

Sin in a Post-Fall World

The Covenant of Works and Covenant-Breakers

The *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* and the *Tree of Life* were not mystical trees that stood in the midst of the garden. They sacramentally held forth spiritual realities to our first-parents, Adam and Eve. The two trees “[conveyed] assurance concerning the future realization of the things symbolized.”¹



Death Camp Memorial Grave (Treblinka, Poland)

Adam and Eve were very different from us pre-Fall.

Upon eating the fruit, they transgressed the Covenant of Works (Life). This is the greatest tragedy of human history. There were many gross sins that occurred after Adam – murder, rape, unjust mass killings, abuse, the list goes on, but Scripture tells us in Romans that none of them was like the transgression of Adam (5:14). On account of this, all subsequent sin originates from this first transgression of God’s law.

WSC 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.

WLC Q. 23 *Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?*

- A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

We first begin with Adam and Eve who were sinless. Without sin. They were in right relationship with God. They worshiped the LORD unhindered and without shame. They thought rightly. In their estate of innocence, they have the ability to choose right or to choose evil.

Biblical Anthropology Post-Fall

The Sting of Imputation

¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, (Carlisle, Banner of Truth, 2015) 27.

Imputation: to attribute responsibility or blame. Theologically it refers to the legal crediting of one's act to another.

The consequences of the sin of our first parents is that their sin was credited (imputed) to all their progeny. Paul explains this quite vividly in Romans 5 as we considered last week:

“...sin came into the world through one man...” (v12)

“...Many died through one man's trespass...” (v15)

“For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation...” (v16)

“...because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man...” (v17)

“...as one trespass led to condemnation for all men” (v18)

“For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...” (v19)

1 Cor 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...”

Doctrine of Original Sin - We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. We are sinners because we inherited a sin nature at birth *on account of* Adam's transgression. Because of him, we are born corrupted and condemned. The penalty of his rebellion means you and I were born into the estate, not of innocence, but of sin, and the guilt of sin sears our consciences.

David declares, “Oh God, I was born in sin, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5).

The Pelagian Heresy (4-6th C.)

Pelagius v. Augustine

Pelagius - Roman British monk (b. 360)

Augustine of Hippo – Roman African (b. 354), modern day Algeria

The Augustinian View

- Man is by nature born sinful and it is God alone who must save.

The Pelagian view

- Predestination made humans automatons with no freedom of will and made God capricious.
- Augustine's teaching denied the Christian of the responsibility to lay hold of their salvation and pursue righteous piety.
- Jesus' commands to be “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48 cf. 19:21) presupposed the innate ability to really accomplish it. Pelagius said Jesus' command was both an obligation and a real possibility for humans.

- Humanity has the innate or natural ability to reject evil and pursue God– we can on our own seek and serve him. Human beings do not inherit an original sin that inclines them toward wrongdoing, but instead they learn wrongdoing from their surroundings and the bad examples that undermine the will's intention to resist evil and aspire to perfection.
- Celestius, disciple of Pelagius - one can attain perfection in this life.

Council of Carthage – 412, modern day Tunisia, condemned teachings of Pelagius and Celestius, doctrine of original sin upheld

Pope Innocent I dies 417AD

Pope Zosimus succeeds

Council of Ephesus – 431, Pelagius and Celestius declared heretics (formal excommunication).

The Attributes of Fallen Man

Man's attributes are qualities that we can understand about ourselves inspired by God's inerrant word.

There are still many good attributes about being made in God's image, even after the fall.

- Reasonable souls
- Reproductive
- Cultural producing
- The Fall changed things ... bearing is also "frightfully deformed"²

What does it mean when David said, we are "born in sin"?

Born in Sin: A Six-Fold Aspect

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

1. A Spiritual Aspect

- We can speak of our estate as a spiritually deadened state. All humanity possesses a spirit that is dead in sin and in need of enlivening (regeneration).

² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1. 15. 4).

- The Holy Spirit must move towards us so that we may live. The means by which we live spiritually is faith because the Spirit gives us saving faith. It is a gift of God (Eph 2:8). Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1).
- Jesus said to Nicodemus, who came at night, “unless you are born of the Spirit you can’t enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5) “and the wind blows wherever he chooses” (3:8). Jesus later said to his disciples, “...the world cannot receive [the Spirit of truth], because it neither sees him nor knows him” (14:17). “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23b).
- “And without [this] faith it is impossible to please him...” (Heb 11:16). God must put a new Spirit within us (Ez 36:26) so that we have true, saving faith.
- There is no neutrality. You either have true spiritual faith, or you do not.

2. A Relational Aspect

- The communion Adam and Eve possessed before the fall was lost. To be without fellowship with your Maker is to be fatherless, an orphan.
- Select passages: Hosea 1:10, 14:13; Jn 1:12; Eph 2:12
- Our relationship with God is marked by enmity, suspicion, mistrust.
- Our relationship with others is marked by hostility, mistrust, inordinate love, apathy, carelessness, etc...
- We experience sin in our relationships with others because of our ultimate relational discord and rebellion against God himself.

3. A Moral Aspect

- The imputation of original sin makes us born guilty. After the fall, Scripture does not speak of an age of innocence into which we are born.
- Actualized Sins – Those sins you voluntarily or involuntarily think, say, or do.
- Rom 1:29-32
- Ps 14:1-3 “...they are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; that have all turned aside there is none who does good...not even one.”
- This moral aspect does not mean you are as bad as you could be.

4. A Noetic (Mind) Aspect

- Original sin even effects how we think.
- The Noetic Effects of Sin - Instead of giving glory to God by faith, we glorify anything but God through an unregenerate thought-life.
- Gen 6:5 - “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
- Jer 17:9 - “The heart is *deceitful* above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

- Rom 1:18 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness *suppress the truth.*"
- Rom 3:9-12 - "...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."
- 1 Cor 2:14 – "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."
- "Conscience, however, is inadequate and needs to be enlightened by Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit. Conscience can never make good that which in itself is sinful, even when someone acts with good conviction."³ (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 1:183)

An Aside: Common Grace

Human depravity does not mean *utter* depravity. Unbelievers and believers can think the same things. There is common grace that God gives whereby you can have common ground with an unbeliever on all sorts of things: murdering the innocent is wrong, giving to those in need is good, social engagement is good, pursue together the sciences and the arts, etc... These all can be commonly shared, but the unbelieving mind before God is not acceptable in any way to him. God is not pleased with the unregenerate because God does not know them in right relationship by faith. The unbelieving mind does not for God's glory.

5. A Physical Aspect

- Our bodies will also die.
- Select passages: Ps 139:16; Heb 9:27; Rom 8:23).

6. An Eternal Aspect

- Original sin brings eternal death.
- Mat 18:8 - "It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire."
- Mat 25:41 - "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"
- Mat 25:46 - "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
- 2 Thess 1:9 - "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed."

³ *Reformed Ethics*, 1:183

A Free Will Problem

“Are we not born just like Adam and Eve before the fall?”

- The unbeliever is “free” to make decisions and choices but is incapable of choosing God.
- God does not open the door for all, and only those who are wise enough, smart enough, or have a seed of grace infused in them at birth walk through it.
- The heart is incapable of moving toward God.
- The Spirit must birth it anew. It is only then that our will is set free from the bondage of sin and death and now is free to live for God.

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Rom 6:22).

“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Pet 2:16).