

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 11—The Fall of Our First Parents, Qs. 13, 15

With Q.13 we enter the section of the Catechism on the doctrines of sin (*hamartiology*). Qs.13-19 cover the following topics: 1) the origin of sin, 2) the nature of sin, 3) the apostatizing act of Adam and Eve, 4) the way in which their posterity were responsible for that act, 5) the estate of sin into which that act of apostasy brought all mankind, and 6) the estate of misery which is inseparable from the estate of sin, which bring us to Q.20

Questions 13 and 15 seek to affirm plainly that our first parents *fell* from their created estate of fellowship and acceptance with God. And in doing so, it seeks to relate the circumstances surrounding their fall. It says, 1) God left them to the freedom of their own will; 2) in the use of that will, they sinned against God; and 3) the sin was their eating the forbidden fruit.

- I. Man was created with a free will, Gen 2.16-17
 - A. Being created in the image of God, with the full *knowledge* of His will, with a perfect outward *righteousness* in relation to it, and with *holiness* of heart in relation to it, man had a nature inclined to obedience and a will able to choose it. *And yet* his will was also able to choose disobedience. He was perfect, flawless, innocent, and holy, and yet mutable.
 - B. Whyte, “It’s a very mysterious thing that God should so “innovate upon His own eternity” as to summon into existence a race of creatures, and bestow upon them the perilous gift of free will—a perilous and, in the event, a fatal gift. Because as experience proved, they possessor of it might rise up against his Maker, might oppose and obstruct His will, and introduce sin and misery and death where life and love and holiness had been intended to dwell.”
 - C. What is free will? Boston, “free will is a power in the will, whereby it does of its own accord, without force upon it, choose or refuse what is proposed to it by the understanding.”
 1. And man has this free will in whatever state he is (cf. *man’s fourfold state*, cf. WCF 9). It’s a necessary, inherent, and inalienable part of his constitution as a free moral agent before God and it’s always determined by man’s nature, which is always in turn determined by man’s estate before God.
 - a) So in the estate of innocency, man had the freedom to choose good or evil. —When he chose sin, he fell into the estate of sin.
 - b) In the estate of sin, man has the freedom to choose only evil. He cannot choose good any longer because his estate won’t allow it. His sinful estate has predisposed and bound his nature over to sin. —By the grace of God he can be brought out of this estate into an estate of grace by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - c) In the estate of grace, man has the freedom to choose good or evil. His changed nature is predisposed to good, but as remnants of his fallenness remain, he can also be deceived into sin. —Dying in the estate of grace, he enters into the estate of glory.
 - d) In the estate of glory, man has the freedom to choose only good. Sin is no longer possible because all the remnants are removed and his redeemed nature is made perfectly and forever holy.
 2. Adam and Eve are the only persons to experience all four estates.
- II. Man used his free will to sin against God, Gen 3.1-6
 - A. The first great mystery connected with the origin of sin is *why* God would allow it.
 1. Hodge, It’s obvious that God has permitted sin, and hence it was right for Him to do so. But *why it was right* must ever remain a mystery demanding submission and defying solution.

- B. The second great mystery connected with the origin of sin is *how* sin could originate in the will of a creature created with a positively holy disposition. How could a sinful choice originate in the holy will of Adam?
1. That Adam was created with a holy yet fallible will, and that he did fall, are facts established by divine testimony. We must believe them, although we cannot rationally explain them.
- C. The dreadful sin of Adam was essentially *unbelief*—they made God out to be a liar, and deliberate *disobedience*—they set up their will as a law in place of God’s.
1. Adam freely chose disobedience against God, and at that moment, sin originated in man. It was a voluntary act sufficient knowledge and equipage. It was a free, inexcusable act of rebellion against the All-perfect and All-beneficent God.
 2. It was the willful refusal to believe God’s character as righteous and good in forbidding the tree and the willful decision to instead be a law unto themselves. Berkhof:
 - a) In man’s *understanding*, sin revealed itself as unbelief and pride.
 - b) In man’s *will*, sin revealed itself as the desire to be like God.
 - c) And in the *affections*, sin revealed itself as an unholy satisfaction in eating the forbidden fruit.
 - d) Hodge:
 - (1) The first address of the Tempter suggested *doubt*, “Has God said?” His second address suggested positive *unbelief*, “You will not surely die.”
 - (2) Thus, *doubt, unbelief, and pride* appear to have been the evil states of heart which led to the outward act of *disobedience*.
 3. Augustine, “Man, by making a bad use of his free will, lost both himself and it.”
 - a) As a result of his sin man lost the moral image of God, fell out of fellowship with God, came under the curse of the Law as guilty, and so depraved and corrupted his whole nature that his will was now bound over to evil only.
 - b) *The Fall* is a technical theological term appropriated to that catastrophe in which Adam fell from his first estate. It’s likely taken from Satan’s own fall mentioned in Jn 8.44 and Judas’ fall in Acts 1.25
 4. The eating of the tree of knowledge was sinful only because God had forbidden it. ***God’s will is man’s Law***. And in forbidding it, God was testing man to see whether he would subject his will unconditionally to the will of his God.
- D. Where was God in all this? Hodge:
1. God created Adam holy, with all the innate powers necessary for accountable agency.
 2. He rightfully withheld from Adam, during his probation, any higher supernatural influence necessary to render him infallible.
 3. He neither caused nor approved of Adam’s sin.
 4. He sovereignly decreed to permit him to sin, thus determining that he should sin as he did.

Reflections:

1. Not God, but man himself was the cause of his ruin, Ecc 7.29.
2. God may justly require of men perfect obedience to His Law and justly condemn them for not giving it, even though they’ve lost all ability to keep it, because man’s inability is not God’s fault, but his own.
3. Behold the infinite obligation we lie under to Jesus Christ the Second Adam, who with His precious blood bought our freedom and salvation from sin!
4. How should this account of our rebellious fall into sin break our hearts!