

QUESTION 164

The Punishment for the First Sin

Next we have to consider the punishment for the first sin. And on this topic there are two questions: first, about death; and, second, about the other particular punishments that are marked out in Genesis.

Article 1

Is death a punishment for the sin of the first parents?

It seems that death is not a punishment for the sin of the first parents:

Objection 1: What is natural to a man cannot be called a punishment for sin, since sin vitiates human nature and does not perfect it. But death is natural to a man; this is obvious from the fact that his body is composed of contraries, and also from the fact that *mortal* is posited in the definition of *man*. Therefore, death is not a punishment for the sin of the first parents.

Objection 2: Death and other bodily defects are found in man, just as they are similarly found in other animals—this according to Ecclesiastes 3:19 (“The death of man and of beasts is one, and the condition of the two of them equal”). But in the case of non-rational animals, death is not a punishment for sin. Therefore, it is likewise not a punishment in the case of men.

Objection 3: The sin of the first parents belonged to specific persons. But death affects the whole of human nature. Therefore, it does not seem to be a punishment for the sin of the first parents.

Objection 4: All things are derived in an equal way from the first parents. Therefore, if death were a punishment for the sin of the first parents, then it would follow that all human beings undergo death in an equal way. But this is clearly false, since some die more quickly (*citius*) than others, and some die in a more burdensome way (*gravius*).

Objection 5: As was established above (q. 19, a. 1 and *ST* 1, q. 48, a. 6 and q. 49, a. 2), the evil of punishment comes from God. But death does not seem to be from God; for Wisdom 1:13 says, “God did not make death.” Therefore, death is not a punishment for the first sin.

Objection 6: Punishments do not seem to be meritorious, since merit is contained under *good*, whereas punishment is contained under *evil*. But death is sometimes meritorious, as is clear in the case of the death of martyrs. Therefore, it seems that death is not a punishment.

Objection 7: Punishment seems to be painful (*poena videtur esse afflictiva*). But as is clear, death cannot be painful, since when death is present the man does not sense it, whereas when it is not present, it cannot be sensed. Therefore, death is not a punishment for sin.

Objection 8: If death had been a punishment for the sin, then it would have followed immediately upon the sin. But this is not true, since, as is clear from Genesis 4:25 and 5:4-5, the first parents died a long time after their sin. Therefore, death does not seem to be a punishment for sin.

But contrary to this: In Romans 5:12 the Apostle says, “Through one man sin entered this world and, through sin, death.”

I respond: If, because of his sin, an individual is deprived of some benefit that had been given to him, then the lack of that benefit is a punishment for his sin. Now as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 95, a. 1 and q. 97, a. 1), man in his first institution was given by God the benefit of being such that for as long as his mind continued to submit to God, (a) the lower powers of his soul would be subject to his rational mind, and (b) his body would be subject to his soul.

However, since the man’s mind withdrew through his sin from submission to God, the result was that (a) the lower powers are not totally subject to reason, and so there is a great rebellion of the carnal appetite against reason, and, again, that (b) the body is not totally subject to the soul, and so death follows, along with other bodily defects. For the life and well-being of the body consists in its being subject to the soul, in the way that what is perfectible is subject to its perfection, and so, contrariwise, the

lack of the body's subjection to the soul involves death and sickness and all other bodily defects. Hence, it is clear that just as the rebellion of the carnal appetite against the spirit is a punishment for the sin of the first parents, so, too, are death and all bodily defects.

Reply to objection 1: 'Natural' means something that is caused by the principles of the nature. Now the *per se* principles of a nature are *matter* and *form*. The *form* of a man is the rational soul, which is immortal in its own right. And so death is not natural to a man on the part of his form. But the *matter* of a man is a body such that it is composed of contraries, and from this composition corruptibility necessarily follows. And in this regard, death is natural to a man.

However, this condition in the matter of the human body is a consequence of the necessity of the matter, since the human body had to be an organ of touch and, as a result, it had to be a medium among the things susceptible to touch. And as is clear from the Philosopher in *De Anima* 2, this could not have been the case if it were not composed of contraries. Now this is not a condition according to which the matter is adapted to the form, because if such an adaptation were possible, then since the form is incorruptible, the matter would instead have to be incorruptible. In the same way, the fact that a saw is made of iron is fitting for its form and action, in order that it might be able to cut because of its hardness; on the other hand, the fact that it is able to get rusty follows by a necessity of this sort of matter and not from the agent's choice. For if the craftsman were able to, he would make the saw out of an iron that was unable to get rusty.

Now God, who is the creator of man, is omnipotent. Hence, as a benefit he removed from man, when he was first created, the necessity of dying that followed from such matter. But this benefit was revoked because of the sin of the first parents. And so death is both (a) *natural*, because of the condition of the matter, and (b) *a punishment*, because of the loss of the divine benefit that preserved man from death.

Reply to objection 2: This similarity of man to the other animals has to do with the condition of the *matter*; that is, it has to do with a body composed of contraries and *not* with the *form*. For the soul of man is immortal, whereas the souls of non-rational animals are mortal.

Reply to objection 3: The first parents were constituted by God not only as singular persons, but as *principles of all of human nature*, which was supposed to be derived from them by their posterity, along with the divine benefit that preserves them from death. And so because of their sin the whole of human nature in their posterity, having lost this benefit, incurs death.

Reply to objection 4: There are two ways in which a deficit follows from a sin:

In one way, *in the manner of a punishment handed down by a judge*. And this sort of deficit should be equal in those to whom the sin belongs.

The second type of deficit is one that *follows incidentally from a punishment of this sort*, in the way that someone who has been blinded because of his own sin stumbles on a path. This sort of deficit is not proportioned to the sin, and it is not taken into account by a human judge, who cannot foreknow fortuitous events.

So, then, the punishment handed down for the first sin, corresponding to it proportionately, was the revocation of the divine benefit by which the rectitude and integrity of human nature was going to be preserved. On the other hand, the deficits that follow upon the revocation of this benefit are death and the other hardships of the present life. And so punishments of this sort do not have to be equal in those to whom the first sin pertains equally.

However, since God foreknows all future events, hardships of the sort in question are, by the dispensation of divine providence, found in different individuals in diverse ways—not, to be sure, because of any merits that precede this life, as Origen claimed (for this would be contrary to what is said in Romans 9:11, "When they ... had not yet done any good or evil," and it is also contrary to what was shown in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 118, a. 3), viz., that the soul is not created before the body), but either (a) as a punishment for the sins of the father, insofar as a child is a sort of part of the father and hence

parents are often punished in their offspring, or, again, (b) as a remedy of salvation for the one who is subject to hardships of the sort in question, so that he might thereby be turned away from sinning or, again, that he might thereby not become proud of his virtues and might be crowned because of his patience.

Reply to objection 5: Death can be thought of in two ways:

(a) *insofar as it is an evil for human nature*. And on this score it is not from God, but is instead a deficit that results from human sin.

(b) *insofar as it has a certain character of goodness*, viz., as a just punishment. And on this score it is from God. Hence, in *Retractationes* Augustine says that God is not the author of death except insofar as it is a punishment.

Reply to objection 6: As Augustine puts it in *De Civitate Dei* 13, “In the same way that the unjust make bad use not only of bad things but also of good things, so, too, the just make good use not only of good things, but also of bad things. From this it follows both that bad individuals make bad use of the Law, even though the Law is good, and that good individuals die well, even though death is bad.” Therefore, insofar as holy individuals make good use of death, death becomes meritorious for them.

Reply to objection 7: There are two ways in which death can be understood:

First, *as the very privation of life*. And on this score death cannot be sensed, since it is a privation of sensation and life. And so it is not a pain of sense (*poena sensus*), but a pain of loss (*poena damni*).

Second, *insofar as ‘death’ names the corruption itself that is terminated in the aforementioned privation*. Now we can speak in two ways about corruption as well as about generation:

(a) *insofar as it is the terminus of an alteration*. And, on this score, at the very instant in which an individual is first deprived of life, death is said to exist in him. And once again, on this score, death is not a pain of sense.

(b) *insofar as it includes the preceding alteration*, in the way that someone is said to be dying when he is moving toward death—just as a thing is said to be in the process of being generated when it is moving toward having been generated. And it is in this sense that death can be painful.

Reply to objection 8: As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram*, “Even though the first parents lived for many years afterwards, they nonetheless began to die on the day on which they received the law of death by which they would grow old.”

Article 2

Are the particular punishments of the first parents correctly determined in Sacred Scripture?

It seems that the particular punishments of the first parents are not correctly determined in Sacred Scripture (Genesis 3:16-24):

Objection 1: Something that would have existed even in the absence of the sin should not be marked as a punishment for the sin. But, it seems, there would have been pain in childbirth (Genesis 3:16) even in the absence of the sin, since the disposition of the female sex requires that offspring cannot be born without pain on the part of the woman giving birth.

Similarly, the submission of the woman to the man (Genesis 3:16) follows from the perfection of the manly sex and the imperfection of the womanly sex.

Again, the germination of thorns and thistles (Genesis 3-18) belongs to the nature of the earth, which would likewise have existed in the absence of the sin.

Therefore, things of these sorts are inappropriate as punishments for the first sin.

Objection 2: What belongs to an individual’s dignity does not seem to involve a punishment for

him. But a woman's dignity involves the multiplication of conceptions (Genesis 3:16). Therefore, it should not be posited as a punishment for the woman.

Objection 3: The punishment of the sin of the first parents flows down to everyone, as has been explained concerning death (a. 1). But conceptions are not multiplied for all women (Genesis 3:16), nor do all men eat their bread in the sweat of their faces (Genesis 3:19). Therefore, these are not appropriate punishments for the first sin.

Objection 4: The place of paradise had been made for the sake of man (Genesis 2:8). But nothing should be done without purpose in the order of things. Therefore, it seems to have been an inappropriate punishment for the man to be excluded from paradise (Genesis 3:23).

Objection 5: The place of the earthly paradise is claimed [by some commentators] to be inaccessible in its own right. Therefore, it was pointless to set up other obstacles to the man's returning there, viz., the Cherubim and the flaming sword turning every way (Genesis 3:24).

Objection 6: Man was sentenced to the necessity of death immediately after the sin, and he could not have been restored to immortality by the benefit of the tree of life. Therefore, it was pointless for him to be forbidden to eat of the tree of life when Genesis 3:22 says, "... lest perhaps he take from the tree of life and live forever."

Objection 7: To mock a miserable individual seems to be incompatible with mercy and clemency, which are especially attributed to God in Sacred Scripture—this according to Psalm 144:9 ("His tender mercies are over all His works). Therefore, it was inappropriate to posit that the Lord mocked the first parents, who had already been led into misery by their sin, when He said, "Behold, Adam has become as one of us, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:22).

Objection 8: Clothing, like food, is a necessity for a man—this according to 1 Timothy 6:8 ("Having food and that by which we might be clothed, we are content"). Therefore, just as food had been provided for the first parents before their sin, so, too, they should have been provided with clothes as well. Therefore, it is inappropriate to say *after* the sin, "God made for them garments of skin" (Genesis 3:21).

Objection 9: The punishment inflicted for a sin should involve more evil than the advantage that an individual gains from the sin; otherwise, the punishment would not deter him from sinning. But through their sin the first parents gained the advantage of having their eyes opened, as Genesis 3:7 points out, and this outweighs in good all the evils of punishment which are posited as having resulted from the sin. Therefore, the punishments that followed upon the sin of the first parents are inappropriately described.

But contrary to this: These punishments were imposed by God, who, as Wisdom 11:21 says, "orders all things in number, weight, and measure."

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), because of their sin the first parents were deprived of the divine benefit by which the integrity of human nature was being preserved in them, and because of the revocation of this benefit human nature fell into deficits of punishment (*in defectus poenales incidit*). And so there were two ways in which they were punished:

(a) First, they were punished insofar as what was taken away from them was what belonged to *the state of integrity*, viz., the place of the earthly paradise, and this is signified in Genesis 3:23 when it is said, "God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure." And since he was unable on his own to return to that state of first innocence, it was appropriate to place obstacles to his returning to those things that belonged to the first state, viz., obstacles involving food, "lest perhaps he take from the tree of life" (Genesis 3:22) and involving place, "God placed before paradise Cherubim and a flaming sword" (Genesis 3:24).

(b) Second, they were punished insofar as what was prescribed for them was what was *appropriate to a nature bereft of such a benefit*—and this with respect to the *body* and with respect to the *soul*.

As regards the *body*, which involves the difference between the sexes, the punishments meted out to the woman are different from those meted out to the man.

To the *woman* punishments are meted out in accord with the two things for the sake of which she is joined to the man, viz., generating offspring and sharing in the works involved in family life (*communicatio operum pertinentium ad domesticam conversationem*). As regards the generation of offspring, she is punished in two ways. The first has to do with the weariness she undergoes in carrying the conceived offspring, and this is signified when it says, “I will multiply your sorrows and your conceptions” (Genesis 3:16). And the second has to do with the pain that she suffers in childbirth, and on this score it says, “... in pain shall you bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16). As regards family life, she is punished by being subject to the man’s dominion.

Now just as it belongs to the woman to submit to the man in matters involving family life, so it belongs to the *man* to procure the necessities of life. And on this score he is punished in three ways. First, by the sterility of the land, when it is said, “Cursed is the land you work on” (Genesis 3:17). Second, by the anxiety of labor, without which he does not see the fruits of the earth, and on this score it says, “with hard work and toil shall you eat thereof all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:17). Third, he is punished by the obstacles that confront those who cultivate the land, and on this score it says, “Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you” (Genesis 3:18).

Similarly, on the part of the *soul* three punishments for them are described. First, they were punished by the confusion they suffered because of the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, and on this score it says, “The eyes of both were opened, and they realized that they were naked” (Genesis 3:7). Second, they were punished by the reproach of their own sin, because of which it says, “Behold, Adam has become like one of us” (Genesis 3:22). Third, they were punished by being reminded of their future death, when it was said to him, “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shall return” (Genesis 3:19). It is also relevant to this that God made for them garments of skin, as a sign of their mortality (Genesis 3:21).

Reply to objection 1: In the state of innocence birth would have occurred without pain. For in *De Civitate Dei* 14 Augustine says, “Just as, in conceiving, it was not lustful desire but deliberate intercourse that joined the two natures together, so, too, in giving birth, it was not groans of pain but the impulse of maturity that would have relaxed the internal female organs.”

The submission of the woman to the man should be understood as inflicted as a punishment for the woman not with respect to the man’s governance, since even before the sin the man would have been “the head of the woman” (1 Corinthians 11:3), but because the woman would have to obey the man’s will against her own will.

If the man had not sinned, the earth would still have brought forth thorns and thistles as food for the animals, but not as a punishment for the man, since, as Augustine explains in *Super Genesim ad Litteram*, their growth would have imposed no labor or pricking on a man who was cultivating the earth. By contrast, Alcuin claimed that, before the sin, the earth did not bring forth thorns and thistles at all. But the first reply is better.

Reply to objection 2: The multiplicity of conceptions is introduced as a punishment for the woman not because of the procreation of offspring itself, which would likewise have occurred before any sin, but because of the multiplicity of afflictions that a woman suffers by the fact that she carries a conceived fetus. Hence, it expressly says, “I will multiply *your sorrows* and your conceptions” (Genesis 3:16).

Reply to objection 3: These punishments in some sense pertain to everyone. If any woman conceives, she has to undergo hardships and give birth in pain—except for the Blessed Virgin, who conceived without corruption and gave birth without pain, since her conception was not in accord with the law of nature derived from the first parents. On the other hand, if a woman never conceives or gives birth, then she suffers from the defect of barrenness, which outweighs the punishments mentioned above.

Similarly, if anyone cultivates the soil, he has to eat bread in the sweat of his face. And those who do not practice agriculture in their own right are occupied with other labors—“for a man was born to work,” as Job 5:7 says—and so they eat the bread made by others in the sweat of their faces.

Reply to objection 4: Even though the place of earthly paradise does not serve man as regards its *use*, it does nonetheless serve him *as a lesson*, as long as he understands that he has been deprived of such a place because of sin, and as long as through those things that exist corporeally in that paradise he is instructed about the things that belong to the heavenly paradise, the way to which is prepared for man by Christ.

Reply to objection 5: Even while preserving the mysteries of the spiritual sense [of this passage] (*salvis spiritualis sensus mysteriis*), the location in question seems to be inaccessible mainly because of the intensity of the heat, caused by the proximity of the sun, in the intervening places. And this is signified by the flaming sword that is said to be “turning every way” (Genesis 3:24) because of a property that belongs to the circular motion that is causing the heat. And since, as is clear from Augustine in *De Trinitate* 3, the movement of a corporeal creature is set in order by the ministry of angels, it was likewise fitting for the Cherubim to be joined to the turning sword in order to guard the way to the tree of life. Hence, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11 Augustine says, “One should believe that even in the visible paradise this was done by heavenly powers, so that a sort of fiery guard was present there by the ministry of the angels.”

Reply to objection 6: If the man had eaten of the tree of life, he would not thereby have recovered immortality, but by the benefit of this food he could have made his life longer. Hence, in what is said here, viz., “... and live forever” (Genesis 3:22), ‘forever’ is being understood as ‘for a long time’. However, it was not expedient for the man to remain in the misery of the present life for a longer time.

Reply to objection 7: As Augustine puts it in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11, “These words of God are not so much the words of God mocking the first parents as they are the words of God deterring others, for whose sake these things have been written down, from becoming proud in the same way. For not only did Adam not become such as he wanted to become, but he did not even preserve what he had been made as.”

Reply to objection 8: There are two reasons why clothes are necessary for man in his state of present misery: first, because of hardships imposed by exterior threats, e.g., extremes of heat and cold; and, second, to cover up disgrace, lest the shamefulness of his members become apparent in those members in which the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit is especially manifest. But these two reasons did not apply in his first state. For as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 97, a. 2), in the first state the man’s body was unable to be injured by anything extrinsic. Nor, again, was there in that state any sort of shame in man’s body that might induce embarrassment; hence, Genesis 2:25 says, “They were both naked”—that is, Adam and his wife—“and they were not embarrassed.”

The argument is different in the case of food, which is necessary for kindling natural heat and adding to the body.

Reply to objection 9: As Augustine explains in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11, one should not believe that the first parents were produced “with their eyes closed, especially given that it is said of the woman that ‘she saw the tree, that it was beautiful and good to eat.’ Therefore, the eyes of both were opened to seeing and thinking about something that they had not noticed before”—namely, to their disordered sentient desire for one another, which had not existed beforehand.