

Orthodoxy: A Corrupt Nature

New City Catechism Q.14: Did God create us unable to keep his law?

Answer: No, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature and unable to keep God's law.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. - Romans 5:12

We can all be observers of human nature, or not. Being in relationships as a husband, father, grandfather, pastor, neighbor, friend, son, brother, relative, makes me well aware of the human condition, my own human condition. In all these places where I relate to others I observe my corrupt nature. In these relationships it seems I don't have to try very hard at being impatient, self centered in my desires and expectations, discouraged or angry when things don't go my way, anxious when I'm not in control, or just mean and unforgiving. What went wrong? I'm not supposed to be this way?

God through his word makes sense of these observations and answers these questions. He gives us a creation - fall - redemption - consummation narrative in the Bible. If we are going to make sense out of what we see in ourselves and others in our present condition then we turn to the creation and fall narrative.

God created all things in the heavens and the earth, then as the crowning jewel of his creation he created man and woman. Adam and Eve were the first perfect human creatures made by God to reflect his glory in their relationship to God, themselves, one another, and the world in which God placed them (see Genesis 1&2). As the image bearers of God they were able to love and obey their Creator God perfectly. But they could also rebel against him by believing lies rather than the truth God revealed to them and cast themselves into sin and death (see Genesis 2:15-18). And this was the end of our first parents, sin and death (see Genesis 3).

We can observe their fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. They were its royalty. Their offices were that of King and Queen over all that God had given them for their good and his glory. But they refused to exercise the gift of their royal dominion. When Satan ventured into this beautiful kingdom they did not thrust this enemy out. Satan was a created creature of perversion, corruption, and distortion. He is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He came speaking lies that were parasitical to the truth. He held just enough of God's truth on his tongue to twist and malign it to bring to an end God's vice regents. Adam was with Eve and he did not cast him out protecting his bride, himself, and all their progeny. Eve was deceived by his trickery and they both ate bringing sin, guilt, and shame to themselves and all the human race that would descend from their seed.

This is how sin entered the world. It entered the nature of humankind like a virus, infecting it wholly without distinction. This is why my observation of my own human nature and everyone I encounter in all my relationships has the common vocabulary of "Mine!". This does not mean that I never experience or observe some goodness in people. Men, women, and children continue to bear the stamp of their Maker. Therefore, we are capable of doing good and beautiful things. Yet, like a stamp that is marred on an envelope already delivered, the image of God in man is corrupted by sin. All our natures are corrupted by sin so that we cannot love and obey God for his glory with all our minds, affections, and wills. This is why Jesus can say to a man, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good." (Matthew 19:16). If we are careful to observe our own human nature or someone else's we find that we are enslaved to sin so that we do not want to seek after God. "None is righteous, no, not one;...no one seeks for God...no one does good, not even one." (Romans 3:11-12). We are all like our father Adam.

From the first Adam came sin, guilt, shame, and death. But there has appeared the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He became sin for us that we might in him become the righteousness of God (2Cor.5:21). He brought us a new life through his obedience, his death for sin, and his resurrection from the dead. Therefore, we can confess how much like our first father, Adam, we are as we put our trust in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sinful nature as he gives us life in himself by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today in Church History, December 8, 1934

In 1925, Betty Alden Scott was nineteen years old living in the United States with her parents who were furloughed missionaries with the China Inland Mission. That year while in college, in view of God's mercies toward her in Jesus Christ, she wrote in her journal, "Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Work out Thy whole will in my life, at any cost, now and forever." In 1927, after finishing a college degree in literature, she enrolled in the Moody Bible Institute to begin training for a life on the mission field.

John Stam began his studies at Moody in 1929. He immediately joined a weekly prayer meeting for the people of China. It was in this group that John and Betty met and fell in love. But their dreams of serving the Lord on the mission field in China prevented them from pursuing marriage. They sought to serve in China through the China Inland Mission. At that time John could only serve as an itinerant in hinterland areas of China which they believed at the time would have been very dangerous to women. Therefore, they both went to China as single missionaries. They said their goodbyes to one another knowing they would be serving in different regions and not certain they would ever see one another again, but still very much in love.

Betty returned to China in 1931. When Betty Scott arrived in China she spent 6 months in Shanghai in language school. Following this she was assigned to the mission station at Yingzhou (now Fuyang City) in Anhui. However, after a kidnapping in this area she and other missionaries were moved back to Shanghai. In 1932 John Stam was accepted and began making his way to China on a ship, The Empress of Japan. When Stam arrived in China, the China Inland Mission changed their plans for him and sent him to Shanghai. There he and Betty were reunited and were permitted to marry in 1933. Their first and only child, Helen Priscilla Stam was born in September 1934.

John and Betty moved with their three month old daughter to a mission station at Tsingteh in Anhui Province. Less than a month later a town official came to John Stam at 8:00 am warning him that the Communists were approaching the city. The Communists were riding the country of Christians and missionaries. The Stams prepared to leave, but before they could get out of their compound the Communists had overrun the city and broken through the gates of their compound. They demanded all the money that the Stams had and then arrested John taking him to the city prison. The soldiers then came back and took Betty and her baby to the prison where John was. On that evening of December 6 John wrote a letter to the China Inland Authorities stating that they were being held for a ransom of \$20,000. The letter was never delivered. In this letter John wrote how he and his wife had been captured and he ended it with Paul's words from Philippians 1:20, "May Christ be glorified whether by life or death." The letter was later found bundled in some of Helen's clothes.

On December 7 the Stams were marched to the town of Miaoshou. There they stopped for the night. During the night Betty hid Helen in a sleeping bag in the room where they were being kept, knowing that the morning would bring their death. On December 8 John and Betty were marched through the streets of Miaoshou before onlookers to their martyrdom. While they marched them down the street a shopkeeper stepped into the street pleading with the Communists to release them and not kill them. They ordered him back but he stood with courage before them refusing. The soldiers were ordered to invade his shop and home where they found a Bible and a hymn book. He was then ordered to march with the Stams. After marching for a short distance longer, John Stam was ordered to kneel, and was beheaded. His wife and the shopkeeper were killed moments later.

The Stams baby daughter Helen was found in the sleeping bag two days later by a Christian pastor. They took her to missionaries they knew in China. She was later moved by ship back to the United States where she was raised by her aunt and uncle.

Worthy or Unworthy?

Mike Emlet writes, "Often in our Christian lives when it comes to approaching God's throne of grace, we see-saw between pride and self-abasement. We come confidently when we're feeling pretty good about our performance. Or we slink away, guilt ridden and embarrassed to face him when we've blown it. Both of these responses reflect a similar dynamic of self-righteousness—that is, we seek to be right in our own eyes. If we're successful, we feel worthy. If we're unsuccessful, we feel unworthy. Neither attitude is oriented toward God, under whose gracious and merciful gaze we live in both our successes and our failures."

The young betrothed peasant Mary, "found favor with God" (Lk.1:30). Why, what had she done? Nothing! He simply set his love upon her favoring her with all his infinite grace and mercy. A proper unworthiness recognizes there is no good in us apart from Jesus and so we come to him despite our many failings. His grace emboldens us. As the hymn writer says, "*Let not conscience make you linger, Nor of fitness fondly dream; All the fitness He requires, Is to feel your need of Him. This He gives you, this He gives you, 'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.*"