

Of Man's Fall, Sin, and Punishment (Part 1)

Gn 3:1-24; WFC 6.1-6.2

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 20 January 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

WCF 6.1 is a very brief summary of what the Bible says about how sin came into this world.

You say, "Sin?" "I don't like that word!"?

Well, who can deny that this world is full of sin!? If you don't want to call it *sin*, then let's call it *evil*! Who can deny that evil is rife in this world!?

Anyone can see that all's not right around us!

I love what Jonathan Edwards said in this regard: Even if the Bible did not teach about the Fall of the human race, then, still, the sheer universal presence of sin – as well as sin's clear existence through all of human history – would be enough to force us into acknowledging that there must have been a major disaster – yes, a fall!²

Indeed, every human being is infected by sin/evil – even the godly Apostle Paul who spoke on behalf of us all when he cried out, "...*what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*"³

Blaise Pascal said the same thing, just in different words – he said as much as that *we are at the same time creatures of the highest grandeur yet the worst misery.*⁴

My brother & sister, many people think that man has evolved – i.e. has improved over centuries and millennia! However, that's not what the Bible teaches! According to the Bible, instead of an *evolution* of man, there has been a *devolution* of man, in the sense that it all started with sinless man (just imagine how wonderful that must have been!), but then, after the Fall, man deteriorated in sin – so much so that this world is rapidly becoming a rougher & rougher place!

Well, WCF 6.1 and 6.2 focus on three aspects of our first parent's Fall – three aspects clearly taught in the Bible. Here they are...

- Totally Depraved
- Dead
- By God's Decree

Totally Depraved

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. I (chapters 1-8 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² Edwards (apud Sproul, *ibid*:176)

³ Cf. Rm 7:15

⁴ Cf. e.g. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. *Our condition, as Pascal points out repeatedly in the Pensées and also in his "conversation" with Sacy, is dual. We are one part misery and one part grandeur; and alongside our feelings of isolation and destitution we also have a profound sense of our intrinsic dignity and worth. Pascal calls us "thinking reeds," though his stress is on thinking* (<https://www.iep.utm.edu/pascal-b/#SSH2biii>).

Also cf. Sproul (*ibid*:176)

Based upon the Bible, the WCF 6.2 says that it was *by this sin* that Adam & Eve *fell from their original righteousness...*

This means that Adam & Eve were *no longer holy!*

Remember: Before their fall, Adam & Eve were not just creatures who were *made in the image of God*; no, they were also creatures *who had not yet sinned!*

But now, after their Fall, they fell short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23)!

What did this mean in practice?

Well, that God's *image* in them was heavily tarnished! Not just *that*, but they could no longer have *communion* with God! Indeed, Gn 3:8 tells us that they now *fled* from God when He came near to them; yes, can you imagine: they hid away from the One who had made them – with whom they used to have sweet fellowship!

What a tragedy!

But, on top of the tragedy, how foolish of them to run from God and to hide from Him! I mean, was it not exactly *now* that they needed God – now that they had given their ears to satan!?

But alas! He/She who has given his ears to satan, simply cannot hear his God without fear! But that's still not all! You see, Adam & Eve have not just lost *communion* with God; no, all their instincts & faculties were now twisted.

Look, is that not why Eccl 7:29 says, "***This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.***"⁵

Why?

Well, because the glory of God had departed from the human race (Rm 3:23).

So, never again, in this life, would ordinary men, women & children be as wise as they were created to be.

Sin has infected all of mankind – and to such a degree, that it has penetrated right through to all man's faculties; yes, right through to man's intellect and man's heart (heart being the control centre of every human being, encompassing man's thinking faculty, desires and will).

Jeremiah once described fallen man's heart (control centre) very well, when he said (in Jer 17:9), ***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?***⁶

Hearing this, someone might want to reply, "Ah, it's not so bad as you're making it out to be!" But, my brother & sister (and dear children), have we not all experienced how *our minds willingly work overtime to find reasons to justify the desires of our hearts?*⁷

Is a textbook example of this not seen in several American presidents – President Nixon whose closest acquaintances had lied under oath to save their president from the Watergate scandal;⁸ and President Clinton who was impeached on grounds of perjury (lying under oath) to the grand jury.⁹

⁵ NIV84

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Je 17:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁷ Van Dixhoorn (ibid:86)

⁸ On the Watergate Scandal, see e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watergate_scandal

⁹ On the impeachment of Bill Clinton, see e.g. "Although proceedings were delayed due to the bombing of Iraq, on the passage of H. Res. 611, Clinton was impeached on December 19, 1998, by the House of Representatives on grounds of perjury to a grand jury (by a 228–206 vote)[17] and obstruction of justice (by a 221–212 vote)" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impeachment_of_Bill_Clinton).

And could it be that America's current tweeting-president is also working overtime to find reasons to justify the desires of his own heart?

But wait! You & I should not point the finger at others, for are we not doing the same?

I mean, just consider our marriages. Have we not all experienced, when a wife critiques her husband, how he can scheme up wonderful words to try and minimise his mistakes? (Also vice-versa when a husband points out to his wife something which she did wrong). Indeed, sinful man always schemes up clever words to justify his sins & sinful desires – and even Christians are not immune to this!

Well, what makes us so bad?

Why (as the Apostle Paul says in a long list in Rm 3) are our *throats like open graves* which allow such spiritually dead words to escape from our hearts causing so much deception & pain to those around us?

Why do our *tongues deceive*?

Why do our *lips spread viper venom*?

Why do our *mouths bring curses & bitterness*?

Why are sinful man's *feet swift to shed blood* – if not literally, then at least spiritually?

Yes, why does sinful man work so much *ruin & misery*?¹⁰

I love the two reasons Paul gives at the beginning and end of this list (in Rm 3). These two reasons have to do with man's *mind* and man's *heart*, for, you see, Paul says 1) it's because sinful man doesn't *understand* (See? The *mind* is affected), and 2) does not *fear* God (because the *heart* is affected)!

So, what do we see?

Well, we see that these two – man's corrupt *mind* and man's corrupt *heart* – conspire to seek after everything else except God!

My brother & sister, see how far sinful man has fallen?

Indeed, what God said about mankind in Noah's days, can still be said of sinful man in our day & age – in fact, in any age (Gn 6:5), "...*every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*."¹¹

So, how can one sum up the *degree* to which man is fallen in sin?

Well, by this unattractive truth: that sinful man is **totally depraved**, in the sense that he is defiled (as WCF 6.2 says) *in all the faculties and parts of soul and body*. And, sadly, gauging by the sins of even professing Christians, one has to admit that even *Christians* are not exempt from the strong pull of this total depravity!

Said in another way, *no part of who we are remains untouched by the plague of sin – not least our minds and consciences!*¹²

Wow, you feel like saying, "We might as well have been dead in our relationship with God!"

Well, that brings us to a small point 2...

¹⁰ Cf. Rm 3:13-18 "*Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.*" "*The venom of asps is under their lips.*" ¹⁴ "*Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.*" ¹⁵ "*Their feet are swift to shed blood;*" ¹⁶ *in their paths are ruin and misery,* ¹⁷ *and the way of peace they have not known.*" ¹⁸ "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*"

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ge 6:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² Van Dixhoorn (ibid:86). Also cf. Tit 1:15 *To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled* (Emphasis mine).

Dead

Based upon the Bible, the WCF 6.2 says, “...and so, (man) became dead in sin...”

My brother & sister, what a grim foreshadowing was Adam & Eve’s post-Fall state of all the misery which was to engulf the rest of mankind!

Yes, as God’s Word so poignantly says: all people would now be *dead in transgressions and sins* already at the stage *when they’re born!*¹³

See?

We’re not merely weak, tired or sick – no, this is a cancer which, in & of ourselves, you & I are unable to cure.

In fact, it’s a death – a spiritual death, and yet more than even just a *spiritual* death, for it also involves our *physical* death!

Look at it this way: if you have killed a member of the Mongrel Mob, then... do you know what? Well, you will be dead while you’re still alive, for it’s only a matter of time and they’ll find you!

Well, how much more is this not true of you & me if we were to stay unrepentant of our sins against the Almighty Judge of heaven & earth!?

You see, he/she who has not received Jesus Christ as his/her Saviour & Lord, is not just spiritually dead, but is, for all practical purposes, dead even while he/she is still alive. For look, it’s only a matter of time and Christ will return to judge the living and the dead!

And so, what do we see?

Well, we see that Adam & Eve’s instant *spiritual* death was also the beginning of their *physical* death.

Yes, they were in for a slow death, for God did not kill them instantly and on the spot. However, death & decay had now instantly entered their bodies, and it became inevitable that, from that moment on, they would one day become dust again!

Well, this brings us to shocking yet comforting news – which is point 3...

By God’s Decree

My brother & sister, hear again the words of WCF 6.1, *Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. God was pleased to permit this sin of theirs, according to his wise and holy counsel, because his purpose was, through it, to glorify himself.*¹⁴

Our OT passage (Gn 3) tells us that the first two human beings *knew* and *understood* God’s law. It also tells us that one of God’s creatures *contradicted* the Creator of heaven & earth! It tells us that woman and man listened, then looked, and then *plunged into sin!*

We may ask (and many *have* asked), “Why did there ever have to be the Fall – especially, seeing that God had decreed everything to happen – also the Fall?”

One answer has always been that, to test our first parents’ love for Him, God did not hard-wire them in such a way that they could only ever “love” Him – yes, God did not “programme” man with just one option, i.e. to just love God always and all the time.

My brother & sister, if God had done that, then what He would have received from man would not have been true/pure love, but cold, programmed obedience.

¹³ Eph 2:1-3 ***And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.***

Also cf. Ps 51:5 ***Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.***

¹⁴ Emphasis mine

Thus, in order to give Adam & Eve the opportunity to show their heartfelt love for God by their free agency (free choice),¹⁵ God had to create them in such a way that they would be able to *exercise* that free agency.

What's more, for Adam & Eve to then show that pure & heartfelt love to God, there had to exist for them *the possibility of sinning*.

Thus, so that man's love could be seen/experienced to be true, heartfelt love, *evil had to exist*.

So, without being the author of evil, God *decreed* the existence of evil.

Well, that was one reason why God could have permitted our first parent's Fall.

Now, although that is a very good reason, the Bible does not explicitly mention it!

However, here's a good reason – in fact, an astounding & awe-inspiring reason why *God was pleased to permit*¹⁶ satan's smooth-talking propaganda and Adam & Eve's rebellious act!

What is that reason?

Well, the reason was so that God could work all of it for His glory!

You say, "How come!?" "How could such an enormously shocking event with so many untold consequences ever work for God's glory?"

My brother & sister, if it was not for Adam & Eve's Fall which plunged the whole human race into sin & God-forsakenness, then how would we ever have known God's mercy – yes, His *gracious loving faithfulness*!¹⁷

Look, is this not why Rm 11:32 says, "***For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy¹⁸ on them all***"?

If there were no darkness, how would you & I ever have appreciated light!?

Yes, in which other way could mankind ever have known & appreciated God's love except by having first fallen into sin and then experienced His tremendous love/mercy in giving His very only-begotten Son for them – and giving Him *while they were still sinners and exceedingly unattractive*!

Consider again Rm 5:8, ***But God demonstrates His own love¹⁹ toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***

So, yes, the Fall was/is absolutely shocking! And, it's also shocking for you and me when we hear it for the first time that God actually permitted/allowed – no, *decreed* (!!) – our first parents' Fall!

But here is the most awe-inspiring, joyful, and comforting fact, i.e. that God did this to demonstrate His love toward us – that while we were yet sinners, God's very own (and only begotten) Son died for us!

Surely, if there never was a Fall, would we ever have seen/grasped (and been moved) by such love?

My brother & sister, I pray that not only you & I, but all of our loved ones would receive Jesus Christ, the enormous Expression of God's love, and so turn from death to life – yes, life to the full!

¹⁵ ... which our first parent had before their Fall, because they had the ability to sin as well as the ability not to sin...

¹⁶ So the WCF 6.1

¹⁷ Three English words to translate the one Hebrew word *hesed* (חֶסֶד).

¹⁸ ἐλεῆση Aorist Active Subjunctive 3rd Person Singular of ἐλεῶ or ἐλεέω: to show kindness or concern for someone in serious need—'to show mercy, to be merciful toward, to have mercy on, mercy' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 750). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁹ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην

AMEN (2,245 words excluding footnotes)