

*Sunday, March 16, 2014*

**From the book “The Ministry of Salvation” (12)**

## **Death and the Consequences of Sin**

Man was created from the dust of the earth. God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and Adam became a living soul. Thus man became closely connected to God as the source of his life. The result of man’s disobedience to God, and following the council of Satan, was that he fell into Sin and was sentenced to death. In the light of this concept, we will explain the meaning of death in our topic “Death and the consequences of Sin.” We will also explain the signs and characteristics of sin as they began to appear in man’s life as a result of falling into disobedience. Additionally we will discuss the reason why God did not allow man to eat from the tree of life, why God didn’t retract His judgment of death upon man, why He did not consider man’s repentance sufficient, and why man didn’t die immediately after his fall.

### **What is the meaning of death?**

In the topic of “Creation” we described the meaning of life for man as being closely connected to God, the source and Grantor of life of man. Here we will answer a complementing question, what is the meaning of death?

**St. Athanasius said:**

**“For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.**

**The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore, when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good. Because they obtained their existence from God, they had to be deprived of existence for eternity which means they would degenerate and remain in death and corruption.**

**By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears also the Likeness of Him Who is, and if he preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt. So is it affirmed in Wisdom: “The keeping of His laws is the assurance of incorruption.” (Wisdom 6:18) And being incorrupt, he would be henceforth as God, as Holy Scripture says, “I have said, you are gods and sons of the Highest all of you but you die as men and fall as one of the princes.”**

St. Athanasius explains that man was created from nothing, i.e. from non-existence by the power and compassion of God the eternal Logos. Man was formed after God’s image and likeness, eternal and in incorruption. However, when mankind refuses to obey God and His commandment, with their own free will, they separate from God. Consequently, the judgment of death befalls upon them, which God had previously warned them from if they disobey the commandment. Therefore, St. Athanasius explained that death is separation from God and it is the returning to the state of non-existence as before man was created.

St. Athanasius continued in his book the incarnation of the Word saying: **“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.” (Wisdom 2:23) 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”.**

Here, St. Athanasius emphasizes on the concept that he explained previously. Moreover, he expands on this concept adding that death is not merely the returning to the state of non-existence, but more so it is the entering into a state of corruption that took over man’s nature. Then, man fell under the dominion of evil which was described previously by St. Athanasius: **“evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good.”**

Death is separation from God and returning to the state of non-existence which man was at before he was created. Not only so, but also it is entering into a state of corruption that became dominant over the nature of mankind.

*Fr. Marcos Daoud*

frmarcosdaoud@yahoo.com

*St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL*