

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church

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Chapter 6 Part 1

Chapter 6 - The Fall, Sin, and its Punishment.

Section 1: Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety 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⁾

Scripture Proof Texts: (1) *Genesis 3:13; 2 Corinthians 11:3.* (2) *Romans 11:32.*

Robert Shaw has a very interesting opening paragraph to this chapter in his Exposition of the Confession. It reads: *That man is now in a very corrupt and sinful state, universal experience and observation attest. That he was not originally formed in this degraded state might be inferred from the character of his Maker; and the Scriptures explicitly affirm that he was at first created in the image of God - in a state of perfect rectitude. The question then arises, How was moral evil introduced into the world? To this important question reason can give no satisfactory answer. Pagan philosophers could not fail to observe the degeneracy of human nature; mournful experience taught them that evil had come into the world; but to assign the source of evil, was knowledge too wonderful for them; numerous were their conjectures, and all remote from the truth. Divine revelation, however, sets this matter in a clear and certain light; and our Confession, in accordance with the inspired record, traces the entrance of sin to the seduction and disobedience of our first parents.*

The Bible alone gives an adequate explanation as to why, in the world, there exists moral evil or sin, death, disease, and conscience with its sense of right and wrong. Only the Bible has a proper answer to these questions.

God having created our first parents holy, and with sufficient knowledge as to His will, capable of obedience yet fallible, this section proceeds to teach the following four propositions:

1. Upon being placed on Probation in the Garden of Eden our first parents sinned.
2. They were seduced to commit this first sin by the work of the devil.
3. The particular sin they committed was their eating the forbidden fruit.
4. God purposed, in permitting sin to enter the world, to overrule it for His own glory.

1. Upon being placed on Probation in the Garden of Eden our first parents sinned. When we observe God's dealings with His rational, moral creatures we are left to conclude that His purpose is to place them in a state of probation for a time. In this state of probation He makes their permanent character, and destiny, dependent upon their own action. God, as Creator, can do with His creatures as He pleases. As He is the all wise God then this purpose must be acknowledged as being one which is eminently wise and righteous.

God creates these rational moral creatures holy, yet capable of falling. In this state of probation He subjects them to a moral test for a time. If they stand the test, the reward is that their moral characters are confirmed and rendered infallible, and they are introduced into an inalienable blessedness forever. If they fail, they are judicially excluded from God's favour and communion forever, and hence morally and eternally dead.

This certainly has been His manner of dealing with the angels and mankind. In the case of mankind the specific test to which our first parents were subjected was their command to abstain from eating of the fruit of a single tree in the Garden. As this was a matter in itself morally indifferent, it was admirably adapted to be a test of their implicit allegiance to God, of their absolute faith and submission.

[1] The origin of sinful thoughts in our first parents. This is an issue that is difficult for us to grasp. A. A. Hodge has the following comment in His Exposition of the Confession: *How could sinful desires or volitions originate in the soul of moral agents created holy like Adam and Eve? Men exercise choice according to their prevailing desires and*

affections. If these are holy, their wills are holy. And the character of their prevailing affections and desires is determined by the moral state of their souls. If their souls are holy, these are holy; if their souls are sinful, these are sinful. Christ says, "A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." (Matt. 12:33,35.) But Adam's heart had been created holy; how then could his action be sinful?

All our experience conspires to make the question more difficult. The sinful souls of fallen men never can give birth to holy volitions until they are regenerated by divine grace. The holy spirits of angels and glorified men in heaven are forever removed from all liability to sinful affections or actions. In both these cases the stream continues as the fountain.

Now, although we cannot explain precisely the origin of sin in the holy soul of Adam, it is plain that the difficulty lies only in our ignorance. We have none of us experienced the same conditions of free agency as those which give character to the case of Adam. We have always been under the bondage of corruption, except insofar as we are momentarily assisted against nature by supernatural grace. Now, in order that a volition shall be holy, it must spring from a positively holy affection or disposition; and as these are not native to our hearts, we cannot exercise holy volitions without grace. But Adam was in a state of probation, holy yet fallible. Saints and angels are holy and infallible, yet their infallibility is not essential to their natures, but is a superadded divine grace sustained by the direct power of God. While holiness must always be positive, rooting itself in divine love, it is plain that sin may originate in defect; not in positive alienation, but in want of watchfulness-in the temporary ascendancy of the natural and innocent appetites of the body or constitutional tendencies of the soul over the higher powers of conscience.

The external influences and the subjective motives which prompted our first parents to this dreadful sin did not in the first instance imply sin in them, but became the occasion of sin upon being allowed to occupy their minds and to sway their wills in despite of the divine prohibition. The external influences and motives combined a natural appetite for the attractive fruit with a natural desire for knowledge. But most importantly, they were seduced by the temptation of Satan, about whose fall little is known, and unto whom the true origin of sin is to be referred.

A. A. Hodge highlights some important issues that are worth remembering, namely:

- i. A different set of circumstances prevailed when our first parents were on Probation compared to what any of us have ever known. There are four states that mankind have find themselves in: [1] The Probation state, where they were holy, yet fallible; [2] The Sinful state, where we are sinful and incapable of any true spiritual desire; [3] The Regenerated State, where we can be subject to both sinful and spiritual desires & [4] The Eternal state, where we will be completely holy and infallible. None of us have ever lived in the 'state' that Adam lived in when on Probation where he was holy, yet fallible!
- ii. The subjective motive in these circumstances was a desire for knowledge which in itself is not sinful.
- iii. The desire for knowledge became sinful when it led to disobedience towards God
- iv. The devil strongly influenced our first parents to sin. He is the true originator of sin.

[2] The character of this first sin. Two characteristics stand out:

- i. The unbelief of our first parents induced them to doubt the wisdom of God's prohibition and the certainty of the divine threatening;
- ii. The disobedience of our first parents to God was a manifestation of their unbelief. They listened to and believed the lie of the devil more than the Word of God. Their unbelief led to disobedience. Unwilling to obey they failed their Probation and lost the promised eternal life and brought misery and death upon all creation.