

The School of Christian Theology

Lesson 7

The Fall, Sin & Freewill

Objective: To understand the profound tragedy and incomprehensibility of the Fall of man into sin and its effects for humanity and creation. To grasp that the Fall so damaged humanity so as to render us morally unable to choose, believe in, or respond to God on our own.

“The doctrine of sin is hardly the most attractive or popular of Christian tenets and yet as far as religion goes it is utterly fundamental. Unless we understand sin and its solemnity and the damage it has done to our human existence, we cannot hope to appreciate such evangelical doctrines as the Cross and the Person of Christ. Religion begins with a sense of sin because it is in conviction of sin that all perception of God’s Word and of the glory of Christ have their origin.” – Donald Macleod, *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine*, 101

I. Review: The Doctrine of Mankind

WSC Q. 10. *How did God create man?*

A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

- Man is the crown of creation
- Created in the image of God
- God put his “very good” stamp upon his creation of humanity
- They were created to...
 - Worship, glorify, and obey God
 - Increase and multiply, filling the earth with the glory of God
 - Subdue the earth and work the ground (i.e., make the rest of the world look like Eden)
- They were given dominion over the whole of creation, not to dominate and exploit it, but to steward creation for mankind’s good and God’s glory

II. What happened to God’s good creation?

A. The Meaning of Sin

- *Harmartia* – “sin” – missing or falling short of the target
- *Adikia* – “iniquity, unrighteousness” – not straight/twisted away from God’s norm
- *Paraptoma* – “transgression” – going off the road/way/path ordained by God
- *Anomia* – “lawlessness” – going against God’s law

WSC Q. 14. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

B. The Origin of Sin

Genesis 3:1-24

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

1. Satan

The Bible tells us that some angels have become evil angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7, 9), which we often call demons (ex. Matt. 7:22; 8:31; Mk. 1:34, 39; 5:9). The chief of the demons/evil angels is Satan (also called Lucifer, the devil, the evil one).¹

The Bible does not give us much information about the fall of Satan and the other demons.

2 Peter 2:4, God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

¹ To read a helpful summary of the Bible's teaching on angels and demons, see Joel Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Crossway, 2019), 1109-1157.

Jude 6, The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 may give us more information, but it is not definitive that those texts go beyond talking about human kings.

Jesus says to the Pharisees when they reject him, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)

2. What More Do We Learn about the Nature of Sin from Adam and Eve's Sin?

Sin Originates from...

- Doubting God's Character
- Distrusting God's Word
- Exalting Ourselves
- Longing for a Prohibited Pleasure
- Disregarding Consequences

C. The Effects of Sin

1. Consequences for Relationship

- **With God**

WCF 6.2, By this sin they fell from their... communion with God

Ephesians 4:18, They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

We are hostile to God (Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21) and enemies of God (Rom. 5:10).

Romans 3:9-18, What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”

“Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”
“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
“Their feet are swift to shed blood;
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they have not known.”
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

This is not just about our relationship with God, but about God’s relationship with us. We are now guilty before a holy and righteous God.

Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death...

WCF 6.6, Every sin... brings guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death...

WSC 19. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

- **With Other People**

Galatians 5:19-21, Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

- With the Rest of Creation

Romans 8:18-23, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

2. Consequences for Our Nature

- Defacing of the Image of God

Man is still the image of God (Gen. 9:6), but remember that the image of God is both constitutional (rational intellect, morality, spirituality/immortality) and functional (dominion/authority, relationship). All of those things have now been hindered or compromised. Mankind still images God, but not like he was supposed to. That's why our sanctification (i.e., growth in holiness) is a growth in the image of God (WSC 35; Eph. 4:23-24).

- Corruption

WCF 6.2, By this sin they... became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

WCF 6.4, From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed actual transgressions.

Jesus makes it clear that our sin is not just actions, but rather that our sinful actions come from a sinful heart.

Mark 7:18-23, "Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Jeremiah 9:17, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Luke 6:43-45, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

We don't just do bad things, but our corruption extends to our minds, hearts, and wills.

D. The Transmission of Sin

Romans 5:12-19, ¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22, For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-3, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

WCF 6.3, They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

WLC Q. 22. Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression.

Original Sin—we inherited both Adam's guilt and Adam's corruption

E. Freewill

“Since there are four states of man: before the Fall, after the Fall, under grace, and in glory; so it is customary to dispute on his free choice in a fourfold way.” Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590), *De operibus Dei*, 3.3.3

1. **Able to sin, able not to sin** (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*)
2. **Not able to not sin** (*non posse non peccare*)
3. **Able to not sin** (*posse non peccare*)
4. **Not able to sin** (*non posse peccare*)

Part of the difficulty is with terminology. When most people say “free” they mean “unrestricted from any external constraint.” And in this sense, we do have a “free will,” because our will is not restricted from anything *outside of us*. Rather, it is restricted from something inside of us—our nature.

We must understand the difference between *liberty* and *ability*.

Romans 8:7-8, For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Reformed understanding of freewill teaches that mankind (prior to God’s regenerating grace) is not able to choose God, trust in God, respond to God, or obey God’s law, because his nature is corrupt. This is commonly referred to as “total depravity.”

“Man, as he was corrupted by the fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil.” – John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5

Cheat Sheet on the Debate:

- **Augustinianism (Calvin, Luther):** The human will is in bondage to sin. Man has no moral ability to choose God. His will must be renewed by the regenerating grace of God. This work is God’s action alone. It is a work of his sovereign grace. Grace is prior and absolutely necessary.
- **Pelagianism (Pelagius):** The human will is harmed by sin only in that Adam has proved to be a poor example. Our constitutional nature is exactly that of Adam’s and is completely able to fulfill the will of God. Pelagius denies original sin and in essence denies the necessity of the atonement. Grace is not necessary.

- **Semi-Pelagianism (Cassius, Erasmus):** Man's will is weakened or diseased as a result of the Fall, but it retains an element of freedom. With this element of freedom cooperates with divine grace. Grace is essential, but not prior; unaided man must cooperate with grace.
- **Arminianism (Arminius):** While virtually undistinguishable from semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism tries to soften the idea of unaided man saving himself by asserting that grace is necessary and universal, yet able to be rejected. Grace is necessary and prior, but resistible.

Suggested Further Reading on The Fall, Sin, and Freewill

Not the Way It's Supposed to Be by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Knowing Sin by Mark Jones

Why I Am Not an Arminian by Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams

Readings for Next Class

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7

WLC 30-36

WSC 20-21

Additional Readings for Next Class on The Covenants

None