



# The Fall

Theology on the Go

*Jeffrey Stivason, editor*



ALLIANCE OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS



# The Fall

Theology on the Go

Edited by Jeffrey Stivason



ALLIANCE<sup>®</sup>  
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

Theology on the Go is a brief conversation on eternal truths with Jonathan Master, executive editor of [PlaceforTruth.org](http://PlaceforTruth.org), a voice of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Each program features a pastor/theologian discussing key biblical doctrines in thoughtful and accessible ways. Theology on the Go will help you better understand the finer points of theology, while showing how relevant and important theology truly is for Christians today.

© 2017 by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

This publication may be duplicated in its entirety and without edit, including this full disclaimer for personal, small group, non-commercial use. No more than 200 copies may be made. No electronic use beyond email is permitted. Any use other than those listed herein are forbidden without prior written permission from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. All rights reserved.

ARTOG002

---

# CONTENTS

---

1. Interview	1
2. The Tale of Two Trees	9
3. The Fall of Camelot	13
4. When Believers Sin	25



---

# INTERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

---

**Jonathan Master:**<sup>2</sup> Our guest today is Dr. Nick Needham, Church History tutor at Highland Theological College in Scotland and pastor of Inverness Reformed Baptist Church. He's author of a general series on church history, which I would highly recommend. It is entitled *2000 Years of Christ's Power*. He's someone who is interesting to talk to on almost every subject and today we're going to talk to him about The Fall.

We'll begin with this: what do theologians mean when they say that human beings are fallen creatures? What does that refer to?

**Nick Needham:**<sup>3</sup> Well it depends on which theologian, I suppose. If we're talking about our own tradition, the Reformed tradition, it has a two-fold reference. Fallen first of all has a historical reference, in that we're partakers of this event, the Fall, which defines human nature and history. It also has an ontological reference to our own natural present condition, that is, that we are not as we were created or intended to be. Something has gone wrong with human nature and then that plays out in terms of our understanding of sin, depravity, and of the need for redemption.

**JM:** Then what were the effects of the Fall?

**NN:** Wow. It affected every aspect of human nature. Nothing in us works properly anymore. Our intellect does not function as it should. Our emotions don't function as they should. Our will doesn't function as it should. Our imagination doesn't function as it should. At the root of all that malfunctioning is a wrong relationship with God. In our heart of hearts we're governed by antipathy towards the Creator. That spills out into every aspect of our being.

**JM:** Now when you say that all those aspects of us don't work properly, does that mean that we're incapable of thinking good thoughts, incapable of feeling in proper ways?

**NN:** Well again one has to define one's terms. We're incapable of thinking or willing spiritually good things. I think our confessions make that distinction. Nothing we think, nothing we feel, nothing we will is going to be spiritually right towards God unless we're first of all regenerated. But that doesn't mean that on other levels we're incapable of good thoughts, feelings, and actions. Jesus talks about we who are evil yet know how to give good gifts to our children in the Sermon on the Mount. At a purely natural level in terms of how we function in relation to other human beings, we're capable of being good parents, good family members, good friends, good citizens, that kind of thing, but unfortunately all of that is perfectly consistent with being rebels against God.

**JM:** Now I want to ask a historical question here. Sometimes Augustine is cited as the theologian who changed the way the Church (or at least the Western Church) viewed the Fall. Do you think that's accurate? Then if so, in what ways did he do this?

**NN:** Difficult and complex question to answer. I personally think that the difference between Western Augustinian and Patristic Eastern understandings of the Fall are probably overplayed, particularly in present-day scholarship. What Augustine did was systematize various disparate strands of thought about the Fall in a way they hadn't been systematized before; he created a more unified concept of the Fall.

In the context of the Pelagian controversy, he also teased out more fully, more clearly, and probably more radically just what it meant to say that our nature is fallen. But you certainly find things in pre-Augustinian theologians that seem very much like Augustine. Ambrose of Milan once said, "In Adam I fell. In Adam I was cast out of paradise. In Adam I died. How shall the Lord call me back unless he finds me in Adam? So that as I am liable to guilt in owing debt in him, so knowing Christ I am justified."



Now if I just quoted that to somebody out of the blue and said, "Who said that?" they might say, "That's Augustine." Well it's not, it's Ambrose of Milan. Although Augustine systematized and, in a way, intensified the Western understanding of the Fall, that doesn't mean there was nothing there before. He's building on foundations that are certainly found in Ambrose and in others.

JM: That's helpful. Now in terms of today, how does recognizing the effects of the Fall in the way that you've articulated influence our expectations regarding social change or the government or even something like evangelism?

NN: Yes, yes. Well, if one follows Augustine, as I tend to do on this, he sets out in his great treatise, *City of God*, a fairly pessimistic view of what we can expect of human society and human culture. It's what you might call a "Realpolitik" view. But we have to recognize that great human civilizations, cultures, and empires are really doing in a large scale what a pirate ship does in a small scale.

If you go to a pirate ship, it's got its own social hierarchy, its own order, its own values, but it's a pirate ship. It's not doing anything very good and you can't expect much in the way of nobility to come out of a pirate ship. Augustine says, "Well, what a pirate does in a small scale, that's what Alexander the Great was doing on a large scale." We have to recognize that the societies we live in, the states we live in, are themselves partakers of the Fall. In other words the Fall doesn't just affect the individual, it affects the society.

I'm not just fallen as a particular human being; I live in a fallen society. Sin governs me. Sin governs my society. We have to be cold-bloodedly realistic about not only the nature of the individual but also the nature of society. In England we have a hymn that's quite popular. I mean I don't particularly like it because I think it's romantic. The hymn talks about "building Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land". Well, you know we'll never do that. Jerusalem is in heaven. It's not on earth.

I think if we take an Augustinian view, if I could paraphrase the hymn a little bit, the most we can do is hope to sabotage the building of

Babylon, but we'll never actually get around to building Jerusalem in a social, political, and cultural sense. That's how I think it should impact our understanding of culture and society.

When it comes to evangelism – I actually preached on this the other Sunday. The gist of my sermon was that if you leave out of the equation God's prevenient and effectual grace, we can expect nothing as a result of our evangelism. Absolutely nothing. We can preach as eloquently as we like. We can produce the most brilliant apologetics, and all the rest of it, and it will have no effect whatsoever, unless grace enables a response.

That ought to deliver us from human self-confidence when we participate in any kind of evangelistic effort. Our confidence is in God. We have faith in God not faith in human nature. I think that in turn ought to deliver us from thinking that if only we can come up with some particular kind of evangelism, some particular method, it's bound to produce results. Well it isn't.

That's the kind of thinking that was introduced into evangelicalism by Charles Finney. "When you have the right method then you get guaranteed results." Well you don't. You can have all the right methods and it will produce no results at all. That's why the grace of God is at work. What Paul says in 1 Corinthians about "one man plants and another man waters but God gives the increase." The increase comes only from the grace of God.

**JM:** What about within the Church? If we're talking now about people whose eyes God has opened and they are alive in Christ – How does your doctrine of the Fall affect perhaps your expectations or your doctrine of the Church? Because we are still fallen creatures even though we're Christians.

**NN:** Well that's it. What we have to do there is not just look at our doctrine of the Fall but our understanding of the impact of salvation. In theory, I suppose, God might have arranged things in such a way that when we receive salvation in Christ, we're immediately delivered from all the effects of the Fall. But that doesn't happen. We are partially delivered from the effects of the Fall here in this present

life. We have the first fruits of our salvation, the first installment, the down payment, but in such a way that the end tail of the Fall is still with us even as Christians. Therefore that's why we have the virtue of hope, looking ahead to the fullness of our salvation when Christ returns.

If we coordinate those two things – our understanding of the Fall and our understanding of the impact of salvation in this present life – then yes even in the Church we're still dealing with fallen people. We have the first fruits of our salvation but we have to pray everyday, "Forgive us debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil one."

Again if I can go back to Augustine, he said that the Church is like a hospital for sick sinners who are recovering from their illness. It's not a society of spiritual supermen or superwomen. Again, as I was saying earlier, we must have a realistic attitude towards what we can expect from society at large, but we also must have a realistic attitude of what we can expect of the Church. In a sense the Church itself is still a partaker of the Fall. We mustn't have rosy tinted, starry-eyed expectations of what Christians are supposed to be. I would think that 10 weeks' exposure to real Church ought to knock that out of you.

**JM:** Realistic expectations both in the society at large and in the Church by virtue of our doctrine of the Fall.

**JM:** Realistic but not too drastically dark and overly pessimistic.

**JM:** Right. One last question, and it relates to debates that are going on today relating to the biblical account of the Fall. In your mind as you understand it, it is necessary to believe in the historicity of the biblical accounts of Adam and Eve in order to have a robust and fully biblical doctrine of the Fall?

**NN:** Yes. We do have to hold to the historicity of Adam as the covenant or federal head of the human race. I think our inheritance of the covenant theology is actually very helpful at that point. There are certain parameters that we can't step outside of and I think one

of those is holding to the federal headship of Adam. I would say that for a number of reasons. I think, first of all, if we deny the historicity of Adam then that takes us way beyond the way we interpret Genesis Chapter 3.

Adam is quite a pervasive figure in the theology of the scriptures, and not just the Old Testament. If I could give a couple of examples, the obvious one is Romans Chapter 5, where Fall and Redemption are paralleled with each other. Adam and Christ. The principal of federal headship or representative headship applied in both cases and Christ is presented as the new Adam. Now that entire structure collapses if you don't have a historical Adam.

You also have 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 where you find similar theologizing about the Adam-Christ relationship: "As in Adam all died, so in Christ all ought to be made alive." "The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." And so on and so forth.

We also have another not quite so theological but more historical references. For example the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel is traced right back to Adam. You've got, "...the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." You've got Adam's sonship in relation to God there at the root of Jesus' Sonship in relation to God, not that Jesus is the Son of God in the same sense as Adam but there's a parallel. And you've got other historical references almost in passing. To me, the fact that they're given in passing lends strength to them because then it's, "Why don't we just take them for granted?" We've got Jude verse 14, "Enoch the servant from Adam, prophesized about these men also."

Then there's 1 Timothy 2, which says that "Adam was not deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and fell into the transgression," that lies at the root of the teaching Paul that gives about the relative roles of man and woman in the life of the Church. At that level I don't think we can do without Adam.

Then there's also another reason why we can't do without Adam: how do we conceptualize the Fall if there's no Adam? In the Bible,

the Fall of the human race is bound back in the Fall of its covenant head. Take away the fall of the covenant head then how are we conceptualizing a fall? When did this fall take place? How did it take place?

At least in the Bible we're given a fairly clear, if ultimately mysterious, explanation of the nature of the Fall in the sense that the whole of humanity is summed up in Adam, the covenant head. The covenant head Falls, human race Falls along with its head. Take away historical Adam and you are throwing the whole doctrine of the Fall up in the air. How did it happen? When did it happen?

**JM:** I think that's very compelling. That's very helpful. Well, we'll end with this, and thank you very much Dr. Needham for your time.



---

# THE TALE OF TWO TREES

---

JEFFREY STIVASON<sup>4</sup>

When Adam stood in the Garden of Eden before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he was confronted with the absolute authority of God. The command from God could not have been clearer, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16b-17). But Adam failed to heed God's precept. He did not lead his wife and she led him to eat from the forbidden tree. He disobeyed the absolute authority of God and became a rebel. What is more, as his posterity we followed him in his revolt. We, like him, are guilty of and polluted by sin.

Scripture describes our condition as being dead in transgression (Ephesians 2:1). Furthermore, Paul goes on to say that the only way to escape this death is by an act of resurrection. If God does not make us alive we remain united to Adam in death. We share in his guilt. And we remain unable to please God. It's that simple.

Let me give you two illustrations of what it looks like to be dead in transgression. Roger Waters, one time bassist for the musical group Pink Floyd, gave an interview in 1992 and told this story, "In a way, grammar schools were still being run on pre-war lines, where you... did as you were told and kept your mouth shut, and we weren't prepared for any of that.... I remember one night about 10 of us went out, because we had decided that one guy - the man in charge of gardening - needed a lesson. He had one particular tree of Golden Delicious apples that was his pride and joy, which he would protect at all costs. We went into the orchard with stepladders and ate every single apple on the tree without removing any. So the next morning

was just wonderful; we were terribly tired but filled with a real sense of achievement." Did you hear – or should I say – read that? Water's act of rebellion gave him a real sense of achievement! That is what it is like to be dead in sin.

The second illustration is a familiar one. It comes from Augustine's Confessions. By his own admission, Augustine was quite the rebel. And he fell in with a group that encouraged his exploits. He was the kind of youth that continued to press the envelope in order to impress his friends. One night he and his cohorts stole the fruit off a pear tree near Augustine's home. They didn't even eat the fruit. In fact, Augustine had better fruit at home. In the end, they threw their booty to the pigs. Listen to how Augustine describes his thievery, "Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden... [I] was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error – not that for which I erred but the error itself." Augustine, before Waters, found that he too was a son of Adam.

But the difference between these two men is not found in the retelling of their act of rebellion. I have chosen these men because of the similarities in their story. No, the difference is found in their later reflections. Waters looked back on his act with a sense of achievement. It was still satisfying to him but not so for Augustine. He looked back on the act and said, "Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart – which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there..." And again, "A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself." Augustine saw his rebellious act as falling further away from the creator. He understood that he was guilty and polluted and unable to please God.

What was the difference? How was it that Augustine came to see his actions as rebellion rather than as an act of achievement?

The answer is simple. The Holy Spirit had brought life to a once spiritually dead Augustine and in so doing the Spirit brought his gaze to rest upon another tree – the tree upon which Christ was crucified.



Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree...' (Galatians 3:13). In looking upon Christ, Augustine realized that his sins deserved the wrath and curse of God. He understood that in Adam he stood guilty and because of sin's pollution he was unable to satisfy the righteous requirements of the living God. He no longer loved his sin. How could he? He now saw his Savior hanged on the tree bearing the curse for even the smallest of his sins. How could he relish his sin as achievements? How could he do anything but weep and behold the One who died for him?

But perhaps you too have seen this tree with this Man upon it. Perhaps in looking upon Him you understand the odiousness of your sins. You understand that it should have been you bearing the curse for your sins! Yes, you understand but you are saying, "How can it be that God would accept His life for mine?" Dear friend, this is the gracious plan of God. The Scriptures tell us that God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). It is in Christ that we behold the mercy of God extended to us. It is through the obedience of Christ, the second Adam that we partake of the life of which Adam the first failed to secure by his obedience. Oh sinner, be neither despondent nor satisfied in your sin but rather look to the tree upon which the Prince of life died and there through faith and repentance find the blood that will cleanse the guilt and wash away the pollution.



---

# THE FALL OF CAMELOT

---

*MICHAEL ROBERTS<sup>5</sup>*

Try to think about what it must have been like to live before the Fall. Of course that is impossible to do because all of our experience has been one of an acute sense of corruption, depravity, evil, and loss. We do not know anything else. We simply cannot relate to a world that is without these things, a world that is not filled with heartache, frustration, suffering, pain, hatred, turmoil, and disintegration. In a word, we have no idea what it is to live without the presence of sin.

The opening song in the musical *Camelot*, nevertheless, gives us an idea—at least in terms of the weather—of what an ideal world would be like. King Arthur sings:

It's true! It's true! The crown has made it clear.  
 The climate must be perfect all the year.  
 A law was made a distant moon ago here:  
 July and August cannot be too hot.  
 And there's a legal limit to the snow here/In Camelot.  
 The winter is forbidden till December  
 And exits March the second on the dot.  
 By order, summer lingers through September/In Camelot.  
 Camelot! Camelot!  
 I know it sounds a bit bizarre,/But in Camelot, Camelot  
 That's how conditions are.  
 The rain may never fall till after sundown.  
 By eight, the morning fog must disappear.  
 In short, there's simply not/A more congenial spot  
 For happily-ever-aftering than here  
 In Camelot.

Camelot was pictured as a kind of Utopia, a sort of second Eden, over which King Arthur and his wife, Guinevere, would reign in perpetual peace and harmony throughout the realm. It was to be a model for what life could be like.

But, sadly, it did not remain that way. The affair between Guinevere and Sir Lancelot, and the wars that followed, destroyed the kingdom. King Arthur's hopes and aspirations were shattered. Now, much later, all the sad monarch could do was to sing the glories of what used to be, Camelot now reduced to a distant memory.

In Eden, it was not just that the weather was perfect; everything there was as it should be. There were no flaws or defects. There was no devastation. There was no strife. There was no violence. There was no death. Seven times in Genesis 1 we are told what God thought of the world He had made. Six times He looks back on what He had done, and declares it to be good. Then at the end of His creative work, He takes in all that He has made, together, as a created whole, and describes it as very good. And at the pinnacle of creation was man, fashioned as male and female in the image of God. They were sinless people, always doing what was right, and consequently enjoying the very fellowship of God Himself in the garden He had given to them.

Prior to this summary of approval, God had given two commands to Adam and Eve, which were both positive in nature. First, they were to multiply and fill the earth. Second, they were to rule over the rest of creation. These were both to be done in the good and holy manner that characterized life in God's garden.

There was a third command, given when God gave Adam a job, that of working and keeping the garden. This third command was different from the first two. It carried with it an imperative in the negative. There was one thing in the garden they could not have. Thus it became a matter of obedience or disobedience. It was only one rule, and seemingly easy to keep, given all the fruit trees available. But it proclaimed God's total sovereignty over His garden: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). Well you know how the story ends. Adam and Eve broke the rule.

Some have looked at this story of the Fall and concluded that it sounds too fanciful to be true, that it is meant to be understood figuratively or symbolically for the general human situation. But if the Fall is not a historical fact, then we have no biblical explanation for how the world got to be the way it is. There is no explanation for how we got from Genesis 1 to Genesis 4, from the goodness of creation to murder. In addition, the New Testament treats Genesis 3 as historical, and for the purpose of teaching about salvation. The reason that Adam and Christ can be compared as they are is because both are real people who lived. If Adam is only a symbol, but Jesus is not, then Paul's careful argument in Romans 5 clearly breaks down. There are massive implications stemming from what we believe about the historicity of Genesis' first three chapters— involving, among other things, salvation, the trustworthiness of God, and even the nature of divine revelation itself.

## THE SERPENT IN THE GARDEN

The account of the Fall, in Genesis 3, begins in a way that strikes us as very unfamiliar. Living post-Fall as we all do, I have to say that the idea of a snake coming up and engaging me in conversation absolutely freaks me out. What an utterly creepy prospect! No one could possibly be that starving for discussion. But of course, at this point in the story, there is no sin in the world, and so there is nothing here to indicate that Eve is at all disturbed by any of this. This chapter, marked by such tragedy, begins with the introduction of this serpent that was responsible for all of it: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?' " The first half of v. 1 says that the serpent was crafty, and the question he posed to Eve proved just how crafty he really was (and is). He began his conversation with Eve by misquoting God's instruction, and then making God sound unreasonable for giving such an

unfair demand. But there is even more to it than this. The serpent is attacking not only God's words, but also His character, which produces those words. He is trying to cast doubt in Eve's mind over the most basic of realities: whether or not God is good.

Eve recognizes that the serpent has it wrong, and so she tries to set the record straight in vv. 2-3: "And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die".'" How did she do in remembering God's words? Was it the right response? Certainly, she got the gist of the command correct, but there were some differences between God's words to them and now her words to the serpent.

For one thing, she leaves out the name of the forbidden tree. For another, she responds that they can eat of the fruit of the trees, but omits that she and Adam may eat of "all" except just this one. She also leaves out both uses of "surely" in 2:16. God told them they may surely eat of every tree of the garden. In His grace God gives the invitation and welcome to freely eat from all of these. But if they eat from the one tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then God said, "You shall surely die." The word "surely" is an intensifier; here it strengthens or underscores both the freedom to eat of all the trees, as well as the penalty for disobedience in taking from the one tree that is denied them.

There is one other part of Eve's answer that is noteworthy. She leaves out a number of elements from God's instruction, but she also adds something to her reply. Concerning the forbidden tree, she told the serpent that God had said they were not even to touch it. But God did not say this. It seems that in this addition and in what Eve leaves out, already the serpent's plan is starting to work. This one tree becomes big in Eve's mind. There is now something about this tree that gets her attention more than all the others. They had perhaps hundreds of trees they could eat from. Only one was off-limits. Yet in the prohibiting of this one tree, it seems that its fruit appeared bigger and juicier and best of all the others they could have. You get the idea that in Eve's mind, God is not as good as she thought He

was. Like the ring in Tolkien's trilogy, this tree is beginning to take hold of Eve, as it had not before.

In vv. 4-5 the serpent decides to go for the jugular by picking up on the last thing Eve said: "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" Notice that the serpent does not waste any time about what God did or did not say, or about how well or poorly Eve is remembering God's instruction. He directly denies God's word: God said you will die, but, in fact, you will not. More than that, if you eat of this one tree you will become like God. The serpent gives the impression that God is not so good after all. "If God is so good, why would he try to keep something like this from us?" "Wouldn't it be wonderful to know what God knows?" "Why can't we be like God? And who does God think He is to try to prevent us from reaching our potential?" One wonders if some of these ideas are starting to float around in Eve's mind.

The serpent presents himself as another authority in the garden. He said if you eat of the fruit of this one tree, you will become like God. But God said if you eat of it you will surely die. Same tree, but two different results issue from it. Who is telling the truth? Who should Eve believe? She decides it would be a good idea to let the tree decide for her.

## EVE'S TESTS

Eve gives the tree an examination, beginning in v. 6: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." The first test she gave to the tree was concerning its nutritional value. Did it look like the other fruit she had seen and eaten before? She put a very practical test to it, and it passed! It did apparently look like other fruit that could be trusted to satisfy her. So far so good. While it is true that God said it would result in death, as far as Eve could tell it looked more like it was

capable of sustaining life rather than ending it. Maybe this serpent knows what he is talking about.

The second test was an aesthetic one. It might be good for good, but how does it look? Even if the value of the fruit is the same, most people want their fruit to look the way it does in a painting. Eve looked at this fruit—whatever it was—and she found it to be “a delight to the eyes.” It looked the way fruit in a sinless world is supposed to look. There was everything about its appearance that told Eve there was no good reason in the world why she should not have it. Maybe by this time the fruit even began to look like something Eve thought she could not get along without. At any rate, the tree passed this second test.

The third test was one of intelligence. Could it make one wise? Could it enable one to know things one did not know before, things that only God knew? Of course there is nothing wrong with learning new things and becoming wiser. We should be doing that. They are assets to be pursued rather than liabilities to be avoided. But this pursuit was treading into God’s territory. Not only is there subject matter about which we should remain ignorant; but in this case, such offers of wisdom were to be turned down because at stake was obedience or disobedience to God Himself. Wisdom was promised by the serpent, when in reality to eat of it was foolishness. Fulfillment was promised, but death and ruin, in all of its forms, would be the end result.

But Eve did not process these things in her decision. She did not start with God and his word, but with the serpent and his word. There was nothing in the appearance of this fruit that proved to her it could impart wisdom. We are not told that it looked any different from the other fruit in the garden. When it passed her third test, it was simply because she believed that the serpent was telling her the truth and that God was not. The first two tests, then, became the set-up questions for the tree’s supposed ability to grant her a change in her character and thus in her relationship to God. She was no longer content to remain submissive and dependent upon God. She wanted God as an equal, not as an overlord.



Once this tree had passed these three tests, she did the only thing she could. Given the means she had chosen to use to decide that this tree was worth her attention, eating of it became the most logical move in the world. But the problem was she used the wrong methods. She asked of it the wrong questions. Had she begun and ended with God, it would have been a question of obedience or disobedience. But from the very beginning of this conversation, the serpent had wanted to divert her attention away from those categories. And he succeeded. The tree passed her examination, and so what the serpent said must be right. So she ate of its fruit, and also gave some to Adam.

One gets the sense that Adam was not here during this whole episode. Not only is Adam silent during this conversation between Eve and the serpent, but Scripture makes a distinction in guilt between them. Paul writes in I Timothy 2:13-14: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." Of course Adam also became a sinner. Paul is not denying that. But they are not at fault for the same reason. It seems that Eve broke the law of God because the serpent deceived her. She was tricked; she was led astray by a smooth and crafty enemy. As the story unfolds in Genesis, it seems that Eve ate and fell into sin first, by the serpent's deception. Adam, following her, became a transgressor as well, but not because he was deceived by the serpent. Instead, he ate of the forbidden fruit in direct disobedience to God because he believed what Eve said and he wanted to enjoy its fruit. Like Eve, he too wanted to become like God.

The tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Presumably Adam and Eve knew something of evil in an intellectual way. Now, they come to know it experientially. If they had not eaten of this one tree, good is all they would have known in their experience. Now they come to experience both. Good was not gone. It did not disappear. But now evil will exist alongside of it; indeed, we can perhaps even say that evil will overshadow it. Evil will appear larger just as that one tree seemed larger than all the other ones that brought blessing.

## A PRICE TO PAY

Sin brings consequences. It was true for Adam and Eve, and because of them it is also true for us. We all painfully know that. In their case, what did their punishment look like? The first part is that their holy innocence is gone. In response they start building a wardrobe. There is a sense of shame that they never knew before, not only between each other but also toward God.

Verse 8 continues the story: "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." They had not tried to avoid God before. Apparently they always sought God out when they heard Him coming. But not this time. Not only did their sin bring shame, but now, because of this, for the first time they were afraid of God. Their perfect fellowship with God was ruined.

They had been warned that the wages of sin is death. Now they knew what that felt like. In a tragic way, part of what the serpent said was true. They did come to know things they had not known before. But it was not at all to their advantage as the serpent said it was. It was not at all for their good.

God of course knows everything; He knows perfectly well what happened. But now, in a kind of cross-examination, He finds out from Adam and Eve themselves what He already knows. He knows their sin, just as He knows ours too. God said to Adam and Eve, the pinnacle of his whole creation: "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat" (v. 11b)? Note their defense, beginning in v. 12. It is not very good, but it is also no worse than the bad excuses we make for the wrong we do: "The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"

They did everything they could to escape from the awful reality they had brought upon themselves. They tried to cover up their sin (literally) with fig leaves. They tried to hide from God. They tried to

shift the blame from themselves to someone else. Adam blames God for giving him such a poor wife. There is no way that could have gone over well with Eve, creating what must have been a very bad case of marital tension that made for a very unpleasant walk home. Eve blames the serpent for his role in all this. One wonders, though, if this was an indirect criticism of God for letting such a destructive creature into the garden in the first place. Covering up their sin. Hiding from God. Shifting blame. People have been doing the same things about their sin ever since. After all, the apple does not fall very far from the tree.

That brings divine reckoning on God's creation. He is going to issue a series of three pronouncements. The first one is on the serpent. While some of it is against the creature itself for serving as an accomplice in the fall of Adam and Eve, the main part is against Satan. God declares in v. 15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." We will come back to this at the end, but for now notice that there is injected into the created order a spiritual war. There is now an enmity—a strife, an antagonism—between the godly and the ungodly. And Satan is going to spend the rest of history striking at God's people, especially at that unique seed of the woman who will go on to crush Satan's head.

As Adam and Eve hear this, imagine what is going through their minds. They probably know their turn is next. What is going to be their punishment? God had said it would be death, but what would that be like? The serpent's punishment was pretty severe. How would God's punishment fit their crime?

The second pronouncement is against Eve: "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'" (v. 16). The first part is easy to understand; the second part may not be so obvious. The woman's desire for her husband, as Dr. Philip Ryken explains, refers to her interest in gaining control over him. Although she wants this kind of authority, in response to

this, the man will rule the woman. Here, the word “rule” is not the word for servant leadership. Instead, it suggests that the man will try to dominate, to dictate, and to defeat the woman’s will in order to get his own way. This explains a lot about the battle of the sexes—in the home, in society, and even in the Church. So women try to manipulate and control; men try to dominate and subjugate. Both attitudes, as Dr. Ryken concludes, are accursed.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to the third pronouncement of judgment, beginning in v. 17: “And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’” Adam is now destined to spend all of his life laboring and toiling to earn his living. He still has the same job God gave before the Fall, but now it is going to be marked by trouble, hardship, and frustration. And at the end of all this difficulty, what is Adam’s reward? What does his retirement package look like? Death. He dies and goes right back into that same ground that owned him all his life.

What happened to Adam and Eve, and the rest of creation, because of their sin? Let’s recap the tragic results. Their holy innocence was lost, replaced by a wretched shame and fear. Their relationship to one another disintegrates. There is strife, tension, and competition. Women grasp for authority and men rule with an iron fist. Life becomes hard. There is pain in childbirth for the woman, and for the man work becomes frustrating and unfulfilling. Creation also changes. Serpents are now reduced to crawling on their belly. Death now has the final word, and it touches everything. Worst of all this, Adam and Eve’s fellowship with God is ruined. They are driven out of their garden home, left as it were to struggle in the undeveloped wilderness.

## TILL ONE GREATER THAN MAN

We come back now to God's judgment against the serpent, specifically to the promise that is contained in it. The English poet John Milton captured the meaning of Genesis 3 as well as anyone at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

In the midst of the worst story in the world we find a glimmer of hope from the gracious God who will not give His creation over to death. He will not allow the serpent in the garden to have the last word. It is not Satan's garden; it is God's garden. And though He comes in righteous judgment, still in that judgment He comes in mercy and restoration. In Genesis 3, the first man, as Milton describes him, disobeyed and from there brought death and every other woe into the world. However, Milton also writes of a greater Man who is coming; and when He comes He will restore us and gain for us the "blissful seat" of Eden once again.

Here in v. 15 is what theologians call the protoevangelium—the first announcement of the gospel. Not only will there be strife between the serpent and Eve, and between her godly and ungodly offspring; but the battle will culminate between Satan himself and the promised offspring of Eve who is both God and man. In His life and in His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ will both strive with and defeat the spiritual forces of sin and death. And though Jesus' death appeared to be the triumph of Satan and the failure of the prophecy from Genesis 3:15, His subsequent resurrection demonstrated with power that Satan's scheme in the garden will one day be undone.

We said above that Genesis 3 is the worst story in the world. But found in this story, in v. 15, is the promise that for all who come to God through Jesus Christ, this story can have a happy ending. The spiritual death and ruin that Adam has caused can be reversed for all

who will repent of their sins and trust in Christ— this seed of the woman once promised in Genesis, and now revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Everyone, apart from Christ, carries Adam's DNA of death. There is nothing anyone can do on their own to undo its deadly effects. But this Second and Last Adam has come to complete the work of obedience that the first Adam failed to do. And as Milton expressed it, all those who by the grace of God are transferred from being in Adam to being in Christ will eventually find themselves to be truly restored, having regained, through the merits of Christ, the blissful seat once again, and this time forevermore.

---

## WHEN BELIEVERS SIN

---

*JAMES BOICE<sup>7</sup>*

*2 SAMUEL 11-19*

Some time ago, in a question-and-answer period, someone asked, "Dr. Boice, is it possible for a Christian to commit murder?"

I suppose the questioner held the view that there should always be a basic minimum of sanctification in a Christian that prohibits such things. But I answered as I always answer such questions, saying, "Yes, a Christian can certainly do that."

A Christian can murder, steal, commit adultery, run off and leave his family, and allow his life to be filled with such bitterness that he is a terror to all around him. In general, a Christian can make a total wreck of his life. The Bible itself suggests this when it warns Christians against such sins.

We must not think, of course, that God will permit sin in the life of a Christian to go undisciplined. And we must acknowledge that there is generally a point in our lives beyond which He will not let us go. We all sin, in big ways or little ways. We taste its consequences. Sin turns ugly. Pleasures turn to dust in our mouths.

But this happens so that we will come to the point—as God intends—when we will yearn for the joy we once knew, and will turn to Him for His perfect forgiveness and cleansing.

We come now come to an incident in the life of King David in which this greatest of all Israel's kings, the one who was called "a man after God's own heart," sinned by committing adultery and then compounded that sin by an act of murder. It is a sad and solemn record. But we turn to it humbly in order that we might learn

something of the depth of our own human depravity and that we might learn how to turn to God for cleansing.

## THE SIN OF KING DAVID

The Bible says that in the time of the year when kings went forth to battle, that is, in the spring after the enforced inactivity of winter, David sent Joab and the troops of Israel out against the Ammonites. "But David," we are told, "tarried still at Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 11:1). It is an ominous "but" for it indicates the disapproval by the Lord of David's action. During this period, David saw Bathsheba bathing on a roof nearby. He sent messengers to find out who she was. They brought back word: "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite?" (verse 3).

That should have been the end of the matter for David; Bathsheba was another man's wife. But instead, he took her to himself and later learned that she had conceived a child by him. We can imagine that at this point David's blood ran hot and cold. But instead of confessing his sin, he set out upon a course that greatly compounded it.

First, he invited Uriah home from the battle on the pretext of learning about it, hoping that the man would spend a few nights at home with his wife so that he could be identified as the father of the child. However, Uriah was more conscious of his duty than King David was of his. He would not go home but said, "The Ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord, Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields. Shall I, then, go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing" (verse 11).

Uriah refused to go home, even when David made him drunk. Therefore, David sent a note to Joab by the hand of Uriah saying that Uriah was to be placed in a position in the battle where the fighting was hottest, abandoned, and left to be killed.

Joab must have wondered how David, the man who could write such beautiful, spiritual poetry and who would not act against King Saul, could command such a murder. For murder it was. Nevertheless,



he did as David commanded. Uriah died. David breathed a sigh of relief and satisfaction. Yet we read: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (verse 27).

## REPENTENCE

Matthew Henry, the well-known Bible expositor, once said, "Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer his people to lie still in it." This is quite true. Thus, instead of abandoning David, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him with his sin. Because of this David repented.

Nathan had said, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7).

And David replied, "I have sinned against the Lord" (verse 13). On the basis of that confession, God forgave David's sin— although he still had to suffer many of the consequences of it—and restored him to complete fellowship.

But how can a righteous God restore to fellowship a man who has committed adultery and then murdered an innocent man? The answer to that question lies in a great psalm that David wrote as the result of this incident in his life. It is important. For if we understand this psalm, we can understand not only how God could forgive King David but also how God can forgive us, no matter how great or small our sins may be.

Psalm 51 begins, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (verse 1). Notice how many times this single verse speaks of God's mercies. It says, "Have mercy upon me... according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." Three times! Thus, when David turned again to God in the aftermath of his sin, the first thing he asserts is his confidence in God's mercy.

Now and then, as I speak to people who do not know the Lord, someone will say that he only wants justice from God. And I say, woe to that person. The man who wants only justice from God will

receive hell and spiritual death, for death is the just punishment for sin (Romans 6:23). How wonderful to know that instead of coming to God on the basis of His justice, we can come on the basis of His mercy, the way David came.

## CONFESSION OF SIN

The basis of forgiveness of sin, then, lies in God's mercy. But this is only the first of several principles that we must apply in our search for forgiveness.

The second is that the condition for forgiveness of sin lies in our confession of it. As soon as David recalled God's mercy, he immediately confessed his sin: "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psalm 51:3, 4).

David laid his sin before the Lord and confessed it utterly. This is the significance of verse four: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Many people have observed that this was not entirely true. David had sinned against Bathsheba, as well as with her. He had sinned against Uriah, her husband. He had sinned against the armies of Israel, who lost a battle during the time of David's sin. He had sinned against the nation. Above all, however, he had sinned against God, and in his own mind this greatly overshadowed the other aspects of his offense.

How great a difference there would be in your life and mine if we would only see our sin for what it is in God's sight and confess it openly.

---

# NOTES

---

1 The original interview may be found online at [www.placefortruth.org/content/theology-go-fall](http://www.placefortruth.org/content/theology-go-fall)).

2 Jonathan Master (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of theology and dean of the School of Divinity at Cairn University. He is also director of Cairn's Center for University Studies. Dr. Master serves as executive editor of Place for Truth and host of the podcast Theology on the Go.

3 Nick Needham is tutor of Church History at Highland Theological College in Scotland and pastor of Inverness Reformed Baptist Church. He is author of a series of books on Church history entitled *2,000 Years of Christ's Power*.

4 Jeffrey Stivason (Ph.D. Westminster Theological Seminary) is the pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Gibsonia, PA, and editor at Place for Truth. He has been serving the Lord as a minister of the Gospel since 1995 and has planted two churches during that time.

5 Michael Roberts (DTh, University of South Africa) is the Alliance editor of ThinkandActBiblically.org .

6 Philip Ryken, *Discovering God in Stories from the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1999), 150.

7 James Boice (1938-2000) was the pastor of Philadelphia's historic Tenth Presbyterian Church (1968-2000). He founded the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in 1994. He served as an assistant editor of Christianity Today in Washington, D.C., from 1966-1968, and as editor of Eternity from 1985-1989. James Boice's Bible teaching continues on The Bible Study Hour radio and Internet program, preparing you to think and act biblically.



## MEDIA

**The Bible Study Hour** *Preparing you to think and act biblically.*  
Clear biblical preaching that serves as both a model to pastors  
and a stabilizing source of biblical truth for lay people featuring  
James Boice. [TheBibleStudyHour.org](http://TheBibleStudyHour.org)



**Every Last Word** *Teaching the whole Bible to change your whole life.*  
A rich diet of expository preaching to help people grow and  
apply God's Word to everyday life with pastor, author, Christian  
college president Philip Ryken. [EveryLastWord.org](http://EveryLastWord.org)

**Mortification of Spin** *A casual conversation about things that count.*  
Culturally relevant and often controversial topics  
taken on in funny, thoughtful, and unpredictable ways  
with Carl Trueman, Todd Pruitt, and Aimee Byrd.  
[MortificationofSpin.org](http://MortificationofSpin.org)



**No Falling Word** *Instilling the Scriptures in an urban culture.*  
Proclaiming and applying the Gospel from the center of one of America's largest  
cities, hosted by Liam Goligher. [NoFallingWord.org](http://NoFallingWord.org)



**Theology on the Go** *A brief conversation about an eternal truth.*  
Pastors and theologians join Jonathan Master to discuss weighty  
topics in a thoughtful and accessible way showing how theology is  
relevant today. [TheologyontheGo.org](http://TheologyontheGo.org)

**Dr. Barnhouse & the Bible** *Making God's Word plain.*  
Scholarly exposition of God's Word that is concise and  
captivating, with one of the most widely acclaimed American  
preachers for half a century, Donald Barnhouse. [DrBarnhouse.org](http://DrBarnhouse.org)



---

The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals is a coalition of pastors, scholars, and  
churchmen who hold the historic creeds and confessions of the Reformed faith  
and who proclaim biblical doctrine in order to foster a  
Reformed awakening in today's Church.

## PUBLISHING



**reformation21** *Encouraging biblical thinking, living, worship, ministry, and constructive cultural engagement.* Providing an authoritative, Reformed perspective on historic matters and current issues to inform, inspire, and challenge Christians. [reformation21.org](http://reformation21.org)

**Place for Truth** *Exploring the depths of what we believe.* Thoughtful yet accessible biblical, systematic, and practical theology, as well as church history exploring the importance and relevancy of what we believe. [PlaceforTruth.org](http://PlaceforTruth.org)



**CT** **The Christward Collective** *Where doctrine and life meet.* Like Calvin, these younger contributors wed theological study to an all-in-life experiential godliness, applying biblical truth to a very contemporary culture. [ChristwardCollective.org](http://ChristwardCollective.org)

**The Shepherd Leader** *Shepherding to the Chief Shepherd's glory.* Tim Witmer provides regular insight and on-going coaching material for church leaders. His system contextualizes biblical principles for the specific ministry roles and needs found in today's Church. [TheShepherdLeader.org](http://TheShepherdLeader.org)

**Meet the Puritans** *Where the dead still speak.* Sharing the theology and piety of the Puritans to reconnect Reformed Christians with their heritage, introduce evangelical Christians to this heritage, and give the world the answers this heritage provides. [MeetthePuritans.org](http://MeetthePuritans.org)



**Daily Devotionals from James Boice and Matthew Henry.** Two devotionals sent daily to complement your time in the Word. [ThinkandActBiblically.org](http://ThinkandActBiblically.org) and [MatthewHenry.org](http://MatthewHenry.org)

**Reformed Resources** *60 Years of Reformed Resources.* Thousands of audio on both CD and MP3, video, book, booklet, and e-book resources from trustworthy authors and Alliance speakers. [ReformedResources.org](http://ReformedResources.org)

## EVENTS

**Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology and Regional Events** *Sound doctrine, boldly preached.* The oldest, continual, national Reformed conference in North America, and regional events including theology and Bible conferences. [AllianceNet.org/Events](http://AllianceNet.org/Events)



**Reformation Societies** *Encouraging, Emboldening, Equipping.* Encouraging, emboldening, and equipping pastors and church leaders for the work of biblical reformation in the church. [ReformationSocieties.org](http://ReformationSocieties.org)



The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals is a coalition of pastors, scholars, and churchmen who hold the historic creeds and confessions of the Reformed faith and who proclaim biblical doctrine in order to foster a Reformed awakening in today's Church.



**A L L I A N C E**<sup>®</sup>  
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

600 Eden Road · Lancaster, PA 17601  
215-546-3696 · (fax) 215-735-5133  
[AllianceNet.org](http://AllianceNet.org)