

Collected Writings of John Murray

Volume Two

Select Lectures in Systematic Theology

Lecture 7

"The Fall of Man"

Man was created upright and therefore with the character that constituted him for, and endowed him with the ability to perform, righteousness. Such a position is demanded by the fact that he was very good and was created in the divine image. If he was very good, he was such in terms of the categories that define his nature as man, and if he bore the divine image, he must have borne it in the fullest terms of the Scripture definition. At the suggestion of Satan, man disobeyed and fell into sin and under its guilt.

Satan tempted man to sin; this temptation was the *occasion* of man's fall. It was not, however, the *cause*. No external power or influence can cause a rational being to sin. The sin of Adam was a movement of defection and apostasy and transgression in Adam's heart and mind and will, and for that movement he was responsible and he alone was the agent and subject. The temptation of Satan did not constitute the sin of Adam. It was the voluntary acquiescence in that suggestion, the embrace or sympathetic entertainment of it. For that acquiescence man was solely and wholly responsible. Satan was responsible for the malicious and seductive intent of the temptation, and for its character as seduction. Satan incurred guilt thereby. But for the fall of Adam, Adam alone was responsible.

God gave to man the power of contrary choice*. Man of his own will, by no external compulsion or determination, used that power in the commission of sin. There was no necessity arising from his physical condition, nor from his moral nature, nor from the nature of his environment, why he should sin. It was a free movement within man's spirit. To use Laidlaw's words, "It arose with an external suggestion, and upon an external occasion, but it was an inward crisis."

The outward act of transgression, like all overt acts, was determined by inclination, propension, character. Since the character that produced the act cannot be different as to its moral character from the act itself, we must conclude that the inclination, disposition or character of Adam changed from holiness to unholiness. It was that change of moral character that alone can explain the overt act of Sin. The inward change was signaled or manifested by the overt act of disobedience.

This analysis can be shown on exegetical and psychological grounds. The overt act must be traced to its source in the movement of defection in man's heart and mind. And that movement of defection consisted in doubt of the divine goodness, wisdom and love, disbelief of the divine Word, coveting of the divine prerogatives. This movement of doubt, unbelief and lust issued in direct disobedience to the divine command. *"The woman*

saw...that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, and she took." In Shedd's words, "Eve looked upon the tree of knowledge not only with *innocent* but with *sinful* desire. She not only had the natural created desire for it as producing nourishing food, and as a beautiful object to the eye, but she came to have, besides this, the unnatural and *self-originated* desire for it as yielding a kind of *knowledge* which God forbade man to have. She lusted after that knowledge of good and evil which eating of the fruit would impart. . . This lusting of Eve for a knowledge that God had *prohibited* was her apostasy."

In reference to I Timothy 2:14, Shedd says, "According to St. Paul, Adam was seduced by his affection for Eve, rather than deceived by the lie of Satan. He fell with his eyes wide open to the fact that if he ate he would die."

The fall, then, was complete moral revolt against the sovereignty, supremacy, authority and will of God. In the command given to Adam there was epitomized the sovereignty, authority, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth of God. Disobedience to it was an assault upon the divine Majesty, repudiation of his sovereignty and authority, doubt of his goodness, dispute with his wisdom, contradiction of his veracity. Sin is transgression of law, and law is the expression of all that God is in the moral sphere in relation to man, as absolute and sovereign Creator and Ruler and righteous Judge. Sin is all along the line of divine perfection a contradiction of each.

In ethics the ultimate question is, "What has God commanded?" It is not, "What is the most expedient, or according to the nature of things, the good or the best?" The ultimate test of our loyalty is preparedness to obey simply and solely because God has commanded. When man fails here, it intimates the bankruptcy of moral character.

**Contrary* choice is the ability to choose between alternatives that are morally antithetical, between good and bad regarded not relatively but absolutely in terms of God's judgment. *Alternative* choice, on the other hand, is the choice between alternatives that are ethically of the same character, alternatives that are both good or both bad.

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