

Loss of Fellowship

Not only did Adam lose his *relationship* with God, he also lost his *fellowship* with Him. Adam no longer wanted to talk with his Creator but instead hid from Him in the Garden. John reminds us:

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:6–7)

The Effects of Sin on Relationship With Other Human Beings

Along with the loss of relationship (and fellowship) with God, the relationship between Adam and other people was also disturbed; sin has a horizontal as well as vertical effect, which is evident in two events that followed.

First, Adam blamed Eve for his situation. Responding to God’s questioning about the forbidden fruit, he said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12).

Second, sibling relationship was disrupted by sin when, because of anger, Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1–8).

The Effects of Sin on Relationship With the Environment

Adam’s sin affected his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were told to “subdue” the earth (Gen. 1:28); they were to “work” and “take care of” the Garden (Gen. 2:15), not destroy it; to rule over it, not ruin it; to cultivate it, not pollute it.

However, after the Fall, Adam’s connection with his environment was disrupted. Thorns and thistles appeared. He had to work by the sweat of his brow. Death became a fact of life. Indeed, everything, because of his sin, was put under bondage. Paul writes:

The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rom. 8:20–21)

The Volitional Effects of Adam’s Sin

In addition to Adam’s sin affecting his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment, it also had an effect on his will.

Free Will Before the Fall

The power of free choice is part of humankind having been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply their kind (1:28) and to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit (2:16–17). *Both of these responsibilities imply the ability to respond.* As noted above, the fact that they *ought* to do these things implied that they *could* do them.

The text narrates their choice, saying, “*She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it*” (Gen. 3:6). God’s condemnation of their actions makes it evident that they were morally free to choose (Gen. 3:11, 13).

The New Testament references to Adam’s action make it plain that he made a free choice for which he was responsible. Again, Romans 5 calls it “sin” (v. 16); a “trespass” (v. 15); and “disobedience” (v. 19). First Timothy 2:14 (RSV) refers to Eve as a “transgressor,” pointedly implying culpability.

Free Will After the Fall

Even after Adam sinned and became spiritually “dead”²² (Gen. 2:17; cf. Eph. 2:1) and thus, a sinner because of “[his] sinful nature” (Eph. 2:3), he was not so completely depraved that it was impossible for him to hear the voice of God or make a free response: “The LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘*I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid*’ ” (Gen. 3:9–10).²³ As already noted, God’s image in Adam was *effaced* but not *erased* by the Fall; it was corrupted (damaged) but not eliminated (annihilated). Indeed, the image of God (which includes free will) is *still* in human beings—this is why the murder or cursing of *anyone*, Christian or non-Christian, is sin, “for in the image of God has God made man” (Gen. 9:6).²⁴

Fallen Descendants of Adam Have Free Will

Both Scripture and good reason inform us that depraved human beings have the power of free will. The Bible says that fallen humans are ignorant, depraved, and slaves of sin—all involving *choice*. Peter speaks of depraved ignorance as being “*willingly*” ignorant (2 Peter 3:5 KJV). Paul teaches that unsaved people perceive the truth, but they willfully “suppress” it (Rom. 1:18–19),²⁵ so that they are, as a result, “without excuse” (v. 20). He adds, “Don’t you know that when you offer your selves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom *you obey?*” (Rom. 6:16). *Even our spiritual blindness is a result of the choice not to believe.*

With respect to *initiating* or *attaining* salvation, both Martin Luther and John Calvin were right—fallen humans are *not* free with regard to “things above.”²⁶ Salvation is *received* by a free act of faith (John 1:12; Eph. 2:8–9), yet it does not find its *source* in our will but in God (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16). With respect to the freedom of *accepting* God’s gift of salvation, the Bible is clear: fallen beings have the ability to so do, since God’s Word repeatedly calls upon us to receive salvation by exercising our faith (cf. Acts 16:31; 17:30; 20:21).

Thus, the free will of fallen human beings is both “horizontal” (social) with respect to this world and “vertical” (spiritual) with respect to God. The *horizontal freedom* is evident, for instance, in our choice of a mate: “If her husband dies, she is *free* to marry anyone *she wishes*, but he must belong to the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). This freedom is described as having “*no constraint*,” a freedom where one has “*authority over his own will*” and where one “*has decided this in his own heart*” (v. 37 NASB). This is also described in an act of giving “entirely on their own” (2 Cor. 8:3) as well as being “spontaneous and not forced” (Philem. 14).

The *vertical freedom* to believe is everywhere implied in the gospel call (e.g., cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31; 17:30). That is, humans are offered salvation as a gift (Rom. 6:23) and called upon to believe it and accept it (John 1:12). Never does the Bible say, “Be saved in order to believe”; instead, repeatedly, it commands, “Believe in order to be saved.”²⁷ Peter describes what is meant by free choice in saying that it is “*not under compulsion*” but “*voluntarily*” (1 Peter 5:2 NASB). Paul depicts the nature of freedom as an act where one “*purposed in his heart*” and does not act “*under compulsion*” (2 Cor. 9:7 NASB). In Philemon 14 he also says that choice is an act of “*consent*” and should “*not be ... by compulsion, but of your own free will*” (NASB).

Unsaved people have a free choice regarding the reception or rejection of God’s gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23). Jesus lamented the state of those who rejected Him: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*” (Matt. 23:37). John affirmed, “*All who received him [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12). Indeed, as we have frequently observed, God desires that all unsaved people will change their mind (i.e., repent), for “he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but *everyone to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

Like the alternatives of life and death that Moses gave to Israel, God says, “*Choose life*” (cf. Deut. 30:19). Joshua said to his people: “*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*” (Josh. 24:15). God sets morally and spiritually responsible alternatives before human beings, leaving the *choice* and *responsibility* to them. Jesus said to the unbelievers of His day: “If you do not *believe* that I am ... you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24), which implies they *could have* and *should have* believed.

Over and over, “belief” is declared to be something we are accountable to embrace: “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69); “Who is he, sir?... Tell me so that I may believe in him” (John 9:36); “Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him” (John 9:38); “Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but *you* do not believe’ ” (John 10:25). This is why Jesus said, “*Whoever believes* in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed* in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18).

NOTES

22 Again, spiritual *death* in the Bible does not mean “annihilation” but “separation”: “Your iniquities have *separated* you from your God” (Isa. 59:2). Likewise, the “second death” (Rev. 20:14; cf. 19:20; 20:10) is not permanent non-existence but eternal conscious separation from God.

23 See chapter 4.

24 Note that Genesis 9 is *post-Fall*; see also James 3:9.

25 That is, they willfully “hold it down.”

26 See Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, especially 75–76; 126–28; 198; 216; 316–18 and Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, especially 1.1.15; 1.1.18; 1.2.4.

27 See chapters 12 and 16.

Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 127-130.