

The First Sin

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Often when Christians think of the first sin, they think of Adam and Eve and the Fall in the Garden of Eden. While this is indeed the first human sin, it is not the first recorded sin in Scripture. As Christians, we know that the serpent tempted Eve, but we often forget that the Devil's fall from grace was what set the stage for humankind's fall, both as antecedent and type.

We catch a glimpse of Satan's fall in the following passage, prophetically directed at the king of Tyre, but in this portion, apparently meant to include someone apart from humanity (specifically referred to as a cherub) who had been in the Garden of Eden, the prophecy turns into a description of an angel, namely Lucifer:

Ezekiel 28:14–15

You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in thee.

What was the first sin? We learn about it and Satan's fall from Isaiah 14:12–15:

How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet you shall be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

It is obvious from the text that Satan's sin was pride. He was so beautiful, so wise, and so powerful as an angel that he began to covet God's position and authority. He chafed at having to serve God and grew angry and rebellious. He did not want to serve, he wanted to be served; he, as a creature, wanted to be worshipped. How starkly contrasted to our savior Jesus Christ, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

How did Satan's prideful rebellion and subsequent fall impact humankind's first sin? Look at some passages in Proverbs that talk about the sin of pride and what effect it produces.

Proverbs 16:18: Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 11:2: When pride comes, then comes shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.

Proverbs 18:12: Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.

Here it is evident that pride literally went before the Fall, both the fall of Satan and the fall of man. Pride causes shame, loss of wisdom, destruction, and ruin. If one were to summarize what actually happened as Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, would not these passages describe their mental and physical condition exactly? Shamed by the knowledge of committing sin against God, physical disease, pain and death looming on the horizon, loss of fellowship with God, and having to fight to eke out a living from the cursed ground; all these are the outworking of the sin of pride.

So, what was Adam and Eve's sin? Wasn't it just disobedience by eating the forbidden fruit? Well, yes, that was the physical act that solidified what had already occurred in their minds and hearts. But let's take a closer look at the passages in Genesis to see what the real sin was and where it started.

Genesis 3:1–7; Genesis 3:12–13

1 Now the Serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea has God said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die: 5 For God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed

fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. 12 And the man said, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. 13 And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

Let's analyze what really happened in verses 1–7. First Satan questioned God's word, then he openly lied to Eve, contradicting what God had said. Then he used the tantalizing bait that humanity could be more like God by having their eyes opened, knowing things they currently didn't know. The real heart of the situation is the statement that Eve thought the tree was good for food and desirable to make one wise. Why would she think this? God himself had told Adam (and either God himself or Adam had told Eve), that eating from the tree would only lead to death. Why would she (and subsequently Adam) accept the word of a talking serpent over the word of God? Only doubt of God's word and subsequently God's motives could have led to this tragedy.

They didn't just ignorantly decide to eat the fruit, nor did they eat it because "the Devil made them do it." Satan's outright lies and cunning half-truths brought something to the surface of Eve's mind that fateful day. She realized that to "be like gods" meant not having to serve God, it meant being equal to God. It meant that she felt as if God had deliberately kept her and Adam in the dark regarding their "divine potential." Why should they tend God's garden in Eden when they could be as gods themselves? Why should they have to obey God if they were also gods? The quickness with which Adam acquiesced to Eve's offer of the fruit may possibly show that he too harbored these same feelings, or it may mean that Adam, though knowing Eve had sinned willfully decided to throw his lot in with her by deliberately eating from the fruit. Eve had been deceived, Adam had not. In any event, we know that it was Adam's sin that was responsible for the Fall and the Curse (Romans 5:12). The sin of pride that led to Satan's fall had now infected the hearts and minds of Adam and Eve, and the result was the same: shame, loss of wisdom, ruin and death.

In verses 12 and 13, we see Adam and Eve's response to God's question. We see the sin of pride showing through in their replies. This isn't just a pass-the-buck response on their part; look at whom they really blamed for their actions: "The serpent deceived me," said Eve; "The woman you gave to be with me enticed me," said Adam. They almost seem to say that if they had been God things would have been different; therefore, it's all God's fault. These are not the responses of broken and contrite hearts, they are the responses of a proud and willful people caught in the act of rebellion against God.

What is still man's most prevalent sin? Little has changed since the Fall. Man is still a creature consumed with pride. We read in Romans 1:18–21 the current condition of mankind:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Why does mankind suppress the truth? Why does he not glorify God? Why is he unthankful? Why is his imagination vain and his heart darkened? Because he does not glorify God as God. Mankind wants to glorify himself as God. We want to be the sole decision maker and sole authority in our life. We want nothing to do with a creator God to whom we should owe allegiance. If only we could come up with some natural explanation for everything we see around us, if only we could ignore our conscience, if only we could forget past history that clearly shows divine intervention, then we could rationalize away God and make gods of ourselves. Isn't this exactly what we see today? Now we have evolution, moral relativism, humanism, revisionist history, and all other attempts to willfully hold God's revealed truth at arms length. Truly our sinful human pride knows no bounds!

The Lord knows where his creatures are most prone to err, and pride is a many-headed hydra that infects all of humanity. In fact, we could make a case for pride being the fountainhead of all other sins. Anger, hate, jealousy, and ingratitude all stem from pride; something we wanted to happen did not happen and we feel offended, our pride is wounded and our emotions are stirred to cause us to act sinfully. One could even make the case that "the love of money is the root of all [kinds of] evil" passage in 1 Timothy 6:10 really deals with the sin of pride as well. We know that covetousness is the same as idolatry (Ephesians 5:5), and idolatry is the sin of creating our own god by being too proud and stubborn to worship the True God. Consider the following verses in Proverbs that reflect God's attitude toward pride.

Proverbs 6:16–19

These six things does the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren.

Proverbs 8:13

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

On God's top seven list of most heinous sins, pride comes in at number one! In verse 13 we see that the fear of the Lord is equated with hating pride and arrogance. If we allow pride to control us, we do not really fear God as we ought. C.S. Lewis said, "The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea-bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

What should we as Christians do to guard against this sin? There are no instant cures for this sin. Pride is a sin we struggle with on a daily basis. (Read Romans 7:13–25 to see how the Apostle Paul agonizes over his struggles against sin, and also think of the "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that was given to Paul to keep him from becoming exalted above measure.) However, God doesn't leave us or forsake us. He gives us grace and power to overcome even this most insidious sin. A couple of passages in James and 1 Peter deal with this very subject.

James 4:5–8

Do you think that the scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy? But He gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.

1 Peter 5:5–10

Likewise, you younger ones, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

It is only through God's grace and provision that we can daily overcome our innate pride. We need to pray (cast all our cares upon God), study the Bible (be sober and vigilant), be submissive to God by obeying Him and revering Him, and recognize that it is Jesus Christ who strengthens, establishes, settles, and perfects us. Without Him we can do nothing!

It is interesting that in both of the above passages we are warned to forsake pride and humbly submit ourselves before God in order to resist the Devil. Why this twofold warning? We give Satan a foothold when we walk more like him than like Christ (who came to do not His own will but the will of the Father). Secondly, playing to human pride is the oldest trick in Satan's arsenal. Just ask Adam and Eve.