

What is the forefathers' sin and what are its consequences? (Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi)

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It is the sin which our forefathers' committed in the Garden of Eden where the Creator had positioned them. Because man was honest and harmless, without having an idea what sin was, he ought to be tested as a rational and free personality to consciously decide over his relationship with God. In order to prove this, he must have adhered to God's command not to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Man disobeyed the command and betrayed his trust in God's will.



This action caused a triple blame to our ancestors. Firstly, they disobeyed the One who had issued the command. Secondly, it was an unjust act of audacity or boldness, ungratefulness and lack of appreciation towards the Benefactor Creator. Thirdly, it was an irrational act, since they knew that death was the consequence of their transgression. The main reason for man's defection was his desire for independence and his wish to become equal to God, which the devil has deceitfully prompted. They believed that they would become gods by themselves and thus become self-sufficient. Instead, they have become like Satan who had deceived them. Thus the words of the Creator have been confirmed: "you shall not eat, (from the fruit) for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2, 17).

With his sin, man fell from his high status. The consequences were tragic. His "image" lost the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with which he might have accomplished his destiny which was to reach the "likeness" to God. Having severed himself from the

source of eternal life he lost the ability to become immortal, incorruptible and unchangeable. His "image" was tarnished, blackened and weakened. It was not totally ruined as the Protestants teach; neither did it remain unaffected as the Catholics believe. After the fall man still has the sense of goodness inside him and can work to perfect it.



Adam's nature has been totally perverted. He fell into the necessary trap of corruption and death. Passions, desires and inclinations flooded him. The mind, deprived of the origin of true light, became dark, deluded and worshiped "nature rather than the Creator". To cite the hymn-writer: "Man in his pomp will not remain;

he is like the beasts that perish” (Psalms 49, 12).

When every man is born he is connected to the nature of the first man. That is, he assumes Adam’s perverted nature which carries death. Because of the unity of human nature the forefathers’ sin is inherited by their descendents.

Paul describes our tragedy saying: “by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Romans 5, 19). And elsewhere he says: “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Romans 5, 12). In describing nature’s perversion after the fall he says: “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 15-20). This bitter description in Paul’s words proves the total perversion caused by the forefathers’ transgression, which has been healed by our Lord’s presence here on earth.

Excerpts from the book “Discourse on Mount Athos” by Elder Joseph of Vatopedi.

Translated by Olga Konari Kokkinou from the Greek edition: Γέροντος Ιωσήφ Βατοπαιδινού, Συζητήσεις στον Άθωνα, Ψυχοφελή Βατοπαιδινά 13, Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου, Έκδοσις Α΄ 2003