

Full Preterism Refuted

Chapter 2: The Fall of Adam and Physical Death

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Introduction

One of the central teachings of the Christian church since its inception has been the resurrection of dead believers at the second coming of Christ. The Apostles' Creed (which is called the first ecumenical symbol because it was universally accepted by the eastern as well as the western churches) says, "I believe in...the resurrection of the body [literally "flesh"; Latin *caro*, Greek *sarx*].¹ The Nicene Creed says, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life in world to come." The Athanasian Creed says that at Christ's coming "all men shall arise again with their bodies." It is very important that we get the doctrine of the bodily resurrection correct because not only is it presented in Scripture as a great hope and consolation for Christians, but it is also intimately connected to other major doctrines such as the consequences of Adam's fall and the salvation achieved by Christ.

As we study this topic we will interact with the full preterist heresy. Full preterists view the resurrection only in terms of deliverance from sin-death, not physical death. They believe, with secular humanists and Socinians, that physical death is natural; it is a normal aspect of God's created order even before the fall. Thus, all full preterists reject the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. All hyperpreterists have one thing in common. They believe that the dead physical bodies of Christians remain in the grave forever. When it comes to defining the resurrection that occurs at the second coming of Christ, there are basically three different views

¹ The ancient church scholars used the term *sarx* or *caro* meaning "flesh" as a bulwark against the teaching of the Gnostics who believed our bodies were intrinsically sinful, disgusting and inferior and thus would not be resurrected. The Gnostics held to a purely spiritual conception of the resurrection. By the term "flesh," however, the ancient church was not teaching that the resurrection was purely physical or that our bodies would not be transformed gloriously by this event and made spiritual and incorruptible. This is evident by the writings of the church fathers on this subject such as Tertullian. One of the foremost authorities on theology and apologetics, J. N. D. Kelly writes, "The Parousia will be preceded, states [cf. 16, 6] the *Didache*, by the resurrection of the dead. The author appears to restrict this to the righteous (cf. *ou panton de*), but the normal teaching was that good and bad would alike rise. Ignatius cites [Trall. 9, 2] Christ's resurrection as a prototype of that of believers, and 'Barnabas' reproduces [5, 6] the Pauline argument that the Savior arose in order to abolish death and give proof of our resurrection. We should observe that both he and the author of *2 Clement* insists [Ib. 21, I; 2 Clem. 9, 1-4] on the necessity of our rising again in the self-same flesh we now possess, the idea being that we may receive the just requital of our deeds. Clement, too, teaches [1 Clem. 24-26] that Christ's resurrection foreshadows ours, and is a pioneer in devising rational arguments, of a type later to become classic, to make the idea of a resurrection plausible. The transition from night to day, he urges, and the transformation of dry, decaying seeds into vigorous plants supply analogies from the natural order, as does the legend of the phoenix from pagan mythology; in any case it is consistent with divine omnipotence, and is abundantly prophesied in Scripture (e.g. *Pss.* 28, 7; 3:6; 23:4; *Job* 19, 26). The insistence of these writers is probably to be explained by the rejection of a real resurrection by Docetists and Gnostics, who, of course, refused to believe that material flesh could live on the eternal plane. Polycarp had them (or possibly Marcion) in mind when he roundly stated [Phil. 7, I.] that 'he who denies the resurrection and the judgment is the first-born of Satan'" (*Early Christian Doctrines* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1960], 463).

among full preterists. Some attempt to define every mention of a future resurrection in terms of a spiritual resurrection (e.g., regeneration). Others view the resurrection as a release of souls from Hades in A.D. 70. Still others believe a bodily resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, but this involved the creation of completely new spiritual bodies that replace the bodies left to rot forever in the earth. They contend that everyone who dies after A.D. 70 receives their new resurrection bodies immediately at death. Consequently, instead of being a part of the great one time eschatological event at the end of history, they teach that the resurrection is progressive and occurs millions of times throughout history. All of this teaching is heretical nonsense. To properly understand the necessity and importance of the bodily resurrection, we need to examine a number of different doctrines.

The first point that we need to consider is what happened when Adam fell? Did Adam *only* experience what full preterists call sin-death? That is, is the first man's death merely spiritual and nothing more? Or, as orthodox expositors and theologians have asserted for almost two thousand years, is physical death a consequence of spiritual death? This is a very important question, for if physical death is a consequence of the fall and of spiritual death, then Jesus Christ would have to conquer physical death to affect a full salvation for man. (This is exactly what Scripture teaches.)

Full preterists do two things to avoid the reality that spiritual death leads to physical death. First, they point out that the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit was a death that occurred on *the very day* the fruit was eaten: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Since Adam died physically over 900 years after eating the forbidden fruit, full preterists argue that physical death (logically) has nothing to do with the fall. (This view ignores the broader context of this passage.) Second, full preterists argue that physical death is a natural aspect of God's created universe. Adam and Eve would have died physically even if they did not eat of the forbidden fruit. They must adopt this position to avoid the obvious conclusion that redemption also involves our physical bodies and, therefore, a literal resurrection.

Is Physical Death Natural?

There are a number of reasons why the full preterist view of the fall as only involving sin-death or spiritual death must be emphatically rejected.

First, the idea that physical death is a natural part of God's created order would mean that God regards physical death as something "good." This would be the natural implication of Genesis 1:31: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day." If physical death is not part of the fall, then it should be accepted as one of the good things of God's creation. The whole purpose of Genesis 1:21 is to emphasize the *perfection* of God's creation. This perfect and "very good" creation reflects the character of God. But if death is good, then why is the universal response to death sorrow, anguish and tears? Why did Jesus weep when He heard that His friend Lazarus had died (Jn. 11:35)? Moreover, if death is good and natural, then why does it involve suffering? There is the suffering of a violent end (e.g., nature red in tooth and claw) and there is the suffering of growing old with all its infirmities and diseases. In fact, growing old is itself a form of slow degradation and decay. No one looks forward to a loss of mobility, poor eyesight, hearing and memory loss, lack of stamina, arthritis and the host of negative changes involved in aging. Growing very old is not intrinsically good or healthy and neither is death.

In addition, if death is normal, for men and animals, then why was vegetarianism God's pre-fall standard for food (cf. Gen. 1:29-30)? Why does Isaiah's prophecy of the blessings of Christ's coming restoration describe an eventual return to vegetarianism, when the lion will eat straw and the lamb and wolf will feed together in harmony (Is. 65:25)? The obvious answer is that Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection will eliminate the curse on this earth that brought the animals under the rule of "tooth and claw." In the coming, literal new heavens and new earth we are told "there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3), "no more death, no sorrow, nor crying" or "pain" (Rev. 21:4). Physical death is not good or natural!²

It is interesting and significant that the first recorded deaths of animals in the Bible is when God made tunics of skin to clothe Adam and Eve. Immediately after the fall the narrative says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they know that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Gen. 3:7). Then right after the section on punishments we read, "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). God shed the blood of animals to cover Adam and Eve's shame associated with their knowledge that they were naked. Their sin led to the killing of an innocent animal. Was this a lesson to Adam that leaves were an inadequate covering for guilt; that sin could only be atoned for by the pain, blood and death of an innocent victim? When we consider that verse 21 is clearly designed to be compared with verse 7 this conclusion is unavoidable. We have the covering of fig leaves verses the covering of animal skins. "The first is an attempt to cover oneself, the second is accepting a covering from another. The first is man made and the second is God made. Adam and Eve are in need of a salvation that comes from without. God needs to do for them what they are unable to do for themselves."³ "It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored."⁴ As the author of Hebrews says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Moreover, God's act of grace precedes His act of judgment. God covered Adam and Eve before He cast them out of the garden. They both learned about the necessity of a death—that is, a blood sacrifice—as an atonement for sin by direct revelation from God at some point, for their second son Abel knew about sacrificing clean animals (a first born sheep) unto God (Gen. 4:4). Once again we see the clear connection in Scripture between sin and physical death.

God's Punishment for Sin

Second, the verses which describe the consequences of the fall upon the earth and mankind make it very clear that physical death is part of God's judgment against sin. In Genesis 3 God pronounces specific punishments against Adam and Eve as a result of their sin that apply to their posterity:

² It is particularly tragic that the full preterist rejection of the orthodox Christian doctrine of the second bodily, literal coming of Christ has forced them to adopt a heathen, secular humanistic concept of death. Robert A. Morey faithfully contrasts the Christian and humanist concepts of death. He writes, "All the humanistic concepts about death being 'natural' or part of human nature are false. Death is the terrible and unnatural ripping of the soul out of man's body. Death tears man in half. Man was made to live, not to die. Christian attitude: 1. Death is unnatural. 2. Death flows from sin. 3. Death is a time of sorrow (John 11:33-39). 4. Death will be done away with when Jesus returns (Rev. 21:4). Humanist attitudes: 1. Death is natural. 2. Death is part of life. 3. Death should mean little or nothing to us. 4. Death will always be here" (*Death and the Afterlife* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984], 40).

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapter 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 207.

⁴ Marcus Dods, Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 1:11.

To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat *of* it all the days of your life.” (Gen. 3:16-17)

Because of the fall, both man and woman’s God-given tasks are made difficult and painful. Woman naturally wants to be a joyful mother of children (cf. Ps. 113:9). But because of the fall, pregnancy and childbirth are exceptionally difficult and painful. Prior to modern medicine, the number one killer of women of childbearing age was childbirth. Because of Adam’s fall the earth is cursed; bringing forth food will require great toil. The pleasantness of tending the Garden of Eden is replaced by sweat and pain. Adam will have to leave behind the lush fruit-bearing trees of the Garden to fight against the “thorns and thistles” that God will cause to spring forth. “The toil that now lies behind the preparation of every meal is a reminder of the fall and is made the more painful by the memory of the ready supply of food within the garden (2:9).”⁵ Adam and his posterity had the whole earth to enjoy. As they took dominion over it they could have used the great abundance the land brought forth with comfort and pleasure. But man’s great blessing is turned into a curse. Hardships, drought, disease-bearing insects, famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanoes, tornadoes, blight, sterility, insect and animal attacks are all a result of sin. They all flow from the curse. Work, necessary for taking dominion, is not the curse, the great hardships, difficulties, setbacks, frustrations and failures that accompany man’s work after the fall are.

The earth is cursed because of Adam’s sin and, consequently, the work of Christ, to be perfect and complete, must eliminate this curse. Paul speaks to this issue when he writes, “The creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:20-23). The apostle says that the elimination of the curse on this earth is coterminous with the bodily resurrection of the saints. As long as this earth is cursed and Christians are asleep in their graves, we know that Jesus has not returned. The full preterist attempt to fit everything into an A.D. 70 framework has rendered Christ’s work of salvation ineffective and incomplete.⁶

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 82.

⁶ Full preterists have argued that in Romans 8:2-23 the word “creation” (*ktiseos*) does not refer to this world, but rather to Israel. This view is absurd and should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) The creation was subjected to futility unwillingly (v. 20). This cannot refer to Israel. Israel willingly sinned against God, while the creation suffered because of what Adam did. “‘Not of its own will’ does not imply that ‘the creation’ possesses will or that it could have willed its own subjection to vanity. This is simply a statement to emphasize the fact that it was wholly on account of the will of another that the subjection took place” (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 65], 1:303). (2) Israel was not delivered from the bondage of decay in A.D. 70. Instead it was destroyed and judged by God. The nation was not delivered from futility in A.D. 70, but rather was rendered purposeless (i.e. the Roman armies obliterated the temple and the sacrificial system that was set out of gear at the cross). Full preterists take an act of wrath and judgment upon apostate Israel and turn it into an eschatological, redemptive event. It certainly helped Christians at the time, but at the most it was a temporary reprieve in persecution. (3) Israel did not obtain “glorious liberty” in A.D. 70, but rather was judged and destroyed. How can

At the end of the pronouncement of punishments against man, we read that, after a whole life of sweat, toil and struggle, all men will die physically. “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Although a number of interpreters see this as only meaning that man’s hard toil has a terminus in death, in this context it must be seen as part of the general penalty. This penalty now determines that man’s body, which was his instrument for dominion, must decay and return to the dust from which it came. As Paul says, “Death came into the world through sin” (Rom. 5:12). Spiritual death is the direct cause of physical death.⁷ This statement is

the full preterist apply this to Israel when Paul says their time will not come until the long, indefinite period called the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled (Rom. 11:25)? As of this writing, the vast majority of those called Jews are still blind to the gospel. (Preaching the gospel is illegal in modern Israel.) (4) The renewal of the earth is tied by Paul to the redemption of our bodies. If Israel was liberated in A.D. 70, then the physical resurrection already happened. But it is obvious that the resurrection has not occurred. Charles Hodges’ comments on this passage are excellent: “That *ktisis* here, is to be taken, not as meaning the whole human family, nor the heathen world, nor all rational creatures, but the whole creation with which we are immediately connected—the earth, and all its tribes of beings, man excepted—is the opinion of the great majority of commentators of all ages. It is supported by the following considerations: 1. In the first place, the words *pasa e ktisis*, *the whole creation*, are so comprehensive, that nothing should be excluded which the nature of the subjected and the context do not show cannot be embraced within the scope [Hodge goes on to explain why angels are excluded].... 2. In the second place, the apostle clearly distinguishes between the *ktisis* [creation] and, believers, the latter cannot be included in the former.... 3. Neither can ‘the creature’ [or creation] mean the race of mankind as distinguished from Christians... [because] (a) It cannot be said of the world of mankind, that they have an earnest expectation and desire for the manifestation of the sons of God.... (b) It cannot be said, in its full and proper force, that mankind were brought into their present state, not by their own act, or ‘willingly,’ but by the act and power of God. The obvious meaning of verse 20 seems to be, that the fact that the creature was subjected to its present state, not by itself, but by God, is the reason, at once, why it longs for deliverance, and may hope to obtain it.... (c) A still greater difficulty is found in reconciling this interpretation with ver. 21. How can it be said of mankind, as a whole, that they are to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and made partakers of the glorious liberty of the children of God? And, especially, how can this be said to occur at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God, *i.e.*, at the time of the second advent, the resurrection day, when the consummation of the Redeemer’s kingdom is to take place? According to the description here given, the whole creation is to groan under its bondage until the day of redemption, and then it also is to be delivered. This description can, in no satisfactory sense, be applied to mankind, as distinguished from the people of God. (d) This interpretation does not suit the spirit of the context or drift of the passage. The apostle is represented as saying, in substance, ‘The very nature and condition of the human race point to a future state: they declare that this is an imperfect, frail, dying, unhappy state; that man does not and cannot attain the end of his being here; and even Christians, supported as they are by the earnest of future glory, still find themselves obliged to sympathize with others in these sufferings, sorrows, and deferred hopes.’ But how feeble and attenuated is all this, compared to the glowing sentiments of the apostle! His object is not to show that this state is one of frailty and sorrow, and that Christians must feel this as well as others. On the contrary, he wishes to show that the sufferings of this state are utterly insignificant in comparison with the future glory of the sons of God. And then to prove how great this glory is, he says, the whole creation, with outstretched neck, has been longing for its manifestation from the beginning of the world; groaning not so much under present evil as from the desire for future good” (*A Commentary on Romans* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1835, 64) 1972], 270-271).

⁷ That the Jews did not regard physical death as good or natural is quite obvious. The Psalms often speak of the great blessedness of a life lived in communion with God and His people; and of death as an enemy or threat (cf. Ps. 6:4 ff.; 86:2-14; 30:2-4; 116:1-4, etc). When Hezekiah became sick and was told that he would die, he wept bitterly, prayed and was healed of his sickness (Isa. 38:1-5). Resurrections unto earthly *temporal* life (e.g., 1 Kgs. 17:17-24; 2 Kgs. 4:31-37; 13:20-21) were viewed as great blessings because death in the middle of one’s days (Ps. 102:25; Isa. 38:10) was viewed as bad, unacceptable and even, in certain contexts, a judgment. The Jews’ view of man and the future bodily resurrection influenced their method of dealing with dead bodies. Instead of burning or cremation, which was common among certain heathen tribes and nations, the Hebrews treated the dead body with utmost respect as if they were placing it in safe storage for the day of resurrection (e.g., Mt. 27:57-60; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42; note verse 40 reads “as was the custom of the Jews to bury”). Interestingly, to not receive a proper burial, but to be left out in the open to be consumed by animals was regarded as a curse (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:16; Jer. 8:1-3; 16:4-6;

a confirmation of the threat of death given earlier. The moment Adam ate the forbidden fruit he died spiritually and became a mortal, perishable creature. His clock of mortality, so to speak, began to tick. Man's body "was *made dust*, and was still so; so that there needed no more than to recall the grant of immortality, and to withdraw the power which was put forth to support it, and then he would, of course, *return to dust*."⁸ The fact that Adam and his wife Eve were not killed physically the very moment they sinned was an act of grace, so that a Seed could be born of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (cf. Gen. 3:15).

Exclusion from the Tree of Life

Third, that the fall of Adam results in spiritual death leading to physical demise is proven beyond a shadow of doubt by the expulsion narrative in Genesis 3:

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (22-24).

As a result of eating the forbidden fruit God drove out Adam from the garden. The verb "drove out" "is a stronger term than 'send out' used in v. 22. It is often used in the Pentateuch of the expulsion of the inhabitants of Canaan (e.g., Exod. 23:28-31)."⁹ The idea is that Jehovah drove Adam out of the garden completely as an act of judgment. Adam did not leave the garden because he wanted to. He was thrown out because of his sin. Sin results in spiritual death as well as separation and alienation from God. The time when Adam walked and talked with Jehovah in the cool breeze of paradise is over. Adam must leave and enter the realm of thorns and thistles. Not only is Adam forced to leave Eden, but cherubim and a flaming sword are stationed to make sure that the man does not attempt to reenter Eden. What is the main purpose of this expulsion

Isa. 14:19). By the second century after the birth of Christ, the Jewish rabbis were teaching that anyone who denied the future resurrection of the body was excluded from the world to come. (see Mishnah, Sanh. 10.1a). That non-Hellenized Jews believed in the resurrection of the body during the inter-testamental period is proven by the account of a Jewish elder (Razis) who lived during the period of the Saleucid persecution. When he knew that his capture by the hated Greeks was inescapable, he disemboweled himself with a sword. In the non-inspired apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees 14:46, we read, "Finally, standing on a sheer rock, and now completely drained of blood, he took his entrails in both hands and flung them at the crowd. And thus invoking the Lord of life and breath to give these entrails back to him again, he died" (NEB).

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McClean, VA: McDonald, n.d.), 1:32. The great Hebrew scholar and expositor Edward J. Young makes observations regarding this passage that are noteworthy: "Again an emphasis upon death. Having been formed of the dust of the ground man is to return to that dust. Man had wanted to be like God, but he is only dust. Herein is the culmination of the threat 'thou shalt surely die.' As soon as man had disobeyed God he became mortal. The power of death came over him and the germ of death entered his nature. He was separated from God and in the throes of spiritual, eternal death. The germ must ripen, and when it does man's body will be dissolved and return to the dust from which he was taken. We must note the force of the word 'till.' It is not used in a chronological sense, as though merely to teach that man would eat bread until his return to the dust. Rather, it is emphatic and climactic in force. Man is to eat bread and this eating of bread as a result of hard toil will culminate in death. Man is the loser in his struggle with the ground, for, as it were, the ground will at last overcome him. Death is not the natural end for man, but a tragic punishment for his disobedience" (*Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966], 138-139).

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, 85.

and the guards with the sword of fire? God wants to make sure that Adam is completely shut off from access to the tree of life, because if he takes from the tree and eats he will live forever. This prohibition was given as a necessary consequence of the fall. It obviously implies that had Adam not sinned, he would have had free access to this tree and not died physically. He also would eventually have obtained glorification and everlasting heavenly life. “The actual tree in the Garden of Eden could enable Adam and Eve to live endlessly if they could continue eating its fruit. But their access to that tree had been conditioned upon their obedience. By cutting mankind from access to the tree of life, by barring access to it, men could then be prepared to receive the true tree of life, Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

One can only conclude from this narrative that death is unnatural. It is a result of sin and a consequence of separation from God. From the moment Adam ate the fruit he was a dying creature. If one argues that Adam was created mortal and corruptible and would have died even if he had never sinned, then the denial of access to the tree of life makes no sense. Moreover, those who argue that the fall only causes sin-death or spiritual death because the penalty had to begin the very day the fruit was eaten, fail to take into consideration that Adam’s expulsion from the Garden and the tree of life is connected to his physical death. Adam was already spiritually dead when he was excluded from Eden. Therefore, physical death had to be the consequence of this permanent exclusion, even a death over 900 years later.

In addition, Jesus died on the cross and rose again that through Him we might recover what Adam lost as our federal head. Obviously, if Adam had obeyed he would have had access to the tree of life. The tree of life signified and sealed both unending physical life (the immortality of the body) as well as glorification and the happiness of eternal fellowship with God that glorification guaranteed. Scripture refers to Christ as the tree of life because He completely obliterated the consequences of the fall for His people and restores that life to His church whose promise the tree of life could have sealed to our first parents. Turretin writes, “Truly he is the only tree because no one except Christ is the author of eternal life (nor is there salvation in any other, Acts 4:12). No one except Christ is in the midst of paradise (Rev. 2:7) and of the street of the city (Rev. 22:2). Christ is in the midst of the church (as a more honorable and suitable place) to be near all and diffuse his vivifying power among all; to be seen by all, as the center in which all the lines of faith and love ought to meet, that they may acquiesce in him.”¹¹

Why Did Jesus Have to Die Physically?

Fourth, the full preterist idea that Adam only suffered sin-death (or spiritual death) and that physical death is natural is explicitly disproved by the atoning death of Christ. If physical death was not a direct consequence of sin, then Jesus did not have to die physically to redeem the elect. His suffering would have been sufficient by itself. But the Scriptures emphasize the fact that, as a sacrifice for sin, our Lord’s atoning work was brought to completion by His death. Jesus “became obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8). Paul says, “We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10). “Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:8). “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all” (Rom. 6:10). “It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen” (Rom. 8:34). When Paul summarizes the gospel he writes, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:

¹⁰ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Genesis* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2002), 42.

¹¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 1:582.

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). “If One died for all, then all died; and He died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14-15). “We believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thess. 4:14). Our Lord came for “the suffering of death” (Heb. 9:15). Because the penalty for sin is death, “no degree of suffering would have been sufficient as an atonement for our sins without the actual death of the sacrifice.... Jesus Christ might have suffered all that He did suffer without a total extinction of life: but He must not only suffer,—He must also die.”¹² The death of Christ was necessary to satisfy divine justice. Hodge writes,

He was put to death, and we in him. To be slain to the law, means to be freed from the law by death. Death, indeed, not our own, but ours vicariously, as we are crucified in Christ, who died on the cross in our behalf, in our stead. It is therefore added by the body of Christ, i.e. by his body as slain. He redeemed us from the law by death; “by being a curse,” Gal. iii.13; “by his blood,” Eph. i.7, ii.13; “by his flesh,” Eph. iii.15; “by the cross,” Eph. ii.16; “by the body of his flesh,” Col. i. 22. These are all equivalent expressions. They all teach the same doctrine, that Christ bore our sins upon the tree; that his suffering and death were a satisfaction to justice, and, being so intended and accepted, they effect our deliverance from the penalty of the law.¹³

Indeed, “He is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death” (Heb. 9:15).

The sacrificial death of Christ is the whole point of the Old Testament sacrificial rituals. Whenever cleansing from sin was required, a clean animal had to be slain and there had to be a blood ritual, for blood represents the essence of life (Lev. 17:10-11). The blood of a slain clean animal was used to make atonement, for the relationship with God could not be renewed without it. Christ suffered, shed His blood and gave His life in the place of His people. Christians are “justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9). If sin-death (or spiritual death) has no relationship to physical death at all because physical death is natural, then Christ’s physical death was arbitrary. It was unnecessary and merely served a dramatic role. Such a view is radically defective and unbiblical.

As the second Adam who came to save His people from the first Adam’s and their own sins, Jesus suffered *the full penalty for sin*. Therefore, if we want to learn what the consequences or punishments for sin are, we simply need to look at the divine punishments that the Savior experienced. There are basically three: (1) Our Lord experienced separation and alienation from God on the cross. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46). (2) He also experienced the suffering, curse, pain, anguish and dread that attend alienation from God, His wrath and displeasure. “Thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer” (Lk. 24:46). “Christ also suffered for us” (1 Pet. 2:21). “Christ suffered for us in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1). “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly” (Lk. 22:44). “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:3, 4). (3) Finally, He suffered physical death on the cross and His soul was separated from His body. “He was cut off from the land of the living.... He poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:8, 12). “They made His grave with the wicked” (Isa. 53:9). “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

Given all of this evidence, the penal consequences of Adam’s sin in the Garden cannot be limited to spiritual death. The term death in the Genesis narrative must include death in the

¹² Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1874] 1958), 197.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1864] 1972), 216-217.

widest sense of that term. It comprehends spiritual death and all the misery which flows from our estrangement from God. It affects the soul as well as the body and is the very antithesis of life in the broad sense of the term. Adam's physical death was guaranteed the moment he ate the fruit. It is organically connected to his spiritual death.

Because full preterists do not understand the relationship between sin and physical death, they pervert the meaning of the resurrection. Jesus had to suffer and die to pay for our sin and conquer death. In order to be raised from the dead, our Lord had to first die on the cross and be buried in a tomb. In order to forever conquer death for His people, He had to pay the penalty in full and then take possession of His enemies' stronghold. Death and corruption could not hold Him, so He emerged from the grave victorious. He now holds the keys of the grave because He passed in and out again and has earned by His redemptive work free entrance and free exit for us. We will receive resurrected bodies at the second coming of our Lord that are glorious, incorruptible, spiritual, and powerful because Jesus submitted to death and was raised. Christ died to save our bodies as well as our souls. The resurrection of the dead in Christ is called the "redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

But with the doctrine of the fall as only entailing sin-death (or spiritual death) the full preterist can either define the general resurrection as merely some kind of spiritual experience; or, as only a release of souls from Hades; or, the creation of a completely new and different spiritual body that has no connection with the previous body that lived on earth. They, in essence, disconnect Christ's literal resurrection from the believer's bodily resurrection. They are supposedly two very different resurrections. All of this equivocating, faulty exegesis, creative theologizing and heresy flow from the rejection of physical death's connection with the fall. Consequently, when they come to Paul's statement about the end of death at the second coming of Christ ("For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: '*Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*' The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." [1 Cor. 15:25, 26, 54-57]), they deny that it means exactly what it says. In their theologically perverted worldview death continues forever. (If they deny this charge and posit a future terminus of death and suffering, they can only do so by contradicting their own system. Moreover, since they believe everything in Scripture has already been fulfilled, they cannot appeal to the Bible to argue that at some future time sin and death comes to an end. Consequently, *they deny the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection to ultimately defeat death and the consequences of Adam's fall.* What a disgusting and pitiful heresy!)

Excursus on Full Preterist Attempts to Justify Physical Death before the Fall

The attempts to justify the full preterist position that physical death is good, normal and natural to God's created order *before the fall* are erroneous and pitiful. Their typical proofs are as follows. First, they argue that physical death had to exist outside of the garden of Eden to serve as a spiritual warning to Adam. Moreover, they say that death had to exist before the fall so that Adam could understand what the threat of death meant.¹⁴ Some full preterists even go so far as to

¹⁴ In this section this author is referring to the arguments of the full preterist book *Beyond Creation Science: New Covenant Creation* by Timothy P. Martin and Jeffrey L. Vaughn (Whitehall, MT: Apocalyptic Vision Press, 2001, 05). On page 217 they write, "*Physical death existed, outside the boundaries of the garden, at the very least, in order*

say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil implies that not only death, *but also evil existed before the fall*.¹⁵ There are a number of serious problems with these arguments. (1) The idea that death had to exist outside the garden as a warning is an argument from silence. In addition, it assumes that God was unable to communicate the concept of sin, rebellion and evil to Adam *without first creating examples of death and evil to observe*. This is a great error. All orthodox theologians teach that Adam and Eve had natural law or the work of the moral law of God written upon their hearts (Rom. 2:15). Consequently, given this fact and the reality of direct revelation from God, it would be absurd to insist that God would have to create liars, thieves, adulterers and murderers so that Adam could understand these moral concepts. God could warn Adam about the consequences of sin without first having to directly create the consequences of sin which would violate His nature and character.

(2) The idea that God deliberately and *directly* placed evil into this world *before* the fall is blasphemous and contrary to all sound theology and exegesis. If God created evil before the fall, then God is the *direct author* of evil. This is biblically and theologically impossible. Jehovah is not the direct cause or responsible author of sin in this world, Adam is. "...Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity" (Job 34:10). God is absolutely holy and righteous and hates sin and evil (Isa. 6:3; Dt. 32:4; Ps. 92:16). He cannot be tempted and does not tempt man to sin (Jas. 1:13). The Bible explicitly teaches that, after God created this world, He proclaimed it to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). If evil existed, then God would be proclaiming evil itself to be "very good." Such a view is obviously irrational and wrong. Full preterist attempts to justify physical death before the fall have led them not only to deny the gospel (i.e. They argue that Jesus' physical death was not a substitutionary atonement, but was necessary *only* in order to produce the resurrection as a *sign* to the Jews. Others argue that Jesus died so His soul could go to Hades and release the Old Testament saints trapped there.), but also to pervert the doctrine of God.

Second, full preterists argue that death, calamity, violence, hurricanes, meteor impacts, tornadoes, tsunamis and the like were built into the fabric of creation by God to teach human beings to beware of God.¹⁶ They say that before the fall nature was naturally dangerous so that we would understand that God is inherently dangerous.¹⁷ What is the problem with this kind of reasoning? It ignores the fact that God is only dangerous to people who sin and rebel against Him. Adam and Eve were without sin and lived in paradise. The Bible explicitly teaches that the earth only became cursed as a result of Adam's sin (Gen. 3:17-19). Also, the full preterist reasoning, once again, ignores the fact that God communicated His will to Adam about rebellion

to serve as a *spiritual* warning to Adam. Death had to exist *before* the fall if Adam was to be informed in some manner about what God meant by the threat of death."

¹⁵ Martin and Vaughn write, "Also consider that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil also existed before the fall. This implies not only death, but evil existed *before* the fall. If death and evil existed before the fall in some form, then we should not be surprised if they exist in some form *after* Christ's redemption is complete" (Ibid). According to an endnote they got the idea that God is the author of evil from a lecture by John Noe. Their book, which essentially teaches that God created evil and intends evil to exist in this world forever, was endorsed by: Don K. Preston, Walt Hibbard, Terry M. Hall, Ed Burley and many others.

¹⁶ "Those who believe there was no biological death before the fall suggest the original creation was *tame* and *safe* in its entirety. But would that not teach falsehood about the biblical God? Is God tame and safe?" (Ibid, 217-218). Here we see why the full preterist extends evil and suffering into eternity. Evil, calamity, suffering and death exist so man can know God's nature and character, they say. Not only does the full preterist ignore the fact that God can reveal Himself to us in special revelation without creating evil as an object lesson, but they essentially teach a form of dualism. Evil becomes externalized forever as a *necessary* symbolism.

¹⁷ "The creation [before the fall] is naturally dangerous, because *God* is inherently dangerous" (Ibid, 218).

through *direct revelation*. The full preterist posits a universe where God's wrath against sin is exhibited *before* sin even exists. God does not need to create death, suffering, evil and calamity to warn man against sin. His verbal revelation is sufficient. Like the previous argument, here the full preterist makes God the direct cause and responsible agent of evil and not man. Such a view should be *immediately rejected* by any Bible-believing Christian.

Third, full preterists argue that the Hebrew terms used in the Bible for various carnivores (e.g., "lion" means "violent"; "hawk" means "tearing") indicate that Adam described a world *already* full of death and destruction (i.e. nature red in tooth and claw) *before* the fall. This argument is refuted by the following considerations. (1) Given the biblical history and what modern scholars know about linguistics, it is extremely unlikely that Adam spoke Hebrew in the garden of Eden. All men were of *one* "race" and spoke *one* language until God divided the human race and made several different languages at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). These few languages are the large branches that come out of the main trunk from which all languages evolved. It is likely that one of these languages was a proto-Semitic language out of which developed Hebrew and other Semitic languages. We must remember that Adam stands in the same relationship to the Hebrew language as he does to Chinese, Indo-European, Latin and African tongues. Adam was no more a Semite than an Indian or Japanese person. Moreover, even if Adam spoke Hebrew (which is exceptionally improbable given Gen. 11:9, "The LORD confused the language of *all the earth*"), languages are so fluid that it is extremely unlikely that Adam could even have a conversation with Moses. (We, for example, would be completely unable to communicate with an Anglo-Saxon from Roman times.)

(2) The names that Adam gave the animals are *not recorded in Scripture*. Thus, their argument is an assumption based on no evidence. The Hebrew names of animals written down thousands of years after Adam and Eve lived would have probably originated with the Semitic tribes in the Middle East and not in the garden of Eden.

(3) The full preterist argument assumes that Adam went outside of paradise to observe the various wild, dangerous and savage practices of the animals as they ripped each other apart and then named the animals accordingly. This assumption is refuted in two ways. a) The biblical text says that God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would call them (Gen. 2:19). God certainly did not bring the animals into paradise so they could tear each other apart in Adam's presence. Moreover, even full preterists think of the violence, suffering bloodshed, brutality and death that existed at that time as occurring outside of Eden. b) The biblical account explicitly teaches that before the fall both man and animals were vegetarians. "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food'; and it was so" (Gen. 1:29-30). Verse 30 means exactly what it says. "[T]his verse is an indication of the perfect harmony prevailing in the animal world. No beast preyed upon the other. Rapacious and ferocious wild beasts did not exist. This verse, then, indicates very briefly for this chapter what is unfolded at length in chapter two, that a paradise-like state prevailed at creation."¹⁸ As Victor P. Hamilton writes, "Man is to have as his food the seed and fruit of plants. Animals and birds are to have the leaves. (The latter point accords with the description of the eschatological age when 'the lion shall eat straw like the ox,' Isa. 11:7; 65:25). At no point is anything (human beings, animals, birds) allowed to take the life of another living being and consume it for food. The dominion assigned to the human couple over the animal world does not

¹⁸ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Watburg Press, 1942), 98-99.

include the prerogative to butcher. Instead, humankind survives on a vegetarian diet.”¹⁹ Those who object to what the Bible teaches in this passage based on the way carnivores function or appear today are simply guilty of unbelief.

Some will object to this interpretation and will argue that we do not find an *explicit* prohibition upon killing animals and using them for food in this passage. The problem with this objection is that this kind of positive command is clearly designed to limit man’s diet. It presupposes such a prohibition. When God says, “This is what I have given you to eat as food,” it has the same sense as “this is what you are permitted to eat.” With this positive command God does not need to set forth a laundry list of forbidden items. The fact that they are *not* permitted automatically excludes them. Similarly, when God told Moses to speak to the rock, it implied that striking the rock instead would be an act of disobedience (Num. 20:8-12; Dt. 32:50-51). Further, when God presented Eve to Adam to be his wife, He automatically excluded all homosexual relationships including sodomite and lesbian marriages.

Moreover, the full preterist scenario of nature before the fall as full of violence, bloodshed, pain, suffering and death *contradicts* the broad context of Scripture. If Adam and Eve could kill or scavenge dead animals to supplement their diet, then why did God give Noah specific permission to eat animals after the flood (Gen. 9:3-4)? Why do the Scriptures say specifically that the victory of Christ’s kingdom will result in the *end* of animal upon animal violence; that even the most dangerous carnivores will be vegetarians (e.g., Isa. 11:7)? If the full preterist objects to this point by saying that the end of animal upon animal violence and killing is not to be taken literally because it is a metaphor for peace, then they still have an insurmountable problem. Note, if animal upon animal violence and killing were taking place *prior* to the fall and was a *good thing*, then why (even if the prophecy is simply a metaphor) would the exclusion of this violence and killing be presented to us by God as *one of the great benefits of Christ’s victorious kingdom*? According to full preterists this cessation of death and violence would not be natural or good. In fact, as we have noted, they teach that a world without violence, suffering, pain and death would communicate a *false picture of God*. The only logical conclusion that we can come to based on the prophetic picture of the kingdom is that God regards violence, suffering and death, *even in the animal kingdom*, as abnormal, as a consequence of sin, as a perversion of the created order.

Fourth, full preterists will point to passages that compare beautiful, lush, post fall geographical areas to Eden (e.g., Gen. 13:10; Joel 2:3) and argue that *all the conditions* in the post fall lush area must be attributed to the garden in paradise.²⁰ This argument should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) The point of the comparison regards *only* the beauty and lushness of a place. We have no exegetical or logical reasons to assume that the inspired authors of such passages are telling us that death, disease, calamity, destruction and animals ripping each other apart, existed in the garden of Eden. Are we to believe that God had to protect Adam and Eve from malaria-bearing mosquitoes or encephalitis or hungry crocodiles? That does not sound like paradise at all. (2) It also ignores the explicit statements in Scripture that tell us the earth was subjected to a curse as a *direct consequence of Adam’s sin* (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:19-22). Thorns and thistles existed in Egypt, but they did not exist in Eden.

Fifth, full preterists appeal to the way in which God made the ostrich as proof that biological death existed before the fall. They quote Job 39:13-17 (NIV): "The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays

¹⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 140.

²⁰ E.g., Martin and Vaughn, 222.

her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, *for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense.*²¹ All that this passage is telling us is that God did not create ostriches with much intelligence or brain power. This is true of innumerable creatures. An animal's lack of intelligence, however, tells us nothing about whether or not death or evil existed prior to the fall. The statement about eggs being crushed, and so forth, describes conditions they existed in Job's own day. There are no exegetical reasons whatsoever to assume that such conditions existed prior to the fall. This full preterist argument (once again) is based on an assumption with no actual proof.

We have seen in this brief excursus that there are no good reasons for abandoning the traditional orthodox understanding of the creation and the fall. The full preterist heresy teaches us a very important lesson: that a radical, foundational perversion of eschatology leads to a heretical perversion of protology—the history of the beginning.

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[HOME PAGE](#)

²¹ Ibid, 223. The NIV is their preferred text.