

# SIN AND THE FALL

## Terms Defined:

1. **Fall** – The Fall refers to that single act of disobedience committed by Adam and the Eve in Paradise, where sin and evil entered into the physical creation and life of the human race.
2. **Sin** - Sin refers to any lack of conformity to or disobedience of the law of God, in thought, word, or deed.

## The Fall Considered:

1. **Though it is a matter of great difficulty to the finite mind of man, the Fall was included in the Decree of God.** His providence extends even to the Fall and to all other sins of angels and men. These sins are not simply allowed by God, but are bound, ordered, and governed by Him in the fullness of His wisdom and power so that they fulfill His own holy purposes. However, the sinfulness still belongs to the creature and does not proceed from God, Whose holy righteousness does not and cannot cause or approve sin.<sup>1</sup> While God's eternal decree made the entrance of sin into the creation certain we are never to infer from this that God is the author of sin. ***“Far be it from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity,” Job 34:10. “He cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man,” Jas. 1:13.*** All theories regarding the origin of evil, as being inherently necessary must be rejected for this reason.
2. **Discussion of the Fall begins not with man, but in the realm of the Angels.** Scripture teaches that the outbreak of sin has its location not on earth, but in heaven. As it were, at the foot of the throne of God. ***“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home- these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” Jude 6.*** From this and 1Tim. 3:6 we can infer that the original sin was that of pride. And this in turn may offer some explanation as to why Satan tempted our first parents at just this point. The Bible gives us no indication as to when that heavenly rebellion occurred, but there are certain necessary considerations.
  - a. **The Creation was pronounced good.**

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<sup>1</sup> WCF modern version, Ch. 5.4. Proof texts cf., 1Ki. 22:22, 23; 2KI. 19:28; Is. 10:6, 7, 12- 15; Lk. 22:31-32; Ac. 2:23, 4:27-28, 14:16; Ro. 9:15,18, 22,23; 11:32-34; Jas. 1:13, 14, 17; 1Jn. 2:16.

- i. **So the rebellion occurs after the seventh day.** It isn't likely that the creation would be pronounced good when, in reality, the host of spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies had already invaded the created order.

The occasion of the Fall was the probationary prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is the point at which Satan attacked Adam and Eve in the garden, bringing about their downfall.

- a. **Adam stood in a federal relationship to the race.** As Federal head of the human race, standing under the covenant of works the actions of Adam had consequences extending to the entire race. This is made abundantly clear in **Ro. 5:12ff.** Adam's unrighteousness extends to the entire race, as does the righteousness of Christ to His elect. Both are efficacious.<sup>2</sup> Death entered into the race by the sin of the one man.
- b. **It was an actual serpent, made use of by the Devil.** This is made clear from the depiction of the event itself. God both addressed and cursed the serpent. **Gen. 3: 14.**
- c. **It was within man's power to stand.** Man received grace adequate to stand, yet not so as to prevent from falling.
  - i. **Satan utilized a 'talking snake.'** That man would disbelieve his good God at the gainsaying speech of a mere creature amounts to the highest heights of folly. Had not, **"God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Gen. 1:28.**<sup>3</sup>
  - ii. **The fruit was, as far as we know, just ordinary fruit (even if it was striking to look at, it was still mere fruit).** All creation save a single tree was put at their disposal and under their dominion. Thus, the extent and ungratefulness of their rebellion is set forth in striking relief.
  - iii. **The threat was sufficient to warn away.** The extreme nature of the threat set against an object so inconsequential as a solitary fruit tree should have been sufficient to make it clear to Adam and Eve that the issue was one of authority and lordship.

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<sup>2</sup> Though many find this a difficult, and at times, intolerable doctrine. It is Scriptural, and in fact, rests upon principles that are common to human experience in every culture. Human inheritance laws are, at times, so inviolable that were there is no direct descendent remote relatives are sought out, that the inheritance may nevertheless be passed on. This principle holds even when the descendent has proven, by reason of scandalous life to be unworthy of receiving the fortune. Citizens of countries very often benefit greatly from the exploits of its leaders. In monarchies and particularly during dynasties, citizens are often born under leaders of which they had absolutely no role in electing. Individuals have little difficulty partaking in the fruits of this common principle, so long as it is to their favor, but will protest vigorously when the results are adverse.

<sup>3</sup> To be led by the subject is a rather strange way of exercising this dominion.

- iv. **It was unreasonable to believe ‘the lie.’** The degree of the wickedness contained in their disobedience is made evident in that they were willing to believe so devilish a slander against One so great and good as God. Had He not proved His love?
- d. **The Effects of the Fall were widespread and comprehensive.**
  - i. **They included immediate loss of fellowship with God.** Man was driven out from the immediate presence of the Lord and was in the world ‘without hope and without God’ until the time of the incarnation.<sup>4</sup> **Gen 3:24; Eph. 2:12.**
  - ii. **There was an actual change in the consciousness of man.** There was an *awareness of pollution*, revealing itself in the sense of shame, as evidenced by their attempt to cover their nakedness. In addition, there was *actual guilt*, as evidenced by the fact that they ran to hide upon hearing God coming. They had never known these emotions before, now they would be unable to rid themselves of both the *guilt* and the *shame*. **Gen. 3:8 –13.**
  - iii. **Physical and spiritual death set in.** We are clued that more than mere physical death was intended by the fact that immediate death was threatened but was not evidenced immediately. Viz., “the day you eat...” That physical death was included is made clear to us by the genealogical litany given in Genesis chapter 5, “and he died.” The serpent lied.
  - iv. **They extended throughout all creation.** The whole of creation was cursed, and has groaned and travailed ever since. **Gen. 3:14 – 19; Ro. 8:20 – 22.** This is the explanation for all natural evil. There would be no earthquakes, tornados, floods, or hurricanes apart from the edenic Fall.

### **Sin Considered:**

Herman Bavinck noted,

According to contemporary science, illness is not a particular substance of matter, but a rather living in changed circumstances, in such a way, in fact, that the laws of life do indeed remain the same as they are in a healthy body but the organs and functions of that life are disturbed in there normal activity. Even in the dead body the functioning does not cease, but the activity that begins then is of a destructive, disintegrating kind. In this same sense, sin is not a substance in itself, but that sort of disturbance of all the gifts and energies given to man which makes them work in another direction, not towards God but away from Him. Reason, will, interests, emotions, passions, psychological and physical abilities of one kind or another- these all were once weapons of righteousness but they have now

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<sup>4</sup> This does not include the children of Israel and the few representative Gentiles, who were called out to belong to God and would be sanctified by the grace of God in Christ.

by the mysterious operation of sin been converted into weapons of unrighteousness. The image of God which man received at his creation was not a substance, but it was nevertheless so really proper to his nature that he, losing it, became wholly misshapen and deformed.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Variant views of Sin.

- a. **Pelagian scheme.** This view of sin sees no connection from Adam's transgression and that of the rest of the race. Man's nature is essentially intact and there is no disposition towards sin. The fact that all do in fact sin is ascribed to force of negative examples that lead to sinful acts which develop into sinful habits. These can be broken or reversed by the power of ones will.
- b. **Semi-Pelagian scheme.** This view of sin sees man as being corrupted from birth by way of his connection with Adam, but refuses to actually ascribe the status of guilt or moral evil to it. It holds that this condition of corruption issues in actual transgressions.
- c. **Contemporary views.** Modern approaches largely lack any semblance of a category for sin. Sin is absent of any penal status and is categorized as social, psychological, and medical conditions.
- d. **Non-Scriptural views summarized.**
  - i. **Man considered as becoming sinful individually.** Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, Eastern Religions.
  - ii. **Man considered as becoming perfected collectively.** Darwinian evolution and the survival of the fittest theory as well as the vast majority of contemporary views of sin and the problem of evil.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. Scriptural view of Sin.

- a. **Man considered as a unity**
  - i. **Through Creation.** Because of common parentage, man has common ties of blood and flesh. (**Acts.17:26**)
  - ii. **Judicially and Ethically.** Man collectively lives under one divine law by the covenant of works and is accountable to the One Creator God. (**Ro. 5:12-21**)
- b. **So sin is not material but moral in essence.** Sin in its essence is *lawlessness* (**1Jn. 3:4**) and *enmity* against God (**Ro. 8:7**). Man's sinful condition issues in actual transgressions (acts of sin). Desires are not sinful in themselves, but desire corrupted and perverted by sin becomes sinful desires.
- c. **Sin involves Original Pollution.** The scriptural view of sin states that all men everywhere are born into unrighteousness (**Ps. 51:7**), corrupted in their very nature, and go astray from their youth

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<sup>5</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> While some will not allow for an official category of 'sin' the subject frequently becomes subsumed under the heading of 'problem of evil.'

onward (**Gen. 6:5**), darkening the understanding (**Ro. 1: 21**) and making the heart deceitful and unfathomable above all else (**Je. 17:9**); there is none righteousness, no not one (**Ro. 3: 10ff.**). And no clean thing can possibly arise from an unclean thing (**Jn. 3:6**).

- d. **Sin involves Original Guilt.** Guilt is simply the state of deserving condemnation or being liable to punishment. Sin involves guilt in a twofold sense. **(1)** It renders the sinner inherently deserving of punishment. **(2)** Sin carries the obligation to satisfy justice, to pay the penalty for sinning.<sup>7</sup> Thus all who are under sin are under the wrath of God. ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”*** **Ro. 1:18.**

## 5. The Pathology of Sin.

- a. [An] organic view is applicable also to the sins, which manifest themselves in particular areas of human life. There are personal and individual sins, but there are also common, social sins, the sins of particular families, nation and the like. ...As it happens we take notice of only a very small portion of the sins of our limited group, and of that only superficially. But if we could penetrate through the essence of appearances, and trace out the root of sins in the hearts of people, we should very probably come to the conclusion that in sin, too, there is oneness, idea, plan, pattern-in a word, that in sin too there is *system*. ...In principle and essence it is nothing less than enmity against God, and in the world it aims at nothing less than sovereign dominion. And every sin, also the smallest, being as it is a transgression of the Divine law, serves this final objective in connection with the whole system. The history of the world is not a blindly operating evolutionary process, but an awful drama, a spiritual struggle, centuries long in duration, a warfare between the Spirit from above and the spirit from below, between Christ and anti-Christ, between God and Satan.<sup>8</sup>
- b. The Confession states that the first man “became wholly defiled, in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.” The seat of this vicious moral *habitus* is, of course, strictly speaking, in the moral propensities. But since these give active direction to all the faculties and parts of soul and body, in actions that have any moral quality, it may be said that, by accommodation of language, they are all morally defiled. The conscience (the highest department of rational intuitions) is not indeed destroyed; but its accuracy of verdict is greatly disturbed by evil desire, and the instinctive moral emotions which should accompany those verdicts, are so seared by neglect, as to seem practically feeble, or dead, for the time. The views of the understanding concerning all moral subjects are

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<sup>7</sup> Dabney distinguishes between these two aspects as (1) potential and (2) actual guilt.

<sup>8</sup> Bavinck, p. 248.

perverted by wrong propensions of the heart, so as to call good evil, and evil good. Thus “blindness of mind” on all moral subjects results. The memory becomes a store of corrupt images and recollections, and thus furnishes material for the imagination; defiling both. The corporeal appetites, being stimulated by the lusts of the soul, by a defiled memory and imagination, and by unbridled indulgence, become tyrannical and inordinate. And the bodily limbs and organs of sense are made servants of unrighteousness. Thus, what cannot be literally unholy is put to unholy uses. ...Original corruption is not, specifically, the perversion of a faculty of the soul, but of the soul itself.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

From what has been said regarding the scriptural understanding of sin several things become evident. **(1)** All of the proposed remedies, which so abound in the world today, are mere child’s play. Our modern politicians, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, and sociologists have not begun to understand the depths of the human dilemma. We are confronted with a problem far too vast for any lasting human solution. To use words from Lloyd-Jones,

Such is the problem with which we are confronted. There is in us, in man, this terrible, mighty power called “sin” which alienates us from God and leads us to hate Him, and at the same time debases us and leads us to conduct which can only be described as disgusting. How idle it is to think of these matters and to discuss them theoretically. How criminal to look at life through rose-coloured spectacles. It is only as we face the facts, and realize the true nature of the problem, that we shall come to see that one power alone is sufficient and adequate to deal with it—the power of God.<sup>10</sup>

**(2)** We are wholly cast upon the grace of God for the salvation of our loved ones and the nations. There can be no substitute for the tried and tested god-given means of grace. We must always remember that the question is not whether an individual has shed a certain habit or enjoyed a certain experience. It isn’t whether a person has a joy they have never known, but are they in the light! Have they been brought out from the dominion of sin? This can only come through the atoning work of the Son of God! Because of the nature of sin there can be no substitute. We are entirely dependant upon the mercy of God. **(3)** The love and compassionate mercy of God can only be measured by the greatness of the grace He has shown us by delivering us from sin. Never has love been more clearly revealed. Never have we a greater cause to worship as when we contemplate the glory of His grace. Praise Him all ye saints of the living God! Praise Him evermore for so great a salvation.

**(4)** Something so foul, destructive and hideous is to be avoided at all cost. There can be no higher height of folly than to willfully tamper with sin. Its capacity for destruction is as close to infinite as can be ascribed to the finite. It is to be dreaded with all the amazement and detestation the redeemed soul is capable

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<sup>9</sup> Dabney, R. L., *Systematic Theology*, 323.

<sup>10</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*, p. 57.

of. It is a thing so great that deliverance could only come at the cost of the death of the Son of God Himself. Who can articulate the enormity of the insult rendered to the glory and honor of God by those who traffic in it while aware of such things? Therefore let us remember,

***...If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of Grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He. 10:26-31.***