

No.8. The Fall of Man

The Scottish preacher & theologian, the Rev. Thomas Boston, wrote a major work entitled *Human Nature in Its Four-Fold State*. Basically the book deals with man in his state of innocence, sin, grace and then glory. What we have covered thus far in this study of the doctrine of man pertains to man's state of innocence prior to his fall into sin. Thus, in proceeding in this study we now come to consider the fall of man & his state of sin.

SATAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN MAN'S FALL

Man was created upright and very good. Thus, he had a character that was compatible with righteousness and equipped him to perform righteousness. But at the evil suggestion of Satan Adam disobeyed, falling into sin and coming under guilt & corruption. Thus, the Fall took place, an event recorded in Genesis 3. The fact that it was through the temptation engineered by Satan that man fell is a reminder of three facts:

1. Sin was present in the universe prior to man's fall. Already there was a kingdom of sin with Satan as its head, an evil spirit of supernatural ingenuity & power. This fact places the origin of sin outside the human realm. It reveals that the origin of sin pertains to the fall of Satan & his angels from their first estate.
2. The fact that man sinned at through satanic instigation reminds us of the reality & activity of Satan and his demonic order. Lying behind the visible & tangible in the sin of this world there are the unseen powers of darkness. The arch-foes of God's kingdom are not the visible powers arrayed against it. Behind wicked men and a wicked world system is the whole kingdom of Satan & his legions with all of their craft & relentless activity. See Paul's teaching in Eph 2: 2 & Eph 6: 12. It is vital to recognise the reality of Satan and his forces, for any rejection of this reality is not according to Biblical Christianity.
3. At this juncture it is appropriate to point out that the work of Christ is essentially the destruction of the power and work of Satan. Satan's destruction is not peripheral or incidental to redemption but is an integral part of its accomplishment. See Christ's words in John 12: 31, words which appear in a setting that is full of references to the necessity & results of the cross. See also 1 John 3: 8, Col 2: 15 & Heb 2: 14, 15. In other words, the very fact of Satan's destruction being a major goal of the Redeemer's work is a revelation of the reality of Satan's involvement in the fall of man.

MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN FALL

However, while Satan tempted man to sin and this temptation was the *occasion* of his fall, it was not the *cause* of man's fall. As John Murray points out – “*No external power or influence can cause a rational being to sin. The sin of Adam was a movement of defection and apostasy and transgression in Adam's heart and mind and will, and for that movement he was responsible and he alone was the agent and subject.*” Satan tempted man. The old serpent was responsible for every feature of the temptation that he employed and in that sense he incurred guilt. But for the submission to that temptation and the subsequent fall Adam was responsible – it was not Satan who ate of the tree but Adam & Eve!

MUTABLE PERFECTION

Thus, since Adam was responsible for his own fall it must be understood that his primitive state was one of *mutable perfection*. As noted in earlier studies, Adam was created in God's image, a rational & moral free agent, made in righteousness, knowledge and true holiness. But as noted that perfection was mutable or changeable – this much is obviously true for the simple reason that Adam did change. His mutability is in view in the teaching of the WCF ch.4, section 2, where it is stated that Adam & Eve were “*under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change.*” Again, man's mutability is implied in the command given in Gen 2: 17. God spoke these words to one who was made in the divine image, at that moment perfect, but obviously it was a mutable perfection, otherwise the warning would have been needless and meaningless.

Now, it is at this point that an important point must be recognised – before man failed the test in which he was placed, Adam's character changed from one of holiness to unholiness. This is central to any understanding of the doctrine of the fall of man. Any outward act is determined by the inward character of the person who performs that act. Therefore, since the outward act of eating the forbidden fruit was in character morally wrong, then the inward disposition of Adam that produced that outward act was already sinful. It is that change of moral character in Adam that alone explains the sinful act that he performed.

IMPORTANT DETAILS WITH RELATION TO THE FALL

Concerning the actual details with respect to the fall note the following:

1. Adam was present with Eve all through the temptation. See Gen 3: 6 – the text shows that Adam was present throughout the entire conversation between the serpent and Eve; and that he had abdicated his headship role. Thus, no less than Eve, Adam failed to defend God's honour when Satan attacked divine integrity. Moreover, he allowed his wife to instruct him to ignore God's command, instead of instructing her to resist Satan, v.17. See 1 Tim 2: 14 – the meaning is that while the woman was plainly deceived, Adam consciously, willingly and wittingly transgressed the divine commandment. W.G.T. Shedd said on this verse – “*According to Paul, Adam was seduced by his affection for Eve, rather than being deceived by the lie of Satan. He fell with his eyes wide open to the fact that if he ate he would die.*”
2. The order of the Fall was as follows. First, there was *doubt* concerning God's wisdom, goodness and love, v.v.1-3; *disbelief* of God's word, v.4; and then *desire* for divine prerogatives, v.5, 6. This operation of doubt, disbelief and desire or lust resulted in direct disobedience to the divine command. Eve looked on the tree with lustful eyes, coveting a knowledge which God did not allow man to have; and this lust in itself was what constituted Eve's apostasy from God. Adam was compliant in Eve's covetousness, thus they both had fallen and had sinned before they ever ate of the tree.
3. The Fall was therefore disobedience to the law. 1 John 3: 4 – this is the Spirit's commentary on all sin: literally, “*sin is lawlessness.*” In God's command to Adam there was the expression of all that God is: absolute Creator, Ruler & Judge. But Adam's sin was a contradiction of the divine being, an assault on God's majesty, sovereignty, authority, wisdom, goodness, justice and truth.