

CHAPTER 6

OF THE FALL OF MAN, OF SIN, AND OF THE PUNISHMENT THEREOF

Nature and cause of humanity's fall into sin

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

Our confession does not explain the original fall of Satan in this place. It appears to have taken place after the six days of creation (when everything was “very good”), sometime after the creation of Adam and Eve. When Satan fell, he seduced many other angels to rebel with him; the fallen angels are the “demons” mentioned in Scripture. The question of how a sinless being in a sinless universe could first sin is a difficult one, and is called the question of “theodicy.” We do know that God did not tempt Satan to sin, but that he also ordained that, in fact, he would sin.

We notice that the one who tempted our first parents to this sin was Satan. In Gen 3 he is called “the serpent.” But in other passages he is identified as Satan (Gen 3:1, 4, 13-14; John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:3, 7-9, 13, 15, 17). It seems probable that the devil inhabited the body of the physical serpent, as all serpents since that time have been cursed to crawling on their bellies and eating dust (Gen 3:14).

The first sin is named as “eating the forbidden fruit,” the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17; cf. 3:3). This “knowledge” is not knowledge of the mind, but knowledge of experience. God knows all things including death and sin, but he had never experienced the power of death or the guilt of sin until Jesus bore these in our place on the cross.

God permitted this sin—he could have prevented it—to further his plan and purpose in the world. Here the Confession uses the word “permitted,” which is true enough; but earlier it has also said that his providence regarding this sin was “not by a bare permission,” but also contained a “most wise and powerful bounding,” “ordering,” and “governing” (WCF 5:4). God did this “to his own glory.”

Results of the fall for Adam and Eve

“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 faculties and parts of soul and body.”

We cannot imagine the terrible results of this first sin; we have lived in our sinful condition from birth, and have never breathed the air of true holiness. For our first parents this fall must have been indescribably horrible. Here are the results noted here:

- Fell from original righteousness
- Lost communion with God
- Died spiritually
- Became dead in sin
- Became totally depraved (that is, each part of them became corrupt with sin; Rom. 3:10-18)
- Were defiled
 - In their hearts, opposed to God
 - In their minds, opposed to truth (this corruption of the mind is referred to as the “noetic effect of sin,” from the Greek *noeo*, to “know, think”)
 - In their bodies, subject to death (removed from the tree of life; Gen 3:22-24)

Original sin

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

“4. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

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

“Original sin” is another way of saying inherited sin. It includes two parts: the guilt of Adam’s first sin, and the corrupt or sinful nature we inherit from our parents.

As the *New England Primer* said, “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.” The Bible teaches that we are all descended from Adam and Eve, and have inherited from birth their guilt for their sin in the garden, and also the corruption of nature that their sin brought about (Gen 1:26; 5:3; Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:21-22).

Only one person in history has not descended from them “by ordinary generation,” the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born by the virgin Mary, through the special work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore his human soul was sinless.

According to Section 4 all of our sins proceed from our wicked hearts. Jesus mentioned this on several occasions (Matt 15:1-2, 11, 17-20). Even the “best” of human beings have such corrupt hearts (Jer 17:9); God has restrained their evil actions for some good purpose. Occasionally even civilized people show their depraved natures, as the Romans in the Coliseum, or the Germans during Hitler’s rule. We all are capable of total wickedness, and we should always remember the saying, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

Section 5 teaches what we already know from experience—sin still remains in Christians, even in the best of Christians. The Bible confirms this experience (1 John 1:8-10; Rom 7:14-25).

But just as the sins we committed before salvation are washed away by the blood of Christ, so our sins committed after salvation, along with our sinful nature itself, are cleansed in the same manner. We are not held guilty for them—otherwise our salvation would be lost. Nevertheless, both our sinful nature and the deeds that stem from it are still sin, deserving God’s wrath and curse.

Punishment for sin

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

This doctrine of punishment for sin is unpopular in our so-called “enlightened” society. But it is a vital part of Christian truth.

Two types of sin deserve this punishment. First, the imputed sin of Adam, along with our sinful, corrupt nature with which we are born, in itself makes us guilty. There is no such thing as an “innocent” child, or even an “innocent” baby. Our sinful nature in and of itself makes us unacceptable to God. Second, the actual sins we commit add to our original corruption and to our guilt.

This sin is described as being “a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto.” God’s law is summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21), and even more succinctly by Jesus Christ in the two great commandments (Matt 22:36-40), and by the apostle Paul (Rom 13:9-10). Sin is the breaking of this law of God (1 John 3:4).

The sinner, the one who breaks the law, rebels against both God and his law. Therefore, he is judged by both:

- Wrath of God (John 3:36; Eph 2:3)
- Curse of the law (Deut 27:26; Gal 3:10; Jas 2:10)

The penalty resulting from this guilt is death (Rom 6:23). This death is linked to “miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.” The sickness, misery, wickedness, violence, and injustice of

our world are either the direct result or the proper judgment for sin. This judgment will continue forever in hell for the non-elect (see Ch. 32). Such is the righteous outcome of our sin.