

Dr. J. R. Beeke

THE FALL IN PARADISE

(Lord's Day 3, Question 7)

Psalter 217

Scripture: Genesis 3

Psalter 102

Psalter 143:2-3

Psalter 140

Dear congregation,

We ask your attention for Lord's Day 3, Question 7, of our Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 7: Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?

Answer: From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.

With God's help, we wish to consider:

The Fall In Paradise

1. Satan's Temptation In Paradise
2. Adam and Eve's Fall From Paradise
3. Our Corrupt Nature Since Paradise

I repeat: The Fall In Paradise: Satan's Temptation In Paradise; Adam and Eve's Fall From Paradise; and, Our Corrupt Nature Since Paradise.

We have seen in previous sermons that our instructor set before us our abnormal state and condition, that we are law-breakers, prone to hate God and our neighbor. He has asked us, "Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?" We have seen that the resounding answer was, "By no means." We have spoiled ourselves, but God made us good, in true

knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, after His own image.

Our instructor then asks the inevitable question that flows out of being corrupt and depraved law-breakers on the one hand and being created good and upright on the other, namely, "Whence then proceeds this depravity?" If we were created good, perfect, and upright with no inclination to sin, and we are at the same time God- and man-haters, where did this awful depravity, this tragic corruption come from? Where did it arise? Where is its origin? In his answer, our instructor points us to our deep and tragic fall in Paradise. We have grown very accustomed, congregation, have we not, to this expression, "our deep and tragic fall in Paradise"? But today we have to examine that fall and ask ourselves, "Is that fall reality in our lives? Has it ever become more than an orthodox expression? Has it ever become a living grief, a deep sigh and reality within our hearts?" Oh, if we were to realize how deeply we have fallen, even a little bit, we would never speak lightly about Paradise!

Boys and girls, you know that Adam and Eve lived in Paradise. Paradise was a beautiful garden, richly watered by four rivers. It had beautiful vegetation and, no doubt, a delightful climate. The entire created world was tame, peaceful, and surrounded Adam and Eve to the glory of God. Everything about Paradise was perfect. Man was not only created good and upright but the animal kingdom was also very good; everything in and about the garden was good.

The word "Paradise," as used in the Hebrew language, means "park," a beautiful park, a beautiful garden. In Isaiah 51:3 Paradise is called the garden of God. In Paradise Adam and Eve lived in perfect communion and sweet fellowship with God, walking with God in the garden in the cool of the day. They were truly happy. They had an undisturbed fellowship. There God dwelt and there they dwelt with God, as a friend with his friends. There they heard and obeyed the Word of God. There they focussed all their affections, their will, purposes, desires, life, and heart upon God alone. Paradise was a scene of undisturbed communion. There was nothing — oh what a blessing, congregation — nothing between God and Adam and Eve. Every word they spoke, everything they did, every thought that passed through their minds was God-glorifying. Oh what a blessed state! Our forefathers called it the state of rectitude. That means a state of righteousness where everything was done

right, where nothing missed the mark (that's the meaning of the word "sin," to miss God's mark of serving His glory). Everything hit the mark of God's design. Everything glorified Him. The life of Adam and Eve, the nature of Adam and Eve — everything was peaceful and restful. Adam and Eve had everything they wanted, everything they needed; they had a life with God.

Now, in the midst of this garden there were two special trees; one tree represented life and the other represented death. The tree that represented life was called "the tree of life." It appears from the Bible that in distinction from all other trees this tree produced fruit which had the power to perpetuate, upon continued eating of it, Adam's earthly existence as a living soul. As long as he would eat of this tree without eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the opposite tree, Adam's life would be preserved. This tree was a symbol of God's nearness, of God's fellowship. Some of our forefathers likened it unto a sacrament, a sign and seal of the favor of God. After the sin of Adam and Eve, we know that God placed at the east of the Garden of Eden "cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Thus the tree of life was the tree that represented the lovingkindness, fellowship, and nearness of God.

But there was another tree. The other tree served as the antithesis of the tree of life. Antithesis is a word that means the contrary or opposite theme. Thesis comes from "theme"; anti means "opposite." Thus this tree of knowledge of good and evil is the antithesis of the tree of life. God set His "No" in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil over against His "Yes" in the tree of life. This tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not a tree that would somehow bring Adam to a consciousness of good and evil, to a discernment of good and evil, as its name may seem to imply. Some people have wrongly taught that Adam was created neutral and that that tree would show him what was good and what was evil. That is not true, congregation. Adam knew what was good and he knew in his moral discernment that if he ate of this tree he would produce evil. Adam was not a neutral sheet of paper, as Pelagius taught; he was not a moral blank, but he was created in a positive knowledge of God, a positive holiness and righteousness. He knew that that tree of knowledge of good and evil was standing there as a symbol of the possibility of evil, and that if he ate of that tree he would be calling God a liar and would be plunging himself and the whole

human posterity into sin and death. Adam and Eve knew what this tree represented. God told them its name, and gave His prohibition, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Thus life and death, righteousness and sin, were placed before Adam and Eve's consciousness. God gave them the possibility of evil because He wanted to be served out of the free will of the heart of Adam and Eve. God purposely, sovereignly, in a way we can never fully comprehend, set before Adam and Eve the possibility of evil without Himself being the author of evil. He set a "thou shalt not" before Adam and Eve in order to test them, to try them, and to receive from their hand free obedience. That was the only "thou shalt not" God gave to Adam and Eve. It was the only prohibition. They could eat of all the other trees of the garden except this one tree.

Thus these two trees became symbols of life and of death. All Adam had to do was obey the word of God — a word that was clear, concise, true, given in love and subscribed to a covenantal form in a covenant of works. The tree of life was a symbol of life; the tree of knowledge of good and evil would bring the threatened death. And the only condition was obedience.

The thought can arise in our minds, why was it necessary for God to plant that tree of knowledge of good and evil in Paradise? Here, my dear friends, we cannot probe too far; we cannot probe beyond the boundaries of Scripture. We cannot grasp fully the question of "whence sin?" But this much we may say that God purposely put that tree there because He wanted man to be on a higher level than the animal kingdom. He wanted man to be the masterpiece, the crown of creation, that would boast in Him, His glory and His power, and serve Him freely, and openly display his daily and willing obedience. Perhaps it is best to use an example here so the boys and girls can understand as well. For example, boys and girls (and I know this comparison is not a perfect one, but take it as an illustration), let's say that your father and your mother bought you new bikes but they were not good for you yet; you were not old enough to really ride those bikes yet. Your mom and dad put those bikes in the garage and they said to you, "Son and daughter, you may not ride the bikes until you are older. You may play anywhere else on the yard; you may play with your toys in the house, but you may not ride the bikes." Let's say then that your father and your mother locked the garage so you could not come near the bikes. Could your father and mother then say to other people, "My

son and daughter are so obedient. I have bought them bikes; I have told them not to ride them and they obey me perfectly"?

Well, someone could say to your father or your mother, "Of course they obey you; they can't disobey you because the garage is locked. But unlock the garage and then see if they will obey you." That is what God did. He left the way open to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to display the obedience of Adam and Eve. If He had blocked off the way to that tree, God could never say, "Adam and Eve are obeying Me," for the way was blocked. Thus God left open, sovereignly and freely, the possibility of disobedience.

We read in Genesis 3 how that disobedience came about. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" You know, boys and girls, Satan came in the form of a serpent. Satan and the devil are the same thing. Satan is his personal name. Sometimes he is called *the* devil; other times we speak of devils, meaning Satan and all the other fallen angels that fell with him. The word devil is the Greek form for the Hebrew word Satan. The word Satan means adversary or opponent. Satan is the one who labors against God. He has many names besides Satan and devil. He is called destroyer, deceiver, evil one, Beelzebub, the murderer from the beginning, the enemy, the dragon, the tempter, the father of lies, the prince of the powers of the air, the prince of the world, the god of this world. All these names teach us that Satan wages war against God. He opposes God. He wants to slander God and do whatever he can to destroy man, God's creation, and God's kingdom. His goal is always opposition to God. Thus we read in Jude 1:6 that "the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, God hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Primarily out of the sinful motive of pride, Satan fell from the glory of heaven and came to this earth. As soon as he saw the masterpiece of God's creation, he approached Eve to attack God. He tried to confuse Adam and Eve with regard to God's own word and command. "Yea," he said, "hath God said, Ye shall not eat of *every* tree of the garden?" God had said, "Ye shall not eat of one tree." But Satan comes and says, as it were, "God is hard. He doesn't want you to eat of any tree of the garden. Yea,

hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" Satan exaggerates the prohibitions of God and he approaches first of all the woman, not because the woman was weaker than the man, but probably, as Paul implies in his epistles and as our forefathers taught, because the command had not come directly from the mouth of the Lord to the woman; thus she may have been more susceptible to temptation. Satan used every device he could think of. When he came to Eve, he did not say right away, "God is a liar. Don't believe your Creator," but he sowed the seed of doubt, didn't he? He said, "Is this what God said?"

Still today Satan is using the same approaches, congregation. After six thousand years he is highly skilled in these devices. He comes to young people and says, "Does God really want you to walk this strict, narrow, and heavy life? Is Christianity really a life of happiness, of joy?" He tries to make God into a heavy and a hard God, a God not worthy to be served. He tries to paint conversion as a life not worthy or desirous to be sought. "Yea, hath God said?" He also comes to God's people to sow the seed of doubt. "Is God's work really in your heart? That conviction of sin that you had years ago and that driving to Christ, was it really the work of the Lord? You are so far from God, you are so backslidden now, you have sinned away too much. It cannot be the work of the Lord. God could not have mercy upon such a one as you are, could He? Is He not holy?" Satan sows the seed of doubt, and he always has the goal of breaking communion with God. He is a slanderer. He opposes God. He tries to portray God as a God who will break communion with sinners. He is always out to destroy the work of God.

Eve responds to Satan. That is, of course, her first mistake. She should have ignored the serpent. Her response, however, shows that she knows very well what God had commanded and the consequences that would follow her transgression. "The woman said unto the serpent," the Bible says, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: (thus she is correcting Satan) But (and here she unfortunately goes on to dialogue with Satan) 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." So Eve adds something to God's prohibition also. Though her addition is more mild than Satan's, still she adds something to it, "neither shall ye touch it." Thus, in her answer to the serpent she resists temptation somewhat but she opens, as Bunyan would say, ear gate, and she begins to dialogue with

Satan. She does not fully see the lie that the serpent puts before her.

I know, congregation, that perhaps in our hearts the objection lives, "Well, if I had been Eve, I would have been more careful, I would not have listened to Satan." Oh, my friend, then you do not know your own heart. Satan is real in every one of our lives, and often he approaches us to get us to slip into sin smoothly, slowly, gradually, down that slippery slope where we begin to question God's prohibitions. Then we begin to dialogue with Satan and begin to reason away the reality of sin.

When Satan has Eve's ear, he becomes stronger in his argument in verses 4 and 5 of Genesis 3, "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 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." Now Satan becomes very bold; he presents a concrete lie in the face of God's truth. God said, "Ye shall surely die"; Satan says, "Ye shall not surely die." Satan implies that God is jealous of what man would become if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He implies that man would become like God and that God would resent His own creature, and that God is holding something back from man. He sows in Eve's heart dissatisfaction with her position, as he himself had dissatisfaction in heaven with his own position. It is as if he says to the woman, "Eve, there is much more to obtain. Would you not rather be independent? Would you not rather lose the shackles of God? Oh, your eyes are closed, Eve, in this garden! You do not see what you could be. Be free and independent; be as God. Cast away the shackles. Eat of the tree of which God has told you, You shall not eat thereof."

Young people, does that not sound familiar? Is that not today, maybe even this past week, the whispering of Satan in your heart? "Cast off the shackles of God. Be free, be yourself, be independent." That is the theme of our society. Perhaps more than any generation before us, we are living in an unrestrained way, freely serving ourselves. And there has never been a generation unhappier, more discontented, more dissatisfied. The life of self-service is the unhappiest life in this world.

As soon as Eve loses sight of God's Word and opens her ear to the temptor, she is already lost; she loses her support. The devil is gaining ground. "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, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Thus both of them fell into sin, and with Adam's fall the whole human posterity fell into sin. This original sin was not the act of God; it was not even ultimately the act of the devil, but it was the free, voluntary act of Adam and Eve. They did eat; they destroyed themselves.

It is from here, congregation, that our depravity of human nature proceeds — from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. When this happened, many other things transpired at the same moment. Adam and Eve committed a sin far more serious than we are prone to realize, for that tree represented God's authority. By sinning, they called God a liar. By eating, they severed the covenant of works with Him and even their very relationship with God. Instantly, they lost the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Instantly, they were filled with corruption. Instantly, they became aware of their nakedness, their shame, and their guilt of conscience. Instantly, spiritual death overcame them and they felt separation in their soul from God. The fruit was that they had to be excluded from their Paradise home. God had to drive the man and woman out, and it was all their own fault. They took of the forbidden fruit. They broke the covenant of works. They left their relationship with God in shambles. As soon as they ate, their conscience spoke. Their heart smote them. They went to hide from God. They tried to excuse themselves; they tried to blame one another. The fruit is that they would beget sons and daughters in their own likeness, after their image.

Thus our instructor says, "hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin." Adam was not just our natural head; he was our covenantal head, our representative head. In him we have fallen. The first sin of Adam was the mother of all the sins of the whole human race. And so in Adam we have become guilty. His guilt is imputed to us and his pollution is inherited by us. Every generation since Paradise has been conceived and born in sin. And yet, the wonder of all wonders is that God did not do to Adam what He did to Satan — cut off all ways forever; instead God established a better covenant, a covenant of grace. Although the way was barred shut to the tree of life in Paradise, God gave a second Adam, Jesus

Christ, to be the tree of life, whose leaves are given for the healing of sinners. Thus, unlike the fallen angels, which never had another opportunity, God graciously intervened. He interposed Himself between the covenant Adam and Eve made with Satan. He interrupted the covenant they made with the devil, with death and with hell, and called Adam from hiding, "Adam, where art thou?"

What a blessing if He may also call us with divine authority, "Sinner, where art thou?" Blessed are they who are brought out of hiding and brought naked before God. Blessed are they who lose their fig leaves, lose their excuses, and say, "Oh God, I am the man. I have broken the covenant of works in pieces. I have destroyed Thy image. I have injured Thy attributes. I have transgressed Thy law." To such God has solemn words but also an unspeakable invitation, as we will consider after we sing from Psalter 143, stanzas 2 and 3.

Congregation, boys and girls, let us never think that we would have done differently from Adam and Eve. We have often told you from the pulpit and in chapel that story about a minister who was approached by a man in his congregation who said, "I never would have done that sin." That story needs to be told again and again, because that minister set before him a little box, as you know, with a mouse in it, and he told that man, "You may touch everything in this room, you may look at everything, but do not open this box, and when I come back we will talk about whether or not you would ever have committed Adam's sin." He stayed away a while, but before he returned, you know that that man opened that box, and when the minister came home, he went over to that box and saw that the mouse was gone, so they had no need to talk.

Congregation, our lives as pastor, as members, everyone of us, the smallest boy or girl, testify against all our excuses. We are no different. We are no better than Adam. The Bible says we are all conceived and born in sin. We all inherit the image of Adam. The Canons of Dort Head III/IV, Articles 2 and 3, state, "Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature. Therefore all men

are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation." Is that a description of what you feel yourself to be? Do you know what it means to sigh and to crawl before God as a worm and no man, and to groan, "Oh God, I am corrupt. I have a vicious nature. I am a corrupt one, a corrupt stock from a corrupt offspring"?

Article 15 of the Belgic Confession of Faith says, "We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind." Do you really believe that, my friend, that your inherent nature, your corrupt nature in which you were conceived, is so evil that that very nature itself, even if you were to add to it no actual sins, would be sufficient to condemn you, because your entire being is polluted?

The Bible, the Canons, the Belgic Confession, and our Catechism, are all sufficient to leave us not only without excuse, because we willingly choose to live out our original sin every day of our lives. They also leave us without any hope from our side, and without any hope from the covenant of works. With man it is impossible to work himself back into God's favor, congregation. The covenant of works lies absolutely broken with respect to its power to justify, but not with respect to its call for obedience. God cannot lessen His demands. But now the wonder of the gospel is that for a people who cannot obey the covenant of works, for a people for whom the way is shut to the tree of life (for there are cherubims in the way, guarding the tree of life), God has raised up a better tree of life, even His Son. Christ does not just give fruits, but is Himself the living Tree of life. He stands at the right hand of the Father ministering to His church. He is the second Adam, who undoes all that the first Adam has undone.

Already in Paradise God sets forth this better covenant in this better Adam, a sure covenant in this sure Adam. He says

as it were, "I will raise up a seed (the seed of the woman), and I will put enmity between thee and the woman (Satan and the woman), between thy seed (Satan, with all unsaved persons and the fallen angels), and her seed (Christ and His people). It shall bruise thy head. It (being *the* Seed, Jesus) shall fatally bruise your head, Satan; and thou, Satan, shalt bruise Christ's heel." On Calvary's cross this first promise of the gospel, often called the mother's promise, was fulfilled in a sure Adam — an Adam that cannot fail and did not fail, but who replaced the first Adam. The first Adam had his ears opened to the blasphemies of Satan and responded in disobedience; but the second Adam heard all the blasphemies against Himself, even being called Beelzebub, the chief of the devils, winebibber and drunkard, but gave no answer, refusing to disobey His Father. The first Adam had eyes that looked upon the fruit together with Eve and saw that it was good, and ate; the second Adam had eyes that turned to Peter in the hall of Caiaphas and caused him to weep. The first Adam had hands that reached out to commit sin; the second Adam had hands that reached out willingly to be bound to pay for sin. The first Adam's feet took him behind the bushes to hide himself in Paradise; the second Adam came out of the thick foliage of the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, and brought Himself out into the moonlight to face His enemies, and said, "Whom seekest thou? I am He." The first Adam turned his back to God, but the second Adam gave His back to the smiters to pay for the sins of His people. The first Adam transgressed against his own soul, knowing that the day he would eat thereof he should surely die, for "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" but the second Adam had His soul smitten, so that He was exceeding sorrowful, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," but He never ate of the fruit and the temptations of Satan. He withstood all the onslaughts of hell — in Gethsemane, at Gabbatha, and on Golgotha — and thus He finished the work His Father gave Him to do.

Christ is the Head of a better covenant, and He represents all the elect whom the Father has given Him from all eternity. He alone knows who they are. But He turns to the congregation who hears the gospel today; He turns to you and to me and sets before us death in Adam and life in the second Adam. He invites us to come with our sinful ears, our sinful eyes, our sinful hands, our sinful feet, our sinful backs, and above all, our sinful souls, to that second Adam to plead for mercy, yes, to cast

ourselves upon mercy. He invites us to take with us the blood of the Son of God, above all, and to cast ourselves upon Him whose blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel. The Lord says that Christ is now the Head of this better covenant and no one who is drawn to the Father by Him shall be turned away. "All that the Father hath given unto Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh unto Me I shall in no wise cast out."

Oh congregation, with man salvation is impossible, but with God all things are possible. By God sinners are drawn to gospel grace, drawn to a better covenant, drawn to Jesus Christ. This Adam can never fail. This Adam has finished His work. This Adam cannot fall. This Adam is at the right hand of the Father, reigning victoriously. He is risen, congregation. He is alive, and He has the keys of hell, of death, of grave, and of our sin-weary souls, in His hand. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, as it is focussed upon Him. Faith in Jesus Christ is what we need, not faith in ourselves, not faith in our faith, not faith in man, but faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, dear flock, I leave you this question in closing: Are you still trying to merit your salvation with an impossible, broken covenant of works? Do you not yet realize that you will miss everything when you flee to this broken covenant? Do you never feel your need for a better covenant and for Him who is its Head, for Him who has fulfilled all the conditions of the old broken covenant for poor sinners and who now says, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the water and buy milk and wine without money and without price"? Oh congregation, if we miss the gospel and this better covenant in this better Adam, we miss everything.

But those who may receive Christ by gracious Spirit-worked faith shall be called the sons of God. They are those who meet both the first Adam and the second Adam experientially in their own souls. Under the first Adam's acquaintance they learn to lose the battle; they learn they are nothing but a lump of sin. But in the second Adam's acquaintance they learn that the banner over them is love and grace, and that all victory is to be had in Him. Thus their poor, weary souls finally find a place of encampment by the cross of Calvary where they may say, "Though I was conceived and born in sin, after the image of Adam, I

was purchased by the blood of Christ, the second Adam." Oh, that second Adam had His bride born from out of His wounded side, out of which flowed blood and water — blood unto justification and water unto sanctification. The first Adam had his bride born from his rib, his side, but it was a bloodless birth; the second Adam had His bride born from a bloody side. The first Adam did not need blood until he fell; then the bloodless covenant of works could not help him. But the second Adam is the Head of a bloody covenant, and through that blood, that blood-bought righteousness, there is help, sinner, there is help laid upon One who is almighty. Blessed be God, Jesus Christ is mightier than all the devils and Satan and Adam and Eve and your corrupt heart and the world and all enemies within and without. Oh, they are all mighty, but He is almighty!

May God give us grace to bow before Him and confess, "God, in Christ, be merciful to me a sinner." Amen.

Psalter