

WCF 06: OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN, AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF

Man was created in the image of God. But Adam our first Father fell into sin, and with him all mankind descending from him by natural generation. Why did it happen? What are the consequences, effects and results of the Fall? These are the questions that will be addressed in this chapter.

On the Fall

6.1 Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit.¹ This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory.²

¹Gen 3:13; ²Cor 11:3; ³Rom 11:32.

- This section presents for us the facts pertaining to the Fall of Adam and Eve. They fell by the sovereign will of God under temptation of Satan. A number of questions remain unanswered and cannot be answered by finite minds, and therefore the Westminster divines make no attempt to answer at all. These are: (1) How did Satan (and his cohorts) fall in the first place when they were created holy and good? (2) How could Adam and Eve who had a perfectly righteous nature fall under the temptation of Satan, seeing that the will is always bounded to the prevailing affection and desire of the heart and mind (cf. Mt 12:33, 35), which in the case of Adam must be holy and righteous? and (3) Why did God allow Satan, Adam and Eve to fall into sin in the first place?
- These questions are commonly asked. We should refrain from attempting to answer them. Great theologians have attempted and made no headway. Like a great horse trying to pull a cart out of the mud, the more they try the deeper they get stuck!
- The most we could say is with the divines: “God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory.” Or we say with the Apostle Paul: “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:22–23). Our response to this doctrine should be one of profound reverence as that of our Lord: “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Lk 10:21b).

On the Consequence of the Fall

6.2 By this sin they fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God,¹ and so became dead in sin,² and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.³

¹Gen 3:6–8; ²Ecc 7:29; ³Rom 3:23; ⁴Gen 2:17; ⁵Eph 2:1; ⁶Tit 1:15; ⁷Gen 6:5; ⁸Jer 17:9; ⁹Rom 3:10–18.

- When God issued the prohibition to Adam and Eve, He said: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). This threat includes three kinds of death (see §6.6), viz.: (1) *Temporal* death, consisting of the dissolution of the union between the body and the soul. Adam and Eve began the process of dying in this sense immediately after they fell. (2) *Spiritual* death, consisting in the loss of the image of God (in the narrower sense of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness) and communion and favour with God. This is the aspect highlighted in our Confession, and Adam and Eve experienced it to the full the moment they fell. (3) *Eternal* death, consisting in everlasting separation of both body and soul from God.
- Robert Shaw explains:

The very day in which our first parents sinned, the sentence of death, though not immediately executed in its fullest extent, began to lay hold upon them. They became mortal, and were exposed to the disorders of a vitiated constitution; the principle of spiritual life was extinguished in their souls, and they were bound over to eternal wrath; and had not a Mediator been provided, not only would

they have returned to the dust, but they would have been “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.”

- The result of the Fall is that man “became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.” *Firstly*, to be dead in sin is to be spiritually dead. It includes an inclination to sins and trespasses, and a totally inability to do what is good in the eyes of God. Paul expressed this in Ephesians 2:1, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). We may call this Radical Depravity (from Latin ‘radix’, i.e., ‘root’) to emphasise that fallen man is corrupt to the core, and so no good can possibly come out of him. The Scripture speaks of the radical depravity of man: “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5b). His heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). This does not mean that unregenerate man is totally unable to seek after God, if we mean by seeking the reading of God’s Word, the hearing of sermons, prayer and the turning away from outward acts of gross sins. But it does mean that these acts are sinful in the eyes of God (though they may not be as sinful as a failure to seek). This must be how Edwards’ distinction between natural and moral ability must be understood. *Secondly*, to be wholly defiled is to be totally, pervasively, not partially or apparently, depraved. He is defiled in all the parts and faculties of the soul and body, and it speaks of Pervasive Depravity. A fallen man is sinful in all that he thinks, says or does. Thus the understanding is darkened, the passion roused, the affections alienated, the conscience hardened and deceitful, the actions hypocritical, etc. Note that this does not mean that unregenerate man is less intelligent than a regenerate man. Some of the world’s greatest scientists were not Christians. But it does mean the unregenerate mind is unable to apprehend spiritual things with approval. Also, when it is exercised in the matters of the world it is never with the glory of God in mind. Neither does it mean that the unregenerate men are less healthy than the Christians, but it does mean that the unregenerate men use their bodies constantly to serve sin.
- Note also that the issue is not whether fallen man is as bad as he can be, but that every unregenerate man is sinning constantly. Indeed, even when he does what may appear to be benevolent and good in the eyes of the world, he is sinning against God. His heart is depraved and has no place for God, and therefore cannot glorify God by his actions. Paul expresses this in no uncertain terms: “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:10–18). No unregenerate man can do anything that is pleasing to God, seeing that he falls short of the glory of God: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

What about the commonly proposed idea that ‘Total Depravity does not mean that man is as bad as he can be’? To answer this question, we must realise that man is indeed as bad as he can be in his nature. He is perfectly capable of doing the worst atrocities imaginable. The reason why he is not doing it is simply due to physical and mental limitation as the restraint placed upon him due to the threat of the law of God and of the land as well as the fear of the disapproval of society, etc. For this reason, he is not as wicked as can be in his practice. But even then, we must remember that even his most perfect work is tainted with sin and sinful in the eyes of God (Isa 64:6).

- Finally, note that the phrase “original righteousness,” occurring here in the Confession for the first and only time, clearly distinguishes the Westminster Assembly as Augustinian and Calvinistic. The opposing view about man’s original state (which is sometimes unwarily adopted by those who profess to be Calvinistic) is Pelagianism which teaches that there is no such thing as original righteousness, and that Adam had the perfect freewill to do what he chose. His heart was like a clean slate and so are the hearts of all babies born by natural generation. In opposition, to this view, the Augustinian/Calvinistic view is that Adam had Original Righteousness, i.e., an inclination to holiness, but having lost it through the Fall he is now possesses Original Sin with an inclination towards evil.

6.3 *They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed,¹ and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.²*

¹Gen 1:27–28; 2:16–17; Acts 17:26; Rom 5:12, 15–19; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45, 49; ²Ps 51:5; Gen 5:3; Job 14:4; 15:14.

6.4 *From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good,¹ and wholly inclined to all evil,² do proceed all actual transgressions.³*

¹Rom 5:6; 8:7; 7:18; Col 1:21; ²Gen 6:5; 8:21; Rom 3:10–12; ³Jas 1:14–15; Eph 2:2–3; Mt 15:19.

- Theologians call the sinful state and condition in which men are born—Original Sin. Original Sin, it must be remembered, does not refer to the sin of eating of the forbidden fruit, but to the consequence of that sin. It is so called because: (1) It is derived from the original root of the human race; (2) It is present in the life of every individual at the time of birth; (3) It is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man.
- These two paragraphs deals with the two elements of Original Sin, namely: (1) original guilt, and (2) original corruption or pollution together with the actual transgressions that proceed from it. These two aspects of Original Sin are well expressed in *WSC* Q. 18: “Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?” Answer: “The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in (1) the *guilt* of Adam’s first sin, (2) [negatively,] the *want* of original righteousness, and [positively,] the *corruption* of his whole nature,—which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.”
- *WCF* 6.3 explains how the guilt of Adam is imputed to us, and how we inherited his corrupt nature. *WCF* 6.4 enlarges on this original corruption to explain how we become sinners in actual words, deeds and thoughts.
- The guilt of Adam’s first sin was imputed or credited upon his posterity by natural generation, because (1) Adam was the Covenant or Federal Representative of all men (*WCF* 7.2); and (2) because they were seminally present in Adam (cf. Heb 7:9–10 and Acts 17:26) and therefore “sinned in him...in his first transgression” (*WSC* 16, *WLC* 22). Paul expresses this doctrine in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Some believe that the phrase “for that all have sinned” (Grk. *εἰς ἃ πάντες ἠμαρτάνοντες*) may be translated “in whom all sinned.” This is possible, but not necessary. I believe both seminalism (that we were present in Adam’s loins and so we are participants in the sin) and federalism (that we were represented by Adam so we are accounted sinners) are involved.
- Moreover, because we inherit Adam’s nature, our souls also are devoid of Original Righteousness and are wholly corrupted. We sin because we are sinners, we do not become sinners because we sin. Thus our Confession speaks about actual transgression as proceeding from original corruption. David expressed this idea in his penitential Psalm: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5). Job also understood this to be the case: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). His friend Eliphaz correctly concurred: “What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (Job 15:14). We are by nature and so by birth, “*utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.*” It is therefore inevitable that actual transgressions proceed from us. We must, however, remember that both the inherited aspect of Original Sin, namely the corrupt inclinations of the soul, and actual transgression are violation of God’s Law. Thus a baby who has not actually transgressed the Law of God by any act is also to be regarded as guilty on account of Original Sin.
- Note that in saying that we inherit Adam’s sin nature by virtue of our being born by natural generation, I am saying that I am inclined towards traducianism (that we receive both our physical nature and soul from our parents) rather than creationism (that we receive our bodies from our parents, but our souls are separately created by God) to explain the origin of our souls. The Westminster divines were clearly traducianists by their use of Acts 17:26 in this section. But the divines do not deny immediate (direct) imputation of Adam’s guilt upon his posterity. Our depravity is inherited (or “conveyed”), our guilt is imputed.

On the Effect of Regeneration

6.5 *This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated:¹ and although it be through Christ pardoned, and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.²*

¹1 Jn 1:8, 10; Rom 7:14, 17–18, 23; Jas 3:2; Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20; ²Rom 7:5, 7–8, 25; Gal 5:17.

- We have ascertained that all man born by ordinary generation is born with a corrupt nature, so that all he does is sinful. But the question is: What about the Christian? What if he is regenerate? Does regeneration remove the natural corruption of fallen man?
- This section confirms the biblical assertion that regeneration does not rid a person of the corruption of his nature. As long as he lives in this life, the regenerate person remains liable to fall into sin. John highlights this doctrine by a rhetoric statement: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8, 10).
- Though the sin of the regenerate is pardoned, and though his nature is being gradually brought into subjection and being mortified by the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, the corruption of his nature and all the motions of it remain truly and properly sin. This is to refute the Romish teaching that Original Sin is taken away in regeneration through baptism, so that when a baptised person recognises a corrupt disposition in himself, he is told that it has nothing to do with Original Sin, but stems out of concupiscence (covetous desires and lust), which is not by itself sinful. But the Apostle Paul teaches clearly that concupiscence or lust is sin: “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom 7:7).

On the Wages of Sin

6.6 Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto,¹ doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner,² whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God,³ and curse of the law,⁴ and so made subject to death,⁵ with all miseries spiritual,⁶ temporal,⁷ and eternal.⁸

¹1 Jn 3:4; ²Rom 2:15; 3:9, 19; ³Eph 2:3; ⁴Gal 3:10; ⁵Rom 6:23; ⁶Eph 4:18; ⁷Rom 8:20; Lam 3:39; ⁸Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9.

- The phrase translated “transgression of the law” in 1 John 3:4, is only one word in the Greek (*ajnomiva*) which may be rendered “lawlessness.” Sin is lawlessness. It is not just a positive breaking of the Law (as taught by Pelagius), but includes the failure to meet up to the standards of the Law. Thus the answer to *WSC* 14 reads, “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the Law of God.” It is the Law that defines sin, and those who fail to conform to the Law or transgress it are guilty before God: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). This guilt is attended with “the wrath of God” (Eph 5:6) and the curse (opposite of blessing) of the law: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10; cf. Deut 27:26). This curse is manifested in death and miseries of three sorts: spiritual, temporal and eternal. The Larger Catechism speaks of punishments in this world and in the world to come:

- **WLC 28.** What are the punishments of sin in this world?

Answer: The punishments of sin in this world are either inward, as blindness of mind,^a a reprobate sense,^b strong delusions,^c hardness of heart,^d horror of conscience,^e and vile affections;^f or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes,^g and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments;^h together with death itself.ⁱ

^aEph 4:18. ^bRom 1:28. ^c2 Thes 2:11. ^dRom 2:5. ^eIsa 33:14; Gen 4:13; Mt 27:4. ^fRom 1:26. ^gGen 3:17. ^hDeut 28:15–68. ⁱRom 6:21, 23.

- **WLC 29.** What are the punishments of sin in the world to come?

Answer: The punishments of sin in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever.^a

^a2 Th 1:9; Mk 9:43–44, 46, 48; Lk 16:24.

- What do we say to these things? Listen to the counsel of Robert Shaw:

When we reflect on the loss which Adam sustained by his fall, and on the guilty and corrupt state in which we are thereby involved, and on the manifold miseries to which we are liable, both here and hereafter, let us be deeply impressed with a sense of the dreadful malignity and demerit of sin,—the source of all our woe. Let us not dare to repine against God, or to impeach His goodness or equity, for permitting sin to enter into the world, and making us responsible for the transgression of the first Adam; but rather let us admire the divine wisdom and grace displayed in providing the Second Adam, by whose obedience we may be made righteous, as by the disobedience of the first we were made sinners. Let us cordially receive the Lord Jesus Christ, that, being found in Him, we may not only be acquitted from the guilt of the first man's transgression, but may be brought, through "the abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, to reign in life by one," even by Jesus Christ, our Lord (p. 83).