

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTIONS # 21 & 13.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #21. *Did man continue in that estate wherein God at first created him?*

A. Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created.¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #13. *Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?*

A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.²

Question 1—*What do we mean by the freedom of man's will?*

Answer—The freedom of the will is a property belonging to man, as a reasonable creature, Prov. 23:7. We may as well separate understanding from the mind, as liberty from the will, Prov. 19:22; Matt. 9:3, 4; especially when it is conversant about things within its own sphere, and, most of all when we consider man in a state of perfection as to all the powers and faculties of his soul, as he was before the fall, Gen. 1:26.

There is a great difference in this freedom of will in the different states of man: 1.) In his corrupt state, man has only the freedom of will to do that which is evil, Gen. 6:5; Eph. 2:1. 2.) In a state of grace, man has the freedom to will partly what is good, partly what is evil, Rom. 7:22, 24. 3.) In the state of innocence, man had a freedom of will to choose both good and evil, Gen. 2:16, 17; yet, the natural set of his will was to do good only, Eccl. 7:29.

Question 2—*What is meant by being left to the freedom of their own will?*

Answer—When God created man in a state of innocency, he removed himself during their probation, so as to permit man to be put to the test, cf. Job 1:12. Of this state of trial, it must be noted that God did not remove from the man any of the strength or ability which he had bestowed in the creation, Rom. 11:29. Nor did he in any way infuse in him any vicious inclinations moving him to sin, Jas. 1:13; God being neither the author nor approver of sin, Ps. 50:21.

Thus, Adam's fall was perfectly voluntary, his own will being the sole cause of it, as appears: 1.) While he continued innocent, he had sufficient power to persevere in his holy state, for though God was under no obligation to give him further grace, he had a perfection that would have upheld him, if he had continued in it, cf. Acts 5:4; Gen. 1:27. 2.) The devil could only tempt, he was not able to overpower him, as if to force his consent, Gen. 3:1. When objects have no constraining force, they are but partial agents, and they derive all their efficacy from the faculty unto which they are agreeable, Acts 5:9. 3.) It was the effect of his own choice, as the result of a specious object being presented to his understanding through an unguarded sense of desire, Gen. 3:6. The appetite of

¹ Gen. 3:6-8, 13; Eccl. 7:29; 2 Cor. 11:3.

² Gen. 3:6-8, 13; Eccl. 7:29.

desire being drawn by the lure of pleasure, the fall into sin was most voluntary though violent, Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3.

Question 3—*What was the means of their fall?*

Answer—It was the devil who tempted our first parents to sin, as is apparent:

First, the appearance was in a serpent, as the most subtle of the beasts to make this temptation, Gen. 3:1. The complicity of the serpent in this temptation is the reason given for its curse, Gen. 3:14. It may be that Eve thought this serpent to be one of the good angels, because it seems not only to have possessed some shiny color, but their connection to the *seraphim*, the angels, is notable in Hebrew, Deut. 8:15; Isa. 14:29.

Second, though not mentioned in the Genesis account, seeing that serpents cannot speak, and devils can, and that this serpent was the instrument of man's fall, we may safely conclude this to be Satan, John 8:44. This explains the long history of the war between Satan and the people of God, Gen. 3:15, Rev. 12:9; and, the rationale behind the coming of the Son of God, Heb. 2:14.

The subtlety of the temptation appears in Satan, using a deception persuading, seducing both the spiritual and animal appetites at once, Gen. 3:5. The result of which was to call the attention of the woman to three things; the agreeableness to the palate of the fruit; the pleasantness to the eye, giving the fruit an inviting appeal; and the desirableness to the rational appetite to elevate the human nature, Gen. 3:6. This allurements is conducted under a promise of impunity, Gen. 3:4. To this, he added the grand hope of possessing the ability to determine what is good and evil, Gen. 3:5.

In the manner of the temptation, the subtlety of Satan also appears in: 1.) He addressed himself to the woman, as the weaker vessel, 1 Pet. 3:7. He tempted her first, knowing it would make the fall of the man easier, 1 Tim. 2:14. 2.) He assaulted her when she was alone, absent her husband, so as to make her more easily prevailed upon, Eccl. 4:9-12. 3.) He appeared under the body of the serpent in order to make the woman less guarded in the approach, Gen. 3:1.

Question 4—*What are the consequences of that fall?*

Answer—The consequences of the fall are immediate, the first parents discover their fallen estate by their reaction, which displays the shame and fear inseparable from sin, Gen. 3:7, 8. The unreasonableness of the estate of sin appears in thinking they could hide themselves from God, Job 34:22.

Additionally, we see the guilt and shift of sin in the response of the man and the woman when God expostulates with them: 1.) The man lays the blame upon his wife, Gen. 3:12. This, of course, is to seek to charge God himself by blaming his providence, Gen. 2:18. 2.) The woman seeks to lay the whole blame on the serpent, Gen. 3:13. Yet, if the woman had had the wisdom to detect the fallacy of the temptation, she would not have given compliance to the serpent, 2 Cor. 11:3.

In transgressing the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they became guilty of breaking all of the ten commandments, Jas. 2:10. Their sin was complicated, involving a vain curiosity to know more than was consistent with their present condition; a pride and ambition to be like the angels, or like God; an atheistic desire to be independent of God; a profane belief that it was permissible to do evil that good might come; the unbelief and disregard for the commandment of God; the presumption that all would be well in obeying the devil; and the ingratitude of not finding contentment in paradise.