

The Legal Effect of Christ's Coming to Earth as a Baby

Before we can understand the legal effect of Christ being born in a stable in Bethlehem approximately two thousand years ago, we first have to understand what the earth's and humanity's legal status was before.



Adam and Eve, and, by family relation, all their descendants, were criminals before God. And not just any criminals; they were traitors who had defied a specific, simple law to not eat of one of the trees in the Garden in which God had placed them. They defied God and His law, they trespassed upon property which God had reserved for Himself, they stole from that property, and they conspired with God's chief enemy in order to attempt to take God's rule from Him. We know this from the account in Genesis chapters 1 through 3. Because they sought to be "like God," they were criminals, traitors, and unlawful usurpers of authority. Death was not only the just punishment, it was the explicit punishment which God had forewarned them would be the consequence for them if they disobeyed His command.

Therefore, they were also fools, for knowing full well what the consequence of this act would be, they went forward anyway. They became fools because they believed a lie from the mouth of a liar, who impugned the character of the God who had created and commanded them to not eat of the tree. Thus, they were complicit in slandering the God who created them. Yet, even though God had told them that "in the day they ate of the tree, they would die," they did not physically die immediately; they died covenantally immediately, meaning rejection from a relationship of friendship with the God who gave them life. Though they could walk around and talk and breathe, they were clearly on death row.

But that's not all. The 6th chapter of the Westminster Confession states that "they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly

defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.” They were ejected from the Garden of Eden, where they had walked with God Himself in the cool of the day. There was also a terrible loss of some kind in their self-perception, for after eating of the fruit, they were ashamed of their “nakedness” and tried to cover themselves with leaves. They were dead to God and “defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.” They feared God and fled from Him, and they couldn’t even face each other as they had in the past. Their existence was a death row, lacking their Father/Creator’s blessed presence and lacking the original confidence that came from knowing God and walking with Him.

But that’s not all. As the delegated guardians and tenders of the plants, the animals, and the earth and as its governors, they had allowed a spoiler into their idyllic life in Eden. They had submitted to his word and turned against God’s. Instead of telling the serpent he was a liar and ejecting him, or even executing him, for slandering God and attempting to foment a *coup d’etat* against God, they listened and were lead by that serpent. They gave him authority over themselves. How? Not because God had legally appointed the serpent to rule over them or given him any jurisdiction over them or the earth. They gave to the serpent authority by obeying him. This is the same type of authority that an owner of a house gives to a burglar by letting him in the house and telling him to take what valuables he’d like. The burglar has no legal claim to anything in the house, but the owner has given it away.

Therefore, when Satan told Christ that he could give to Christ all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, he was lying or stating a half truth. He couldn’t say that he had legal possession of those kingdoms. See Matthew 4:8; Luke 4:6. Satan did not recognize God’s authority and determination of ownership anyway. Men had given Satan that authority by not submitting to the true King, that is, God. In fact, seeing that Christ had not sinned and was indeed the Son of God and entitled to rule the entire universe, this temptation was actually Satan using his subtlety to get Christ to give to Satan all authority over the world. “Heads you lose, tails I win.” Unlike Adam and Eve, Christ explained the correct delegation of authority, glory and power, when He replied, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and

Him only shall you serve.' ” Matthew 4:10. The lawful owner and authority of the world and all that is in it is the Lord God.

God allowed them to live quite lengthy lives, but of course, Adam and Even eventually died after having children. Their children, lacking even the original association with their Creator, also walked under the burden of rejection, defilement, and eventual death. We can safely assume that Adam and Eve would not have hidden their personal history in the Garden of Eden from them, so they would have known that their parents were the original sinners and were justly suffering for their sin. But that negative example did not stop their children from sinning even further. The defilement appears to have grown in only one generation with Cain's murder of his own brother, Abel. We see a rapid decline of the human race until Noah, when God sees that he must destroy that entire generation with the exception of the eight in Noah's family.

The capital defendant sits on death row and awaits the finalization of his appeals; he lives in a miserable, limbo-like state of expectation of his end. If upheld on appeal, the original decree of the trial judge is a powerful thing. It affects his entire life, his outlook, his longevity. He is not making big plans, building a family, or looking forward to starting a special mission or enterprise. He's looking to die soon. And his "good works" while on death row do not grant him a pardon; he's still sentenced to and awaiting death. God's legally binding decree sentencing man to ejection from His presence and the Garden and from life itself and from which there was no appeal, had an even greater effect on mankind through the generations. Even the best of mankind had to be ashamed and disappointed at the height of mankind's fall - from being created in the image of God to being sentenced by that God to death row. Short-timers were they all, and most apparently lived for the moment and their own pleasure, not believing that God would somehow redeem mankind based on his prophecy to the serpent in the Garden - "He shall crush your head, and you shall crush his heel." Genesis 3:15.

But some did believe. Some did not give in to hopelessness and total surrender to the sin that had brought upon them their misery. They considered God just, so they patiently endured the suffering of their death row existence. But they also believed in

God's mercy for them and His victory over the serpent. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so many others awaited expectantly the redemption promised.

Summarizing mankind's situation before Christ's coming: They lived in constant expectation of their just and unappealable sentence of death, they were without the covering and enabling presence of God to give them strength and hope to fight the temptations to sin they faced, they bore children who seemed to become worse than their parents over time, and they were voluntarily enslaved to Satan's illegitimate usurpation of rule over the earth and without a sufficiently powerful deliverer to escape enslavement. Yet, for those who enabled to see, God's word and His interventions in history at specific times gave them hope for something better coming – a deliverer, a legitimate ruler, God's anointed, who would crush the serpent's head.

This, of course, was Christ Jesus, who was born into this world and, therefore, one of us. Yet he was not guilty of that original sin, nor was he sentenced to the death which original sin deserved. Though He was one of us, he did not come from Adam, the original sinner. Man did not choose Him as his deliverer; He was chosen before the foundation of the world. And He was chosen and appointed as deliverer for mankind by an unrivaled authority, able to give us a just release from the sentence of death – the Judge who had originally sentenced us, the Creator God. Without being unjust, the Judge who had sentenced us provided a way to free us from the sentence. One man, Adam, was the source of our sentence and woe, and one man, Jesus, would be the rescuer of us from that sentence and woe. “The just for the unjust,” as Paul explains in such a lawyerly fashion in the Book of Romans. The sentence was carried out upon the innocent Christ at the cross, such that God's justice was satisfied. The curse of the Garden was undone. Like a canceling of a debt, the debtor was now free. And Christ's last words on the cross - “It is finished” - established that cancelation legally in God the Judge's court of justice.

So what was the legal effect. If the sin of Adam and Eve established the basis for the death sentence mankind had lived under for thousands of years, then what effect did Christ's coming have on our legal status? Legally, Christ undid the curse, which included the death sentence, the curse of the earth and its fruit, and

the usurper's ability to deceive mankind into giving him authority. Christ, the sacrifice, was our substitute in death. Christ, our blessed One, represents to God a sinless man, in whom we can claim refuge from the curse and work to tend the earth instead of destroy it. More than that, our rejection by God is reversed and we are adopted by means of Christ's work back into the Family of God. We work and overcome sin while living in grace, not while living under judgment. Finally, Christ, our King, has taken the ultimate position of rule over not only the earth but also heaven, sitting at the right hand of God the Creator. Therefore, death has lost the power over us that it formerly imposed, we serve a loving Father instead of the Judge who sentenced us to death, we can work toward a better world for us and our descendants, and Christ gently reigns over us, establishing justice and never being subject to Satan and his schemes.

As a result of Christ's work, why don't we see everything perfect now, you ask? Because God didn't want to end everything in the first century. To bring in the perfect, final judgment and make man's body holy and to live forever would mean the end of all things. It would mean the coming in of the perfect heavenly kingdom, no more children, and you and I would never have been born. It would also mean the serpent's successful undermining of God's purpose for creating the world - subduing it over time to man's dominion and subject to the Creator. Genesis 1:28-31. His original purpose was a good purpose, and He will not let it be thwarted by the serpent. On the contrary, in God's economy, the serpent's attempts to thwart become God's tools to bring about.

Legally, we now have free access through faith in Christ to the God who created us and who desires to bless us. There is no legal impediment to God blessing us now. We have been liberated from the rule of the serpent and are now ruled by a man, Christ Jesus. And we can pursue our calling to subdue and take dominion over the earth in the way God had originally planned. We must not let that sly serpent slip in to deceive us, however, for he has yet to face his final doom in the lake of fire. And we must not defy God and His word, a repeat of the Garden's rebellion. But even if we were seeing mankind in such a rebellion, we know that based on Christ's just rule and the blessing He bestows upon His Church, He will never allow such a situation to exist for longer than He wisely

foresees is necessary for His purposes. God considers Himself obligated legally to ensure the success of His Son's mission – the Church teaching and discipling the world and prevailing over the very gates of hell. In other words, such eruptions of Eden-like sinfulness are always temporary during His kingdom reign. Victory is the constant drumbeat in the heart of the Son who crushed the serpent's head!

Therefore, because of the legal effect of Christ's coming to earth, we can sing. Realize the beauty and truth and power of the words of Christmas carols like:

“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.” Joy to the World

“Yea, her sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed; all that well deserved his anger he no more will see or heed.” Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

“. . . trace we the babe, who hath retrieved our loss, from his poor manger to his bitter cross; treading his steps, assisted by his grace, till man's first heav'nly state again takes place.” Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn

“Light of light descendeth from the realms of endless day, that the powers of hell may vanish as darkness clears away.” Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

“Your death has ransomed our lost race, for on the cross you took our place.” O Jesus Sweet, O Jesus Mild

“Nails, Spear, shall pierce him through; the cross be borne for me, for you: hail, hail, the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary.” What Child is This?

“O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny; from depths of hell thy people save, & give them victory over the grave.” O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

“Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom
bring.” Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

“Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn
King;’ peace on earth, and mercy mild, God & sinners
reconciled! * * * Mild he lays his glory by, born that man
no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to
give them second birth.” Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

“God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day,
to save us all from Satan’s pow’r when we were gone
astray.” God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

“Forth today the Conqu’ror goeth, who the foe, sin and
woe, death and hell, o’erthroweth. God is man, man to
deliver; his dear Son now is one with our blood forever.”
All My Heart This Night Rejoices

“. . . then why should men on earth be sad, since our
Redeemer made us glad, when from our sin he set us
free, all for to gain our liberty.” On Christmas Night All
Christians Sing