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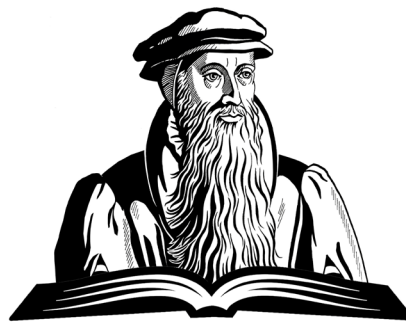
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #10

The Fall of Man

Catechism Questions 13 and 15



The John Knox Institute
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The Shorter CATECHISM

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by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

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Lecture #10

The Fall of Man

Question 13: *Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?*

Answer: *Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.*

Question 15: *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

Answer: *The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.*

God established a covenant of life with man. He promised to Adam life for him and for his descendents, if he would obey his commandments. Today we give our attention to the sad history of our first father. To do so, we are looking at two Questions from our Catechism. Note that the Questions are slightly out of order as you find them in the Catechism. Today we look at Questions 13 and 15. In our next lesson, we will look at Question 14, which deals generally with what sin is. Today, we look at Questions 13 and 15, which help us deal with the history of Adam in his covenant of life. The Questions before us today look at what Adam did after God established the covenant of life with him.

So here are the Questions. Question 13: "Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?" The Answer to this Question is as follows: "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God." Notice that word "will." The word "will" refers to the ability that man has to choose what he will do. When you or I choose to do something, it is our will that is at work. We can think of it perhaps by comparison. When you or I study something, and we're thinking about something, it is our mind that is at work, while, when we're choosing something, it is our will. Our will is a part of what we are, and it is that by which we choose to do something or not to do something. Our mind is part of what we are, and it is that by which we think and understand. Now when you get older, you may read about man's faculties. This word "faculties" refers to the special abilities or powers of our soul, namely, our will by which we choose, our mind by which we think, our memory by

which we remember things, and so on. But for now, just notice that the Answer before us has this word “will,” and that the word refers to that ability that we have to choose to do something.

Now the other Question we consider in this lesson is Question 15. And this helps complete the story of Adam’s action. It asks, “What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?” To this Question, we find the Answer, “The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit.” Now, in other words, the Answer to Question 13 tells us that Adam and Eve sinned, while the Answer to Question 15 identifies the particular sin that broke the covenant of life, and caused man to fall from the estate wherein he was created. So we can see that these two questions belong together. Both of these Questions use the expression, “first parents.” This refers to Adam and Eve. You have your parents, your mom and dad, or mother and father. You also have grandparents, your mother’s parents, and your father’s parents. And this goes back again and again to great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents, and so on. Now, if you were to trace this history back beyond your great-great-grandparents, and keep on going back, and back, and back, you would get to the beginning, and you would find that your first parents are Adam and Eve. This is true of me; it’s true of every man, every woman, every child. It’s an impressive truth. The Bible teaches that all mankind descend from Adam and Eve. This is why it’s most proper to speak of “the human race,” instead of multiple races. Whether our skin color is different, or our language is different, or our culture is different, whatever those differences may be, each of us descends from the same first parents—Adam and Eve. Now, this truth is wondrous to us to think about, but it’s also full of an important consequence, because our first parents, as we see in these Answers, did not obey God. They sinned against God and fell. And so what that means is we come from a fallen humanity. We’ll look at that more both in this lesson, and in a couple of other lessons.

Notice that these Questions teach us that Adam did not do as he was supposed to do. Instead of obeying God, Adam sinned against God. The particular sin that he committed was his eating the forbidden fruit. The record of this is found primarily in Genesis chapter 3. Before moving into the main focus of our lesson, you’ll notice that these first three chapters of the Bible—Genesis 1, 2, and 3—are of tremendous importance. They tell us of the beginning of the whole universe—God made all things out of nothing. They also tell us that mankind was made after God’s own image, and that man was made male and female, and with dominion over the creatures. It tells, of course, as you read, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, that God established work, and God established marriage, and that marriage is between one man and one woman. It tells us of the first covenant that God made with man—the covenant of life or the covenant of works. And as we see here, it also tells us that man sinned against God and failed to keep this covenant. These are tremendously important truths. We’ll also come to see that in Genesis 3, there is the first promise of the gospel. We’ll save that for later. For now, simply note that these first three chapters are very significant for understanding both the Word of God, and the world in which we live. And I encourage, and even exhort and challenge you to be much in your studying of these first three chapters, and think and meditate much upon them.

Well, let’s move into the main part of our lesson, as we look at this sin Adam committed while in the covenant of life. First, we’ll look at man’s state at creation. And second, we’ll look at man’s will at creation. And third, we’ll look at man’s choice at creation.

Well, first, let’s look at man’s state at creation. Remember that God made man after his own image. After making man, God looked over all that he had made, and as Genesis 1, verse 31 says, “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” This, of course, includes

man. Man was made good. This is very different than man is today. Man today desires sinful things, and we see that these truths of man being made good, and yet today is sinful, it's stated very clearly in Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, verse 29. It's there we read, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Man was made upright, but he's gone astray in his own devising of sin. What this means is that mankind, and particularly, our first parents, Adam and Eve, when they were first made, they had no sinful tendencies within them. They were not like you, not like I am. We are sinners, even from our conception. Remember when David was convicted of his sin? We have Psalm 51 that gives us his confession, and oh, praise God for such a Psalm, that reminds us of our acceptance by God's grace. Well, while David is confessing his sin, he says, in Psalm 51, verse 5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." This is true of all men, male and female, adult and child, after Adam's sin.

However, Adam and Eve were made without sin. They were made upright. They were made without sinful desires and inclinations. Additionally, they were surrounded by an unbroken and an unspoiled creation. They did not have sickness and death, they did not have famine and war. They were placed in a garden, with plenty of food, and beauty all around them. Even better, neither of them is isolated. Adam was given Eve, because it was not good for man to be alone. They knew one another, they loved one another, they supported one another, but best of all, in this state, they had God's instruction and fellowship. We've already seen that God gave them instruction, "You may eat of every tree, except this one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." We read of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The garden is where Adam and Eve were placed, and God was with them. This is the best of all, that Adam and Eve had the privilege of God teaching them, and of being near them.

This is the point. Adam and Eve were in an estate of paradise. They had all that they needed. They had all that was good. And best of all, they had God. This is what is meant when both Questions refer to "the estate wherein they were created." They were surrounded by what was good. They were themselves good. They had everything their bodies needed. They had everything their souls needed. They had everything they needed. Moreover, as we considered last lesson, God had entered into a special relationship with them, and this covenant of life held forth that rich blessing of life. Everything in this state was good.

Second, let us look at man's will at creation. Question 13 tells us that they were "left to the freedom of their own will." Now, this is an important expression. Remember, man's will is his power to choose. Here, it says that they had freedom of will. This means that they were not compelled, or constrained, or forced by anything outside of them. They weren't inclined within to evil. They didn't have sinful tendencies, and they certainly weren't forced to sin, as if it were against their will. This is different from you and me in some ways. No one can force us to sin. However, by the fall, as we'll see, our wills, as well as our minds, and our desires, our hearts, have undergone a change. Our will is no longer free in the same sense that Adam's will was free.

Now, it's true that even fallen men truly choose what they desire. However, since the fall, man's heart desires what is sinful and wrong. Man's will is bound to a wicked heart that desires wicked things. We see this throughout the Scripture after the fall. We can see it throughout the whole of the Bible. We can see it particularly in Genesis 6, and in Genesis 8. Now this is important, because Genesis 6 talks about men before the flood. This is after the fall, but before the flood. Whereas Genesis 8 talks about men after the flood. So Genesis 6 is fallen men before the flood. Genesis 8 is fallen men after the flood. Notice Genesis 6, verse 5 says, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart

was only evil continually.” This is far from a flattering picture of mankind. It’s a very gruesome picture of how wicked man is. It doesn’t mean that man is as bad as he could be. We can imagine that the worst of men could always have done something even more wicked and evil. It does, however, mean that fallen man is always given and inclined to what is bad. The same is expressed of men after the flood. In other words, though the flood judged the whole earth, and destroyed all but Noah and his family in the ark, it did not cause the heart of man to change. So, in Genesis 8:21, we read, “The LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Notice, before the flood and after the flood, fallen man is described as one who is wicked. The desires of his heart are only evil continually. So this is true of all men since the fall.

Remember, these Questions are dealing with Adam and Eve before the fall. And so it’s far different with Adam before sin, and with Eve before sin. Adam’s will before his sin was free from wicked inclination. His heart was not what was only devising evil continually. He was not inclined unto evil, or rebellion, or sin. So when it speaks of “the freedom of their own will,” it is telling us two things. First, it’s telling us that man before the fall had a will that could choose what is good. Second, it’s telling us that there was nothing that forced man to do what was wrong. Man’s will before the fall, at creation, was good.

Well now, third, let’s look at man’s choice at creation. What was it that man chose? Well, Genesis 3 gives us the context of this history. It opens with the first notice of something wrong. It presents to us Satan working through and in a serpent to tempt man. So we read, in Genesis 3:1, “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Well, we aren’t told much about Satan’s fall from heaven. We know he was an angel that sinned against God. However, how or when did it happen? Well, we aren’t given those specifics. But what we do know is that he now challenged Eve to disobey God. He raises a subtle question, mentioned just before, as we noted. And then he directly challenges God’s truthfulness. He says, “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.” Remember, God said, “In the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die,” and now Satan says, “God knows that you won’t die.” And this sends Eve on a way of temptation. She then, as the Bible goes on to say, “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.”

So Satan misdirected Eve. He set her on a course that seemed right and desirable. Isn’t this the way with all temptation? James mentions this in his epistle, James, chapter 1, and verse 14. He says, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Oh, that Eve had remembered the goodness of God, the faithfulness of God, the wisdom of God. But instead, she trusted Satan. She leaned unto her own understanding, and as Genesis 3, verse 6 records, “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.” Notice too that Scripture makes a point about Eve being deceived, which Paul, in 1 Timothy 2, verse 14, notes as a reason that women are not to serve as officers in the church of Christ. We must remember that Adam also took the forbidden fruit, and ate it himself. In fact, in the same verse that records that Eve took the fruit and did eat, we read, in fact, in the same sentence that Eve “gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” All of this took place with Adam nearby. And instead of Adam stepping in and protecting his wife, and counseling her, and intervening; instead, he took the fruit as well, and ate it.

What was it that Adam chose with his will? Well, he chose to sin against God by eating the forbidden fruit. It’s possible that he had many arguments and reasons that were going through his mind. Perhaps he thought, After all, it is good to look at and beautiful. And even as was notice with

reference to Eve, maybe he also thought, Well, it will give nourishment, it's good for food. Perhaps he himself was inclined to entertain what Satan was saying, that by eating this, maybe God was keeping something from us, and so if we ate it, we would get better. Or maybe he thought further, Well, now that my wife has eaten it, and she that is given to be a help for me, is holding it out to me, well, I'll eat it too. The truth is, we don't know exactly all that was going on in Adam's mind, but we do know this, whatever Adam had in his mind as a reason to eat the fruit, notice that his will chose to sin against God. Think of that. He chose to trust himself. He chose to trust his wife. He chose to trust Satan. And in doing so, he chose to distrust God. God, who had made him, God who had sustained him, God who had provided for him, God who had promised life to him. He took all that God had said, and he threw it aside, and he chose what God had forbidden. He rejected God's counsel and chose to sin against God. This is, as we'll see true of all sin, whenever we sin, we're rejecting God's counsel, and we're choosing something else.

But this sin is, in a particular way, significant and important. It was the sin that caused the covenant of life to be ruined. This is why the Catechism calls this sin "the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created." Well, soon enough we will see that unleashes a torrent of misery upon mankind. But for now, see what foolishness it was. Life was held forth by God. A lie was held forth by Satan. Our first parents rejected life to follow a lie. The human race was plunged into misery by the following of a lie. Death was chosen over life. Sin was chosen over righteousness. Satan was chosen over God. This first sin was most wicked.

What a sad lesson this is. God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions. And we will see that this is the fountainhead of all the miseries that engulf our world today. It is the beginning of an innumerable number of sins and rebellions against God. It is the mother, the womb of all other sin. It reminds us that man is not evolving into something better, because man was made good and upright, and instead of him evolving into something better, he's actually fallen from something better into something worse. Man was made good, but by sin, he has left that good estate, and has fallen into an estate of sin and misery.

Yet, we must remember that this tremendous failure of mankind by his rebellion against God will be overcome by the Son of God, who became man to save sinners. We look forward to getting to that in a few more lessons. However, the next number of lessons, we will look more closely at the effects of this fall. And remember, that's why we call this "the fall of man," because Adam and Eve were created in a good position, and a good estate with God, and yet by their sin, they fell into an estate of sin and misery. Well, as we look at what that means, and what that's brought to pass, we'll see just how miserable it is. And as we do, we pray that God would cause us to see how far we have fallen by our sin, and how desperately we need the Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ. And in doing so, may he prepare us to take hope by trusting in the Savior, even the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, the Savior of fallen sinners.