

Chapter VI.

Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof

SECTION I.—Our first parents, begin seduced by the subtilty and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

Exposition

That man is now in a very corrupt and sinful state, universal experience and observation attest. That he was not originally formed in this degraded state might be inferred from the character of his Maker; and the Scriptures explicitly affirm that he was at first created in the image of God—in a state of perfect rectitude. The question then arises, How was moral evil introduced into the world? To this important question reason can give no satisfactory answer. Pagan philosophers could not fail to observe the degeneracy of human nature; mournful experience taught them that evil had come into the world; but to assign the source of evil, was knowledge too wonderful for them; numerous were their conjectures, and all remote from the truth. Divine revelation, however, sets this matter in a clear and certain light; and our Confession, in accordance with the inspired record, traces the entrance of sin to the seduction and disobedience of our first parents. They “sinned in eating the forbidden fruit.” This supposes that the fruit of a certain tree was prohibited. The moral law was impressed upon the heart of man at his creation, and entire conformity to it was his indispensable duty; but, besides this natural law, God was pleased to give man a positive law, restricting him from the use of the fruit of a particular tree in the garden. “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.—Gen. ii. 16,17. Without loosening his obligation to yield obedience to the whole moral law, God summed up the duty of man in this single positive injunction, and constituted his abstaining from the fruit of a certain tree the test of his obedience. The thing forbidden was in its own nature quite indifferent, neither good nor evil; the prohibition was founded solely on the sovereign will of God; it was, therefore, a most proper trial of man’s obedience to the divine authority.

The occasion of man's violating this express injunction of his Sovereign, was the temptation of Satan. The inspired historian, in the 3rd chapter of Genesis, makes mention only of the serpent as concerned in seducing our first parents; but since we find Satan represented, in manifest allusion to the transactions of the fall, an "a murderer from the beginning," and as "the old serpent and dragon" (John viii. 44; Rev. xii. 9, and xx. 2), we are led to the conclusion that Satan was the real tempter, and that he made use of the literal serpent as his instrument in carrying on the temptation. The various methods of fraud and cunning whereby he conducted his plot are stated in the sacred history, and have been illustrated by many eloquent writers. It was not by force or compulsion, but only "through his subtlety that the serpent beguiled Eve." Seduced by the tempter, Eve "took of the fruit, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."—Gen. iii. 6. Thus the eating of the forbidden fruit was the first sin actually committed by man in our world. No doubt, our first parents were guilty of sin in their hearts, before they committed it with their hands; but the eating of the forbidden fruit was the first sign that was finished. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." - James i. 15.

To some the eating of an apple may appear a very trivial matter, and often have attempts been made to turn this grave subject into ridicule; but, in judging of this act of our first parents, we must remember that they thereby transgressed an express prohibition of the Most High. Their abstaining from the tree of knowledge was the criterion by which their fidelity was to be tried, and their eating of the fruit of that tree was a violation of the whole law; for it was rebellion against the Lawgiver, and a renunciation of his authority. "This grand transgression," says a judicious author, "though in its matter—to wit, eating a little fruit—it may be looked upon as a most mean and insignificant action; yet, if we consider it in its formal nature, as disobedience to an express divine command, which precept was particularly chosen out and enjoined as the test of man's pure love, just gratitude, and absolute obedience to God, it was certainly a most heinous sin. For behold what monstrous infidelity, ingratitude, and diabolical pride, were all at once implied in the same." "It was aggravated," says another, "by the Being sinned against,—a Benefactor so bountiful, a Master so indulgent; by the persons guilty of it,—creatures fresh from God's hand, untainted by sin, and laden with benefits; by the precept violated, - so plain and simple; by the place where it was committed,—a place where every plant, every creature, and every scene, displayed the bounty of the Lord, and proclaimed his goodness; and by its results, which were not to be limited to

themselves, but to extend to their descendants, whom, for a momentary gratification, they ruined for ever."

Is it asked, How could upright man be seduced to commit this great transgression? The answer is, Man, though perfectly holy, was mutable. He had power to stand, but was liable to fall. God left him to the freedom of his own will, and that freedom he abused. No doubt God could have prevented his fall if he had pleased, by giving such influences of his Spirit as would have been absolutely effectual to hinder it; but this he was under no obligation to do. He did not withdraw from man that ability with which he had furnished him for his duty, nor did he infuse any vicious inclinations into his heart,—he only withheld that further grace that would have infallibly prevented his fall. If it be inquired, Why God permitted the fall of man to take place? "Probably the best answer ever given to this question in the present world, is that which was given by Christ concerning one branch of the divine dispensations to mankind: "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." It was a dispensation approved by infinite wisdom, and seen by the Omniscient Eye to be necessary towards that good which God proposed in creating the universe."

Section II.—By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

Exposition

This section points out the consequences of the sin of our first parents, in regard to themselves. They "fell from their original righteousness," and became wholly corrupted in all the faculties of their souls and members of their bodies. The understanding, once a lamp of light, was now overwhelmed in darkness. The will, once faithful for God, and regulated by his will, now became perverse and rebellious. The affections, once pure and regular, now became vitiated and disordered. The body, too, was corrupted, and its members became instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. Our first parents likewise lost the happiness which they had formerly possessed. They were expelled from that pleasant and delightful abode in which God had placed them, the ground was cursed with barrenness for their sake, they were doomed to lead a life of toil and sorrow, and at last to return to the earth from which they were taken. But this was the least part of the misery into which they fell. They lost com-

munion with God, the chief good; they forfeited his favour, and incurred his righteous displeasure. They became dead in sin—obnoxious to that death which is the wages of sin, and which had been threatened as the penalty of their disobedience. "In the day thou eatest thereof," said God, "thou shalt surely die." This threatening included temporal death, consisting in the dissolution of the union between the soul and the body, spiritual death, consisting in the loss of the favour and the image of God; and eternal death, consisting in the everlasting separation of both soul and body from God. The very day in which our first parents sinned, the sentence of death, though not immediately executed in its fullest extent, began to lay hold upon them. They became mortal, and were exposed to the disorders of a vitiated constitution; the principle of spiritual life was extinguished in their souls, and they were bound over to eternal wrath; and, had not a Mediator been provided, not only would they have returned to the dust, but they would have been a punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Section III.—They being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

Section IV.—From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Exposition

These sections point out the consequences of the sin of our first parents in regard to their posterity. These consequences are restricted to those "descending from them by ordinary generation." This restriction is obviously introduced in order to exclude our Lord Jesus Christ, who, as man, was one of the posterity of Adam, but did not descend from him by ordinary generation. The genealogy of Christ is traced up to Adam (Luke iii. 38), but his human nature was supernaturally framed in the womb of the Virgin, by the power of the Holy Ghost.—Luke i. 35. In his birth, therefore, as well as in his life, he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners." But the effects of Adam's first transgression extend to all his natural posterity; and, according to our Confession, the guilt of this sin is imputed, and a corrupt nature is conveyed, to them. This is what is commonly called Original Sin. Though that phrase is of-

ten restricted to the corruption of nature derived to us from Adam, yet, in its proper latitude, it includes also the imputation of guilt.

The doctrine of original sin was universally received by the Church of God until the beginning of the fifth century, when it was denied by Pelagius. He maintained "that the sins of our first parents were imputed to them alone, and not to their posterity; that we derive no corruption from their fall, but are born as pure and unspotted as Adam came out of the forming hand of his Creator." This opinion was adopted by Socinus in the sixteenth century, and is held by the modern Socinians. The Arminians, who derive their name from Arminius, a divine of the seventeenth century, may not speak in the same unqualified terms of the purity of the descendants of Adam, but they do not admit that their nature is wholly vitiated, or that they have entirely lost their power to do good. In opposition to such tenets our Confession teaches, that a corrupt nature is conveyed to all the posterity of Adam; and that, by this original corruption, "we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil."

It may be proper to remark, that it is not the doctrine of the Scriptures nor of our standards that the corruption of nature of which they speak is any deprivation of the soul, or any essential attribute, or the infusion of any positive evil. The Confessions of the Reformers teach "that original righteousness, as a punishment of Adam's sin, was lost, and by that defect the tendency to sin, or corrupt disposition, or corruption of nature, is occasioned. Though they speak of original sin as being, first, negative; i.e., the loss of righteousness—and, secondly, positive, or corruption of nature, yet by the latter, they state, is to be understood, not the infusion of anything in itself sinful, but an actual tendency or disposition to evil, resulting from the loss of righteousness." The universal corruption of mankind is amply confirmed by the Scriptures: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Gen. viii. 21. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me."—Ps. li. 5. "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."—Ps. lviii. 3. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."—John iii. 6. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."—Rom. viii. 7. These, with many other places of Scripture, fully show that all mankind are infected with a corrupted nature. And the Scriptures no less clearly ascribe this corruption to the apostasy of Adam. The first man was created in the image of God, but after his fall "he begat a son in his own likeness."—Gen. v. 3. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin."—Rom. v. 12.

The corruption of human nature, which the Scriptures so clearly teach, may also be inferred from the fact that men, in all countries and in all varieties of situation, are sinners. "The way we come by the idea of any such thing as disposition or tendency, is by observing what is constant or general in event, especially under a great variety of circumstances." Now, it is a fact, "that all mankind come into the world in such a state as without fail comes to this issue, namely, the universal commission of sin; or that every one who comes to act in the world as a moral agent, is, in a greater or less degree, guilty of sin." From this we infer "that the mind of man has a natural tendency or propensity to that event which so universally and infallibly takes place; and that this is a corrupt or depraved propensity." The universal prevalence of sin cannot be accounted for, as Pelagians have alleged, by the influence of bad example; for, as President Edwards has justly argued, "this is accounting for the corruption of the world by the corruption of the world." There are manifestations of moral depravity so very early in childhood as to anticipate all capacity for observing and following the example of others. There also frequently appear in children propensities towards those vices of which they have seen no examples. Besides, there are many examples of eminent virtue in the world, which yet are not so frequently or easily imitated as those of a vicious nature, which plainly shows an innate tendency towards vice.

Another branch of original sin is the imputation of the guilt of Adam's first transgression. This is rejected by many who admit original corruption. By the imputation of Adam's first sin, it is not intended that his personal transgression becomes the personal transgression of his posterity; but that the guilt of his transgression is reckoned to their account. And it is only the guilt of his first sin, which was committed by him as a public representative, that is imputed to his posterity, and not the guilt of his future sins, after he had ceased to act in that character. The grounds of this imputation are, that Adam was both the natural root and the federal head or representative of all his posterity. The former is the only ground mentioned in this section of the Confession, probably, because the representative character of Adam in the covenant of works has not yet been brought into view; but in the succeeding chapter this is distinctly recognised. And both in the Larger Catechism (Quest. 22), and in the Shorter (Quest. 16), the representative character of Adam in the covenant made with him, is explicitly assigned as the principal ground of the imputation of the guilt of his first sin to all his posterity.

We do not see how the universal corruption of mankind can be accounted for, without admitting that they are involved in the guilt of his first transgression. It must be some sin which God punishes with the deprivation of original

righteousness; and that can be no other than the first sin of Adam. The doctrine of imputation is clearly taught in Scripture; particularly in Rom. v., it is so plainly stated, so often repeated, and so formally proved, that it must be acknowledged to be the doctrine of the apostle. In support of this doctrine, we might appeal to the universality of the effects of sin; especially to the death of infants. The apostle affirms, in the most express terms, that death is the effect of sin (Rom. v. 12); and experience as well as Scripture shows that death passes upon all men. It passes even upon those who are incapable of committing actual sin; for "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."—Rom. v. 14. This is generally understood as referring to infants, who are incapable of sinning personally and actually, as Adam did; and since they have never in their own persons violated any law, their exposure to death can only be accounted for on the ground of the imputation to them of the sin of Adam. This doctrine also derives confirmation from the analogy betwixt Adam and Christ, as stated by the apostle in the same chapter. In verse 14, he affirms that Adam "is the figure of him that was to come," and he traces the analogy in the subsequent verses, particularly in verses 18, 19. "Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." "These verses," says Dr. Chalmers, "contain the strength of the argument for the imputation of Adam's sin. As the condemnation of Adam comes to us, even so does the justification by Christ come to us. Now we know that the merit of the Saviour is ascribed to us, else no atonement for the past, and no renovation of heart or of life that is ever exemplified in this world for the future, will suffice for our acceptance with God. Even so then, must the demerit of Adam have been ascribed to us. The analogy affirmed in these verses leads irresistibly to this conclusion. The judgment that we are guilty is transferred to us from the actual guilt of the one representative, even as the judgment that we are righteous is transferred to us from the actual righteousness of the other representative. We are sinners in virtue of one man's disobedience, independently of our own personal sins; and we are righteous in virtue of another's obedience, independently of our own personal qualifications. We do not say, but that through Adam we become personally sinful—inheriting as we do his corrupt nature. Neither do we say, but that through Christ we become personally holy—deriving out of his fullness the very graces which adorned his own character. But, as it is at best a tainted holiness that we have on this side of death, we must have something more than it in which to appear before God;

and the righteousness of Christ reckoned unto us and rewarded in us, is that something. The something which corresponds to this in Adam, is his guilt reckoned unto us and punished in us—so that, to complete the analogy, as from him we get the infusion of his depravity, so from him also do we get the imputation of his demerit." "Adam is not merely the corrupt parent of a corrupt offspring, who sin because of the depravity wherewith he has tainted all the families of the earth; but who have sinned in him, to use the language of our old divines, as their federal head—as the representative of a covenant which God made with him, and through him with all his posterity."

Section V.—This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.

Exposition

This section teaches us, that corruption of nature remains in those that are regenerated, and is commensurate with this life. This condemns the tenet of Christian perfection; and it is supported by the plainest declarations of Scripture. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—1 John i. 8. Paul himself says, "Sin dwelleth in me," and affirms, that "when he would do good, evil is present with him."—Rom. vii. 17-21. It has, indeed, been disputed, whether Paul, in that chapter, describes his own feelings, or personates another. We have no doubt that Paul speaks of himself as regenerated, and describes his own state, and consequently the state of every regenerated person; but we do not rest the doctrine upon this single passage, for the conflict there described is represented in other places in language which, by common consent, can only be applied to true Christians. We shall only refer to Gal. v. 17: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

This section also affirms that, even in the regenerated, this corruption, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. The guilt of it is, no doubt, removed by the blood of Christ, and the power of it subdued by his Spirit and grace; but, in itself, it retains the character of sin. This is affirmed in opposition to a tenet of the Church of Rome. That universal propensity to sin, which we call the corruption of nature, Roman Catholic writers denominate concupis-

cence; and this, they maintain, is no part of original sin, and is not in itself sinful. As they believe that original sin is taken away by baptism, and nevertheless find that this corrupt disposition remains in the regenerated, they conclude that it is no part of original sin, but that it is the natural state in which Adam was made at first; only, that in us it is without the restraint of supernatural assistance which was given to him, and which, in consequence of his transgression, was withdrawn from him and his posterity. In answer to this, it is argued that lust or concupiscence is, in several places of the New Testament, spoken of as sin; particularly in Rom. vii. 7, Paul declares that "he had not known sin but by the law;" he then gives an instance of this,—"he had not known lust, except the law said, Thou shalt not covet." Here he expressly asserts that lust is sin.

Section VI.—Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

Exposition

This section relates to the desert of sin. Being a transgression of the law of God, it must, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, or render him liable to punishment. It exposes him to the wrath of God, for "the children of disobedience" are also "children of wrath," i. e., they deserve and are obnoxious to the wrath of God. It subjects him to the curse of the law, by which we may understand the condemnatory sentence of the broken law, which binds over the guilty sinner to all the direful effects of the wrath of God. It likewise subjects him to death, or the dissolution of the mysterious union between the soul and the body. Pelagians and Socinians hold that death is not the punishment of sin—that Adam was mortal from the beginning; and for this reason, those who are born of him must also be mortal. Others, again, both in former and later times, have held that temporal death was the only penalty threatened to Adam, and that this is the only death which results from his sin. Both these opinions are so plainly contradictory to the express declarations of the Word of God, that they are unworthy of serious refutation. In addition to this, our Confession states, that sin exposes the sinner to numerous miseries, both in this life, and in that which is to come. Among the spiritual or inward miseries to which it ren-

ders the sinner liable in this world, the compilers of our Confession elsewhere mention "blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections;" and among the temporal or outward miseries, they mention "the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, relations, and employments." And the miseries to which sin exposes in the world to come, they sum up in "everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hellfire for ever."

When we reflect on the loss which Adam sustained by his fall, and on the guilty and corrupted state in which we are thereby involved, and on the manifold miseries to which we are liable, both here and hereafter, let us be deeply impressed with a sense of the dreadful malignity and demerit of sin, - the source of all our woe. Let us not dare to repine against God, or to impeach his goodness or equity, for permitting sin to enter into the world, and making us responsible for the transgression of the first Adam, but rather let us admire the divine wisdom and grace displayed in providing the second Adam, by whose obedience we may be made righteous, as by the disobedience of the first we were made sinners. Let us cordially receive the Lord Jesus Christ, that, being found in him, we may not only be acquitted from the guilt of the first man's transgression, but may be brought, through "the abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, to reign in life by one," even by Jesus Christ, our Lord.