

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Lesson 18: Of the Fall of Man, Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof (§ 1 – 2)

High Plains Fellowship PCA

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Introduction

This week we begin a three-part study of Chapter 6. We will be considering the *Fall* and its *effects* on man—first upon Adam and Eve, and consequently, upon all their posterity.

There are two common errors we can make at this point: (1) to deny the historical *reality* of the Fall (and the Curse), or (2) to affirm the Fall but deny its *severity*. Our view of the depravity of man will shape the entire course of our life and ministry. And a deficient view of depravity—which characterizes most of the church—undercuts the message of the gospel by allowing men to think they can still save themselves or contribute something to their own salvation. In this way we place ourselves in danger of wandering off into heresies—and if that sounds too alarmist, read the first chapter of Galatians again. A weak view of depravity leads to a weak view of the gospel!

We are Pelagians by nature, and even with the benefit of conversion we barely improve upon that condition. In our fallen nature, we naturally want to think the best of ourselves. And after generations of brainwashing in self-esteem theology, we think it's cruel to “tear someone down” by pointing out the severity of the spiritual condition. But we must confront the condition if we want to receive the cure.

Man is not “basically good.” He is evil through-and-through, as history continually reminds us. Jesus said, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For *out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander*. These are what defile a person.” (Matt 15:18-20)

Opener

- How would you respond to the question, “Are things getting better or worse?”
- What are some of the obvious signs of man's *inherent* corruption? (hint: start young)
- Why is it generally bad advice to “follow your heart”? What is better advice?
- How bad does sin have to be in order to surprise or shock us? Why? How does that reveal our own latent Pelagian tendencies?

WLC Q/A #21-25

Q21: Did man continue in that estate wherein God at first created him?

A21: Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created.[1]

1. **Gen. 3:6-8, 13** - So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. . . . Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." **Ecc. 7:29** - See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. **2 Cor. 11:3** - But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Q22: Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?

A22: 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, [1] sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression. [2]

1. **Acts 17:26** - And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.

2. **Gen. 2:16-17** - And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." **Rom. 5:12-20** - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. **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, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Q23: Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A23: The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. [1]

1. **Rom. 3:23** - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Rom 5:12** - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Q24: What is sin?

A24: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature. [1]

1. **1 John 3:4** - Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **Gal. 3:10, 12** - For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." . . . But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

Q25: Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A25: The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin,[1] the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually;[2] which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.[3]

1. **Rom. 5:12, 19** - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. . . . For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

2. **Rom. 3:10-19** - 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." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **Rom 5:6** - For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **Rom 8:7-8** - For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **Eph. 2:1-3** - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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—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. **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.

3. **James 1:14-15** - But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. **Matt. 15:19** - For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

WCF 6.1-6.2

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

a. **Gen 3:13** - Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." **2 Cor 11:3** - But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

b. **Rom 11:32** - For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

- "Our first parents"—from whom the whole human race descends
- Adam as the federal head (representative) of all mankind
- Adam in his public/private roles (WLC #22)
- Man was created good but placed "on probation"

- By implication, Satan had to fall first (but we are still left without an explanation of the origin of evil)

“It appears to be God’s general plan, and one eminently wise and righteous, to introduce all the new-created subjects of moral government into a state of probation for a time, in which he makes their permanent character and destiny depend upon their own action. He creates them holy, yet capable of falling. . . . If they stand the test, the reward is that their moral characters are confirmed and rendered infallible, and they are introduced into an inalienable blessedness forever.”¹

- The doctrine of the Fall reminds us how important it is to preserve the historical accuracy of the Genesis narrative—it is not mythological or symbolic
- Williamson raises the problem of “Barthian” neo-orthodox theology that seeks “to have its cake and eat it too”—in order to be accepted as Christians *and* to be respected by the world
- In neo-orthodoxy, “true” doesn’t mean what you think it means—it attempts to fragment “spiritual” truth from historical truth (*spiritual* being conveniently located in the realm of personal, unverifiable experience—hence, “existential” Christianity devoid of objective facts like the temptation and Fall)
- This problem takes us back to the “modernist-fundamentalist” controversy of the early 20th century—where the “higher critics” (theological liberals) sought to remove history from scripture while retaining some spiritual meaning
- Meanwhile, scripture demonstrates—from *the very first verse*—that doctrine and history are inseparable

“The fall of man needs as much emphasis as his creation.”²

2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God,^a and so became dead in sin,^b and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.^c

a. **Gen 3:6-8** - So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. **Eccl 7:29** - See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. **Rom 3:23** - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

b. **Gen 2:17** - “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” **Eph 2:1** - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.

c. **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

¹ Hodge, p. 105-106.

² Cornelius Van Til, quoted by Williamson, p. 53.

sick; who can understand it? **Rom 3:10-19** - 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.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **Titus 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.

- “Original righteousness”: man was made righteous (to paraphrase Ben Franklin) but only if he could keep it
- Irony: fallen man is *Totally Pelagian*—he considers himself to be inherently *good* (thereby revealing the ignorance and corruption of his proud heart)
- But of course, “good” is a relative term these days (and the bar is as low as you need it to go)

“The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact.” —Malcolm Muggeridge

- Depravity becomes its own worst enemy—man can do nothing to improve his own moral nature
- Rom 1:21-22: For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but *they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened*. Claiming to be wise, *they became fools*.
- We note the loss of “communion” in the Fall—an essential outworking of the *imago Dei*: man who was made to be in spiritual union with God is now alienated by his sin and therefore “spiritually” dead (cut off from the spiritual life of his Creator)
- The work of Christ in redemption is a restoration of the union that was lost in the Fall; regeneration reunites the spirit of man with God and reconnects him with the Spirit of life
- When the Calvinist talks about the “total depravity” of man he means that the Fall has affected every part of his being; it is “total” in extent but not in degree (i.e., no man is as bad as he could be)
- Although man is fallen, he is nevertheless restrained by “common grace”—otherwise society would be impossible (we would all literally kill each other)

“There are, for the present, certain instrumentalities of God which retard and restrain in order that life in this world might be tolerable.”³

- In times of judgment, God removes the restraints of common grace—the madness of the fallen mind drives man to more violence and self-destruction; such characterized the ante-diluvian world

³ Williamson, p. 55.

- Man in his depravity rejects God as his ultimate reference point—he makes himself the measure of all things; the result is futility
- *Betrayal* is one way to describe the Fall—it started at the beginning and will continue until the end of the present age

Concluding Thoughts

“There is enough tinder in the hearts of the best men in the world to light a fire that shall burn to the lowest hell, unless God should quench the sparks as they fall. There is enough corruption, depravity, and wickedness in the heart of the most holy man that is now alive to damn his soul to all eternity, if free and sovereign grace does not prevent.” —Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“It is only against the pitch blackness of the night that we see the glory of the stars. And it is only against the pitch blackness of man’s radical depravity that we can begin to see the glories of the gospel.” —Paul David Washer

Upcoming Lessons

- January 15: Chapter 6, Paragraphs 3 & 4
- January 22: Chapter 6, Paragraphs 5 & 6
- January 29: Chapter 7, Paragraphs 1 & 2
- February 12: Chapter 7, Paragraphs 3 & 4
- February 19: Chapter 7, Paragraphs 5 & 6

Suggested Resources (new items added to the top of the list / older items removed)

Resources you may find helpful for this study:

- *Report of the Creation Study Committee*, 27th General Assembly, 1999. ([here](#))
- *The Lie: Evolution*, Ken Ham, 1987.
- *Genesis and the Decay of the Nations*, Ken Ham, 1996.
- *The New Answers Book 2*, Ken Ham ed., 2008.
- “In the Beginning . . .”, R. C. Sproul, September 18, 2020. ([here](#))
- “Is Genesis History?”, Del Tackett, 2020. (full movie [here](#))
- YouTube Channel: Is Genesis History? ([here](#))
- Answers in Genesis ([here](#))
- The Institute for Creation Research ([here](#))
- *The Confession of Faith*, A. A. Hodge, 1869.
- *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, G. I. Williamson, 1964.

All scripture quotations are ESV unless otherwise noted.

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