

No.11, The Natural State of Fallen Man

Over the past two weeks our focus has been set on the issue of the results of the fall of man when he disobeyed God. These results of the Fall were evident as soon as man fell, and in the sacred narrative in Gen 3 clear reference is made to them. In last week's study we majored on one main result of the fall, namely that the fellowship between God and man was broken. God was alienated from man, an alienation that was both just and right since He was the offended party. Man was also alienated from God, an alienation that was inexcusable and wicked since man was the offender and the perpetrator of the disobedience that cut him off from God. At this stage let me mention two other immediate results of the Fall that we did not have time to note last week.

1. **Adam and Eve came under personal adverse consequences of what they had done.**

Eve – see v.16. The terms of this verse indicate that Eve was adversely affected by the Fall in that a form of punishment came upon her in her role as a woman and a wife. We may sum it up this way – Eve's position of womanhood was made exceedingly difficult because of sin. She was to endure painful child-bearing. It is not that child-bearing *per se* is cursed for before man fell procreation was part of the original intention of God for the human race, ch. 1: 28. However, due to sin child-bearing became painful, implying that had there been no sin it would not have been a sorrowful experience. Her subjection to her husband was intensified, again v.16. The point being made is that because the woman usurped the man's place at the time of the temptation by Satan, her place of subjection to her husband was increased. But it must be remembered that in the fallen state this subordinate role is for the woman's good, protection & well-being; a point clearly proved by much Scripture that deals with the role of the woman, Eph 5: 22-24; 1 Tim 2: 11-15; & Titus 2: 4-6. In this fallen world, it is when women rebel against the position of being in submission that tragedy comes.

Adam – see v.v.17-19. In view is *painful* labour; again, not labour *per se*, see ch.2: 15 – labour was instituted by God and is therefore marked by dignity & glory. Incidentally, therefore, laziness is the result of sin and must be curbed & resisted. But, Adam's position in this world became a struggle for subsistence in that the ground that he was commanded to cultivate came under the curse.

2. **Another result of the Fall was the curse that came on the physical creation.**

See v.17 – “*cursed is the ground for thy sake.*” And again see v.18. In microcosm there is presented here the explanation for all of the ills that exist within the natural realm. God placed a curse on natural creation because of the sin of man, Rom 8: 19-22. Paul's language indicates that creation groans & travails under the curse and looks forward to that day when Christ will come and creation will be delivered. In the light of Gen 3: 17 it is true to say that the physical & natural calamities that come on this world constantly are reminders to man of his own sin and the great judgment that is to come. See Jonah 1: 4 and note that it was God who sent this great storm because of Jonah's disobedience.

3. **Original sin – the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin and the reception of a corrupt nature.**

From all of this detail that delineates the consequences of the Fall it is unambiguously clear that the natural state of fallen man is one of both guilt and corruption, that natural state being succinctly summed up for us in the Westminster Confession in chapter 6 that deals with the subject of the Fall of Man. In sections 3 & 4 we have the following statements:

“They (Adam & Eve) 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.” “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.”

Effectively these confessional statements point out **the consequences of the sin of our first parents with regard to their posterity.** Note that these consequences are restricted to those “descending from them by ordinary generation.” Obviously the framers of the Confession included this restriction in order to exclude Christ. As man, Christ was of the posterity of Adam, but He did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation, Matt 1: 18. But the effects of Adam's first transgression extend to the entire race, including the imputation of the guilt of Adam's first sin as well as the conveying of a corrupt nature. This is what is meant by the term *original sin*.

The doctrine of original sin was universally held by the Christian Church until the beginning of the 5th century, when it was denied by Pelagius, a British monk. Pelagius taught that “*the sins of our first parents were imputed to them alone, and not to their posterity; that we derive no corruption from their fall, but are born as pure and unspotted as Adam came out of the forming hand of his Creator.*”

Thus Pelagius denied the ruin of human nature by sin, thus that every human being has the natural ability to do good because God creates each person with the same natural ability as Adam had. According to Pelagius man does not have a sinful inclination or disposition and that sin consists only in separate acts of the will. He sought to explain the universal presence of sin as the result of the imitation of the habits of other sinners. On this error Dr. Jonathan Edwards once stated in his lectures on Original Sin – “*this is accounting for the corruption of the world by the corruption of the world.*” Pelagianism, therefore, had no place for the truths of God's sovereignty, or the

doctrines of grace or even for redemption. It held that man's free will is sufficient for the practice of virtue, assisted by the law of God and the example of Christ, making it easier for man to practise holiness.

In Church history we also meet with what is known as Semi-Pelagianism, which is an attempt to embrace a middle position between Augustine's defence of salvation by grace and Pelagius's denial of it. Semi-Pelagianism presents the view that fallen nature retains some power to incline toward that which is good yet grace is necessary for salvation. However, it teaches that this grace is given after the first step is taken by the will of man. With regard to salvation, the sinner does not receive Christ because of grace, but receives grace after he decides to receive Christ. Arminians, who derive their name from Arminius, a 16th century theologian, are essentially Semi-Pelagian in their views on the nature of man.

The universal corruption of man is clearly presented in Scripture: see Gen 6: 5, 6; Gen 8: 21; Psalm 51: 5; Psalm 58: 3; John 3: 6; Rom 8: 7. All of these Scriptures show that all mankind has been infected by a corrupted nature derived from Adam. This is what is meant by the doctrine of Total Depravity. The total depravity of man means that all men are corrupt in the totality of their being with every part, power and faculty of their nature being affected by this corruption inherited from Adam – mind, intellect, emotions, will, conscience and body.

Along with the depravity of man is his Total Inability. Because corruption extends to every part of his being, man is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption. He is not capable of discerning, loving or choosing the things that are pleasing to God, clearly presented in the following Scriptures: John 3: 3, 5; John 6: 44; John 14: 17; Romans 8: 7, 8; 1 Cor 2: 14; 1 Cor 12: 3.

Rev. John Greer