

The Fall of Man

by Watchman Nee

The Fall of Man is a story of how man's rebellion against God led to the death of his spirit, the enslavement of his soul, and the corruption of his body.

Scripture: Genesis 2:16

Topics: "Spiritual Death", "The Nature of Man"

Description

Watchman Nee discusses 'The Fall of Man,' emphasizing the unique creation of humanity with a spirit, soul, and body, and the freedom of choice given by God. He explains how Adam and Eve's choice to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil led to a reversal of the intended order, resulting in spiritual death and the subjugation of the spirit to the soul and body. Nee highlights that the fall was not just a physical act but a profound spiritual rebellion against God, leading to a loss of communion with Him. He warns that the pursuit of knowledge outside of God's will can lead to spiritual death, and stresses the importance of recognizing the distinction between the spiritual and soulish life. Ultimately, he calls for a return to dependence on God to restore the intended order of spirit, soul, and body.

Transcript

THE MAN GOD fashioned was notably different from all other created beings. Man possessed a spirit similar to that of the angels and at the same time had a soul resembling that of the lower animals. When God created man He gave him a perfect freedom. He did not make man an automaton, controlled automatically by His will. This is evident in Genesis 2 at the time God instructed the original man what fruit he could eat and what not. The man God created was not a machine run by God; instead he had perfect freedom of choice. If he chose to obey God, he could; if he decided to rebel against God, he could do that too. Man had in his possession a sovereignty by which he could exercise his volition in choosing to obey or to disobey. This is a most important point, for we must realize that in our spiritual life God never deprives us our freedom, Unless we actively cooperate, God will not undertake anything for us. Neither God nor the devil can do any work without first obtaining our consent, for man's will is free.

Man's spirit was originally the highest part of his entire being to which soul and body were to be subject. Under normal conditions the spirit is like a mistress, the soul like a steward, and the body like a servant, The mistress commits matters to the steward who in turn commands the servant to carry them out. The mistress gives orders privately to the steward; the steward in turn transmits them openly to the servant. The steward appears to be the lord of all, but in actuality the lord over all is the mistress. Unfortunately

man has fallen; he has been defeated and has sinned; consequently, the proper order of spirit, soul and body has been confused.

God bestowed upon man a sovereign power and accorded numerous gifts to a human soul, Thought and will or intellect and intention are among the prominent portions. The original purpose of God is that the human soul should receive and assimilate the truth and substance of God's spiritual life. He gave gifts to men in order that man might take God's knowledge and will as his own. If man's spirit and soul would maintain their created perfection, healthiness and liveliness, his body would then be able to continue forever without change. If he would exercise his will by taking and eating the fruit of life, God's Own life undoubtedly would enter his spirit, permeate his soul, transform- his entire inner man, and translate his body into incorruptibility. He then would literally be in possession of "eternal life." In that event his soul life would be filled completely with spiritual life, and his whole being would be transformed into that which is spiritual. Conversely, if the order of spirit and soul would be reversed, then man would plunge into darkness and the human body could not last long but would soon be corrupted.

^We know how man's soul chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than the tree of life. Yet is it not clear that God's will for Adam was to eat the fruit of the tree of life? Because before He forbade Adam to eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil and warned him that in the day he ate he should die (Gen. 2.17), He first commanded man to eat freely of every tree of -the garden and purposely mentioned the tree of life in the midst of the garden. Who can say that this is not so?

"The fruit of the knowledge of good and evil" uplifts the human soul and suppresses the spirit. God does not forbid man to eat of this fruit merely to test man. He forbids it because He knows that by eating this fruit man's soul life will be so stimulated that his spirit life will be stifled. This means man will lose the true knowledge of God and thus be dead to Him. God's forbiddance shows God's love. The knowledge of good and evil in this world is itself evil. Such knowledge springs from the intellect of man's soul. It puffs up the soul life and consequently deflates the spirit life to the point of losing any knowledge of God, to the point of becoming as much as dead.

A great number of God's servants view this tree of life as God offering life to the world in His Son the Lord Jesus. This is eternal life, God's nature, His uncreated life. Hence, we have here two trees-one germinates spiritual life while the other develops soulish life. Man in his original state is neither sinful nor holy and righteous. He stands between the two. Either he can accept God's life, thus becoming a spiritual man and a partaker of divine nature; or he can inflate his created life into becoming soulish, consequently inflicting death on his spirit. God imparted a perfect balance to the three parts of man. Whenever one part is overdeveloped the others are afflicted.

Our spiritual walk will be greatly helped if we understand the origin of soul and its life principle. Our spirit comes directly from God for it is God-given (Num. 16.22). Our soul is not so directly derived; it was produced after the spirit entered the body. It is therefore characteristically related to the created being. It is the created life, the natural life. The soul's usefulness is indeed extensive if it maintains its proper place as a steward, permitting the spirit to be mistress. Man can then receive God's life and be related to God in life. If, however, this soul life becomes inflated the spirit is accordingly suppressed. All man's doings will be confined to the natural realm of the created unable to be united to God's supernatural and uncreated life. The original man succumbed to death in that he ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, thereby abnormally developing his soul life.

Satan tempted Eve with a question. He knew his query would arouse the woman's thought. If she were completely under the spirit's control she would reject such questioning.

By trying to answer she exercised her mind in disobedience to the spirit. Doubtless Satan's question was full of errors, for his prime motive was merely to incite Eve's mental exertion. He would have expected Eve to correct him, but alas, Eve dared to change God's Word in her conversation with Satan. The enemy accordingly was emboldened to tempt her to eat by suggesting to her that, in eating, her eyes would be opened and she would be like God-knowing good and evil. "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" (Gen. 3.6). That was how Eve viewed the matter. Satan provoked her soulful thought first and then advanced to seize her will. The result: she fell into sin.

Satan always uses physical need as the first target for attack. He simply mentioned eating fruit to Eve, an entirely physical matter. Next he proceeded to entice her soul, intimating that by indulging, her eyes would be opened to know good and evil. Although such searching for knowledge was perfectly legitimate, the consequence nonetheless led her spirit into open rebellion against God because she misconstrued God's forbiddance as arising from an evil intention. Satan's temptation reaches initially to the body, then to the soul and lastly to the spirit.

After being tempted Eve gave her verdict. To begin with, the tree was good for food." This is the "lust of the flesh." Eve's flesh was the first to be stirred up. Second, "it was a delight to the eyes." This is "the lust of the eyes." Both the body and her soul were now enticed. Third, "the tree was to be desired to make one wise." This is "the pride of life." Such desire revealed the wavering of her emotion and will. Her soul was now agitated beyond control. It no longer stood by as a spectator but had been goaded into desiring the fruit. How dangerous a master human emotion is!

Why should Eve desire the fruit? It was not merely the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, but also curiosity's urge for wisdom. In the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, even of so-called "spiritual knowledge," activities of the soul often can be detected. When one tries to increase his knowledge by doing mental gymnastics over books without waiting upon God and looking to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, his soul is plainly in full swing. This will deplete his spiritual life. Because the fall of man was occasioned by seeking knowledge, God uses the foolishness of the cross to "destroy the wisdom of the wise." Intellect was the chief cause of the fall; hence, in order to be saved one must believe in the folly of the Word of the cross rather than depend upon his intellect. The tree of knowledge causes man to fall, so God employs the tree of folly (I Peter 2.24) to save souls. "If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God" (I Cor. 3.18-20; also see 1.18-25).

Having carefully reviewed the account of the fall of man, we are able to see that in rebelling against God, Adam and Eve developed their souls to the extent of displacing their spirits and plunging themselves into darkness. The prominent parts of the soul are man's mind, will and emotion. Will is the organ of decision, therefore the master of the man. Mind is the organ of thought, while emotion is that of affection. The Apostle Paul tells us "Adam was not deceived," indicating that Adam's mind was not muddled on that fatal day. The one who was feeble-minded was Eve: "the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (I Tim. 2.14). According to the record of Genesis it is written that "the woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me and I ate' " (Gen. 3.13); but that "the man said, 'The woman gave (not beguiled) me fruit of the tree and I ate'" (Gen. 3.12). Adam obviously was not deceived; his mind was clear and he knew the fruit was from

the forbidden tree. He ate because of his affection for the woman. Adam understood that what the serpent said was nothing more than the enemy's deception. From the words of the Apostle we are led to see that Adam sinned deliberately. He loved Eve more than himself. He made her his idol, and for her sake he was willing to rebel against the commandment of his Creator. How pitiful that his mind was overruled by his emotion: his reasoning, overcome by his, affection. Why is it that men "did not believe the truth?" Because they "had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2.12). It is not that the truth is unreasonable but that it is not loved. Hence when one truly turns to the Lord he "believes with his heart (not mind) and so is justified" (Rom 10.10).

Satan moved Adam to sin by seizing the latter's will through his emotion, while he tempted Eve to sin by grasping her will through the channel of a darkened mind. When man's will and mind and emotion were poisoned by the serpent and man followed after Satan instead of God, his spirit, which was capable of communing with God, suffered a fatal blow. Here we can see the law which governs the work of Satan. He uses the things of the flesh (eating fruit) to entice man's soul into sin; as soon as the soul sins, the spirit descends into utter darkness. The order of his working is always such: from the outside to the inside. If he does not start with the body, then he begins by working on the mind or the emotion in order to get to the will of man. The moment man's will yields to Satan he possesses man's whole being and puts the spirit to death. But not so the work of God; His is always from the inside to the outside. God begins working in man's spirit and continues by illuminating his mind, stirring his emotion, and causing him to exercise his will over his body for carrying into execution the will of God. All satanic works are performed from the outside inward; all divine works, from the inside outward. We may in this way distinguish what comes from God and what from Satan. All this additionally teaches us that once Satan seizes man's will, then is he in control over that man.

We should carefully note that the soul is where man expresses his free will and exerts his own mastery. The Bible therefore often records that it is the soul which sins. For example, Micah 6.7 says, "the sin of my soul." Ezekiel 18.4,20 reads, "the soul that sins." And in the books of Leviticus and Numbers mention frequently is made that the soul sins.

Why? Because it is the soul which chooses to sin. Our description of sin is: "The will acquiesces in the temptation." Sinning is a matter of the soul's will; atonement accordingly must be for the soul. "Ye give the heave-offering of Jehovah to make atonement for your souls" (Ex. 30.15 Darby). "For the soul of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17.11 Darby). "To make atonement for our souls before Jehovah," (Num. 31.50 Darby). Since it is the soul which sins, it follows that the soul needs to be atoned. And it can only be atoned, moreover, by a soul:

"It pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath subjected him to suffering ... thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin ... He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied ... he hath poured out his soul unto death ... and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Is. 53.10-12 Darby)

In examining the nature of Adam's sin we discover that aside from rebellion there is also a certain kind of independence. We must not lose sight here of free will. On the one hand, the tree of life implies a sense of dependence. Man at that time did not possess God's nature, but 'had he partaken of the fruit of the tree of life he could have secured God's life; man could have reached his summit possessing the very life of God. This is dependence. On the other hand, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil suggests

independence because man strived by the exercise of his will for the knowledge not promised, for something not accorded him by God. His rebellion declared his independence. By rebelling he did not need to depend upon God. Furthermore, his seeking the knowledge of good and evil also showed his independence, for he was not satisfied with what God had bestowed already. The difference between the spiritual and the soulish is crystal clear. The spiritual depends utterly upon God, fully satisfied with what God has given; the soulish steers clear of God and covets what God has not conferred, especially "knowledge." Independence is a special mark of the soulish. That thing-no matter how good, even worshiping God is unquestionably of the soul if it does not require complete trust in God and instead calls for reliance upon one's own strength. The tree of life cannot grow within us together with the tree of knowledge. Rebellion and independence explain every sin committed by both sinners and saints.

SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY AFTER THE FALL

Adam lived by the breath of life becoming spirit in him. By the spirit he sensed God, knew God's voice, and communed with God. He had a very keen awareness of God. But after his fall his spirit died.

When God spoke to Adam at the first He said, "in the day that you eat of it (the fruit of the tree of good and evil) you shall die" (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve nevertheless continued on for hundreds of years after eating the forbidden fruit. This obviously indicates that the death God foretold was not physical. Adam's death began in his spirit.

What really is death? According to its scientific definition death is "the cessation of communication with environment." Death of the spirit is the cessation of its communication with God. Death of the body is the cutting off of communication between spirit and body. So when we say the spirit is dead it does not imply there is no more spirit; we simply mean the spirit has lost its sensitivity towards God and thus is dead to Him. The exact situation is that the spirit is incapacitated, unable to commune with God. To illustrate. A dumb person has a mouth and lungs but something is wrong with his vocal cords and he is powerless to speak. So far as human language is concerned his mouth may be considered dead. Similarly Adam's spirit died because of his disobedience to God. He still had his spirit, yet it was dead to God for it had lost its spiritual instinct. It is still so; sin has destroyed the spirit's keen intuitive knowledge of God and rendered man spiritually dead. He may be religious, moral, learned, capable, strong and wise, but he is dead to God. He may even talk about God, reason about God and preach God, but he is still dead to Him. Man is not able to hear or to sense the voice of God's Spirit. Consequently in the New Testament God often refers to those who are living in the flesh as dead.

The death which began in our forefather's spirit gradually spread until it reached his body. Though he lived on for many years after his spirit was dead, death nevertheless worked incessantly in him until his spirit, soul and body were all dead. His body, which could have been transformed and glorified, was instead returned to dust. Because his inward man had fallen into chaos, his outward body must die and be destroyed.

Henceforth Adam's spirit (as well as the spirit of all his descendants) fell under the oppression of the soul until it gradually merged with the soul and the two parts became closely United. The writer of Hebrews declares in 4:12 that the Word of God shall pierce and divide soul and spirit. The dividing is necessary because spirit and soul have become one. While they are intimately knit they plunge man into a psychic world. Everything is done according to the dictates of intellect or feeling. The spirit has lost its power and sensation, as though dead asleep. What instinct it has in knowing and serving God is entirely paralyzed. It

remains in a coma as if nonexistent. This is what is meant in Jude 19 by "natural, not having spirit" (literal).* This certainly does not mean the human spirit ceases to exist, for Numbers 16:22 distinctly states that God is "the God of the spirits of all flesh." Every human being still has in his possession a spirit, although it is darkened by sin and impotent to hold communion with God.

However dead this spirit may be towards God it may remain as active as the mind or the body. It is accounted dead to God but is still very active in other respects. Sometimes the spirit of a fallen man can even be stronger than his soul or body and gain dominion over the whole being. Such persons are "spiritual" just as most people are largely soulful or physical, because their spirits are much bigger than that of ordinary individuals. These are the sorceresses and the witches. They indeed maintain contacts with the spiritual realm; but these do so through the evil spirit, not by the Holy Spirit. The spirit of the fallen man thus is allied with Satan and his evil spirits. It is dead to God yet very much alive to Satan and follows the evil spirit which is now at work in him.

In yielding to the demand of its passions and lusts the soul has become a slave to the body so that the Holy Spirit finds it useless to strive for God's place in such a one. Hence the Scripture declares, "My Spirit shall not always plead with Man; for he indeed is flesh" (Gen. 6.3 Darby). The Bible refers to the flesh as the composite of the unregenerated soul and the physical life, though more often than not it points to sin which is in the body. Once man is completely under the dominion of the flesh he has no possibility of liberating himself. Soul has replaced the spirit's authority. Everything is done independently and according to the dictates of his mind. Even in religious matters, in the hottest pursuit of God, all is carried on by the strength and will of man's soul, void of the Holy Spirit's revelation. The soul is not merely independent of the spirit; it is additionally under the body's control. It is now asked to obey, to execute and to fulfill the lusts, passions and demands of the body. Every son of Adam is therefore not only dead in his spirit but he is also "from the earth, a man of dust" (1 Cor. 15:47). Fallen men are governed completely by the flesh, walking in response to the desires of their soulish life and physical passions. Such ones are unable to commune with God. Sometimes they display their intellect, at others times their passion, but more often both their intellect and passion. Unimpeded, the flesh is in firm control over the total man.

This is what is unfolded in Jude 18 and 19 - "Mockers, walking after their own lusts of ungodlinesses. These are they who set themselves apart, natural men, not having spirit" (Darby). Being soulish is antagonistic to being spiritual. The spirit, that noblest part of us, the part which may be united to God and ought to regulate the soul and body, is now under the dominion of the soul, that part of us which is earthly in both its motive and aim. The spirit has been stripped of its original position. Man's present condition is abnormal. Wherefore he is pictured as not having spirit. The result of being soulish is that he becomes a mocker, pursuing ungodly passions and creating divisions.

1 Corinthians 2:14 speaks of such unregenerated persons in this fashion: "The natural (soulish) man does not receive the gifts of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Such men as are under the control of their souls with their spirits suppressed are in direct contrast to spiritual people. They may be exceedingly intelligent, able to present masterful ideas or theories, yet they do not consent to the things of the Spirit of God. They are unfit to receive revelation from the Holy Spirit. Such revelation is vastly different from human ideas. Man may think human intellect and reasoning are almighty, that the brain is able to comprehend all truths of the world; but the verdict of God's Word is, vanity of vanities."

While man is in his soulish state he frequently senses the insecurity of this age and so he too seeks the eternal life of the coming age. But even if he does, he is still powerless to uncover the Word of life by his much thinking and theorizing. How untrustworthy are human reasonings! We often observe how very clever persons clash in their different opinions. Theories easily lead man into error. They are castles in the air, tumbling him into eternal darkness.

How true it is that without the guidance of the Holy Spirit intellect not only is undependable but also extremely dangerous, because it often confuses the issue of right and wrong. A slight carelessness may cause not merely temporary loss but even everlasting harm. The darkened mind of man frequently leads him to eternal death. If only unregenerated souls could see this, how good it would be!

While man is fleshly he may be controlled by more than just the soul; he may be under the direction of the body as well; for soul and body are closely entwined. Because the body of sin is abounding in desires and passions, man may commit the most hideous of sins. As the body is formed of the dust, so its natural tendency is towards the earth. The introduction of the serpent's poison into man's body turns all its legitimate desires into lusts. Having once yielded to the body in disobeying God, the soul finds itself bound to yield every time. The base desires of the body may therefore often be expressed through the soul. The power of the body becomes so overwhelming that the soul cannot but become the obedient slave.

God's thought is for the spirit to have the pre-eminence, ruling our soul. But once man turns fleshly his spirit sinks into servitude to the soul. Further degradation follows when man becomes "bodily" (of the body), for the basest body rises to be sovereign. Man has then descended from "spirit-control" to "soul-control," and from "soul-control" to "body-control." Deeper and deeper he sinks. How pitiful it must be when the flesh gains dominion.

Sin has slain the spirit: spiritual death hence becomes the portion of all, for all are dead in sins and trespasses. Sin has rendered the soul independent: the soulish life is therefore but a selfish and self-willed one. Sin has finally empowered the body: sinful nature accordingly reigns through the body.

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