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The Degradation of Sin

God gave His exiled people, embittered on account of the role Edom played in the devastation Babylon perpetrated against them, this book of Obadiah (cf. Obadiah 12). As understandable as may have been their resentment, Israel needed to hear that if they gave into their anger, they would be harboring in their body a disease which, as we have seen, could destroy their life! , Again speaking of the naïve sinner who gives himself to sin, the wise man wrote:

Proverbs 7:23 "...so he does not know that it *will cost him* his life."

And so as a deterrent, God gave His exiled people a description of the havoc which sin would wreak in the lives of the Edomites (Obadiah 5-9) with the obvious implication... if God's people

gave in to their sinful resentment, their lives could become as miserable as the Edomites soon would be!

This is why in part Obadiah was written — to warn God’s people of the danger of harboring or freely engaging in sin! We all have darlings lusts, don’t we? And because of grace, it is easy to think that they are no big deal. Yet we must see that they most certainly are — they are to God and they must be to us. Spurgeon commented:

Christian, why would you play with sin? Has it not cost you enough already?... A great sin cannot destroy a Christian, but a little sin can make him miserable... Transgression destroys peace of mind, obscures fellowship with Jesus, hinders prayer, brings darkness over the soul. (Spurgeon, 1991, p. May 30)

And so we have before us the anatomy of sin and its restraint. In the present world, God restrains both the extent to which sin might progress in a life or a society as well as its consequences. It is this reason today why sin is pleasurable, on the whole the sinner enjoys the pleasures of sin with few of its consequences. Yet as a lesson to the believer and unbeliever alike, God at times allows sin to wreak havoc in the lives of people; this is what occurred amongst the Edomites which brings us to sin’s end (Obadiah 5-6, 18).

These verses describe the downfall and destruction of Edom in extreme and brutal detail. Theirs would be a violent end in which every individual Edomite would be touched, “...there [would] be no survivor of the house of Esau” (v. 18b)!

Now because of the absolute language used here we saw that this passage is layered. Immediately it referenced the downfall and destruction of Edom. Yet it also hinted at a greater judgment that was coming upon them... that time when they would be cast into the Lake of Fire (cf. vv. 15-16).¹ This is the ultimate end of sin! This is “its wage” (Romans 6:23)!

The treachery of sin is that involves a betrayal that is unimagined. As educated as the Edomites were, none could have imagined that on account of their rejoicing over the downfall of Israel that they were celebrating their own demise! This is how sin works! It comes off looking insignificant, pleasurable, and even innocent, but when allowed to fester and grow, it betrays its customer.

James 1:15: “Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

If that was NOT enough to detour God’s people, Obadiah describes the temporal consequences of sin.

Obadiah 8, “‘Will I not on that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘Destroy wise men from Edom and understanding from the mountain of Esau?’”

As I referenced last time, one of the things Edom was known for in the ancient world was its knowledge, education, and so wisdom! For example, Eliphaz, the foremost of Job's friends and clearly the leader in rebuking Job, was from the land of Edom (cf. Job 2:11). While he had a major theological flaw (namely, he believed that God helps those who help themselves [an idea made popular by the deist, Benjamin Franklin]), nevertheless if you've read Job you know how insightful Eliphaz was! Again, get this, he was from Edom!

1 Kings 4:30a, "Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East [which is a reference to Edom]..."

This tells us something. To demonstrate how incredible was Solomon's wisdom, the text says that it surpassed that of Edom!

Jeremiah 49:7, "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman [though a city of Edom, nevertheless it is used in the Bible as a reference for the nation (just like Ephraim was for Israel)²]? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed?"

E. B. Pusey said of this verse:

He speaks as though Edom were a known abode of human wisdom, so that it was strange that it was found there no more. He speaks of the Edomites as prudent, discriminating, full of judgment, and wonders that counsel should have perished from them. They had it eminently then, before it perished. They thought themselves wise; they were thought so; but God took it away... (Pusey, 1885, p. 359)

Along with its inviolableness as a nation, Edom was known throughout the ancient world as the harbinger of wisdom and knowledge — this was their boast! Yet what would be the impact of Edom's unconfessed sin — specifically as it related to their wisdom? The text before us says two things:

Obadiah 8a, God would "...destroy³ wise men from Edom..."

The word for "destroy" is broad. It could mean

- (1) That on account of their sin, the wise of Edom would all die (cf. Joshua 23:16; Jonah 4:10). Yet barring a disease that attacked only the wise, most likely its broader use is what is being utilized here.
- (2) That use speaks NOT of the death of an individual, BUT the death of their reputation (cf. Exodus 10:7). Based on the context, that most likely is the usage here.

Obadiah 8b, on that day, God would "...destroy... understanding from the mountain of Esau?"

In light of their boast and that for which they were known in the ancient world, this is

significant! On account of Edom's sin, God would remove "understanding"- that is wisdom- from Esau. The focus here is NOT knowledge per se, BUT the ability to use knowledge unto a positive/beneficial end. Think of it relatively speaking, animals do not lack knowledge; they lack the ability to use the knowledge they have. When their food is scarce or covered by snow, animals *know* they lack food and so they spend their waking hours scavenging for it. Clearly, they don't lack knowledge. What they lack is the ability to respond appropriately to this knowledge, which is why in some cases they die. They know food is beneath them in the snow, but they do not understand how to get to it!

That is the toll that sin would take from the Edomites. On account of their rebellion, their minds, thinking, wisdom would atrophy! In time, they would become like animals!

Christian, allow this warning to sober you. Any sin can rob you of understanding and so revert you to the level of an animal- that's what is pictured in the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar. On account of his sinful pride, the Lord took his understanding, and he was left to live as an animal for "seven periods of time." At the moment of reckoning, Daniel told the king:

Daniel 4:32, "...you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle..."

When we considered this passage, we spent time considering the heinous nature of sin and how it can rob the sinning individual of his humanity! Look around, is this NOT what we see in our society today? Treachery is on every side.

- Drive on the highway during rush hour.
- Look at any news page on the internet... this past week- I forget the day- I counted more than 10 different examples of the animalistic behavior of man:
- Cannibalism.
- The torture of a child.
- Deviant sexual behavior.
- The showcase of a new sport (boxing without gloves),
- The ever-growing trend of adultery amongst women.
- The outright celebration of sin.
- On and on it went.

It didn't just remind me of Romans1, IT IS ROMANS1.

Romans 1:28-31, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful."

This is the course of sin which- you will note- begins with God handing the unrepentant sinner over to a depraved mind. That is the point here! I love how C. S. Lewis pictured it in The Chronicles of Narnia when the enlightened animals gave themselves to their lower nature they reverted to the dumb animals of our world.

That is pictured in the passage before us! On account of their sin and way before they were destroyed in 70 AD, Edom was given over to a depraved mind such that they lost their understanding! As such, they became foolish, stupid, and base in their passions and desires. Truly, “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22)!

We don’t have time to look at more passages, but consider the impact that sin had on God’s people in Redemptive History:

- David (Psalms 32:9a),
- The Galatians (Galatians 5:15)
- The Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:1),
- And Judah right before their destruction (Jeremiah 4:22)!

Truly, as lovely, fun, and exciting as may be sin, it is the most virulent disease known to mankind and can/will rob you of your wits if it is left unopposed! May God give us the grace NOT to scorn the Edomites, BUT to “look to ourselves lest we too be tempted” (Galatians 6:1)!

Sin makes “Mighty Men” into cowards.

Obadiah 9a, “Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman⁴...”

What was the second, temporal consequence of sin on Edomite society? It made its “mighty men” into “cowards” which is shocking since Edom’s military strength was another one of its boasts!

“Mighty men” in the Edomite culture no doubt referenced strong and powerful warriors. Yet in a biblical culture the emphasis was NOT on the might of a man, BUT their trust in God and so their subsequent boldness! Biblically, a “mighty man” had two primary qualities:

- (1) They were pious (men of great trust in God) who
- (2) Acted upon that piety and so were fearless (cf. cf. 1 Chronicles 11:15-19; 2 Samuel 23).

Describing the piety of boldness, Dr. Smith wrote,

His feet plucked from the horrible pit and planted on the Eternal Rock, his heart thrilled with an adoring gratitude, his soul conscious of a Divine love that will never forsake him and a Divine energy that in him and through him is working out eternal purposes of good, he is girded with invincible strength. In a nobler sense than Napoleon ever dreamed, he knows himself to be a ‘man of destiny.’ (Smith, 1901, p. 53)

Yet what happens when a “mighty man’s” piety is compromised? He who once was nobly-bold becomes a coward- or as referenced here, “dismayed.” The word references the idea of being “broken” and so being in a panic, demoralized, and so fleeing for one’s life.

And so it is in the life of the one whose flirtation with sin blossoms into romance! Sin compromises their strength (their piety) and so they are left to face this world and so Satan as if alone! It is as Jonah warned:

Jonah 2:8, “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.”

Which ultimately is God! Whatever vestiges of godly devotion that might have been passed down through the ages from their father, Esau, this devotion evaporated in Edom. Though they dwelt in the shelter of Petra, they became as frightened animals!

Once again, we do not have time to explore this point further amongst God’s people. But consider the impact that Elijah’s sin had on his boldness (cf. 1 Kings 18 & 1 Kings 19:1-3a).

Christian! Allow the cowardice of Edom to sober you when it comes to sin. Let us not take any sin lightly. It has the potential of making cowards of us all- which brings us to the final temporal consequence of sin referenced here; it makes an individual vulnerable.

Obadiah 9b, “Then your mighty men will be dismayed, O Teman, in order that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter.”

Before Edom could be conquered, its mighty men had to be compromised (which was the focus of our last point). With the compromise of Edom’s mighty men came the demise of their nation! From this we see another temporal consequence of sin: Vulnerability! As the degradation of sin works its way out in the life of a sinner, they become vulnerable to all manner of ill!

Proverbs 25:28, “*Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.”

You can’t miss this shocking comparison. The man who struggles with self-control is a like a city in the ancient world without walls! What is this a picture of? Vulnerability in the extreme!

Most of you know the two main areas of civilization in the ancient world were Egypt and the Tigris/Euphrates river valley! When both of these geographies had a strong nation, where did they fight? Palestine! Accordingly, to be a city of Palestine in that day “*without walls*” was to be exceedingly vulnerable!

By way of note, that is the strength that was pictured in Samson’s hair (Numbers 6:5). The Nazarite’s hair was a symbol of his dedication and devotion to the Lord (which is why they

couldn't cut it)! Yet what happens when a "mighty man's" piety is compromised? When their "hair" is figuratively cut off? They are vulnerable to an easy capture (cf. Judges 16:19-21)!

This is what Edom had become on account of their sin, which explains why in the fifth century BC that which had not occurred in over a thousand years took place. Edom was toppled as a nation! Think of that. During the tumultuous years 1800-500 BC for God's people, Edom remained strong and inviolable as a nation. Yet now they fell!

How? What's to explain this shocking event? According to our passage, it was on account of their sin! Their sin made them vulnerable which the nations took advantage of unto Edom's destruction!

Family of God may this passage have the impact on us that God intended it to have on His exiled people! May it humble us... sober us... and make us a broken and repentant people and so ever vigilant to fight against sin (cf. Proverbs 4:23)!!

Yet how do we do this? How do we battle against sin? Any and every individual who "comes to Mount Zion" is delivered from sin's penalty (v. 17)! Truly, Jesus came to this world to save sinners, of whom we are the foremost! Accordingly, it is only as we understand this forgiveness and live in light of it that we will respond to a passage like this with both the passion and resources to fight against the sin of our heart! Knowing the forgiveness of sin — knowing that there is "no condemnation for the people of God" (Romans 8:1) — we are in a place to fight and so take action! But what action? Obadiah doesn't give it — but Paul does in Romans 6:12-13.

The aim of sanctification in the life of the Christian is one and the same as the aim of the modern Olympian. Pierre de Coubertin, credited as the father of the Modern Olympic games, said, "The important thing in life is not triumph, but the struggle; the essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." Notice, guarding our hearts and lives from sin involves three things.

(1) Prohibition, vv. 12-13a.

Obadiah 12-13a, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness..."

This means on account of grace, we pay particular attention to what we allow our hearts and minds to dwell upon! It is so true.

Proverbs 23:7a: "...as [a man] thinks within himself, so he is..."

Success in overcoming sin begins with what we allow our minds to think upon and how we choose to use our bodies! It is "the foxes that ruin the vineyard" (Song of Solomon 2:15)!

(2) Dedication, v. 13b.

Obadiah 13b, “But [this is a strong adversative; if there is going to be success when it comes to resisting sin, it secondly involves...] present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.”

Do you know what it means to be a “saint”? The word means “holy ones” and references any and all whom the Lord has chosen and so *set apart for Himself*- that is a saint!

And Christian, that is what you have become in Christ... the property of God! In this regard it is only natural to “present ourselves to God” for His purpose and pleasure! Guarding our heart from indulging in sins of the mind and body, we are to devote ourselves unto the service and glory of God! Yet herein we must guard our heart. Thomas Watson wrote this:

Many deal with their sins as Moses’ mother dealt with her son. She hid him in the basket, as if she had left him- but her eye was still upon him- and in the end, she became his nurse (Exodus 2:9). Just so, many seem to leave their sins- but they only hide them from the eye of others. Their heart still goes after them, and at last they nurse and give breast to their sins. (Watson, 2014)

“Presenting ourselves to God” involves confessing this inclination, turning from it, and so considering ourselves as a vessel claimed by God for His use! This naturally leads to presentation.

(3) Presentation, v. 13c.

Obadiah 13c, “and [present] your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

The word for “present” is an important exhortation. In the Septuagint, it was often used as a technical term for a priest's placing an offering on the altar. It therefore carried the general idea of surrendering or yielding up.

And so as members of God's "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5), we are here exhorted to perform what is essentially a priestly act of worship- The Formal Presentation Of Our Members to God! In what way?

- As instruments of righteousness to God: this is the same language as in v. 12- as weapons to be used by God for righteousness! So we are talking here about the *practice* of godliness.
- That’s the package! As we labor to prohibit the smallest sinful thought a place in our minds, at the same time we recognize that in Christ our lives- and so everything about us- now belong to the Lord (we are saints). As such, we actively labor at giving Him ourselves. As we do this, driven by gratitude for what Christ has done for us, we make headway against sin!

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End Note(s)

¹ R. B. Robinson has correctly understood “day” to be a reference “not to an actual day in realistic [historical] time, but to the eschatological day, that envisioned and visionary day when God will judge all nations. (Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, NAC, p. 188).

² cf. Jeremiah 49:7, 20; Amos 1:12; Hab. 3:3.

³ The TWOT says, “The verb ’ābad is a common word for to die, or, in the case of things, reputation, etc., to pass away.” (p. 3)

⁴ cf. Job 36:11.