

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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Christ's Conquest of Satan

In the New Testament, conversion to Christ is depicted as a turn from darkness and an escape from the power of Satan. In 1 John 3:8 we are told that the reason the Son of God entered into our world was to destroy Satan:

*He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was **to destroy the devil's work** (1 John 3:8).*

In Acts 26:18, Saul of Tarsus (later, the Apostle Paul) was told that his mission as an apostle of Christ was to go to the Gentiles with the message of deliverance from the darkness of evil and the power of Satan:

*Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and **turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God**, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16-18).*

Paul was to take the story of Christ's conquest of Satan to a world in darkness, many of which were yet under the power of Satan. This story he called "*euangelion*," good new, the gospel of Christ. How had Christ accomplished the overthrow of Satan? The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that it was accomplished by his death:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their

*humanity so that **by his death** he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14).*

From the portrayal of the risen Jesus in the Apostle John's book called, *Apokalupsis Iesou Christou* (Revelation of Jesus Christ), Jesus is revealed to John as having conquered Satan by overcoming Satan's power to hold him captive in the realm of death.

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! **And I hold the keys of death and Hades.** (Rev 1:17-18.)*

How Did the Death of Christ Destroy the Power of Satan?

Making sense of the death of Christ was of major concern to the Apostle Paul. Perhaps, this is why he was so opposed to Christianity in its earliest beginnings. After all, who could believe in a Messiah who was put to death? What kind of deliverer dies at the hand of his enemies? However, once Paul saw Jesus of Nazareth alive again, he realized that his death was not what it appeared to be at all. Throughout Paul's New Testament letters he discusses his understanding of the meaning and significance of Christ's death. Paul's understanding of the death of Christ is a story of divine reversal; i.e., what happened to man in the fall that brought death on all of Adam's descendants, God had reversed through the resurrection of Christ.

From the narrative of Gen 2-3, we learn that man had fallen under the power of Satan and sin. Man had set before him a choice between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. With each choice there were consequences (Gen 2:8, 15; 3:1ff). God had revealed to Adam everything he needed to know in order to have complete happiness in the presence of God in the Garden of Eden. Everything he had said to him was true, all that was necessary for Adam to dwell in paradise was to believe God. Adam, however, chose to believe the word of Satan, which was a lie. He ate of the forbidden tree, believing that he would gain the knowledge that would make him equal to God, and thus came man's fall. "In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die" God had told Adam, and on that day he and

Eve were driven from the garden paradise, from the presence of God, and into the earth in a pilgrimage of death. Not only had the curse of death come upon them, but was passed on to their offspring as well, i.e., the whole of the human race, adamic man (Gen 2:17; 3:17ff).

The "curse of death" was placed upon Adam and passed on to all of humankind. We all, as son of Adam, are born to die and we all enter the realm of death at the conclusion of our lives here on earth. Some have temporarily returned to life, but they only postponed their final encounter with death, they did not escape the power of death.

Jesus of Nazareth, however, as a *ben Adam*, a son of Adam (or "son of man") experienced human death as one under the curse of death. He, however, by the power of his belief of God's promise to raise him to life again, escaped from the realm of death by a resurrection into a new existence. Not only did he escape death by his resurrection, he destroyed its power to hold anyone who believed in God's promises and he had believed God's promise. This is why the resurrection of Christ is the central belief of the Christian religion. Christ not only destroyed the power of death by his resurrection, he destroyed the power of sin (which gives death its power) and, ultimately, the power of Satan (who is the source of the power of sin and death).

Resurrection into New Existence

What distinguishes the resurrection of Christ from other restorations to life in the New Testament (e.g., Lazarus) is that where Lazarus was raised back into his old existence (adamic existence) where reigns the satanic powers of sin and death), Christ was raised into a new existence (where reigns the divine powers of grace and eternal life). In the "resurrection existence" Christ now enjoys, sin, death, and Satan have no presence or power. These are powers limited to the old human existence in Adam.

The curse of death was passed upon man as a being of this earth (created out of the earth). When one dies to this existence, the curse is fulfilled or accomplished. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was a resurrection into new existence or "otherworldly existence." This is the message that stands at the heart of Paul's good news to the race of mankind. His theology of the divine reversal of the fall is found beautifully developed in the 15th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, specifically, 15:20-28,

42-49; and 2 Cor 5:17).

Divine Reversal

The concept with which we are working here is that of "divine reversal" - a reversal of the story of the fall of man. The first Adam was given a choice; the "promise of life" verses "the curse of death." Adam of old chose death, not only for himself, but for all of his offspring. Christ represented the first Adam in his experience of human death, but he represented a second Adam in his resurrection into new existence (cf., Rom 5:12, 15-19; 1 Cor 15:20-28, 42-49). God entered into our existence through Jesus of Nazareth and reenacted the story of Adam, which had become "our story." This time, however, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, chose "the promise of life" rather than "the curse of death."

Jesus, as the second Adam, believed God rather than Satan and sealed that choice with his own blood, he died as a son of Adam. In his death he died to his adamic existence, as do we all. In his resurrection, however, he was raised into new existence; not back into his old existence in Adam, which would again end in death. Paul calls him the *aparche*, a Greek word which means, literally, "the first from." It is translated 1 Cor 15:20 and 23 as "firstfruit," i.e. the first or beginning of something. Here in 1 Cor 15, the first of those who will be resurrected to life; not a resurrection to life as we know it (life in Adam) but resurrection into new existence in Christ. The consequence of Christ's death and resurrection was the reversal of the curse of death for us, that is, for those who are "in Christ" by means of their union with him (2 Cor 5:17). The promise of life has replaced the curse of death for those who have become one with the new Adam by experiencing new creation and are now "in Christ."

Conclusion

The impact of all this upon us is that to those of us who remain one with the old Adam in his disbelief and disobedience, the curse of death, sin, and Satan continue to reign in our lives. This is what the expressions, "new birth," "regeneration," and "new creation" are about. The way we became one with the old Adam is through our birth; we were born into an adamic existence where sin, death, and Satan reign. In the same manner we become one with the new Adam through a birth - a spiritual birth wherein we die to

our old existence "in Adam," we bury that existence, and are raised into new existence "in Christ," where grace, life, and God reign (cf. Rom 6:1-11; 1 Cor 15: 21; 2 Cor 5:17).

What dies in human death is the adamic body (the flesh) with its passions. What lives on after that death is what is regenerated in conversion - the human spirit - this is that part of you that has experienced new creation and transformation as a spiritual being. This is how a man in Adam becomes a holy one of God, i.e., a saint; by dying to his old existence in Adam and becoming a new creation in Christ; and, most important of all, the one whose life now becomes a reflection of one created in the image of God. While yet dwelling in our adamic bodies we experience the tension of the desires of the flesh with the desire of our regenerated spirit until our adamic existence concludes in the death of the body. Then, in his return, Christ will totally destroy Satan and raise our bodies into new existence, making our bodies like his (1 Cor 15:20-26, 35-57) and reuniting them with our spirits in new eschatological or otherworldly existence.

In conversion to Christ we become one with him in who we are (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:29; Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:22-5:2). The means of access into this new existence is belief, or better, believing that this will happen with such depth that our lives will become transformed by our beliefs. The kind of faith that makes things such as this happen is the kind of faith that Jesus of Nazareth manifested in his life (Heb 5:8-9 and Phil 3:9 [the Greek text reads "the faith of Christ"]). If the disbelief of the first Adam could have had such an effect on the human race, then the belief of the second Adam can have as great an effect on the human race. In fact, the belief of Christ and his submission to the will of God in the Garden of Gethsemane, was an event having cosmic significance. Our faith can have as great an effect on our own individual existence, but only if that faith is centered on Christ and what he has done to effect the divine reversal of our existence in this life and in the life which will be made full at his return (Rom 10:9-10; 1 John 5:4-5). This is why our faith is the means of access to God and his promise of new existence - an existence in which Satan and the powers of evil are conquered by our beliefs of the claims of Christ to be the Savior of the world and the Lord of heaven and earth.

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