

§ 10. Doctrine of Man

Lecture 19

Man as Sinner

Good morning! Welcome to Defenders. We are podcasting today from my home office. We've learned from the church that we normally meet at that it will not be until mid-August that we'll be allowed to meet again at the church building. So until that time we'll continue with our podcasts from home.

Today we come to the fourth subsection of our study of the doctrine of man, which is "Man as Sinner." Let's look first at the classic doctrine of the Fall. We will look at three biblical passages concerning the Fall. The first is from Genesis 3:1-7:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 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, 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 aprons.

From this point the remainder of the story goes on to tell of how God then cast certain curses upon the man and the woman for their disobedience in the Garden.

The principal passage in the New Testament which reflects on the Fall is found in Paul's letter to the Romans 5:12-21. Paul writes,

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned – 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 sins were 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 in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 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. Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 Paul writes, "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."

These are the three critical passages in the Scriptures relevant to the doctrine of the Fall, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Let's turn now to some attempt to systematize these biblical data.

Traditionally, the doctrine of the Fall is taken to be the doctrine that man was originally created in what was called the state of integrity. But man's original state of integrity and sinlessness was lost through Adam's fall, and we now find ourselves as a result in a state of corruption. The state of integrity is what man was created to be like. The state of corruption in man is in contradiction to what he was created to be like. So in one sense, the truly natural state is the state of integrity. The state of corruption is an unnatural state contrary to the way we ought to be, and that is the result of the human fall into sin.

In the state of integrity, man possessed a certain set of perfections – both the so-called major perfections, which were perfections of the soul, and then also minor perfections, which were the perfections of the body. Among the major perfections – that is to say, the perfections of the soul – we find the knowledge of God, the sanctity of the will (that is to say, we will to do what we ought to do), and the purity and harmony of man's desires. In the state of integrity, the body also possesses certain perfections as well. These would include immortality, freedom from harm, and being the lord of the earth. All of these perfections were considered to be lost in the Fall; both the major and minor perfections were lost, and so now we find ourselves in a state of corruption in which we no longer possess these perfections.

Let's say a word about the state of man in the state of integrity with respect to his ability to resist sin compared to the state of corruption. In the state of integrity, man had the ability to not sin. In Latin this is written *posse non peccare* – able not to sin. Man was able not to sin; he had the ability to resist temptation, to do righteousness, and his passions were in harmony with his will, and therefore he had the ability to avoid sin. But, in the state of corruption, man loses his ability to not sin, so that he can only sin in

various ways. He has lost his ability to not sin, so that now, in the state of corruption, man is still free but he is free only to sin. He can choose various sins to commit; but he is fallen and therefore unable to avoid sin – *non posse non peccare*.

As for the origin of sin, where does this come from? The Genesis narrative does not address the origin of moral evil. The evil serpent opposed to God just shows up unexplained in the Garden. The character of the serpent in the Garden is traditionally thought to be or to represent Satan. The origin of evil could be thought of as due to creaturely freedom. With respect to Satan, Satan was usually thought to be some sort of an angelic being who fell into sin, whose will was no longer directed toward God as the greatest good, but he sought lesser goods and therefore fell away from and became opposed to God. So Satan is essentially a fallen angel.

On a deeper level, however, it might be thought that in one sense the origin of sin is due to God's own decree. Perhaps there are worlds feasible for God to actualize in which human beings never sin but always freely choose to do what is right. But suppose that a world in which Christ's self-giving sacrifice to redeem mankind from sin is better than any world lacking Christ's sacrifice. In that case God might prefer a world in which Christ's sacrifice occurs over a world without it. But any world in which Christ's redeeming sacrifice occurs is a world with human sin. There has to be sin in order for Christ to redeem man from it. So God actually prefers a world with sin over a world without it.

This scenario is related to the Calvinistic debate between Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism. This is the idea that God's decrees have a certain logical order to them. Supralapsarians hold that God's primary decree was the decree to the election of the saved and the reprobation of the damned. In order to have something to save the elect from and to condemn the non-elect for, God decreed man's fall into sin. On this view, the cross is not so much thought of as a remedy for the Fall into which man has tumbled; rather, quite the reverse. Logically, in order to have the act of the cross, you need to have a state from which mankind needs to be rescued and redeemed.

Infralapsarianism would say that first God decrees the Fall, and then in light of the Fall, He decrees the elect and the reprobate. God first decides to create a world with sinful creatures, and then He decides what to do about it. On this view God decrees the cross in order to rescue man from the Fall.

In either case, you'll note the actual agent of sin will not be God; it will be the creatures themselves who freely misuse their will – their free will is a good thing, a God-given thing. They use this free will in order to rebel against God.

Let's briefly contrast this traditional view of the Fall with more modern views of the Fall. For many modern theologians the idea of the Fall is in a literary sense – I don't mean this

negatively – a myth. That is to say, it is a sort of figurative re-telling of the condition of every man. Every individual during his life falls into sin and therefore loses his innocence and finds himself in a state of corruption and alienation from God. Adam is a sort of symbol or representation of all persons who find themselves guilty before God. So the Fall, on these modern views, is not so much a historical event in the past but rather a symbol of man's condition in general.

Next time, we will want to give some evaluation of how we ought to understand the Fall – whether historically or in a purely symbolic sense or perhaps in some combination of the two. Until then, I wish you Godspeed.¹

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