

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him” Class 8 – The Covenant of Works and the Fall of Man

2024–2025

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 20–24)

Writing assignment: What are key things we need to understand about the covenant of works and the fall of mankind?

- A. **Reading assignment for next time: Yes, I know...pages are missing!
This was to shorten the reading just a bit.**
- B. **Schedule for January – Next class is Jan 9!**

II. Another way to think of this lesson: *Why is Christmas so amazing?*

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt 1:18–21)

III. The Fall

- A. **Where we are in our study of theology – Revelation, God, Creation/Providence, Fall,...Redemption**
- B. **The Fall**

It is indeed remarkable how very seldom the OT refers to this history of the Fall....Nevertheless, the Fall is the silent hypothesis of the whole Biblical doctrine of sin and redemption; it does not rest only on a few vague passages, but forms an indispensable element in the revelation of salvation. The whole contemplation of man and humanity, of Nature and history, of ethical and physical evil, of redemption and the way in which to obtain it, is connected in Scripture with a

Fall, such as Genesis 3 relates to us.
Herman Bavinck³⁶

To make sense of the fall, though, we need to grasp “the covenant of works.”

IV. What is a “Covenant” in the Bible?

A. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties that binds them to certain commitments (or promises).

1. My HOA
2. Marriage covenant

B. Covenant in the Bible

1. The way our Bible is organized: “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament.” “Testament” is from the Latin *testamentum*, which is the word used to translate Greek and Hebrew words for “covenant.”
2. Why divide the Bible like this? It shows that (1) it is a single revelation from God but (2) there is a “new covenant,” which makes “the old covenant” *old* (2 Cor 3; Luke 22:20).

C. There are many places where God makes a significant “covenant” with a person or people:

1. Adam (Gen 2:16–17; Hosea 6:7)
2. Noah (Gen 8:20–9:17)
3. Abraham (12:1–3; 15; 17:1–17; 22:15–18)
4. Moses (Exod 19–24)
5. David (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17)
6. New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor 3; Heb 7–10)

D. In these covenants we notice some things:

1. God initiates
2. God speaks
3. God promises
4. God acts through a representative (federal) head

³⁶ Herman Bavinck, “The Fall,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

5. God inaugurates a new epoch of salvation history: *You can map the progression of salvation history with these covenants.*

V. Making Sense of the Covenant with Adam

- A. God initiates by creation (Gen 1–2) and covenant (Gen 2:16–17; Hosea 6:7)
- B. God speaks (Gen 2:16–17)
- C. God promises (Gen 2:9; 3:24; Rev 22:2, 14; Rom 5:12–19)
- D. God acts through a representative head (Rom 5:12–19) – Adam and Christ are the two heads of two humanities. Adam’s success and failure to keep the covenant will impact multitudes. And the same is true of Christ!
- E. God inaugurates a new epoch of salvation history – The history of mankind can be divided into pre-fall and post-fall.
- F. Why it’s called “a covenant of works” – Obedience is the definitive response. Where “faith” is the definitive response in the covenant of grace, “works” are the definitive response in the covenant of works.

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam and in him to his posterity, upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience.

Trinity Confession of Faith, 8.2

VI. The First Sin and the Fall of Man

- A. **Back to Genesis 3... (where not *all* of our questions get answered!)**
 - 1. Satan’s first attack: God’s Word (Gen 3:1)
 - 2. Eve’s *almost right* response (Gen 3:2–3)
 - 3. Satan’s second attack: God’s Character (Gen 3:4–5)
 - 4. Adam and Eve take the bait and sin (Gen 3:6):

When Adam and Eve disobeyed this command [in 2:17], they did become ‘like God,’ as the serpent (who deceived them into disobedience) said they would. That is, they put themselves in God’s place; they took upon themselves the right to decide how they should live and what was right and wrong for them to do. For them to become ‘like God’ in this way was

catastrophic.
Tim Keller³⁷

5. Notice the progression of sin in Gen. 3:6

VII. The Impact of the Fall of Man

A. Alienation

1. Man and himself (Gen 3:7)
2. Man and God (Gen 3:8)
3. Man and man (Gen 3:9–13)
4. Man and Creation (Gen 3:17–19)

B. Curses of Gen 3:14–19

1. Gen. 3:14: Satan vanquished—crawling on your belly is what the losers do (Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23; Micah 7:17)
2. The *protoevangelium*—first gospel!—in Gen. 3:15, that promises the final defeat of Satan (Rev 12; 20:10)
3. Gen. 3:16 – Marriage and childbirth impacted
4. Gen. 3:17–19 – creation cursed (Rom 8:19–21), work impacted, death promised

C. Cain and Abel: Gen 4: How quickly the first sin escalates!

D. Lamech: Gen 4:23: It gets worse...

E. The Flood of Noah: Gen. 6:5–6: And worse...

F. The Tower of Babel: Gen. 11: A global flood, and still we don't learn...

G. The progression of sin in Genesis 3–11 tells us of the seriousness and deadliness of Adam's sin.

H. But grace is there: Seth and Enosh in Gen. 4:26! Noah in Gen. 6:9!

³⁷ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 77.

VIII. How Adam's Sin Impacts Us: Original Sin

A. Definition

1. Not "the first sin," though it sounds like that.
2. Louis Berkhof's definition:

The sinful state and condition in which men are born...is called "original sin" (1) because it is derived from the original root of the human race; (2) because it is present in the life of every individual from the time of his birth, and therefore cannot be regard as the result of imitation; and (3) because it is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man.

Louis Berkhof³⁸

B. Includes Original Guilt —Rom 5:12–19; Eph 2:3; 1 Cor 15:22

C. Includes Original Pollution, which means we are bent toward sin and not away from it (Gen 6:5; Rom 3:10–18).

1. Total depravity is our condition, and this means a "total inability" to please God unless he changes our hearts.
2. Romans 3:10–18 is who we are until we get a new heart (Ezek 36:25–27; John 3:3–8).
3. Sin affects our HEARTS: We love what we should hate, we hate what we should love.
4. Sin affects our MINDS: foolishness is easier than wisdom, impure thoughts are a temptation, renewing our minds is necessary (Rom 12:2).
5. Affects our BODIES: Our bodies bear the marks of the fall. Organs and cells carry diseases, sometimes fatal. Some diseases impact how our brains function (
6. Affects our MOTIVATIONS: Our desires can so easily be disordered and need to be redirected toward God and his righteousness (Gal 5:17; Matt 6:33).

D. Yet, common grace is real, so we are not as evil as we could be.

³⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 244.

IX. The Nature of Sin (the DNA of sin)

- A. “Sin” (חטָא, *chātā*) – to “miss a mark or a way,” the bullseye being God’s preceptive will, Gen 18:20
- B. “Iniquity” (יָסוּר, *ōn*) – “to bend, twist, distort,” Gen 15:6; Isa 53:6
- C. “Transgression” (פְּשָׁע, *pesha*) – crossing God’s good and established boundary lines, Isa 43:27; 53:12
- D. “Sin” (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*) – Used 300x in NT, “to act contrary to the will and law of God” (L&N), “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin (*hamartia*) is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).
- E. “Unclean” (נִדָּח, ἀκάθαρτος) – Used in OT and NT. Can be amoral like certain “unclean” foods (Lev 11:4) or morally “unclean” (Isa 6:6). Christ declares all foods “clean” (Mark 7:19); his blood cleanses us from all sins (Titus 2:14; Heb 9:14, 22, 23).
- F. **A definition of sin from our *Catechism***

Q23. What is sin?

A. Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God. (1 John 3:4; Rom 2:14–16; 14:23; 8:7–8)

The Trinity Catechism

X. The Punishment for Sin

- A. **Alienation from God (Isa 59:2; cf. Gen 3:8; Rom 5:10; James 4:4)**
- B. **Alienation from one another (Gen 3:7–13)**
- C. **Sin as its own punishment – Rom. 1:24–32 – God “gives us over” to even greater sins**
- D. **Guilt – objective guilt (Isa 53:10) but also subjective guilt in our conscience and a sense of shame (Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 1:3; 2 Thess 3:14; Luke 22:62; Ps 51:3)**
- E. **Temporal physical/emotional punishments – blindness (Gen 19:11; 2 Kgs 6:18), sickness (Gen 12:17); plagues (Exod 7–10); flood of Noah (Gen 6–9); Babylonian captivity (Jer 20:1–6)**
- F. **Death (Gen 2:16–17)**
- G. **Suffering in the intermediate state (Luke 16:19–31)**

H. Hell (Matt 25:41; 7:23)

I. BUT—The Christian receives absolutely NONE of these!!!!

1. We receive God's fatherly discipline but NOT PUNISHMENT for sin.
2. His discipline can FEEL like punishment, but the motive and the end result are completely different.

My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline or be weary of his reproof,
¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom
 he delights. (Prov 3:11–12)

XI. Conclusion

A. Grace is greater than our sins!

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 5:20–21)

B. Christ provides the complete cure for our sins:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

C. The Glory of Christmas

God did not leave us in our sins. He came to us. He came to save us from sin's punishment. He came to save us from sin's power.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10–11)