

OF THE SIN AND FALL OF OUR FIRST PARENTS

The law given to our first parents, and the covenant made with them, were soon broken. As it is written, "But they like men [or Adam] have transgressed the covenant" (Hosea 6:7). They did not remain long in their state of innocence and obedience, but by sinning, they fell from their original state of uprightness into a condition of sin and misery.

Let us consider first the persons involved in this fall—none other than Adam and Eve, the common ancestors of all mankind. These were the very ones to whom the law was given and with whom the covenant was made. Eve was the first in the transgression, followed by Adam, even though Adam had been formed first. As the apostle writes, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:13–14).

Eve's fall began when she was beguiled by the serpent—the devil in disguise. He tempted her to eat the fruit that God had strictly forbidden. Her sin seems to have begun when she entered into conversation with the serpent, especially on such a subject as the forbidden tree. The very introduction of that topic by such an extraordinary creature should have aroused suspicion. She ought to have broken off the dialogue immediately and avoided even the appearance of evil. But, in the innocence of her heart, she may have considered the question harmless and thus gave a straightforward and honest reply.

Some have criticised Eve's recounting of God's command—saying she both added to it ("neither shall ye touch it") and softened it ("lest ye die")—as if she was unsure about the consequence. For God had said, "Thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). However, she may be defended in this. Though the command did not explicitly forbid touching, it was implied—for one could hardly eat the fruit without first touching it. Her reasoning might well have been: "If we may not even touch the fruit, how much more are we forbidden to eat it?" As for the phrase "lest ye die", such expressions in Scripture do not always indicate doubt. They can denote the certainty of judgment. See, for example, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way" (Psalm 2:12).

Eve's sin, however, lay in believing the serpent's lie: "Ye shall not surely die", which flatly contradicted the word of God, "Thou shalt surely die". She began to doubt God's warning and, as her confidence in His word waned, she gave heed to the deceitful voice. The serpent may even have eaten the fruit himself to demonstrate it caused him no harm—no sign of death appeared. He might have presented himself as proof that the fruit brought wisdom and superiority above the rest of the creatures. He could have argued that his own intelligence came from eating it, and if she and Adam did likewise, they would become wise—perhaps like the angels.

Eve then saw the fruit with new eyes. It was appealing in every way: attractive to look upon, good for food, and—according to the serpent—capable of making one wise. Thus, all at once, there arose in her heart what the Apostle John later describes: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Her sin began inwardly, with desire, before she ever touched the fruit. This follows precisely what James says about the process of sin: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin" (James 1:15).

When her lust had taken hold, she could resist no longer. She reached out—whether taking the fruit from the serpent or plucking it directly from the tree—and ate. In that moment, she completed her transgression. But she did not stop there. Having tasted the fruit herself, she gave it to her husband. Whether Adam was nearby or she went to find him, we cannot say for sure. But we may imagine her carrying the fruit with her, still eating it along the way, and when she met Adam, she held it up for him to see, praised its taste, and perhaps repeated the serpent's arguments. Adam listened to her and, heeding her voice, took the fruit and ate also—thus falling into sin.

Secondly, that Adam also sinned—just as surely as Eve—cannot be denied. Though the Scripture says “Adam was not deceived” (1 Timothy 2:14), this does not mean he was guiltless. It means that he was not deceived by the serpent as Eve was. Rather, he was persuaded by his wife. And when it says that Eve was “in the transgression”, it is not to say that she alone was guilty, but that she transgressed first. Adam was no less a partaker in the fall, for it is written, “Adam’s transgression” (Romans 5:14).

If, as the letter of the text suggests—“she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6)—Adam was present with Eve at the moment she sinned, then his guilt would be compounded. He failed on several counts: he did not challenge the serpent’s subtle lies; he did not defend his wife from temptation; he did not reason with her or remind her of God’s command; he did not exercise his rightful headship by forbidding her. If he stood by silently, he was complicit—a passive participant and accessory to her transgression. Yet perhaps he was not present at that moment.

Nevertheless, Adam’s sin is clearly described by God in these words: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife” (Genesis 3:17). That was the root of his downfall. Eve may well have pleaded with him: that perhaps they had misunderstood God’s warning; that surely they would not die, since she had eaten and remained alive and well. Persuaded by such reasoning, Adam yielded. Some suppose he was not even deceived by her—that he knowingly and wilfully sinned. That he acted with full awareness of what he was doing and its consequences. And if that be so, it makes his offence all the more grievous.

Some argue that Adam acted out of an intense, misguided love for his wife. That rather than lose her to death, he chose to sin and die with her. But even such affection does not excuse his conduct. Though a man is commanded to love his wife as his own flesh, he must never love her above God, nor give more weight to her words than to the voice of his Maker.

However one views it, Adam sinned—and Scripture places greater emphasis on Adam’s guilt than Eve’s. The ruin of mankind is attributed to his fall, not hers. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). Again, “In Adam all die” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Adam acted not merely as a private individual but as the federal head of all humanity. His disobedience brought sin and death upon all his posterity.

Some have speculated that had only Eve sinned and not Adam, the consequences would not have extended to all. For she was not the federal head. But even if she had fallen alone, she could not have produced a sinless generation—for “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). She would have died for her offence, and God might have raised up another woman for Adam from whom a holy seed could be born. But such ideas are mere conjecture.

It is also not entirely settled whether Eve had no role at all in federal headship. Though the command was originally given to Adam and the covenant made with him before Eve’s creation, she was clearly informed of it, consented to its terms, and was equally bound by it. She shared in its privileges, such as dominion over the creatures. She was, with Adam, the common ancestor of all mankind—the “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). She was one flesh with him, and both are referred to collectively as “Adam”: “Male and female created he them... and called their name Adam” (Genesis 5:2). Therefore, they together stand as the head of the human race.

Thirdly, how is it that creatures so wise and understanding—so holy, just, and good—who were made in the image and likeness of God, should sin as they did? This question deserves careful consideration. To whom or to what can their sin and fall be attributed?

Certainly not to God. “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). Nor was God the author of their fall. Satan, indeed, was the instrument—enticing, deceiving, and sowing lies—but the actual fault lies with Adam and Eve themselves. It was their own free will, their own deliberate act and deed.

First, it was not of God. Far from encouraging sin, God strictly forbade it, was greatly displeased by it, and responded with righteous judgment. Some critics of our views claim that by asserting Adam's fall came by divine permission, we make God the author of sin. God forbid! We utterly reject and abhor such a notion. Let us therefore carefully consider what role—if any—God had in this matter, to show that the charge is both false and groundless.

What God Did Not Do:

(1) God did not prevent the serpent from entering the garden and tempting Eve. He could have done so, of course. He could have commanded Satan to stay away, or bound him altogether. Likewise, God could have rendered the temptation powerless, unable to sway Eve or Adam in the slightest. But He chose not to.

Nor did God restrain Adam from sinning. He might have, just as He withheld Abimelech from touching Sarah, saying, "I also withheld thee from sinning against me" (Genesis 20:6). God restrained Laban and Esau from harming Jacob. He stopped Balaam from cursing Israel. So yes, He could have intervened to stop Adam—but He did not. And crucially, He was under no obligation to do so.

On the other hand, God did not compel Satan to tempt, nor did He force Adam to sin. There was no coercion involved. Satan acted of his own malicious will, envious of man's happiness and determined to ruin it. He willingly concocted his scheme and pursued it with devilish intent. Likewise, Adam and Eve acted freely. They consented with their own will to the temptation. No one forced the fruit into their mouths. In fact, none of Adam's children have ever eaten with greater appetite or delight than they did of that forbidden fruit. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Proverbs 9:17).

(2) God did not withdraw any gift or strength He had already given to man. Adam was not weakened or made vulnerable by some act of God before the fall. When God does withhold or remove blessings, it is always in response to sin. But at that time, Adam had not sinned. God left him in full possession of the abilities and faculties He had originally bestowed.

Adam had all he needed to stand if he had chosen to do so. God did not give him additional strength beyond what was necessary—nor was He bound to do so. But Adam was sufficiently equipped to resist the temptation and continue in obedience. The fact that God did not interfere or bolster him with fresh strength does not make God the author of sin. These are negative acts, not active causes.

In sum, God neither tempted Adam, nor constrained him, nor withdrew necessary grace. Adam stood by free choice and fell by free choice. He had power to stand and fell by wilful disobedience.

Fourthly, there are some things that God did do—acts which are rightly ascribed to Him—in relation to this whole matter.

God foreknew Adam's sin and fall. Just as He foreknows all things that come to pass in the world—nothing being hidden from His infinite knowledge—so also He certainly foreknew this most significant of events. Any who confess the omniscience of God must admit this. And if the Lord foreknows even the most minor and uncertain events, then surely He foreknew Adam's fall, given the tremendous consequences that flowed from it.

But God's foreknowledge does not stand apart from His will. He foreknows what will be, because He has determined that it shall be. As such:

God decreed Adam's fall. It came under His eternal counsel and sovereign decree, as do all things that come

to pass. As it is written, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” (Lamentations 3:37). Nothing is done unless the Lord wills it so. The fall of Adam was included in the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). This is evident because the sufferings and death of Christ—ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20)—were appointed as the means of redemption from that very fall. But how could that redemption have been certain if Adam’s fall had not also been part of God’s sovereign decree?

Yet this decree did not compel Adam to sin. It introduced a necessity of certainty—that what God has purposed must surely come to pass—but not a necessity of coercion or force. Just as Judas sinned freely when he betrayed the Lord, and the Jews freely consented to His crucifixion (Acts 4:28), so Adam also sinned of his own will, without any external compulsion. Therefore, though God decreed the event, the guilt of the act lies entirely with Adam. God is not the author of sin.

God permitted Adam to fall. This was no idle or indifferent permission. It was a wise, holy, and sovereign allowance—an act of permission in full harmony with God’s unchangeable counsel and will. In one sense, God willed the fall—not as evil in itself, but as something He would overrule for great good. He did not will it as sin, but as a means to manifest His grace and mercy, His justice and holiness. The permission was not passive or ineffectual. It was part of His divine purpose.

God’s providence concurred with Adam’s act, sustaining him in life and strength even as he sinned. As God upholds all things by the word of His power—even the wicked during the very acts of their rebellion—so also He upheld Adam when he reached for the fruit and ate it. Without divine providence, neither Eve nor Adam could have lifted a hand. All things live, move, and have their being in God (Acts 17:28). Every action, as an action, is sustained by God. Yet the moral defect—the sinfulness of the act—arises from the creature alone. Thus God is not the author of sin, either in Adam or in any other man.

Lastly, God provided the occasion of Adam’s testing—by planting the garden, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and by forbidding its fruit. But does not God, as the sovereign Lord, have every right to plant what He pleases, and to command as He pleases? He gave Adam the power to obey, had he chosen to use it rightly. The occasion of temptation is not the same as causing sin. By the same logic, God is not blamed for giving wealth to a man who uses it to indulge his lusts. The fault lies in the misuse, not the gift.

Therefore, when all is considered, the sin and fall of Adam were foreknown, decreed, permitted, and upheld in providence by God, yet freely committed by Adam himself. The Lord remains holy, just, and good—and man alone is the author of his sin.

Secondly, we must now consider the part Satan played in this tragic affair. His involvement was not through force or compulsion, but by subtle persuasion. He acted as a tempter—which is why he is called “the tempter” (see Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). He enticed and seduced our first parents through lies and cunning arguments, and in so doing, he prevailed.

Scripture says plainly that he “beguiled Eve” and “deceiveth the whole world”—that is, the representatives of it (2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9). He worked through the body of a serpent—not merely appearing as one, but actually using a real creature, which is described as “more subtil than any beast of the field” (Genesis 3:1). This same creature was later cursed by God to go upon its belly and eat dust all its days—confirming that it was a true animal and not a phantom or illusion. Yet it was no ordinary serpent—it was Satan in the serpent.

This becomes evident not only because the creature spoke—something serpents do not do—but because it reasoned, argued, and skilfully executed a scheme to bring about man’s downfall. Scripture leaves no doubt that the deceiver was “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 12:9), “a liar, and the father of it” (John

8:44).

Satan showed immense cunning in every part of this event. First, in his choice of instrument—the serpent—widely known for its subtlety. It could slither quietly into the garden, unlike other beasts that might have caused alarm. It may well have been a beautiful creature, with golden scales or shining patterns that caught the sunlight and made it lovely to behold. In some regions, such serpents are known for their dazzling appearance. Such beauty might have attracted Eve, even kindled a fondness for the creature. It may have been familiar to her, wrapping itself about her arms in affection. What's more, it could speak—allowing her to engage it in innocent conversation over time. Such familiarity may have gone on for a while before Satan made his move. Thus, when it spoke, she was not startled. She was used to it.

Satan's strategy also included choosing just the right time. He struck early—while Adam and Eve had only just begun to enjoy their paradise. Their habits of virtue were not yet well rooted, which made them more vulnerable to deception. Satan also wisely approached Eve first, and at a time when she was alone—without Adam to guide, protect, or correct her.

He did not introduce himself as an enemy of God. He didn't begin by revealing his true identity as a fallen angel who rebelled against heaven. Had he done so—had he blasphemed or mocked God openly—Eve would have recoiled in horror. That would have ruined his entire scheme. No, he approached under the guise of reason, even seeming to acknowledge God's authority. He began by asking a question: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). He pretended to doubt whether God had issued such a command, implying that surely a kind and generous God would not withhold any good thing from them. The suggestion was subtle—that they must have misunderstood God's words, or that Adam had perhaps misreported the command to Eve, since she wasn't present when it was first given.

Once he saw her wavering, Satan became bolder. He flatly contradicted God's warning: "Ye shall not surely die." Then he made his real appeal: God, he claimed, knew that eating the fruit would elevate them in knowledge—that it would make them "as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). He implied that the Lord had selfish motives in withholding such wisdom.

Eve, now convinced, saw that the fruit was beautiful, good for food, and desirable for gaining wisdom. She took it, ate it, and gave it to her husband. Thus they both fell—not because they were forced, but because Satan seduced them with cunning words and deceitful reasoning.

Thirdly, we must conclude that the sin, fall, and ruin of man were entirely of his own doing. Adam was not ignorant or lacking in understanding. He had been created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), and part of that image included wisdom and knowledge. He was not in darkness, nor blind, nor hardened in heart. He knew the Lord—his Creator and gracious Benefactor. He knew the will of God. He knew the law. He knew the penalty of disobedience. The command was clear, and the consequences were plainly stated: "Thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

It is true that, though upright, Adam was not incapable of being deceived. A false good may have been presented to his understanding—something that appeared right in his own eyes—and his will embraced it. But this was not because he lacked holiness or righteousness. Scripture says plainly, "God hath made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). He was endowed with a pure nature—drawn toward good and inclined away from evil.

However, he was also made mutable—changeable. That is, he was not fixed in his estate, but left with the possibility of falling. This was no flaw, but part of the nature of created beings. Only God is unchangeable: "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). If we ask, "Why did God make man mutable?"—we may as well ask, "Why did

God not make man God?" For immutability belongs to God alone.

Perhaps we might reframe the question: "Why did not God confirm man in the state in which he was created, as He confirmed the elect angels?" It may be that God would have done so, had Adam continued in obedience a little longer. But that, too, is speculation.

The most fitting and final answer is this: "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:26). God, in His sovereign will, chose to confirm the elect angels, but not the rest. Likewise, He did not confirm man. He left him to the freedom of his will, and so he fell.

This is enough for us to know. The sin was Adam's. The fault lay entirely with him. God remains holy, just, and good. "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).