

God is not the Source of the Punishment

God warned of the punishment but is not the source of the punishment. The punishment was a result of the sin.

In eating of the tree, and using their freewill to reject God and His goodness, and see Him in another fashion, they separated from Him as a result of rejecting Him. Thus, being separated from Life, we bring death. By separating from Light, we bring darkness.

Punishment: There are two types of punishment. One is an outcome of action, as if you speed and lead to an accident, which is an outcome of our speeding. But there is a punishment that is not related, as if you speed and get a ticket. The ticket here is different from the accident. Likewise, there is a difference with a student who doesn't study and fails the exam, and does not graduate. The teacher here only announces your performance, but is not the direct cause of your failure. In a similar way God announced to Adam and Eve the consequential punishments that resulted from their disobedience. If his parents decide to take away his car as a punishment, this is not just an announcement of a condition, but a direct and personal act chosen by parents to inflict on their son.

God punishes but is not the source of our punishment. Our sin is the source of our punishment, when we strayed from God.

As St. Athanasius says, God had announced the punishment that would come upon man.

This, then, was the plight of men. God had not only made them out of nothing, but had also graciously bestowed on them His own life by the grace of the Word. Then, turning from eternal things to things corruptible, by counsel of the devil, they had become the cause of their own corruption in death; for, as I said before, though they were by nature subject to corruption, the grace of their union with the Word made them capable of escaping from the natural law, **provided that they retained the beauty of innocence with which they were created.** That is to say, the presence of the Word with them shielded them even from natural corruption, as also Wisdom says: *"God created man for incorruption and as an image of His own eternity; but by envy of the devil death entered into the world."* When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and raping filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both singly and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says: "Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature; and the men also, leaving the natural use of the woman, flamed

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out in lust towards each other, perpetrating shameless acts with their own sex, and receiving in their own persons the due recompense of their pervertedness.¹

So, God warned Adam about the consequences that would come upon him due to sin. But as mentioned above, He is not the source of their punishment. St. Cyril continues to say the same thing in his *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* regarding the punishment:

Therefore, we next discuss how he planned to do this, how he implanted in us the grace that is our refuge, how the Spirit was rooted once again in humanity and how our nature was transformed to its original state. The first man was earthly and from the earth. He had in his power to choose either good or evil, since he was the master of the inclination to each. But he was seized by bitter treachery. He inclined toward disobedience, and he fell to the earth, the mother from which he came, and, now overcome by decay and death, he conveyed his penalty to the whole race. Evil increased and multiplied among us, and our thoughts always descended to the worse. Sin reigned, and thus human nature was shown to be stripped of the indwelling Holy Spirit. "For the Holy Spirit of wisdom will flee deceit," as it is written, "and will not dwell in a body enslaved to sin." (Wisd. 1:4).

Since the first Adam did not preserve the grace given by God, God the Father planned to send us the Second Adam from heaven. He sent His own Son, Who is by nature without variation or change, into our likeness. He knew no sin at all so that, just as through the disobedience of the first we came under God's wrath, so through the obedience of the second, we might escape the curse, and its evils might come to nothing. When the Logos of God became man, He received the Spirit from the Father as one of us. He did not receive anything for Himself personally because He Himself is the supplier of the Spirit. But the One Who knew no sin received the Spirit as man in order to keep the Spirit in our nature and root in us once again the grace that had left us.

I think that is the reason that the holy Baptist profitably adds, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven and remaining on him" (Jn. 1:32). For The Spirit flew away from us because of sin, but the One Who knew no sin became one of us so that the Spirit might become accustomed to remain in us, since the Spirit might be accustomed to abide in us, having no occasion of departure or withdrawal in Him.²

This demonstrates that the sin was found in Adam.

Boules el Bushi also says something similar when speaking of God as punishing mankind.

In this way God made covenant with His creation through the law and the prophets, through His promise and His prohibitions. When their disobedience grew more severe, He punished them with afflictions, misfortunes, rising costs, and forced migration, and arrogant kings disgraced and reviled them. Through this, God did not intend their worship of humankind. When they grew accustomed to evil, the disease intensified, the illness increased, and the sickness multiplied. And when the sick became gravely ill, there was great need for a cure from the true Doctor, the Healer of souls and bodies, and the cure was the divine Incarnation, for if the work becomes ruined, no one is able to fix it except its craftsman. In this way, creatures, when they perish, need the promise of the Creator, to Him be the glory!³

¹ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 5.

² St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 2.1 (1:22-23), see *Ancient Christian Texts* (InterVarsity Press), 82.

³ Bishop Bules el Bushi, §§1-7, trans. Stephen Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice*, p. 299.