

The Fatal Effects of Anarchy

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Throughout the 1960s and on into the 21st century we have heard a great deal about geo-political anarchy, from the riots on college campuses through the torching of cities, to the shootings in some of our nation's schools. Now we face the anarchy of terrorism and the high probability that there are terrorist cells right in our own community. As bad as that may seem, there is a worse kind of anarchy going on in the bodies and souls of all human beings, a physical and a spiritual anarchy, respectively. I am referring to both cancer and sin.

Cancer and sin are each mutually fatal conditions if they are not discovered and treated early on. They share some common features if one compares the spiritual aspects of sin and its management with the physical characteristics of cancer and the therapeutic endeavors of various oncological medical experts. There are some intriguing analogies.

The Cause and Treatment of Cancer

Cancer results from cellular anarchy. Each cell is programmed by the DNA in its nucleus to behave physiologically, biochemically and structurally the way it was originally designed to function. Every organ system in the human body has a tendency to wear out and all cells have a particular, limited life span. For example, our bone marrow replaces our red blood cells every 120 days. (The ones you are making this very moment will be dead and gone in less than four months.) We replace the platelets, so essential for initiating the clotting process in the unfortunate eventuation of bleeding, every ten days. The upper layer of skin, that covers the surface of your body 30 days ago, is no longer part of your being. The inner lining of our gastrointestinal tract sloughs off and is replaced every two weeks. When I tell you that I'm not the man I used to be, it's literally, anatomically speaking, quite true.

Every one of our tissues has a specific stem cell that is designed to replicate on demand, and one of the two daughter cells resulting from that replication remains in the stem cell mode while the other goes on to divide further, differentiate and replace the cells that were lost from the bone marrow, skin or GI tract - just to mention the examples given above. The beauty of that process is that the total number of stem cells never diminishes and thus, the template for cellular substitution is ever present. Occasionally those stem cells fail to follow their pre-programmed genetic orders and begin to proliferate in ways that they were not designed to do. That anarchy may result from an exposure to cancer-causing chemicals or irradiation, or an inherited gene. The result is a malignant transformation of that developing cell. Some genetic orders actually come from abnormal, inherited cancer-producing genes located in the nuclei of every cell; they are called "oncogenes." People with those genes have an unusually high incidence of malignant tumors of various kinds in their family tree: carcinomas, sarcomas, lymphomas and leukemia.

Fortunately, our bodies have a surveillance system located in the thymus gland, which in turn is located behind the breast bone in the thoracic (chest) cavity and it sends out patrols of killer T-cells that seek and destroy those anarchic, developing cancer cells. However, if the thymically-based investigation system is overwhelmed or otherwise breaks down, cancer will develop and progress unchecked. AIDS (HIV infection) causes the thymus to fail.

Early detection offers the best chance of cure for cancer, before the tumor has spread beyond the confines of the original organ or tissue in which it forms. The most successful treatment typically consists of surgery. Cutting the tumor out is the best hope for a cure, generally stage 1 cancers. Few cancers, other than childhood acute lymphocytic leukemia, are cured with chemo therapy alone.

When that surgery fails to rid one's body of the entire tumor, because of local spread

(Stage 2 or 3) or distant metastases (stage 4), radiation, and or chemotherapy, become necessary. Radiation may be in the form of an external beam or the implantation of radioactive substances. In the case of thyroid cancer, we administer the radioactive iodine by mouth and because the thyroid gland normally takes up iodine in the process of making thyroid hormone, the radiation is limited to the source of the malignant tumor. Chemotherapy attacks the most rapid-growing cells. That is what most cancer cells do; they proliferate rapidly. Other rapidly growing normal cells are those in the bone marrow and the scalp. That is why a patient experiences a loss of hair or a suppression of bone marrow when being treated with chemotherapy. Hair and bone marrow cells are among the most rapidly growing tissues in the body.

Cancer left untreated, discovered too late in its development or treated belatedly or incompletely can affect one's lifestyle and quality of life. It can also result in an untimely death. However, our Lord has said, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both the body and the soul in Hell* (Mt. 10:28). Cancer destroys the body, but sin unchecked or untreated results in spiritual death and an eternity spent in Hell. That's the ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE concerning death.

The Reality of Sin

Sin, like cancer, results from anarchy, but this type of rebellion is spiritual, not physical. As with cancer, the best hope for a cure is early detection. Solomon said, *"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say 'I find no pleasure in them'"* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The longer one lives under the control of sin, the harder it becomes to repent and commit one's life to God.

The first sin committed by mankind occurred in the Garden of Eden. It was the result of a strong desire for autonomy and rebellion from the declared will of God. Autonomy is a compound word arising from two Latin words, *auto*, meaning self and *nomos*, meaning law. Thus, it is self rule or a law unto oneself unresponsive to outside sources,

particularly God. It is portrayed in the third chapter of Genesis. Let's turn there. We can see that both Adam and Eve did their own thing. (Read Genesis 3:1-6) You will note that Satan (embodied in a snake) questioned the Word of God. He said to Eve, "Has God said?" Eve, having learned God's Word vicariously through her husband, misquoted God. When Satan tried to twist the truth by questioning the first couple's ability to eat fruit from any of the trees in the Garden of Eden, Eve countered with the erroneous notion that they were not permitted to eat from, OR TOUCH, the tree in the middle, which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The no touch part was Eve's own idea.

Verse six clearly states that Adam was present during this dialog between Eve and Satan. It was Adam that we should find culpable in the first sin, not Eve. He had four opportunities to nip in the bud this deadly spiritual disease. By detecting early on how Eve had misquoted God, and knowing himself exactly what God had said, he could have stepped in and corrected Eve and put an end to the discussion. Next, when he heard Satan arrogantly impugn God's motives, he could have put a halt to the fallacious dialog. Then as Eve began to take a bite of the fruit that had her captivated by its beauty, Adam could have warned her of the deadly consequence of disobeying God's command not to eat the fruit; apparently, he remained silent. Last of all, Adam could have refused to eat what Eve offered to him saying in effect, "You die if you wish, but I am going to live for God and obey His Holy Word."

It was Adam who had directly received the command of God. He thus had the role of a prophet, one who speaks God's Word to the spiritually ignorant public. It was Adam, like all husbands, who was to be the spiritual head of the house (a priestly role), as we learn from I Corinthians 11:3. He failed in both roles, as prophet and priest. Thus it was Adam who Paul blamed when he wrote in Romans 5, "*Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin and in this way death came to all men because all sinned*" (vs. 12).

Much like the oncogene inherited from our ancestors, a gene that has a proclivity for causing physical death from cancer, every human born after Adam inherited this strong

appetite, penchant, tendency and inclination for sin.

Original Sin

When we speak of original sin, we are not referring to the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Instead, we are speaking about that sin which resides in the soul of every human ever born. That is the inclination of evil that resides in the soul of all people. G.K. Chesterton, former skeptic and late Roman Catholic apologist wrote, "The Christian doctrine of original sin has received empirical verification throughout the past 6000 years of human history."

Writing in *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis said this about sin and evil: "The greatest evil is not done in those sordid dens of crime that Dickens loved to paint...It is conceived and ordered, moved, seconded, carried and minuted in clear, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices."

Free Will and Sin

Free will has been defined as doing whatever you want to do at a particular moment in time. Where Christians are concerned, does that mean that they had the freedom of will to receive or reject Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives before they were born again? That all depends on whom you ask. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards would emphatically say no. In his discourse entitled *The Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther referred back to his mentor in the faith and fellow priest, St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. Augustine had said regarding the will and sin, there are three states.

1. Adam's state and the believer's state, in the Latin, *Posse peccare* = able to sin
or
Posse non peccare = able not to sin. There is thus a free will to chose the right or the wrong. The believer's will has been set free from the bondage of sin by Jesus. (John 8:36) and we are free to chose to obey or disobey God.

2. *Non-possesse peccare* = not able to sin is God's state. God is powerful enough to sin, but He never acts contrary to His character, which is utterly holy. (Hebrews 6:18)
3. *Non-possesse non-peccare* = not able not to sin: the unregenerate's state. Read Genesis 6:5 and 8:21. Thus, unless the evil inclination is changed by God, one is incapable of recognizing one's need for salvation, confessing one's sin, and receiving Christ as Lord. That is what Jesus meant in His remark of John 6:65. *No one can come to me unless the Father enables him.*

That spiritual anarchy, bred and born in the souls of Adam and his wife Eve, ultimately spread like a cancer to their sons Cain and Abel, and then to the whole world. Abel, saved by God's grace and changed in his heart, became a victim of his brother's unregenerate depravity. From the moment that Adam and Eve broke God's only commandment, every person ever born on this earth was destined to die a physical death (Hebrews 9:27). Reading in Genesis 6:5, we find that after a period of approximately 1600 years, the world had become so overwhelmed by sin and violence that God decided to wipe all of mankind (except for eight souls) from the face of the earth. God recognized that "*every inclination of the thoughts of mankind was only evil all the time*" (Genesis 6:5). He justly sought to pass judgment on that sin by flooding the whole earth. That likely represented billions of people destroyed in the worldwide flood. It all began with one man's disobedience to God's Word. It began just like a cancer because of the anarchy in the heart of one man, and like the deadly oncogene, it was passed on throughout human history to every generation. Genesis 8:21 informs us that even the great flood had no effect on changing the heart of sinful man and its "inclination" to sin. The root of original sin had not been extirpated by the flood waters and it is very evident to this day. That is why G.K. Chesterton said what he did about original sin. One need only read the daily newspaper to find how true that statement is.

The result of that fall from grace is spoken of by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. Let's turn there. The first reference (Romans 5:12) has already been

addressed. Romans 3:23 assures us of the ubiquitous nature of sin. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Falling short is like almost being in an elevator when the

door shuts. The result of falling short is ultimately spiritual death unless someone intervenes to save us from that consequence. Like the person who has cancer, we need a cure from the fatal disease called sin. Romans 6:23 carries both good and bad news and reads, *"The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."* The bad news is obvious. The good news is that Jesus has a cure for our fatal illness. David recognized that he was sinful from the moment of conception. Psalm 51:5 reads, *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* He wrote that psalm after he had committed an adulterous affair with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, and following his confrontation with the prophet Nathan who knew that he was the guilty party in that murderous plot.

Is there a cure for this deadly disease? Yes! Jesus shed His blood for the remission of your sins and mine and because of that, if we accept the truth of that sacrifice and claim it for ourselves by receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are cured of the fatal effects of sin. The result of our original sin is rendered cured. The original sin that stained our lives and the spiritual death that results has been healed. Isaiah chapter 53:5 and I Peter 2:24 each tells us that *"By His wounds we are healed."*

The Jews were instructed to **circumcise** their boys at the age of eight days as a sign that they were part of God's covenant children. Paul tells us that the real cure for sin is a circumcision of the heart. That's the spiritual **surgery** that cures our original sin and that operation comes through the action of the Holy Spirit when we are being born again. Here again, we read what the apostle Paul has written: *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law you become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?* Romans 2:25-26. The circumcision of the heart inclines us toward keeping God's laws. The Holy Spirit also **irradiates** our hearts with the truths of Christ: *For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* (II Corinthians 4:6).

There is more, however. In cancer treatment there are many things that physicians do

to **prevent a recurrence**. It is called **adjuvant therapy**. This involves the use of additional doses of chemotherapeutics over long periods of time. It also involves avoiding the things that brought on the deadly cancer in the first place. Things like: avoiding ultraviolet irradiation, stopping smoking, staying away from heavy drinking of alcohol, avoiding those exposure to viruses known to cause cancer (HPV) and having frequent check ups with a medical professional. In Christianity, this adjuvant therapy consists of having a consistent **prayer** life, intently **studying** and living according to **God's Word** and **avoiding** the people and places that might lead you to be **tempted** to resume your old anarchic behavior (I Corinthians 15:53). It also includes the regular **worship** of God and being **involved in His work** in the world. This work has already been planned for you and I to do (**Read Ephesians 2:10**) and each one of us has been gifted in some way to accomplish the work.

Finally, in place of the regular visit to a doctor for a check up, you and I need to be involved with an **accountability** person or a group of persons. In that manner we can share our feelings and thoughts with another person who can help us to grown stronger in our faith and overcome the temptation to rebel against the will of God. *Iron sharpens iron* (Proverbs 27:17).

I would like to close with a thought that came my way from my Christian brother, Tom Marlier. He reminded me how often a parent has said that he would take his child's cancer into his own body if he could so that the child would not suffer a physical death. Our heavenly Father did just that for us. Read what is written in II Corinthians 5:21. God exchanged the deadly sin in our bodies for His righteousness and by His stripes we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5). This is known in theology as double imputation. Our sins were imputed to Christ and He paid for them on Calvary's cross. His righteousness, earned through living a perfect human existence for 33 years, was then imputed to us.

Now I ask you, have you gone to the Great Physician for a cure from your deadly disease of sin? Have you given up your autonomy and anarchy in favor of a life of reverent obedience? If not, Hell awaits you and beyond Hell the outreaches of a Godless Eternity, where there is no comfort or Comforter, where you will be alone with regrets.

It is called the second death and it comes after years in Hell. It is appropriated at the Great White Throne judgment (Read Revelation 20:11-15). If that bothers you, I am glad. If it does not, I would close with this warning from the prophet Isaiah. It deals with that miserable, intermediate state between your physical death and that which all unbelievers will one day suffer in the infamous *lake of fire*. Unlike the latter, final destiny, they will be in the company of all like-minded people who rejected God's offer of salvation while they were alive. They will be incarcerated in a place known as Hell.

The grave below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it arouses the spirits of the departed to greet you - all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones - all those who were kings over the nations. They will respond; they will say to you; "You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us." All your pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you (Isaiah 14:9-11).

Soli Deo Gloria.