

The City of God

Books XIII - XIV

Author:

Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

Translation:

Translated by the Rev. George Wilson, Glenluce; and by the Rev. J.J. Smith.
First eBook Edition - September 2009

Publication:

Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC
P. O. Box 3473
Peabody, Massachusetts

Dan Dery
2307 - Church History
Dr. Theodore G. Van Raalte
October 24, 2019

Thesis in Syllogism

Physical death was included in the penalty of Adam's origin sin. But, those in Christ who are forgiven of their sin, are subject to physical death. Therefore, *those in Christ who are forgiven of their sin, pay the penalty of Adam's sin in that they are subjected to physical death.*

Primary Source Outline

In chapter thirteen, Augustine's focus is "death" as it relates to the fall of Adam. He affirms that man was originally created mortal with the possibility of "immortality in the flesh", should he remain in perfect obedience. But this was not to be. The original sin of man resulted in "death" in all its forms, and is imputed to all men who are born into the family of Adam. Augustine insists that the words, "*for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die*"; included the threat of biological death. Yet, he is quick to point out the fact that man did not die physically in the very day he ate, but that he died a singular form of death which was of a spiritual/covenantal nature.

Augustine turns to the question of why those whose sin has been forgiven through the grace of Christ continue to suffer physical death, and thus, the penalty of sin. He reasons that if the full power of sin were overcome immediately at time of regeneration, the believer's faith in the victory of Christ over the power of sin and the penalty of death would be weakened. Concerning the death of infants, Augustine suggests that a "redeeming grace" delivers them from the condemnation of "original sin". And, since their death occurs prior to any "personal sin", they are redeemed by that death, from the death that is called "the second".

In chapter fourteen, Augustine shifts his focus to the "carnal nature of man" as it relates to the fall of Adam. He believes that through Adam's original sin, his nature was radically altered for the worst and transmitted to all his posterity. Augustine assumes that prior to the entrance of sin, life in the garden was one of "total bliss", and that only through sin did man become "subject to

all mental and emotional discomforts.” Augustine believed that the purity of sex in marriage which our first parents enjoyed was forever corrupted by sin. Where in the beginning, man was intended to bring forth children through love and holy emotion, man under sin is utterly incapable of doing so. Since the fall, all children are conceived in lust and ungodliness. He concludes that had man not sinned, he would have experienced the grace to exercise complete dominion over all sexual desire. For Augustine, to “live in the flesh” was to live one’s life under the corruption of body and soul that resulted from man’s first sin.

Interacting with Augustine

Let us begin by saying that we do agree with Augustine on several important points. It is true that in the beginning, man was created mortal. It is also true that “death” affects man in three dimensions; the spiritual, the carnal, and the eternal. We agree that through “one man” sin came into the world; and that every man who comes into the world enters through the family of that one man. We also agree that “in the day” that Adam ate, the death which he experienced was of a spiritual/covenantal nature. Finally, it is most assuredly true that to live “according to the flesh” is to live in subjection to the corruption of sin that resulted from Adam’s first transgression.

There are however several significant points with which we cannot agree. We deny that in the beginning man was created with a view to “immortality in the flesh”; for, that which is “of the dust” must assuredly return to dust. We likewise deny that physical/biological death was included in the threat, “in the day that you eat.... you will surely die”; for, the soul of man did not depart from his body in the very day that he ate, but some nine centuries later.

Our primary objection is aimed at Augustine’s assumption that those in Christ who are forgiven of sin continue to be subjected to its penalty; physical death. The implications of this doctrine are detrimental to the Christian faith and impugn the efficacy of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

Notice the implications of Augustine's position in the following syllogism: The "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But, "physical death" is included in "the death" which is the wages of sin. Therefore, *the physical death of every man in Christ is the penalty which he himself pays for sin.*

Furthermore, we also object to Augustine's attempt to mitigate and diffuse this conclusion. To suggest as he does that the believers' faith in Christ would be weakened if the victory of Christ over the power of sin and the penalty of death was applied to the believer, is to say the least; confusing. It would be just the opposite. Faith in Christ's victory over death *in all its dimensions* would be multiplied exponentially should death *in its physical dimension* be shown to be conquered.

Concerning the death of infants, we disagree with Augustine's on the following points. The bible says nothing of a "grace" which delivers infants from the penalty of "original sin". Salvation by faith in Christ is the only source of redemptive-grace revealed in the pages of scripture. Furthermore, the idea that the physical death of infants who commit no "personal sin" somehow redeems them from experiencing the "second death", is shocking. According to Augustine, the infant's physical death (which is the penalty of Adam's sin) is what frees them from the second death (which is the penalty of Adam's sin). In this construct, the penalty of sin pays the penalty of sin, and thus, the sacrifice of Christ which paid the penalty of sin is negated.

Finally, we must disagree with Augustine concerning the "nature of man" as it relates to the fall of Adam. That man was created immune to all mental and emotional infirmities, is foreign to the Edenic account. That evil, lust, and disobedience has a place in the heart of the man and his wife prior to their fall through sin, is expressed in the words; *"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."* Augustine seems to acknowledge this truth when he says, "Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were

secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it. In this, Augustine disagrees with himself.

Concluding Thoughts

This analysis was personally helpful in that it revealed how Augustine and others have sought to deal with the physical death of Christians who stand redeemed from sin and death. Its relevance to the church today is that it reveals the nature of both the death that came through sin, and the redemption that has come through Christ. Contrary to Augustine's thesis, the penalty of Adam's sin was limited to spiritual/covenantal death. Thus, those who stand forgiven of sin do not pay the penalty of sin when they experience physical death.