

# MAN'S TOTAL DEPRAVITY

by A.W. Pink [Pages 9-37 Gleanings From Scripture]

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

THE subject which this chapter is designed to introduce is likely to meet with a decidedly mixed reception. Some readers will probably be very disappointed when they see the title of this book, considering the subject quite unattractive and unedifying. If so, they are to be pitied; we hope that God will bless the contents to them. Medicine is proverbially unpleasant, but there are times when all of us find it necessary and beneficial. Others will be thankful that, by divine grace, we seek to glorify God rather than please the flesh. And surely that which most glorifies God is to declare "*all his counsel*," to insist on that which puts man in his proper place before Him, and to emphasize those portions and aspects of the truth which our generation is most in need of. As we shall endeavor to show, our theme is one of immense doctrinal importance and of great practical value. Since it is a subject which occupies so prominent a place in God's Word, no apology is needed for our engaging in such a task.

#### **A VITAL CONTEMPORARY QUESTION**

It is our deep conviction that the vital question most requiring to be raised today is this: Is man a totally and thoroughly depraved creature by nature? Does he enter the world completely ruined and helpless, spiritually blind and dead in trespasses and sins? According as is our answer to that question, so will be our views on many others. It is on the basis of this dark background that the whole Bible proceeds. Any attempt to modify or abate, repudiate or tone down the teaching of Scripture on the matter is fatal. Put the question in another form: Is man now in such a condition that he cannot be saved without the special and direct intervention of the triune God on his behalf? In other words, is there any hope for him apart from his personal election by the Father, his particular redemption by the Son, and the supernatural operations of the Spirit within him? Or, putting it in still another way: If man is a totally depraved being, can he possibly take the first step in the matter of his return to God?

#### **THE SCRIPTURAL ANSWER**

The scriptural answer to that question makes evident the utter futility of the schemes of social reformers for "the moral elevation of the masses," the plans of politicians for the peace of the nations, and the ideologies of dreamers to usher in a golden age for this world. It is both pathetic and tragic to see many of our greatest men putting their faith in such chimeras. Divisions and discords, hatred and bloodshed, cannot be banished while human nature is what it is. But during the past century the steady trend of a deteriorating Christendom has been to underrate the evil of sin and overrate the moral capabilities of men. Instead of proclaiming the heinousness of sin, there has been a dwelling more upon its inconveniences, and the abasing portrayal of the lost condition of man as set forth in

Holy Writ has been obscured if not obliterated by flattering disquisitions on human advancement. If the popular religion of the churches—including nine-tenths of what is termed "evangelical Christianity"—be tested at this point, it will be found that it clashes directly with man's fallen, ruined and spiritually dead condition.

There is therefore a crying need today for sin to be viewed in the light of God's law and gospel, so that its exceeding sinfulness may be demonstrated, and the dark depths of human depravity exposed by the teaching of Holy Writ, that we may learn what is connoted by those fearful words "dead in trespasses and sins." The grand object of the Bible is to make God known to us, to portray man as he appears in the eyes of his Maker, and to show the relation of one to the other. It is therefore the business of His servants not only to declare the divine character and perfections, but also to delineate the original condition and apostasy of man, as well as the divine remedy for his ruin. Until we really behold the horror of the pit in which by nature we lie, we can never properly appreciate Christ's so-great salvation. In man's fallen condition we have the awful disease for which divine redemption is the only cure, and our estimation and valuation of the provisions of divine grace will necessarily be modified in proportion as we modify the need it was meant to meet.

David Clarkson, one of the Puritans, pointed out this fact in his sermon on Psalm 51:5:

The end of the ministry of the Gospel is to bring sinners unto Christ. Their way to this end lies through the sense of their misery without Christ. The ingredients of this misery are our sinfulness, original and actual; the wrath of God, whereto sin has exposed us; and our impotency to free ourselves either from sin or wrath. That we may therefore promote this great end, we shall endeavor, as the Lord will assist, to lead you in this way, by the sense of misery, to Him who alone can deliver from it. Now the original of our misery being the corruption of our nature, or original sin, we thought fit to begin here, and therefore have pitched upon these words as very proper for our purpose: "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*"

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCTRINE**

This subject is indeed a most *solemn* one, and none can fitly write or preach on it unless his own heart is deeply awed by it. It is not something from which any man can detach himself and expatiate on it as though he were not directly involved in it; still less as from a higher level looking down on those whom he denounces. Nothing is more incongruous and unbecoming than for a young preacher glibly to rattle off passages of Scripture which portray his own vileness by nature. Rather should they be read or quoted with the utmost gravity. J. O. Philpot stated:

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express, the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man. In separating him from God, it severed him from the only source of all happiness and holiness. It has ruined him body and soul: the one it has filled with sickness and disease; in the other it has defaced and destroyed the image of God in which it was created. It has made him love sin and hate God.

The doctrine of total depravity is a very *humbling* one. It is not that man leans to one side and needs propping up, nor that he is merely ignorant and requires instructing, nor that he is run down and calls for a tonic; but rather that he is undone, lost, spiritually dead. Consequently, he is "without strength," thoroughly incapable of bettering himself; he is exposed to the wrath of God, and unable to perform a single work which can find

acceptance with Him. Almost every page of the Bible bears witness to this truth. The whole scheme of redemption takes it for granted. The plan of salvation taught in the Scriptures could have no place on any other supposition. The impossibility of any man's gaining the approbation of God by works of his own appears plainly in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ. Judged by human standards, he was a model of virtue and religious attainments. Yet, like all others who trust in self-efforts, he was ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of God's law; when Christ put him to the test his fair expectations were blown to the winds and "he went away sorrowful" (Matthew 19:22).

It is therefore a most *unpalatable* doctrine. It cannot be otherwise, for the unregenerate love to hear of the greatness, the dignity, the nobility of man. The natural man thinks highly of himself and appreciates only that which is flattering. Nothing pleases him more than to listen to that which extols human nature and lauds the state of mankind, even though it be in terms which not only repudiate the teaching of God's Word but are flatly contradicted by common observation and universal experience. And there are many who pander to him by their lavish praises of the excellency of civilization and the steady progress of the race. Hence, to have the lie given to the popular theory of evolution is highly displeasing to its deluded votaries. Nevertheless, the duty of God's servants is to stain the pride of all that man glories in, to strip him of his stolen plumes, to lay him low in the dust before God. However repugnant such teaching is, God's emissary must faithfully discharge his *duty* "*whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*" (Ezekiel 3:11).

This is no dismal dogma invented by the church in "the dark ages," but a truth of Holy Writ. George Whitefield said, "I look upon it not merely as a doctrine of Scripture—the great Fountain of truth—but a very fundamental one, from which I hope God will suffer none of you to be enticed." It is a subject to which great prominence is given in the Bible. Every part of the Scriptures has much to say on the awful state of degradation and slavery into which the fall has brought man. The corruption, the blindness, the hostility of all Adam's descendants to everything of a spiritual nature are constantly insisted upon. Not only is man's utter ruin fully described, but also his powerlessness to save himself from the same. In the declarations and denunciations of the prophets, of Christ and His apostles, the bondage of all men to Satan and their complete impotence to turn to God for deliverance are repeatedly set forth—not indirectly and vaguely, but emphatically and in great detail. This is one of a hundred proofs that the Bible is not a human invention but a communication from the thrice holy One.

It is a *sadly neglected* subject. Notwithstanding the clear and uniform teaching of Scripture, man's ruined condition and alienation from God are but feebly apprehended and seldom heard in the modern pulpit, and are given little place even in what are regarded as the centers of orthodoxy. Rather the whole trend of present-day thought and teaching is in the opposite direction, and even where the Darwinian hypothesis has not been accepted, its pernicious influences are often seen. In consequence of the guilty silence of the modern pulpit, a generation of churchgoers has arisen which is deplorably ignorant of the basic truths of the Bible, so that perhaps not more than one in a thousand has even a mental knowledge of the chains of hardness and unbelief which bind the natural heart, or of the dungeon of darkness in which they lie. Thousands of preachers, instead of faithfully telling their hearers of their woeful state by nature, are wasting their time by relating the latest news of the Kremlin or of the development of nuclear weapons.

It is therefore a *testing* doctrine, especially of the preacher's soundness in the faith. A man's orthodoxy on this subject determines his viewpoint of many other doctrines of great importance. If his belief here is a scriptural one, then he will clearly perceive how impossible it is for men to improve themselves—that Christ is their only hope. He will know that unless the sinner is born again there can be no entrance for him into the kingdom of God. Nor will he entertain the idea of the fallen creature's free will to attain goodness. He will be preserved from many errors. Andrew Fuller stated, "I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian, the Arian, the Socinian, the Antinomian schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity or blameworthiness." Said the well-equipped theological instructor, J. M. Stifler, "It cannot be said too often that a false theology finds its source in inadequate views of depravity."

It is a doctrine of great *practical* value as well as spiritual importance. The foundation of all true piety lies in a correct view of ourselves and our vileness, and a scriptural belief in God and His grace. There can be no genuine abhorrence or repentance, no real appreciation of the saving mercy of God, no faith in Christ, without it. There is nothing like a knowledge of this doctrine so well calculated to undeceive vain man and convict him of the worthlessness and rottenness of his own righteousness. Yet the preacher who is aware of the plague of his own heart knows full well that he cannot present this truth in such a way as to make his hearers actually realize and feel the same, to help them stop being in love with themselves and to cause them to forever renounce all hope in themselves. Therefore, instead of relying upon his faithfulness in presenting the truth, he will be cast upon God to apply it graciously in power to those who hear him and bless his feeble efforts.

It is an exceedingly *illuminating* doctrine. It may be a melancholy and humiliating one, nevertheless it throws a flood of light upon mysteries which are otherwise insoluble. It supplies the key to the course of human history, and shows why so much of it has been written in blood and tears. It supplies an explanation of many problems which sorely perplex and puzzle the thoughtful. It reveals why the child is prone to evil and has to be taught and disciplined to anything that is good. It explains why every improvement in man's environment, every attempt to educate him, all the efforts of social reformers, are unavailing to effect any radical betterment in his nature and character. It accounts for the horrible treatment which Christ met with when He worked so graciously in this world, and why He is still despised and rejected by men. It enables the Christian himself to better understand the painful conflict which is ever at work within him, and which causes him so often to cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am!"

It is therefore a most *necessary* doctrine, for the vast majority of our fellowmen are ignorant of it. God's servants are sometimes thought to speak too strongly and dolefully of the dreadful state of man through his apostasy from God. The fact is that it is impossible to exaggerate in human language the darkness and pollution of man's heart or to describe the misery and utter helplessness of a condition such as the Word of truth describes in these solemn passages: "*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). "*Therefore they could not believe, because he hath [judicially] blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not*

*see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (John 12:39-40).* This is yet more evident when we contrast the state of soul of those in whom a miracle of grace is wrought (see Luke 1:78-79).

It is a *salutary* doctrine—one which God often uses to bring men to their senses. While we imagine that our wills have power to do what is pleasing to God, we never abandon dependence on self. Not that a mere intellectual knowledge of man's fall and ruin is sufficient to deliver from pride. Only the Spirit's powerful operations can effect that. Yet He is pleased to use the faithful preaching of the Word to that end. Nothing but a real sense of our lost condition lays us in the dust before God.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORIGIN

That something is radically wrong with the world of mankind requires no labored argument to demonstrate. That such has been the case in all generations is plain from the annals of history. This is only another way of saying that something is radically wrong with man himself, for the world is but the aggregate of all the individual members of our race. Since the whole of anything cannot be superior to the parts comprising it, it necessarily follows that the course of the world will be determined by the characters of those who comprise it. But when we come to inquire exactly what is wrong with man, and how he came to be in such a condition, unless we turn to God's inspired Word no convincing answers are forthcoming. Apart from that divine revelation no sure and satisfactory reply can be made to such questions as these: What is the source of the unmistakable imperfections of human nature? What will furnish an adequate explanation of all the evils which infest man's present state? Why is it that none is able to keep God's law perfectly or do anything which is acceptable to Him while in a state of nature?

### UNIVERSAL MALADY

To ascertain how sin, which involves all men, came into the world is a matter of no little importance. To discover why it is that all men universally and continually are unrighteous and ailing creatures supplies the key to many a problem. Look at human nature as it now is: depraved, wretched, subject to death. Ask philosophy to account for this, and it cannot do so. None can deny the fact that men are what they ought not to be, but *how* they became so human wisdom is unable to tell us. To attribute our troubles to heredity and environment is an evasion, for it leaves unanswered the question How did it come about that our original ancestors and environment were such as to produce what now exists? Look not only at our prisons, hospitals and cemeteries, but also at the antipathy between the righteous and the wicked, between those who fear God and those who do not fear Him. The antagonism between Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, is repeatedly duplicated in every age and area; but the Bible alone traces that antagonism to its fountainhead.

Judicious ancients recognized and bemoaned the universal tendency of men to be lawbreakers, but were entirely unaware of its real source. They were agreed that the practice of virtue was the chief thing necessary for the promotion of man's good, but they

had to lament an irregular bent in the wills and a corruption in the affections of their disciples, which rendered their precepts of little use, and they were completely at a loss to assign any reason why men, who have the noblest faculties of any beings on earth, should yet generally pursue their destruction with as much eagerness as the beasts avoid it. Plato, in the second book of his Republic, complained that men by their natures are evil and cannot be brought to good. Tully acknowledged that “man is brought forth into the world, in body and soul, exposed to all miseries and prone to evil, in whom that Divine spark of goodness, and wisdom, and morality, is opposed and extinguished.” They realized that all men were poisoned, but how the poison came to be in the human constitution they did not know. Some ascribed it to fate; others to the hostile influences of the planets; still others to an evil angel which attends each man.

Most certainly we cannot attribute man’s natural inordinance and defectiveness to his Creator. To do so would be the rankest blasphemy, as well as giving the lie to His Word, which declares, “*God hath made man upright*” (*Ecclesiastes 7:29*). Even on a much lower ground, such a conclusion is self-evidently false. It is impossible that darkness should issue from the Father of light, or that sin should come from the ineffably holy One. It is infinitely better to confess our ignorance than to be guilty of grossest impiety—to say nothing of manifest absurdity—by placing the onus on God. But there is no excuse for anyone to be ignorant on the matter. The Holy Scriptures supply a definite solution to this mystery, and show that the entire blame for his present wretchedness lies at man’s own door. And therefore to say that man is a sinful creature, or even to allow that he is totally depraved, is to acknowledge only half of the truth, and the least humbling half at that. Man is a fallen creature. He has departed from his original state and primitive purity. Man, far from having ascended from something inferior to an ape, has descended from the elevated and honorable position in which God first placed him; and it is all-important to contend for this, since it alone satisfactorily explains why man is now depraved.

## **UNIVERSAL DEFECTION**

Man is not now as God made him. He has lost the crown and glory of his creation, and has plunged himself into an awful gulf of sin and misery. By his own perversity he has wrecked himself and placed a consequence of woe on his posterity. He is a ruined creature as the result of his apostasy from God. This requires that we consider, first, man in his original state, that we may perceive his folly in so lightly valuing it and that we may form a better conception of the vastness and vileness of his downward plunge, for that can only be gauged as we learn what he fell *from* as well as *into*. By his wicked defection man brought himself into a state as black and doleful as his original one was glorious and blessed. Second, we need to consider most attentively what it has pleased the Holy Spirit to record about the fall itself, pondering each detail described in Genesis 3, and the amplifications of them supplied by the later scriptures, looking to God to grant us graciously an understanding of the same. Third, we shall be in a better position to view the fearful consequences of the fall and perceive how the punishment was made to fit the crime.

## **ORIGINAL MAN, GOD’S MASTERPIECE**

Instead of surveying the varied opinions and conflicting conjectures of our fallible and fallen fellow creatures concerning the original condition and estate of our first parents, we shall confine ourselves entirely to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the only unerring rule of faith. From them, and them alone, can we ascertain what man was when

he first came from the hands of his Creator. First, God's Word makes known His intention to bring man into existence: *"And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26). There are two things exceedingly noteworthy in that brief statement, namely, the repeated use of the pronoun in the plural number, and the fact that its language suggests the idea of a conference between the divine Persons at this point of the "six days" work. We say "at this point," for there is nothing resembling it in the record of what occurred during the previous days. Thus, the divine conference here conveys the impression that the most important stage of creation had now been reached, that man was to be the masterpiece of the divine workmanship, the crowning glory of the mundane sphere—which is clearly borne out in his being made in the divine image.

It is the usage of the plural number in Genesis 1:26 which in our judgment intimates the first signification of the term "image." God is a trinity in unity, and so also is the man He made, consisting, in his entirety, of *"spirit and soul and body"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). While in some passages "spirit" and "soul" are used as synonyms, in Hebrews 4:12 they are distinguished. The fact that the plural pronoun occurs three times in the brief declaration of the Deity in Genesis 1:26 supplies confirmation that the one made in Their likeness was also a threefold entity. Some scholars consider that there is an allusion to this feature of man's constitution in the apostle's averment *"In him we live, and move, and have our being"* (Acts 17:28), pointing out that each of those three verbs has a philological significance: the first to our animal life; the second (from which is derived the Greek word used by ethical writers for the passions such as fear, love, hatred, and the like) not, as our English verb suggests, to man's bodily motions in space, but to his emotional nature the soul; the third to that which constitutes our essential being (the "spirit")—the intelligence and will of man.

*"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Genesis 1:27). This announces the actual accomplishment of the divine purpose and counsel referred to in the preceding verse. The repetition of the statement with the change of the pronoun from plural to singular number, implies a second meaning for the term "image." Viewing it more generally, it tells of the excellence of man's original nature, though it must be explained consistently with the infinite distance that exists between God and the highest creature. Whatever this glory was which God placed on Adam, it does not infer that he shared the divine perfections. Nor is the nothingness of the best of finite beings any disparagement when compared with God; for whatever likeness there is to Him, either as created, regenerated or glorified, there is at the same time an infinite disproportion. Further, this excellence of man's original nature must be distinguished from that glory which is peculiar to Christ who, far from being said to be "made in the image of God," *"is the image of the invisible God"* (Colossians 1:15), *"the express image of his person"* (Hebrews 1:3). The oneness and equality between the Father and the Son in no way pertain to any likeness between God and the creature.

Examining the term more closely, "the image of God" in which man was made refers to his moral nature, Calvin defined it as being "spiritual," and stated that it "includes all the excellence in which the nature of man surpasses all the other species of animals" and "denotes the integrity Adam possessed." He stated further that it may be more clearly specified "in the restoration which we obtain through Christ." Without an exception, all the Puritans we have consulted say substantially the same thing, regarding this "image of God" as moral rectitude, a nature in perfect accord with the divine law. It could not be

otherwise; for the holy One to make a creature after His likeness would be to endow him with holiness. The statement that the regenerate has been *“renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”* (Colossians 3:10) clearly implies the same image in which man was originally made, and which sin has defaced. Not only did that image consist of knowledge (i.e., of God) but, as Ephesians 4:24 informs us, of “righteousness and true holiness” also. Thus man’s original state was far more than one of innocence (sinlessness, harmlessness), which is mainly a negative thing.

That man was created in positive holiness is also taught in *Ecclesiastes 7:29*. *“God hath made [not ‘is now making’] man upright,”* not only without any improper bias but according to rule—straight with the law of God, conformed to His will. As Thomas Boston expressed it, “Original righteousness was con-created with him.” The same Hebrew word occurs in *“good and upright is the LORD”* (Psalm 25:8). We have dwelt long on this point because not only do Romanists and Socinians deny that man was created a spiritual (not merely natural) and holy (not simply innocent) being, but some hyper-Calvinists—who prefer their own principles to the Word of God—do so too. One error inevitably leads to another. To insist that the unregenerate are under no obligation to perform spiritual acts obliges them to infer the same thing of Adam. To conclude that if Adam fell from a holy and spiritual condition, then we must abandon the doctrine of final perseverance is to leave out Christ and lose sight of the superiority of the covenant of grace over the original one of works.

*“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”* (Genesis 2:7). This supplies us with additional information on the making of Adam. First, the matter from which his body was formed, to demonstrate the wisdom and power of God in making out of such material so wonderful a thing as the human body, and to teach man his humble origin and dependence upon it. Second, the quickening principle bestowed on Adam, which was immediately from God, namely, an intelligent spirit, of which the fall did not deprive him (Ecclesiastes 12:7). That “the breath of life” included reason, or the faculty of understanding, is clear from *“the life was the light of men”* (John 1:4). Third, the effect on Adam. His body was now animated and made capable of vital acts. Man’s body out of the dust was the workmanship of God, but his soul was an immediate communication from *“the Father of spirits”* (Hebrews 12:9), and thereby earth and heaven were united in him.

*“And the LORD God said, It not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept : and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man (Genesis 2:18-22).* It seems that God chose this mode of making the woman, instead of forming her also out of the dust, to express the intimate union which was to take place between the sexes, to denote their mutual relation and dependence, and to show the superiority of man. Those two were so made that the whole human race, physically considered, were contained in them and to be produced from them, making them all literally “of one blood” (Acts 17:26).

## **MAN’S ENDOWMENTS**

*“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of*

*the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28).* Those words intimate that there was yet another meaning to “the image of God,” for the position of headship and authority which He conferred upon Adam showed the divine sovereignty. *Psalm 8:5-6* tells us, *“Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”* Adam was constituted God’s viceroy on earth, the government of all inferior creatures being conferred upon him. That was further demonstrated when the Lord brought all before Adam for him to give names to them (Genesis 2:19-20), which not only evinced that he was a rational creature, endowed with the power of choice, but manifested his superiority over all mundane creatures, his proprietorship in them, and his liberty to use them for God’s glory and his own good.

But more. God not only endowed Adam with righteousness and holiness, thereby fitting him to fulfill the end of his creation by glorifying the Author of his being. He also bestowed on him the gift of reason, which distinguished him from and elevated him above all the other inhabitants of the earth, conferring on him the charter of dominion over them. Further, He brought him into a pure and beautiful environment. *“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.... And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden [which the Septuagint renders ‘the paradise of joy’] to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:8-15).* Genesis 3:24 confirms the fact that the garden of Eden was distinct from the earth. The whole world was given Adam for a possession, but Eden was the special seat of his residence, a place of preeminent delight. It presented to his view the whole earth in miniature, so that without traveling long distances he might behold the lovely landscape which it afforded. It epitomized all the beauties of nature, and was as it were a conservatory of its fairest vegetation and a storehouse of its choicest fruits.

That the garden of Eden was a place of surpassing beauty, excelling all other parts of the earth for fertility, is evident from other scriptures. Ezekiel, when prophesying in a day of wretchedness and barrenness the bountiful spiritual blessings which would attend the gospel era, used this figurative but graphic language: *“This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden” (36:35).* Still plainer was the promise of *Isaiah 51:3: “For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”* It is clear that nothing was wanting in Eden, in its pristine glory, to give the completest happiness to man. That it was a place of perfect bliss is further evident from the fact that heaven itself, the habitation of the blessed, is called “paradise” in *Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7.* Some see in that threefold allusion (there are no others) a pledge for the complete satisfaction of the glorified man’s spirit, soul and body.

Several things are imported and implied in the statement that the Lord God put the man into the garden of Eden “to dress it and to keep it.” First, and most obvious, God takes no pleasure in idleness, but in active industry. That such an appointment was for Adam’s good cannot be doubted. Regular employment preserves us from those temptations which so often attend indolence. Second, secular employment is by no means inconsistent with perfect holiness, or with a person’s enjoying intimate communion with God and the blessings resulting from it. Of course Adam’s work would be performed without any of the fatigue and disappointment which accompany ours today. The holy angels are not inert, but “ministering spirits” (*Hebrews 1:14*). Of the divine Persons Themselves our

Lord declared, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). Thus this employment assigned Adam was also a part of his conformity to God. Third it implied the duty of keeping his own heart—the garden of his soul—with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23), tending its faculties and graces so that he might always be in a condition to pray, *“Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (Song of Sol. 4:16).*

Further, in the words “dress it” (Hebrew “serve,” “till it”) we are taught that God’s gracious gifts are to be highly treasured and carefully cultivated by us. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Timothy 4:14). “Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee” (2 Timothy 1:6). In the Genesis phrase “and to keep it” we believe there was a tacit warning given by God to Adam. Not only does the English term convey that thought, but the Hebrew word (shamar) here used requires it. Nineteen times it is rendered “preserve,” twelve times “take heed,” four times “watch,” and once it is actually translated “beware.” Thus the phrase signified a caution against danger, putting Adam on his guard, warning him to be on the lookout against the encroaching enemy. The Dutch Puritan, Herman Witsius, pointed out that the “keeping of paradise virtually engaged him of all things to be anxiously concerned not to do anything against God, lest as a bad gardener he should be thrust out of the garden, and in that discover a melancholy symbol of his own exclusion from heaven.” Finally, since paradise is one of the names of heaven, we may conclude that the earthly one in which Adam was placed was a pledge of celestial blessedness. Had he survived his probation and preserved his integrity, he would have enjoyed “heaven” on earth.

In addition to the institution of marriage (*Genesis 2:23-25; 1:28*), God appointed the weekly Sabbath. *“On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it : because that in it he had rested from all His work which God created and made” (2:2-3).* Should any raise the objection that the term “Sabbath” is not found in those verses, we would remind them that in Exodus 20:11 Jehovah Himself expressly terms that first “seventh day” of rest “the sabbath day.” The word “blessed” signifies to declare blessedness; thus on the frontispiece of His Word, God would have every reader know that special divine blessing attends the observance of the Sabbath. The word “sanctified” means that it was a day set apart for sacred use. For Adam it would be a means for his more intimate communion with God, in which he would enjoy a recess from his secular employment and have opportunity of expressing his gratitude for all those blessings of which he was the partaker.

## **FALL OF MAN**

Though Adam had been made in the image of God, taken into communion with Him, fitted to rejoice in all the manifestations of His wisdom and goodness which surrounded him in Eden, nevertheless he was capable of falling. Since it is a point which has sorely puzzled many of the Lord’s people, we will endeavor to explain how it was possible for a holy person, devoid of any corruption, to sin. First, Adam’s liability to falling lay in the fact that he was just a creature. As such he was entirely dependent on Him *“which holdeth our soul in life” (Psalm 66:9).* As our natural life continues only so long as God sustains it, so it was with Adam’s spiritual life: he stood only so long as he was divinely upheld. Moreover, as a creature he was finite and therefore possessed no invincible power with which to repel opposition. Nor was he endowed with omniscience, which would have made him incapable of being deceived or mistaking an evil for an apparent good. Thus, though man’s original condition was one of high moral excellence, with no

evil tendency in any part of his nature, with nothing in him which in the least deviated from the moral law, yet, being only a creature, he was capable of falling.

Second, Adam's susceptibility to falling lay in his mutability. Changeableness is the very law or radical characteristic of the creature, to distinguish it from the Creator. God alone is without variableness or shadow of turning (James 1:17). Therefore He "cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13), that is, induced to sin. This statement clearly implies that the creature as such has a capacity to be so tempted—not only a depraved creature, but even an unfallen one. Immutability and impeccability (non-liability to sin) are qualities which essentially distinguish the Creator from the creature. The angels possess neither. Further, God alone acts from His own power, whereas the creature acts by a power given to him which is distinct from himself. Goodwin, pointed this out: "God's own goodness and happiness is His ultimate end, therefore He can never act but holily, for He acts by Himself and for Himself, and so cannot fail in acting, but is holy in all His ways and works, and cannot be otherwise." But man neither acts immediately by his own power nor is himself the legitimate end of his acting, but rather God. Thus, with all faculties, man may falter when using them.

Third, Adam's liability to falling lay in the freedom of his will. He was not only a rational creature, but also a moral one. Freedom of will is a property which belongs to man as a rational and responsible being. As we cannot separate understanding from the mind, neither can we part liberty from the will, especially in connection with things within its own sphere, especially when considering that all the faculties of man's soul were in a state of perfection before the fall. With Adam and Eve the freedom of their will consisted in a power of choosing or embracing what appeared agreeable and good to the dictates of their understandings, or in refusing and avoiding what was evil. There was no constraint or force laid upon them to act contrary to the dictates of their own wills. Such freedom also infers a power to act pursuant to what the will chooses, otherwise it could not obtain the good desired or avoid the evil detested: and in such a case its liberty would be little more than a name. Freedom of action is opposed to that which is involuntary or compelled, and the will is both self-inclining and self-determining in the acting, both internally and externally; for then only can it be said to be free.

Our first parents had that freedom of will, or power to retain their integrity. This is evident from the clearly revealed fact that they were under an indispensable obligation to yield perfect obedience to God, and liable to deserved punishment for the least defection. Therefore they must have been given a power to stand, a liberty of will to choose that which was conducive to their happiness. The same thing is also evident from the difference between man's primitive and present state. As fallen, man is now by a necessity of nature inclined to sin, and accordingly he is denominated "*the servant of sin*" (*John 8:34*), a slave to it, entirely under its dominion. But it was far otherwise with Adam, whose nature was holy and provided with everything necessary to his yielding that obedience demanded of him. Nevertheless, his will being free, it was capable of complying with an external temptation to evil, though so long as he made a right use of his faculties he would defend himself and reject the temptation with abhorrence. It pleased God to leave our first parents without any immediate help from without, to the freedom and mutability of their own will. But that neither made Him the author of their sin nor brought them under any natural necessity of falling.

Before considering the probation under which Adam was placed, and the test to which his loyalty and subjection to God were submitted, it should be pointed out that Scripture

requires us to regard him as far more than a private person, the consequences of whose action would be confined to himself. As we purpose showing, that is made very plain from the event itself. Adam was more than the father of the human race. By divine constitution he was made the covenant head of all his natural seed, so that what he did was divinely regarded and reckoned as being done by them—just as Christ came into the world as the covenant Head of all His spiritual seed, acting and transacting in their name and on their behalf. This is considered more fully under the next division of our subject, where we treat of the imputation of his offense to all his posterity. Suffice it to point out that in Romans 5:14 Adam is expressly called “the figure of him that was to come.” In what was he a type of the Redeemer? The principal respect in which he was distinguished from all other creatures lay in his being the federal head and legal representative of all his offspring. This is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 where the first Adam and the last Adam are designated “the first man” and “the second man,” for they were the only two who sustained that covenant and federal relation to others before God.

*“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God, to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:8-9).* That is the first mention of those two notable trees, and it is to be observed that, like all the others surrounding them, they were both pleasing to the eye and suitable for eating. Thus God provided not only for Adam’s profit but for his pleasure also, that he might serve Him with delight. *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (2:16-17)* This, as the following verses indicate, took place before Eve was created, and thus the covenant of works was made with Adam alone as the head of our race. Far more was implied in those words than is actually expressed, as we show when considering them more closely under our next division. Meanwhile, a few general remarks may be of interest.

Herman Witsius stated:

The tendency of such a Divine precept is to be considered. Man was thereby taught: (1) That God is Lord of all things—that it is unlawful for man even to desire an apple but with His leave. In all things, therefore, from the greatest to the least, the mouth of the Lord is to be consulted as to what He would or would not have done by us. (2) That man’s true happiness is placed in God alone, and nothing to be desired but with submission to God, and in order to employ it for Him. So that it is *He* only on whose account all other things appear good and desirable to man. (3) Readily to be satisfied without even the most delightful and desirable things, if God so command: and to think that there is much more good in obedience to the Divine precept than in the enjoyment of the most delightful thing in the world. (4) That man was not yet arrived to the utmost pitch of happiness, but to expect a still greater good after his course of obedience was over. This was hinted by the prohibition of the most delightful tree, whose fruit was, of any other; greatly to be desired; and this argued some degree of imperfection in that state in which man was forbidden the enjoyment of some good.

In forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil his Maker asserted His dominion and enforced His authority. That it was proper for Him to do so cannot be lawfully questioned, and as the sole Proprietor of the garden it was fitting that He should emphasize His rights by this restriction. Moreover, since man was created a rational creature and endowed with freedom of will, he was a fit subject for command, and

accordingly was placed under law. Thereby Adam's loyalty and subjection to his Creator and Lord were put to the test. Trial of his obedience was made to discover whether the will of God was sacred to him. It was both fit and just that man should remain in the state of holiness in which God had made him, if he would continue to enjoy His favor. Thus he was placed on probation, made the subject of divine government. Adam was not an independent creature, for he did not create himself. Being made by God, he owed a debt to Him; he was a moral being, and therefore responsible to serve and please God. The commandment given to him was no arbitrary infliction, but a necessary injunction for evidencing and enforcing man's relationship to God.

The particular stipulation laid upon our first parents (Genesis 2:17) has been a favorite subject of ridicule by the opponents of divine revelation. Those who are wise in their own conceits have considered it unworthy of the Al-mighty to interpose His authority in a matter so trifling, and have insisted it is incredible to believe that He exposed Adam and Eve to the hazard of ruining themselves and all their progeny by eating the food of a particular tree. But a little reflection ought to show us that nothing in that prohibition was unbecoming to God's wisdom and goodness. Since He had been pleased to give Adam dominion over all creatures here below, it was surely fitting that He should require some peculiar instance of homage and fidelity to Him as a token of Adam's dependence and an acknowledgment of his subjection to his Maker—to whom he owed absolute submission and obedience. And what mark of subjection could be more proper than being prohibited from eating one of the fruits of paradise? Full liberty was granted him to eat all the rest. That single abstention was well suited to teach our first parents the salutary lesson of self-denial and of implicit resignation to the good pleasure of the Most High.

In addition to what was noted by Witsius, it may be pointed out that the character of this prohibition taught Adam and Eve to keep their sensitive appetites in subjection to their reasoning faculty. It showed them they must subordinate their bodily inclinations to finding their highest delight in God alone. It intimated that their desire after knowledge must be kept within just bounds, that they must be content with what God knew to be really proper and useful for them, and not presume to pry with unwarrantable curiosity into things which did not belong to them, and which God had not thought well to reveal to them. It was not sinful per se for Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but only because the Lord God had expressly forbidden them to do so. Accordingly, solemn warning of the dire consequences that would certainly follow their disobedience was given, for even in Eden man was placed under the holy awe of divine threatening, which was a hedge placed around him for his protection. Man's supreme happiness lies in God Himself and the enjoyment of His favor, and in Eden he was forbidden to seek satisfaction in any other degree. His integrity was put to the test in that single restriction of his liberty.

Far from that arrangement being unworthy of the divine majesty, such an enforcing of His will and authority on the creature of His hand was most becoming. The arrangement was necessary in the nature of the case if the responsibility of a free agent was to be enforced, and his subjection to the divine government insisted on. Also the very triviality of the object withheld from our first parents only served to give greater reality to the trial to which they were subjected. As Professor Dick pointed out,

It is manifest that the prohibition did not proceed from malevolence or an intention to impair the happiness of man: because, with this single reservation, he was at liberty to appropriate the rich variety of fruits with which Paradise was stored. It is certain that, situated as he was, no command

could be easier, as it properly implied no sacrifice, no painful privation, but simple abstinence from one out of many things; for who would deem it a hardship, while he was sitting at a table covered with all kinds of delicate and substantial foods, to be told that there was one and only one that he was forbidden to taste? It is further evident that no reason could be assigned why Adam should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil but the Divine prohibition. The fruit was as good for food as that of any tree, and as pleasant to the eye; and there was nothing sacred in it which would have been profaned by human touch. Hence you will perceive that if God had an intention to make trial of the newly formed subject He could not have chosen a more proper method, as it indicated nothing like a harsh or tyrannical exercise of authority, and was admirably fitted to ascertain whether His simple command would be to him instead of all other reasons for obedience. It is not a proper trial of reverence for a superior when the action which he prescribes is recommended by other considerations. It is when it stands upon the sole foundation of his authority; when, having no intrinsic goodness, it becomes good only by his prohibition; when the sole inducement to perform it is His command. It is in these circumstances it is known whether we duly feel and recognize our moral dependence upon him. The morality of an action does not depend upon its abstract nature, but upon its relation to the law of God. Men seem often to judge of actions as they judge of material substances—by their bulk. What is great in itself, or in its consequences, they will admit to be a sin; but what appears little they pronounce to be a slight fault, or no fault at all.

Had Adam, it has been remarked, been possessed of preternatural power, and wantonly and wickedly exerted it in blasting the beauty of paradise, and turning it into a scene of desolation, men would have granted that he was guilty of a great and daring offense, for which a curse was justly pronounced upon him. But they can see no harm in so trifling a matter as the eating of a little fruit. Nothing, however, is more fallacious than such reasoning: the essence of sin is the transgression of a law and whether that law forbids you to commit murder or to move your finger, it is equally transgressed when you violate the precept. Whatever the act of disobedience is, it is rebellion against the Lawgiver: it is a renunciation of His authority, it dissolves that moral dependence upon Him which is founded on the nature of things, and is necessary to maintain the order and happiness the universe. The injunction therefore to abstain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a proper trial of our first parent, and the violation of it deserved the dreadful punishment which was denounced and executed. He was put to the test whether the will of God was sacred in his eyes and he was punished because he gave preference to his own will.

Our reason for making a longer quotation than usual from the writings of others is that the one just given is of particular weight and importance and greatly needed in this day. We hope the reader will give it a second and more careful perusal.

It only remains for us to add that the foundation of Adam's obligation to render such obedience to God lay, first, in his relations to Him. As his Maker, his Governor, his Benefactor, it was fitting for him to render full subjection to His revealed will. Second, in the privileges and favors bestowed on him: these required that he should express his gratitude and thanksgiving by doing those things which were pleasing in His sight. Third, in his endowments, which qualified him to do so: he was created in God's image, with a nature that inclined his will to obedience—ability and obligation then being coextensive. Fourth, in the relation he sustained to the race: as the head and father of all his progeny, their welfare or ruin was bound up in how he conducted himself, thus greatly augmenting his responsibility to abstain from wrongdoing. Fifth, in that the command forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge was accompanied by a solemn threat of dire punishment in case of disobedience. Not only should that have acted as an effectual deterrent, but the penalty necessarily implied a promise: since death would be the sure result of disobedience, life would be the reward of obedience—not only a continuation of the blessedness and happiness which he then enjoyed in fellowship with his Maker, but an augmentation of them. That also ought to have served as a powerful incentive to

continued fidelity. Thus there was every reason why Adam should have preserved his integrity.

## MUTABILITY OF MAN

Though created in the image and likeness of God, man was not endowed with infallibility. In body perfectly sound, in soul completely holy, in circumstances blissfully happy, still man was but a mutable creature. Pronounced by God “*very good*” (*Genesis 1:31*) on the day of his creation, man’s character was not yet confirmed in righteousness, therefore he was (like the angels) placed on probation and subjected to trial—to show whether or not he would render allegiance to his Lord. Though “made upright,” he was not incapable of falling; nor did it devolve upon God to keep him from doing so. This is clear from the event, for had there been any obligation on God, His faithfulness and goodness would have preserved Adam. Nor would He have censured our first parents had their defection been due to any breach of His fidelity. As moral agents, Adam and Eve were required to maintain their pristine purity unsullied, to walk before God in unswerving loyalty, which was necessary for the testing of their loyalty and the discharge of their responsibility.

Regrettably man did not endure honorably. He valued at a low rate the approbation of his Maker and the inestimable privilege of communion with Him. He chafed against the love-lined yoke that had been laid on him. How quickly he supplied tragic evidence of his mutability and disrupted the tranquillity of paradise. The beauty of holiness in which the parents of our race were clothed was soon succeeded by the most revolting depravity. Instead of preserving their integrity, they fell into a state of sin and misery. They were speedily induced to violate that commandment of God’s obedience which was the sole condition of their continued bliss. They did not long enjoy their fair heritage. In spite of the ideal conditions in which they were placed, they became dissatisfied with their lot, succumbed to their very first testing, and evoked the holy displeasure of their Benefactor. How early the fine gold became dim! How soon man forfeited the favor of his Maker, and plunged himself into an ocean of wretchedness and woe! How swiftly the sun of human happiness was eclipsed by man’s own folly!

It has been generally held among devout students of God’s Word that our first parents remained unfallen for only a brief time. Such a view is in full accord with the general Analogy of Faith, for it is a solemn and humbling fact that whenever God has been pleased to place anything in the hands of human responsibility, man has proved unfaithful to his trust. When He has bestowed some special favor on the creature, it has not been long before he has sadly abused the same. Even a considerable part of the angels in heaven “kept not their first estate,” though the Scriptures do not disclose how soon they apostatized. Noah, when he came out onto a judgment-swept earth to be the new father of the human race, defiled his escutcheon at a very early date and brought a curse on his son. Within the space of a few days after Israel had solemnly entered into a covenant with Jehovah at Sinai, they were guilty of the horrible sin of idolatry, so that the Lord complained to Moses, “*They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it*” (*Exodus 32:8*). How tragically that portended the whole of their future national history!

No sooner were the “times of the Gentiles” inaugurated by Nebuchadnezzar’s being made “*a king of kings*” (*Daniel 2:37*), so that his dominion was “*to the end of the earth*” (*4:22*), than pride led to his downfall. While he was boasting, “*Is not this great Babylon,*

*that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”* a voice from heaven announced, *“They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will”* (4:30, 32). Man is a sad failure. Even the honor of the primitive Christian church was speedily tarnished by the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Thus it has been all through the past, and there is no evidence to show that at the commencement of human history Adam and Eve were any exception. Rather are there clear indications to the contrary, so that God had reason to say of them also, *“They have turned aside quickly out of the way.”*

Personally we doubt if our first parents preserved their integrity for forty-eight hours, or even for twenty-four. In the first place, they were told to *“be fruitful, and multiply”* (Genesis 1:28); and had they complied with that injunction and the blessing of God had been on them, a sinless child would have been conceived, which, following the fall of Adam and Eve, would have been part of a depraved family—a terrible anomaly, involving the utmost confusion. Second, if those words concerning Christ are to be taken without qualification, *“that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (Colossians 1:18), then He is the only One who kept the Sabbath perfectly on this earth, and consequently Adam fell before the seventh day ended. Third, in Psalm 49:12, the Hebrew word for “man” is Adam—the same as in Genesis 2 and 3 and Job 31:33, while that for “abode” signifies “to stay or lodge for a night.” Manton rendered it “Adam being in honor abideth not for a night.” And Thomas Watson in his Body of Divinity said, “Adam, then, it seems, did not take up one night’s lodging in Paradise.” Fourth, the devil “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44)—not from the beginning of time, for there was no man to slay during the first five days, but from the beginning of human history. In the morning man was holy; by night he was a sinner!

We now consider the melancholy and disastrous episode of the fall itself. Genesis 3 describes the event, about which George Whitefield rightly said, “Moses unfolds more in that chapter than all mankind would have been capable of finding out of themselves though they had studied it to all eternity.” It is indeed one of the most important chapters in all the Bible, and it should be pondered by us frequently with prayerful hearts. Here commences the great drama which is now being enacted on the stage of human history, and which nearly six thousand years have not yet completed. Here is given the divine explanation of the present debased and ruined condition of the world. Here we are shown how sin entered the world, together with its present effects and dire consequences. Here are revealed to us the subtle devices of our great enemy the devil. We are shown how we permit him to gain an advantage over us. On the other hand, it is a most blessed chapter, for it reveals the grace and mercy of God, and assures us that the head of the serpent will yet be crushed by the victorious Seed of the woman (Romans 16:20), telling us that His redeemed will also participate in Christ’s glorious triumph. Thus we see that in wrath our God from the commencement “remembered mercy”!

A careful reading of Genesis 3 indicates that much is compacted into an exceedingly small space. The historical account of this momentous incident is given with the utmost conciseness—so very different from the way an uninspired pen would have dealt with it! Its extreme brevity calls for the careful weighing of every word and clause, and their implications. That there is not a little contained between the lines is plainly intimated in the Lord’s words to Adam: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife” (v.17), yet the preceding verses nowhere tell us that she even spoke to him! Again, from

the judgment pronounced on the serpent, “Upon thy belly shalt thou go” (v.14), we may infer that previously it had stood erect. Again, from that part of the divine sentence passed on the woman, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (v.16), it may be concluded that Eve had acted unbecomingly and exerted an undue influence and authority in inducing Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. If we fail to ponder thoroughly every detail and meditate on it, we are certain to miss points of interest and importance.

## **SUBTLETY OF THE SERPENT**

*“Now the serpent was more subtil [wiser] than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3:1).* Great care needs to be taken in the interpreting of this sentence. On the one hand, we must not give free rein to our imagination; on the other, this fact is not to be hurriedly and thoughtlessly skimmed over. Other passages should be compared if a fuller understanding is to be obtained. Personally we believe that the statement refers to a literal “serpent” as being the instrument of a superior being. We consider that the terms of verse 14 make it clear that an actual serpent is in view, for the Lord’s words there are only applicable to that beast itself: “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle; . . . upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” Nevertheless, what immediately follows in verse 15 makes it equally plain that more than a beast of the field was involved, namely Satan. Putting the two statements together, we gather that Satan made use of a literal serpent as his mouthpiece in the beguiling of Eve—as the Lord later spoke through the mouth of Balaam’s ass (Numbers 22:30-31).

Confirmation of what has just been said is found in John 8:44, where our Lord declared that the devil is “a murderer [literally manslayer] from the beginning”—designating him as such because by his wiles he brought death on our first parents. Moreover, in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, Satan is called “that old serpent,” in manifest allusion to the transaction of Genesis 3: “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” The thoughtful reader is at once struck by the abruptness of this remark, and is almost forced to conclude that the serpent was replying to what Eve had said previously; for his opening “yea” plainly implies something going before. Where was Eve when she was thus addressed and assailed? We believe, as do many others, that she was standing before the very tree whose fruit they had been forbidden to eat. It is apparent from the immediate sequel that she was at least within sight of the tree. The serpent, taking advantage of Eve’s looking at the tree, spoke about and commended it to her.

We also agree with those who have concluded that Adam was not with Eve when the serpent first engaged her in conversation, though we know that soon afterward he rejoined her. Ridgley, Whitefield, Gill and many others held that Eve was alone when the serpent confronted her. For ourselves, we base that belief upon what we are told in 1 Timothy 2:13-14, where the Holy Spirit has emphasized the fact that the woman was first in the transgression, and then became the seducer of the man. That could hardly be said had Adam been present from the beginning, for then he would have been partaker of her evildoing—by allowing her to yield to the temptation instead of making every effort to cause her to reject it. Furthermore, it should be carefully noted that when the guilty couple were arraigned before their Maker, Eve passed no blame upon her husband for making no attempt to dissuade her, but instead sought to throw the onus on the serpent.

Nor did the Lord Himself charge Adam with any complicity in his wife's crime, as He surely would have done had Adam been a passive spectator. The serpent, then, must have tempted Eve in the absence of her husband.

We consider that Eve's being alone, and more especially her approach to the fatal tree, casts considerable light on what then occurred. Matthew Henry stated, "Had she kept close to the side out of which she was lately taken, she had not been so exposed." And had she kept away from that which threatened certain death, she would have been on safer ground. Satan cannot injure any of us while we are walking with God and treading the paths of righteousness.

We are expressly told that there is no lion in the "way of holiness," that no ravenous beast shall be found there (Isaiah 35:8-9). No, we have to step out of that way and trespass on the devil's territory before he can "*get an advantage of us*" (2 Corinthians 2:11). That is why we are so emphatically enjoined, "*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it*" (Proverbs 4:14-15). We certainly do not regard Eve as being guilty of any sin at this initial stage, but the sequel shows plainly that she incurred great danger and exposed herself to temptation by approaching so near to that tree whose fruit had been divinely prohibited, and we need not be surprised to discover, as she also did, that that ground was already occupied by the serpent. This has been recorded for our learning and warning.

### **GULLIBILITY OF EVE**

"And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" The serpent must have looked very different from the repulsive reptile it now is, not only standing erect but—in keeping with his preeminence above all other beasts, and as the Hebrew word intimates—of a striking and beautiful appearance. Apparently he stood before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it seems more than likely that he personally took and ate its fruit in Eve's presence. This no doubt evoked from her an ejaculation of surprise or a look of horror, which explains why he then said what he did. As Samuel Hopkins long ago pointed out,

It is probable that the serpent told the woman that by eating of the fruit of that tree he had obtained the use of reason and the faculty of speech which she now saw in exercise; and therefore said that, from his own experience, he could assure her that if she would eat of this fruit she would be so far from dying that she would reach to a higher degree of perfection and knowledge.

While such an inference must not be pressed dogmatically, we have long felt it possesses much probability, and that it is an illuminating one.

Recently we discovered what John Brown of Haddington wrote in his family Bible concerning the serpent's words to Eve: "Perhaps he pretended that himself had acquired what knowledge he had above other beasts by eating of this forbidden fruit. It is certain that he attempted to confirm his contradiction of the threatening by a solemn appeal to God." This requires us to examine closely the tempter's words. The margin of some Bibles gives an alternative rendering, "Yea, because God hath said," which makes his statement a declaration rather than a query. (Genesis 13:9; Psalm 25:12; Matthew 26:53; Luke 22:35 are other examples where a strong affirmation or appeal is, for the sake of emphasis, put in the form of an interrogation.) Considering it thus here, we may regard the serpent's opening words to Eve as answering her previous expression of surprise: "Is

it ‘because God hath said’ that you are so startled at seeing me eating the fruit?” Thomas Scott pointed out, “Indeed we cannot satisfactorily account for the woman’s entering into conversation with the serpent, and showing no marks of surprise or suspicion, unless we admit a supposition of this kind.” It is one of the first duties of an expositor to show the connection, explicit or implicit, of each statement of Holy Writ.

In the serpent’s statement we perceive the guile and malice of the enemy. His allusion to the divine restriction made it appear much greater and more severe than it actually was. The Lord had in fact made generous provision for them to eat freely of “every tree of the garden” with but a single exception (Genesis 2:16). Satan sought to bring reproach on the divine law by misrepresenting it. It was as though he said, “Can it be that your Maker has given you appetites and also placed before you the means of gratifying them, only to mock you? You surely must have misunderstood His meaning!” We therefore regard this opening utterance of the serpent as an attempt not only to make Eve doubt God’s veracity but also to cause her to suspect the divine beneficence. Satan is ever seeking to inject that poison into our hearts: to distrust God’s goodness—especially in connection with His prohibitions and precepts. That is really what lies behind all evil lusting and disobedience: a discontent with our position and portion, a craving for something which God has wisely withheld from us. The more clearly we perceive the precise nature of the serpent’s poison the better we are enabled to judge its workings within us. Reject any suggestion that God is unduly severe with you. Resist with the utmost abhorrence anything which causes you to doubt God’s loving kindness. Allow nothing to make you question His love.

We have called attention to the brevity of the narrative of Genesis 3 and the need for us to weigh carefully every word in its opening verses and ponder the implication of each clause. While we must refrain from reading into it what is not there, we must be careful not to overlook anything of importance which is there. Matthew Henry pertinently pointed out, “Satan tempted Eve that, by her, he might tempt Adam; so he tempted Job by his wife, and Christ by Peter. It is his policy to send temptations by unsuspected hands, and theirs that have most interest in us and influence over us.” Eve’s suspicions ought to have been aroused when the serpent introduced such a subject for conversation, and she should have turned away immediately. Those who would escape harm must keep out of harm’s way. *“Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge” (Proverbs 14:7).* *“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge” (Proverbs 19:27).* The serpent’s opening word was designed to produce in Eve a spirit of discontent. It was really a sly insinuation which amounted to this: “If you cannot eat of all the trees, you might as well eat of none.” King Ahab took this view. With all his royal possessions, he was dissatisfied while denied Naboth’s vineyard. And Haman, though he had found favor with the king, petulantly exclaimed, “All of this availeth me nothing” because Mordecai refused to pay him deference.

If Eve was not already secretly desiring the forbidden fruit, would she have paid any attention to the cunning query made to her? We very much doubt it. Still less can we conceive of her entering into a discussion with the serpent on the subject. Toying with temptation always implies lusting after the object presented. Had Eve been content with God’s grant in Genesis 2:1b, and satisfied with the knowledge He had given her by Creation, she would have abhorred the false knowledge proposed by the tempter, and that would have precluded all parleying with him! That is more than a supposition of ours, for

it is obviously confirmed by what follows. Compare her conduct with Christ's and observe how very differently He acted. He steadfastly refused to enter into any debate with the devil. He did not dally with temptation, for He had no desire for anything but the will of God. Each time He firmly repulsed the enemy's advances by taking His stand on God's Word, and concluded by thrusting away Satan's propositions with utmost revulsion. A greater contrast cannot be imagined: the woman's Seed met Satan's temptation with holy loathing; the woman was in a condition to respond to the serpent's wiles with unholy compliance.

*“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden : but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Genesis 3:2-3).* Instead of fleeing in dread from the serpent, Eve conferred with him, which was both foolish and fatal, as the outcome showed; Satan is much wiser than we are, and if we attempt to meet him on his own ground and argue with him, the result will be disastrous. His evil influence had already begun to affect Eve injuriously, as appears from a close examination of the first part of her reply. The Lord had said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.” Eve's omission of that word “freely” was both significant and ominous—indicating that the generosity of the divine provision was not influencing her heart as it should have. But on the other hand we do not agree with those who charge her with adding to God's word in verse 3. For while the “neither shall ye touch it” was not distinctly expressed in Genesis 2:17, nevertheless it was clearly and necessarily implied. How could Eve eat of the fruit without touching it? The one act requires the other.

There is a very important principle involved in what has just been pointed out. It may be stated thus: When God forbids any act He at the same time forbids everything encouraging or leading up to it. Our Lord made that very plain in His Sermon on the Mount, as He enforced the spirituality and strictness of the law when repudiating the errors of the rabbis, who were guilty of modifying its holy requirements. He insisted that “Thou shalt not kill” is by no means restricted to the bare act of murder, but that it also prohibits every evil exercise of the mind and heart preceding the act, such as hatred, ill will, malice. In like manner He declared that “Thou shalt not commit adultery” includes very much more than outlawing intercourse between the sexes even impure imaginations and desires. That commandment is broken as soon as there is unchaste lusting or even looking. God demands very much more than merely keeping clean the outside of the cup and platter (Matthew 23:25-26). “Thou shalt not steal” includes not even thinking of doing so, nor handling what is not your—nor borrowing anything when you have no intention of returning it.

Eve, then, was quite right in concluding that the divine commandment forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil included not ‘touching it’, for the act of eating involves not only desire and intention but also touching, handling, plucking, and placing the fruit in the mouth. But we are not so sure about the exact force of her words “lest ye die.” Many have supposed she was toning down the Lord's “thou shalt surely die.” They may be right, but we are not at all sure. *“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry” (Psalm 2:12)* is obviously not the language of uncertainty. The Hebrew for “lest” is rendered “that... not” in Genesis 24:6. If the reader will compare John 3:20; 12:42; 1 Corinthians 1:17, he will see that the force of “lest” in these passages is “otherwise.” Gill also states that Eve's employment of the “lest” is not at all conclusive that she expressed any doubt, since the word may also be used of the event of anything, as in

Psalm 2:12, and hence may be rendered “that ye die not.” We therefore prefer to leave it as an open question.

*“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).* Perceiving his advantage, now that he had gained Eve’s ear, the tempter grew bolder and flatly contradicted the divine threatening. He began by seeking to instill a doubt—Is it so or not?—by casting a reflection upon the divine goodness and making Eve dissatisfied with God’s liberal provision. Then he denied that there was any danger in eating the fruit. First he had by implication slandered God’s character; and now he told a downright lie. If, as we believe was the case, he had himself eaten of the forbidden tree in the woman’s presence, then his action would lend color to his falsehood. It was as though he said, “You need not hesitate. God is only trying to frighten you. You can see for yourself the fruit is quite harmless, for I have eaten it without suffering any ill effects.” Thus the enemy of souls seeks to persuade man that he may defy God with impunity, inducing him when *“he heareth the words of this curse” to “bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst” (Deuteronomy 29:19).*

No excuse can be made for Eve now. If she had acted foolishly in approaching so near to the fatal tree, if her suspicions were not at once aroused by the serpent’s opening remark, she certainly ought to have been deeply horrified, turning immediately away, when she heard him imply that the Lord her God had lied. Joseph fled from his temptress (Genesis 39:12). Eve had much more reason to run from the serpent with loathing. Instead, she remained to hear him add, *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (3:5).* He declared that not only would no harm be suffered, but they would benefit by heeding his suggestion and doing as he had done. A threefold promise or inducement was set before the woman. First, that by eating this fruit their capacity of discernment and perception would be considerably increased. That is the force of “your eyes shall be opened.” Their physical eyes were open already, therefore his reference must have been to the eyes of their understanding. Second, their position would be improved and their power enlarged: they should be as “gods” or angels. Third, their wisdom would be much augmented: “knowing good and evil”—as though that were most desirable. And all of this at once—“then”—without any delay.

It will be observed from the above that the serpent directed his attack not at Eve’s bodily appetites but at the noblest part of her being, by the inducement of an increase of wisdom that would elevate our first parents above their condition and fit them to be companions for the celestial creatures. There lay the force of his temptation: seeking to fan a desire for forbidden knowledge and self-sufficiency—to act independently of God. From then until now, Satan’s object has been to divert men from the only source of wisdom and cause them to seek it from him. Nevertheless, the bait dangled before Eve in no way hid the barb he was using to catch her. Putting together the whole of his statement in verses 4 and 5, we see the serpent not only charged God with making a threat which He had no intention of fulfilling, but also accused Him of being tyrannical in withholding from them what He knew would be for their good. He said, “You need have no fear that God will be as severe and rigorous as His language sounded. He is only trying to intimidate you. He is well aware that if you eat this fruit, your knowledge will be greatly enlarged; but He is unwilling for this to happen, and therefore He wants to prevent it by this unreasonable prohibition.”

*“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (3:6).* Before examining the details of this tragic verse, we shall carefully consider two questions, and endeavor to answer them. First, why did not the divine threat in Genesis 2:17 deter Eve from disobeying God? David declared, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart [to be awed thereby, to put it into practice], that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).* It is clear from Genesis 3:3 that God’s word was at least in Eve’s thoughts when the serpent accosted her. Then how was it that it did not preserve her from sin? Surely the answer is that she did not make use of it, but instead dallied with temptation, parleyed with God’s enemy, and believed his lie. Here is a most solemn warning for us. If we wish God to deliver us from the destroyer, then we must determine to shun every occasion of evil and, as Joseph did, flee from temptation. If we really take to heart the solemn failure and fall of Eve, then we shall pray with ever increasing earnestness, “Lead us not into temptation” and, if the Lord sees fit to test us, “Deliver us from evil.”

Second, in 2 Corinthians 11:3, we are informed that “the serpent beguiled [cheated] Eve through his subtilty,” and in 1 Timothy 2:14 that she was “deceived.” How then are we to explain what is recorded of her in Genesis 3, where the historical account seems to make it very plain that she committed the act after due deliberation, with her eyes wide open? How was she deceived if she knowingly disobeyed God? The answer is that as soon as she ceased to be regulated by the light of God’s word, her imagination became filled with the false impressions presented to her by Satan, and her mind became darkened. Unholy desires were born within her. Her affections and appetites overrode her judgment, and she was persuaded to disbelieve what was true and believe what was false. Oh, the *“deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13),* which calls good evil and bitter sweet. She was beguiled by consenting to listen to another voice than God’s, and because she disregarded her allegiance to her husband. The prelude to every fall from grace is the alienation of the heart from Christ, the Christian’s spiritual Husband, with the consequent clouding of the judgment. When the truth is rejected, error is welcome. Satan, in his effort to induce souls to look for their happiness in departing from God, adapts his temptations to the cases and circumstances of the tempted.

Eve saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was “pleasant to the eyes.” Let us consider at what point this statement comes in the narrative: not at the commencement, but after all that is recorded in the preceding verses had transpired. Let us also observe the order of those two clauses. We would expect to find the phrase “pleasant to the eyes” mentioned before “good for food.” Why then are the two descriptions reversed? Does not this better enable us to understand exactly what is meant by “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food”? The time element must not be ignored, for it cannot be without significance. We suggest that it looks back to the foregoing action of the serpent, which we believe is clearly implied in the context, namely, his personally eating the forbidden fruit in Eve’s presence. How else could she perceive the tree was “good for food” before she had tasted it? Does not the third clause of the verse confirm and clinch this interpretation, for how else could Eve possibly know the fruit was “to be desired to make one wise” unless she had previously witnessed what appeared to her to be a visual demonstration of the fact?

Is it not evident that the words “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food” signify that since she had seen the serpent eating it without dying or even suffering any injury, she need not fear following his example? Could his action not infer that from his so doing he had acquired the faculty of reason and the power of speech, and that she too would be benefited by doing the same? Instead of acting in faith on the word of God, Eve walked by sight, only to discover—as her sons and daughters often do—that appearances are very deceptive. She saw “that it was pleasant to the eyes.” There was nothing in the outward appearance of the fruit to denote that it was unfit for eating; on the contrary, it looked attractive. In Genesis 2:9 we read that “out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” As the remainder of that verse shows, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was no exception. All creation was beautiful and agreeable to the senses. But Eve, by yielding to the serpent’s temptation, found that tree particularly appealing. She had a secret hankering after its fruit and unlawfully coveted it.

Had there been any uncertainty in Eve’s mind, she could have consulted her husband; this is a wife’s duty and privilege. Instead, she saw the tree was “to be desired to make one wise.” She judged it entirely by what the serpent had told her—and not by what God had said—as the preceding verse shows. She was flattered with the false hope the enemy had held out to her. She first gave credence to his “ye shall not surely die.” Next she was attracted by the prospect of becoming like the “gods” or angels. And then, on her believing the promise of augmented knowledge, lustful longing consumed her. The Hebrew word for “desired” in Genesis 3:6 is translated “covet” in Exodus 20:17. The same word is termed “concupiscence” in Romans 7:8, and “lust” in James 1:15. Indeed, that latter passage traces for us in detail the course of Eve’s downfall, for her conduct solemnly illustrates *James 1:14-15*:

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away [from the path of rectitude] of his own lust [as Eve was in approaching the forbidden tree], and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived [in her by the seductive promises of the serpent], it bringeth forth sin [externally]: and sin, when it is finished [i.e., the outward act is completed], bringeth forth death.*

Shedd stated that God’s commandment in its full form was essentially this: “Thou shalt not lust after but abhor the knowledge of good and evil; thou shalt not choose but refuse it.” The Eden statute, as well as the Ten Commandments, involved both the inward desire and the outward act. Note that the holiness of Christ is described as a refusing of the evil and a choosing of the good (Isaiah 7:15). He who desires the prohibited evil does in effect choose it, as he who hates another violates the sixth commandment though he does not actually kill him. Eve was not to desire the fruit, for God had forbidden her to eat it. Instead of desiring, she should have dreaded it. In lusting after what God had prohibited. She turned from God as her everlasting portion and chief end; she preferred the creature to the Creator. This is an unspeakably solemn warning for us. If we estimate things by our senses or by what others say of them, instead of accepting God’s evaluation, we are certain to err in our judgment. If we resort to carnal reasoning, we shall quickly persuade ourselves that wrong is right. Nothing is good for us except that which we receive from God’s hand.

*“She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6) without consulting Adam. So strong was the desire of her heart that she could no longer check it, and she committed the act which completed “the transgression.” Yes, “she took of the fruit thereof, and did*

eat.” The serpent did not put it in her mouth. The devil may tempt, but he cannot force anyone. By Eve’s own free act she took of the fruit; therefore she could rightly blame no one but herself. By this time Adam had rejoined her, for we are told that she “gave also unto her husband with her”—the first time he is mentioned as being by her side. This is the progression of sin: one yielding to temptation, and then becoming the tempter of others—seeking to drag them down to the same level. “And he did eat,” instead of refusing what his God-defying wife proffered him. He “*was not deceived*” (*1 Timothy 2:14*), which, if possible, made his guilt the greater. He “*hearkened unto the voice of ... [his] wife*” (*Genesis 3:17*). Probably she repeated to him what the serpent had said to her, commending the fruit and possibly pointing out that they must have misunderstood the Lord’s words, since she had eaten and was still alive.

Thus man apostatized from God. It was a revolt against his Maker, an insurrection from His supremacy, a rebellion against His authority. He deliberately resisted the divine will, rejected God’s word, deserted His way. In consequence he forfeited his primitive excellence and all his happiness. Adam cast himself and all his posterity into the deepest gulf of anguish and wretchedness. This was the origin of human depravity. Genesis 3 gives us the divinely inspired account of how sin entered this world, and supplies the only adequate and satisfactory explanation of both its six thousand years’ history and of its present-day condition.