

Lesson 43: Chapter 6: Paragraph 1: The Original Sin

OUTLINE

The first condition of man
The first sin of man

INTRODUCTION

We come to explore the needed doctrine of sin, also called hamartiology. What is a sin? Where did sin come from? Why do we die? What is a sinful nature? How do we have a sinful nature? How is sin passed on from generation to generation? What is the impact of the fall? What is the relationship between sin and human responsibility? Does a Christian still have a sinful nature? What is the Christian's relationship to sin? These and many other questions are addressed in the chapter we have ahead of us. Today we begin with chapter 6 paragraph 1, 'Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof, yet he did not long abide in this honour; Satan using the subtlety of the serpent to subdue Eve, then by her seducing Adam, who, without any compulsion, did willfully transgress the law of their creation, and the command given unto them, in eating the forbidden fruit, which God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.' The confession assumes the historical narrative of Genesis 1-3 as true, and as the source of sin. Today we open the paragraph that talks about the original sin. We have to go back to the beginning to understand the original condition of man as he was originally placed in the Garden under a Covenant of Works (CoW); and here explore what the true nature of sin is. These will be our two headings, the first condition of man; the first condition of man.

As we begin let us think about some modern ideas about sin. The Bible has been cast off; God's law has been rejected; God Himself has been denied, but the language of sin still continues, how does the modern world define sin? Sin is by definition something against God but when you don't have God whatever you have at the center of your moral universe as the highest good will define what sin is. So we have witnessed the de-divinization of sin and human beings put at the center of the universe. The highest crime is not to defy the Ultimate Being of pure perfection who made us and to whom we owe everything as our highest good, but human happiness, both your own and others. And so we have seen the personalizing of sin as we break promises to ourselves, let ourselves down, or do self-harm. Forgiveness comes from the one you sin against, so you have to forgive yourself. This humanizing of sin sees acts against human happiness as the highest moral evil and sin. If sin is not against God but against human beings then this has to change how we see the desires that arise from the human heart. Sin can no longer be related to those things that we want as human beings, or approve of collectively as human beings, for they are natural to us, and as basic as instincts. There is an externalizing of sin as we no longer judge that which comes from us as 'bad' and in contradiction to God's nature or His original purpose for us. If human beings are at the top of the food chain, and make a choice that harms ourselves but no one else, this as an exercise of our personal freedom is a morally righteous act, because I exercised my will to make an informed choice. We see a criminalizing of sin where those acts that are destructive alone are sins, many things that we call sin like adultery and drunkenness, gluttony and lust, are adult pleasures not sins, only those who do

things that harm others are perceived as sinners. Ironically Christians who call out sin in society are now perceived as harming others and seen as criminal and sinning. Here we see the second command of loving our neighbor as ourselves replacing the first commandment of loving God. Linked to this is the ecologizing of sin where nature is central, Nature personified as Mother Earth as the one who sustains human life; or for some who is more important than humanity itself. The rise in Green movements are a symptom of the vacuum created when we no longer have God at the center. The rise of psychology has led to the psychologizing of sin where sin is blamed on someone else through us being the victims of some sort of trauma. We have all seen this recently in the recent exposure of Green MP Golriz Ghahraman. She had been caught for repeated shop lifting, she psychologized her actions with this statement, 'I fell short. I'm sorry. It's not a behaviour I can explain because it's not rational in any way, and after medical evaluation, I understand I'm not well. The mental health professional I see says my recent behaviour is consistent with recent events giving rise to extreme stress response, and relating to previously unrecognised trauma.'¹ Her words give the impression that her actions were forced out of her because she was experiencing stress at work, and has some trauma in her past. This owning of guilt and disowning of it in the same breath is the air we breathe. This is added to with the medicalizing of sin, we have become aware of the various conditions that affect the brain that impact our moods, memories and actions. This too has led to a diminishing of personal responsibility for our actions and has deeply impacted how the criminal justice system now punishes crime. On top of that Communism's long shadow is being felt through the institutionalization of sin, where Whiteness, Straightness, and other group distinctives are guilty of crimes against humanity. And merely being part of a group is now a 'sin'. It has been commented that there is no forgiveness of sin in the recent CRT discussions only guilt and restitution. We need clarity on the question of sin, and the Bible's teaching summarized here by the 1689 does that.

The first condition of man

'Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof, yet he did not long abide in this honour;' Following the theory that semicolons introduce new ideas we take the whole first part of the paragraph as one idea introducing us to the original condition of mankind in the Garden of Eden before the fall. As noted the confession takes literally the historical account of Adam and Eve sinning in the Garden. This is very different to modern Liberalism that denies the historicity of Adam. There is many a modern theologian that denies Adam was literally created upright and perfect, and due to breaking the law of God by literally eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought sin and death upon himself and his progeny. These modern theologians talk about Adam as a representative person, not in the federal sense where his actions are accounted as ours, but as a typical case of the human condition. Frederick Schleiermacher sees sin as a problem of human psychology where the higher parts of psyche are at odds with the lower parts. Eve's actions are symbolic of our weakness to be easily seduced from spiritual things; and Adam shows our greatest weakness is imitating others in this weakness. Jesus is then commended by him as the ultimate human being who models putting God first. Others like Walter Rauschenbusch the father of the social gospel have spoken

¹ <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/350146185/green-mp-golriz-ghahraman-resigns-amid-shoplifting-allegations> accessed 26/1/2024

about the Garden story as a myth used to teach us that our individual ego acts against the common good, and we need Jesus teaching of a kingdom of love to counteract the raising of individual desire above the needs of the community. The first Adam was an individualist and capitalist and the last Adam was a socialist.

We have the original integrity of humanity as God made Adam and Eve sinless yet fallible; able to sin, and able not to sin. We have dealt with this matter in chapter 4 paragraph 2 on creation and there we spoke about the fourfold state of human will and ability. The point to take away is that God put Adam and Eve under a legal covenant, and they were perfectly fit by virtue of being sinless and competent to obey that law.

The 1689 refers to 'a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof.' The Savoy uses the words 'covenant of works' here, which was the common understanding of this situation at the time. Some have thought that these Reformed Baptists rejected the idea of a covenant of works because they did not follow the Savoy here. This is not the case, the CoW is mentioned in the 1689 in 19:6 and 20:1. The 1689 is much longer and more detailed than both the WCF and the Savoy and its emphasis is spelling out the goodness of the law while also affirming the legal realities of the CoW of life for obedience and death for disobedience.

Let's say a few things about what we understand about this legal situation where Adam and Eve are confronted with life and death, which has been most popularly known as the CoW. There are other names some have tried to call it the Edenic Administration, but this is not helpful due to the fact that the CoG was also given in Eden. It has been called the Covenant of Creation as it is the covenant given to Adam before the fall at the beginning of creation, which is fine but does not say much about its substance. I think CoW is the best name for it as it gets at the heart of the key principle at work, if Adam works obedience there will be life; if he works disobedience there will be death. It is also good in contrast with the Covenant of Grace (CoG). These two covenants spelled out as works and grace identify the key principle by which they work. The Covenant of Works was given to Adam, who was sinless and able to perform what it demanded. The Covenant of Grace is God's gracious provision of salvation to sinners who are condemned under the CoW.

Some who are more Biblicist in their orientation deny that such a covenant is present because the word covenant is not present and only first appears in Genesis 6. This is not the biblical way of thinking. The Davidic Covenant established in 2 Samuel 7 also does not use the word 'covenant' but we see in other parts that a covenant is understood to be there, e.g. Ps. 89:3. Covenant is an agreement between two parties, and we can see that there is an agreement between God and Adam. We can also see that there are stipulations or conditions, if you eat you die. The opposite, if you obey you live is inferred by the tree of life, the promise of Sabbath rest in the tree, and Christ's obedience as the Second/Last Adam which secures what the first Adam failed to secure. Some have spoken of the gracious nature of the CoW, but this is very confusing. Grace is not merely unmerited favour but demerited favour and Adam had no sin when God made the covenant. Our confession uses the language of God condescending to enter into such an arrangement with His sinless creature, and it is a condescension because though sinless, the reward of having eternal fellowship with God in eschatological bliss is not equal to the act of not eating

from the tree. It is by God's accommodation not the condignity of the merit of Adam's obedience that undergirds the principle of the works present, the merit he would have earned has been named pactum/covenant merit to state this aspect. The idea is that Adam was under probation and being tested, like Israel, the son of God; like Jesus the Son of God. If he passes he will win access to the tree of life and win life instead of death for His offspring and obtain a higher eschatological state where a glorified existence in the presence of God better than Eden would happen. It is thought that along with the test to not eat of the tree, Adam would also have to be busy with the cultural mandate, filling the earth and subduing it to the glory of God. With a world full of holy beings the test would end and a new creation won by obedience would happen. We infer all this from the results of the Last Adam. We know however that the first Adam failed, he plunged us all into sin. This is why Jesus born under the law had to keep the law as a CoW on our behalf offering obedience to obtain life on our behalf. He will multiply offspring and subdue the earth, and then all will be glorified in a higher state than Eden.

Now the law that stood as a token of this legal arrangement was of course Gen. 2:16-17, 'And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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." This command is a positive law; in other words it is not part of the natural law written on every humans heart. There is no evil in the act of eating fruit, the sin comes from violating the command not the act of eating. The confession talks about it as a righteous law underlining that this law was not commanding something evil; nor commanding something impossible beyond Adam's ability; nor commanding something unreasonable. It was something that was highly possible because it consisted in merely not eating; it was a law to not eat of only one tree that they had access to while being able to eat all the fruit of all the other trees, barring the tree of life which would be given as a reward for obedience to confer life. Adam had every advantage in being made upright and perfect; having a heart and body and mind fitted for obedience; he had sufficient knowledge; he had God warning of the penalties of disobedience and the greatest incentives for obedience; he was without excuse.

Then of course, we have the tree itself. What is the tree and why is it called that? Some have thought it to be a fig tree due to fig leaves being used to cover their nakedness. Some have thought an apple tree based on Song of Solomon 8:5. We do not know what sort of tree it was. Why is it called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Turretin says that it is not because the tree itself had the knowledge; nor because it actually bestowed some hidden knowledge; nor a pretense made up by satan. He writes, 'Rather it is so called both sacramentally (because it was an exploratory sign and a warning to avoid the experimental knowledge of evil equally with good) and eventually a posteriori (from what is later/after the fact) by anticipation (inasmuch from eating of it, he was really about to experience the difference between the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, so that he who was unwilling to discern by precept, might discern by experiment; and he was to be taught by his own evil how much good he had lost, how much evil on the other hand he had drawn upon himself, from what a height of happiness, into what a profound abyss of misery, he had precipitated by sin).' (Topic 8: Question 4, p579, Vol. 1).