

1 John 2:16 (Walter Biggar Scott) 132309

Two Trees of Paradise: God's Grace And Man's Responsibility, Responsibility in Connection With Man's Will and Power. (2:16)

Before briefly developing the chief features of man's history outside paradise, we would press the important consideration that his responsibility is in no wise enfeebled through his non-inability to discharge it. He could have met his obligations God-ward, creation-ward, and woman-ward, in Eden, and in fact did so, though for a very brief season. It is often said, "Why was man not constituted invulnerable to any attack on the part of Satan? Why was he not insured against falling? Why not hedged round about by omnipotent power?" Now, suppose I am a watch-maker, and I choose to make a watch. Have I not the right and power to do so? But what if the watch could reply, and say, "Why was I not made to go on tick! tick! tick! perpetually?" Has not the potter right over the senseless, lifeless clay, to make vessels as it pleaseth him. And has not God right and choice to make a man out of the dust of the ground—of inanimate material, and then endow the man with life direct from Himself, thus placing him in immediate responsibility to His Creator and others, and further setting him where and how He pleased, so as to manifest that responsibility in due course and result to the full? And who is the creature that dare arraign the sovereign rights of God? Yea, who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? At the beginning man was rendered capable of rendering that obedience to God which he was responsible to do; so were the now fallen angels. But had man been constituted impeccable, then there could have been no fair trial of responsibility, the strength of the creature would not have been tested, and the counsels of love to be accomplished through death in the Second Man, and after the proved ruin of the first, would not have been effected. O richer far is the harvest of glory reaped for the living God, yea, and of deeper and fuller blessing to us, through the ruin of man and consequent redemption in Christ, than if the creation had forever remained sinless!

God did not forbid man an evil thing in itself; it was only evil to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because of the Divine prohibition. Had there been no test of obedience, then the waiting creation must have anxiously and vainly inquired: Who is God? Who is the Creator or else, regarded man as the absolute sovereign of all; hence the importance of the test imposed in the garden. The man had not to reason, but simply to obey the divine command, and obedience is the first duty of the creature, and an obligation altogether independent of circumstances—whether of innocence, sin, or holiness. If a sinful man, as such, cannot obey the Will and Word of God, he is none the less responsible to do so. If the responsibility ceased with his lack of power, then there would be no just ground for judgment, either now, or at the "great white throne." And here it may be well to remark, that conscience, which is the moral capacity acquired when man gave himself up to Satan, and which distinguishes between good and evil, possesses no authority in itself. The revealed Word and Will of God is the source of all authority, and is the guide, light, and strength of conscience. This, however, is somewhat modified in the case of the heathen, and where no positive revelation exists; there conscience pronounces upon good and evil, and is thus constituted an authority and ground of judgment, but only, be it carefully observed, where the law and the Scriptures are entirely unknown (Rom 2:12-16).

The Apostle of love and life, in giving a moral definition of the world, sums it all up in two characteristic words, lust and pride (1 John 2:16)—the desire to get what God has withheld, and the desire to be what God has not made you. Man set up to have a will of his own, and to assert it, too, and this forms the very essence of sin; is its very root. And what is human history, but the story of man's acting in self-sufficiency and independence of God? Thank God! the reverse side shows Him patient in goodness and long-suffering in mercy. All the moral features of man in the flesh were displayed before the expulsion of the guilty pair from the garden. Self-will, lust, and pride had their birth before the world properly began, before the banishment from paradise. Cain, the first born of the human family, was conceived and begotten in sin outside paradise. It was he and not Adam who began the world as it is. Adam sinned directly against God; Cain added to that by positive sin against his brother, denying too that class and kind of responsibility, saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" What a deplorable picture of man! The father hiding himself away from God, and the son killing his brother. The world commenced its truly awful history, by rejecting God as good, by accepting Satan as its god, by hatred of the pious Abel—the man of faith, and by violence and murder.