruption, pride, and cruelty—must exist in the material world. All these bestial attributes exist in the nature of man. A man who has been deprived of spiritual education is even as an animal, like those inhabitants of Africa whose actions, manners, and morals are purely instinctual and who act according to the dictates of nature, to the point of rending and eating one another. Thus it becomes evident that the material world of man is a world of sin, and that on this plane man is indistinguishable from the animal.

All sin is prompted by the dictates of nature. These dictates of nature, which are among the hallmarks of corporeal existence, are not sins with respect to the animal but are sins with regard to man. The animal is the source of imperfections such as anger, lust, envy, greed, cruelty, and pride. All these blameworthy qualities are found in the nature of the animal, and do not constitute sins with regard to the animal, whereas they are sins with regard to man.

Adam is the cause of man's material life, but the reality of Christ, that is, the Word of God, is the cause of his spiritual life. It is a life-giving spirit, meaning that all the imperfections imposed by the material life of man are, through the instruction and guidance of that Essence of detachment, transmuted into human perfections. Therefore, Christ was a life-giving spirit and the cause of the spiritual life of all mankind.

Adam was the cause of material life, and since the material world of man is the realm of imperfections, and since imperfection is tantamount to death, Paul compared the former to the latter.

But the majority of the Christians believe that Adam sinned and transgressed by eating from the forbidden tree, that the dire and disastrous consequences of this transgression were inherited for all time by His descendants, and that Adam has thus become the cause of the death of man. This explanation is irrational and clearly mistaken, for it implies that all men, even the Prophets and Messengers of God, through no fault or sin of their own, and for no other reason than their descent from Adam, became guilty sinners and suffered the torments of hell until the day of Christ's sacrifice. This would be far from the justice of God. If Adam was a sinner, what was the sin of Abraham? What was the fault of Isaac and of Joseph? What was the transgression of Moses?

But Christ, Who was the Word of God, sacrificed Himself. This has two meanings—an outward meaning and a true meaning. The outward meaning is this: Since Christ intended to promote a Cause that entailed the education of the human race, the

quicken of the children of men, and the enlightenment of all humanity, and since promoting such a mighty Cause—a Cause that would antagonize all the peoples of the earth and withstand the opposition of every nation and government—was bound to bring about the spilling of His blood and to lead to His crucifixion and death, therefore at the moment He revealed His mission He offered up His life, welcomed the cross as His throne, regarded every wound as a balm and every poison as sweetest honey, and arose to instruct and guide the people. That is, He sacrificed Himself that He might bestow the spirit of life, and perished in body that He might quicken others in spirit.

However, the second meaning of sacrifice is this: Christ was like a seed, and this seed sacrificed its form so that the tree might grow and develop. Although the form of the seed was destroyed, its reality manifested itself, in perfect majesty and beauty, in the outward form of the tree.

The station of Christ was that of absolute perfection. Those divine perfections shone even as the sun upon all believing souls, and the outpourings of that light became manifest and resplendent in their realities. That is why He says: “I am the bread which came down from heaven; whosoever shall eat of this bread will not die”;^[9] that is, whosoever partakes of this divine sustenance will gain eternal life. Thus, whoever partook of this grace and acquired a share of these perfections found eternal life, and whoever sought illumination from His ancient grace was delivered from the darkness of error and illumined by the light of guidance.

The form of the seed was sacrificed for the tree, but its perfections were revealed and manifested by virtue of this sacrifice: For the tree, its branches, its leaves, and its blossoms were latent and hidden within the seed, but when the form of the seed was sacrificed, its perfections were fully manifested in the leaves, blossoms, and fruit.