



## Lesson 2: Man's Sin and God's Promise

### **Lesson Introduction:**

As we move towards Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, it is helpful to consider why these events took place. So, in this lesson we will look in Genesis to find out more. The book of Genesis is a book of beginnings. In the book we read about the beginning of the world, the beginning of mankind, the beginning of Israel, and the beginning of God's plan for salvation. We also see the beginning of sin in humanity.<sup>1</sup> The book of Genesis generates a lot of debate regarding the nature of these beginnings. While this lesson does not address many of the debatable issues, it is important to make a few comments about the book as a whole in this introduction.

The book of Genesis was not intended to be a science book or even a history book like the modern history books we read today. The main point of the book is to teach us about God and his relationship with creation. The technical questions regarding creation are secondary to the primary message. Thus, we will prioritize what the book emphasizes: That God is the Creator who consistently takes the initiative to love and redeem His creation. In this lesson we will look back at creation to examine the origins of humanity, human sin, and redemption.

**Read the Text:** Genesis 3

### **Understanding the Text:**

#### *Creation Before the Fall*

Creation itself is an act of love. Nothing in our world existed prior to God. God took the initiative to create an environment where life could be sustained. Then, as the pinnacle of his creative work, He made man and women to enjoy, rule, and live off of His creation. God made mankind in his own image. This does not mean that we resemble God physically. Rather, it designates humanity as more than mere physical beings. We are also spiritual beings who represent our Creator in His creation. The command, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) is a mandate for humanity. Humans further the creation that God brought forth out of nothing. Being fruitful and multiplying involves both creating new life and nurturing life and the creation that sustains it. Humans were also tasked with subduing and ruling over the earth as representatives of the authority of God in creation. Subduing and ruling here is not a matter of defeating nature. Rather, we work to ensure that creation remains the setting where life can be sustained. To care for creation and to create new life in it is to carry on the work of God in whose image we are made.

God also gave another command: "Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). Although we do not know the exact nature of this tree some things are clear. First, the tree was good because God called everything he made in creation good. Second, the command against eating from it was not given to keep humanity ignorant. Humanity was not ignorant. In fact, humanity had access to the greatest source of all knowledge, God himself. In giving His commands, God had established a standard of right and wrong from which humanity could distinguish between good and evil. Why, then, would God put this tree in the garden? The tree represented a genuine choice that Adam and Eve had to make every day. Would they choose God or would they not choose God? Would they choose to learn from the word of God or pursue knowledge in ways contrary to the plan of God? God didn't create robots. God wanted humans to genuinely love Him as He genuinely loved them. God also had a choice, to create or not create. He chose to create as an expression of supreme love. Now, in the garden, Adam and Eve have the choice to obey God's word regarding the trees as an expression of their genuine love for God. Both God's initiative in creation and man's obedience in creation are expressions of genuine love.

As a result of hearing and believing God's word, Adam and Eve knew it was wrong to eat from the tree. Only through the word of God did they know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. They had no experience of doing evil from which to learn. They only knew of evil notionally, not as a lived experience. Thus, to eat from the forbidden tree would be gain knowledge of good and evil through sinful activity rather than the word of God.<sup>ii</sup> It's like telling a child not to touch fire. Children know from the word of their parents that fire will burn but until they are actually burned, they do not have the knowledge that accompanies experience. Learning good things through good experiences is wonderful. However, learning through bad experiences is problematic. Nevertheless, knowledge gained in such a way, through rebellion, disobedience, and bad decisions, can be redeemed.

Up in the branches of this tree lurked the serpent, the enemy of God and his people. He called out from the tree for humanity to come and experience what God had commanded against. He deceived by twisting the word of God. He portrayed the loving commandments of God as harmful restrictions on human freedom and knowledge. Adam and Eve had to respond. The decision before them is not really about what fruit to eat. They must choose God or not choose God; honor him or betray him; express love or rejection. Adam and Eve fail to make the right decision and fall in the face of temptation.

### *The Roots of the Fall*

1. Doubting God and His Word - The serpent, the enemy of God, did not begin by holding up the forbidden fruit. He began by putting down the word of God. The serpent presented Eve with the possibility that the word of God was not true and she began to doubt. Doubt is the space from which the enemy launches his attack. Doubting God and His word opens the way for temptation to come. Eve and Adam both eventually wavered in their trust in God and His word. Their faith in God, who they knew so closely, was quickly abandoned or at least diminished in the face of the serpent's challenge. Those who walked with God in the cool of the day rejected Him in the midst of opposition. Faith is easily maintained in the midst of ideal circumstances. The truly faithful, however, are steadfast when situations arise that challenge their faith.

2. Pride and Arrogance – Once the serpent saw that Eve was doubting God he knew the time was right to suggest exalting self. The serpent said, "When you eat from this tree your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." Yet the eyes of Adam and Eve were not closed, God open them himself when He breathed the breath of life into them and spoke the words of life into them and invited them to eat of the tree of life. They were already made in the image and likeness of God. If Adam and Eve had trusted in God's word, they would have had confidence that they were like God as God intended. It is good to want to be like God in character, work, love, etc. It is wrong to want to be like God in ways God did not intend. Selfishly wanting to be a god is sinful. Yet we put ourself in God's place when we exalt self over God; when we trust in your own understanding rather than Gods' word. Pride and arrogance are the results of persistent doubt because if we lack confidence in the plan of God we will chase after our own plans. When God is diminished in our eyes, we will place ourself in His place. Here we find Eve reaching up in her own strength and understanding, striving not only for a piece of fruit but also after an unhealthy desire to be godlike. Rather than reaching out to God in faith believing she reaches up in pride and arrogance dismissing the love of God and denying her dependence on God. Pride and arrogance make us more susceptible to temptation. When we think too highly of ourselves or selfishly desire for ourselves, we become weaker in the midst of temptation.

3. Act of Disobedience – The actual disobedient act of eating the fruit did not arise spontaneously. Adam and Eve did not stumble into their fall. They walked wide-eyed into it.<sup>iii</sup> The enemy had a clear plan of first convincing them to doubt God and then encouraging them to trust self. Self-confidence is good when that confidence arises from faith in God. Pride and arrogance, however, are the result of trust in self rather than God. The fruit of such behavior is sin. Sin is the ugly flower than blooms on the vine of pride that grows from the root of doubt. When doubt is uprooted, faith can take hold and produce a strong but humble vine from which the flower of obedience blossoms. Adam and Eve allowed doubt to thrive and grow and produce fruit in their lives. The consequences are still being felt today.

### *The Results of the Fall*

The results of the fall are either directly mentioned or implied in this text. Among them include:

1. Hardship for humanity – Rejecting God comes with consequences. For humanity, the creation which was designed to sustain life will now only do so by the constant toil of mankind. Creation is less cooperative and conducive for life as a result of sin.
2. Cursing for creation – The sin of humanity also produced corruption and decay for creation. Paul wrote in Romans 8:19-21 that creation was placed in bondage to decay as a result of the sin of man. Creation groans even now for redemption.
3. Peace with God shattered – Humanity was created to love and worship God. That plan was rejected in pursuit of sin. As a result, humans became the enemies of God (Romans 5:10).
4. Access to God limited – God dramatically demonstrated the separation between God and man when he assigned cherubim with flaming swords to keep mankind out of the garden. Later in the Old Testament, the division between man and God was seen in the Tabernacle and Temple. A curtain divided the building as a physical representation of the spiritual reality. Mankind was no longer able to enter the presence of God on account of sin.
5. Death – Initially, it seemed as if the serpent was right, they did not immediately die. Though they remained physically alive, we see that Adam and Eve did die an immediate, spiritual death. This spiritual deadness is seen in the inability of man and women to stand in God’s presence. Separation from God is a death and this spiritual death was passed down to all subsequent generations. Eventually, by being cut off from the Tree of Life, physical death would also come to Adam and Eve. Thus, all their descendants are born with spiritual deadness and will eventually experience physical death.

As mentioned above, the consequences of sin were not for Adam and Eve alone. All humanity is born fallen and corrupted. Sinful flesh begets sinful flesh. Though we are physically alive we are spiritual dead until we accept Christ (Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13). This is why Jesus emphasizes being born again, not by the flesh but by the Spirit in John 3:3-6. Salvation is coming alive in our spirit before we die in our flesh so that we may live for eternity.

Humanity inherits Adam and Eve’s sinful condition (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Yet we are also sinners for we too break God’s laws. We have also doubted or even rejected God’s Word. We have exalted self above all else. We have made wrong and bad choices. We share not only the sinful condition of Adam and Eve, we also share the in the act of sinning.

In summary, the results of the fall are tragic and disastrous for humanity. We are condemned at every turn and corrupt in every way. Humanity has fallen; we are in trouble with God and given over unto death. Paul summarized the condition of humanity in Romans 7:24: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (NIV).

#### *The Remedy for the Fall*

There is good news in Genesis 3. Ultimately, this is not a story about creation or sin, fallen humans or talking animals. This is a lesson about God. Genesis was not written to teach us about the science of creation but the nature of the Creator. Even in this text, Genesis 3, God speaks 5 times more than the serpent and the woman and 6 times more than the man. His work, His word, and His character are the priorities in this story. Yes, in the story we learn something about how humanity came into a sinful state but more importantly we learn how God has already moved on our behalf to save and restore us back into right relationship with Him

We are not left in Genesis 3 without a message of hope. We immediately see the grace of God at work. Here, it is important to remember two things: First, God was not obligated to save humanity. He did not have to intervene on behalf of humanity. His intervention was an act of grace, not obligation. Second, God did not wait to intervene but immediately responded to fallen humanity with a promise and a plan for redemption. God did not wait for Moses or Isaiah or the New Testament to reveal his plan. He shows us the remedy for sin and the path to salvation even while the taste of the forbidden fruit was still on the lips of Adam and Even. Yes, God surely demonstrated his justice in the form of severe punishment but God also demonstrated his mercy right alongside his justice when he shows the following remedy for the fall:

1. The Initiative of God. As mentioned in the beginning, creation was solely undertaken as God’s initiative. God alone made the decision and exerted the effort to establish creation. In the same way, the redemption of humanity begins with God’s initiative. Adam and Eve did not go seeking for God after the fall. They hid from God. God came into Eden looking for his people in full awareness of their sin. He wasn’t

surprised by the condition in which he found them, he sought them out because they were in such a condition. They were helplessly lost and needed saving. Adam and Eve did not even ask for salvation, rather they pointed the fingers at each other. Yet God came with a message of redemption. Salvation is totally the initiative of God. God does not save us because we beg Him enough or because we work hard enough. We did not come to Him and propose the idea of salvation. God came to us with the message of salvation. As Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God took the initiative. By this I mean that God himself made the plan and exerted the effort and paid the price for us to be redeemed, restored, and saved. One day we will eat again from the tree of life because God took the initiative to bring us back to Him.

2. The Coming of Christ. Just as God came into the garden looking for Adam and Eve, in Genesis 3:15 we can foresee the coming of Christ into the created world "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Genesis 3:15 is often called the first preaching of the Gospel. Just as God begins to give out curses, He makes a promise. The promise is that one day someone would come from women who would rise up against the serpent. The serpent would strike his heel but he would crush the serpent's head. This one to come would do what Adam and Eve failed to do. Eve should not have listened to the serpent. Adam should have opposed and resisted the serpent. They failed but someone was coming who would be victorious and with his bloody heel defeat the enemy once and for all. This was the promise of Jesus. Jesus was not plan C or an afterthought. He was not sent in a desperate, last minute effort to fulfill the plan of God. From the moment Adam and Eve sinned (and even before – Revelation 13:8) God had a plan to send His Son to be our Savior and do what we could not in regards to sin and Satan.

3. The Covering of God. After Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked. This is a reference to the first ever feeling of shame. Prior to sin, they felt no shame. After they sinned, they felt shame. Most likely, their bodies were not the source of their shame. Rather, they realized that sin had brought corruption into their lives and they were now unrighteous. They recognized that they were no longer right, no longer righteous. They tried to sew together some leaves to cover them, to hide their sin and shame and unrighteousness but when God found them, He made it clear that the covering they had made for themselves was inadequate. It was not good enough. So, in Genesis 3:21, God makes a covering for them. His covering was not made of leaves but of skin. God went out deeper into his own creation and found some animals who were innocent of sin. These animals were killed and their blood was spilled so that Adam and Eve might have a suitable covering. Very early in God's story we learn two important truths:

A. No human work can make us truly righteous (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:20) Our best is not good enough. We are thoroughly corrupt and completely unable to save ourselves.

B. True righteousness can only come by the shedding of blood (Exodus 12:13; Hebrews 9:22). Animal's blood is a temporary solution but another type of blood is needed for lasting results.

Even in Genesis we have a clear picture of the Gospel. God has taken the initiative to send us a savior to defeat the enemy and cover us so that we might stand in right relationship with God once more. Jesus was the fulfillment of all this. Jesus came not by the work of man but by the grace and initiative of God. Jesus overcame sin, death, and Satan. Jesus prepared a covering for us by shedding his own blood. The blood of the animals covered for a season but the blood of Christ covers us for eternity. Jesus shed his blood and gave his life on a tree so that we may be right with God again and saved from eternal destruction.

Note: See my comment on Genesis 3:22 in the endnotes of this lesson for a discussion of the meaning of that verse.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Apply the Text:**

The purpose of these lessons in general is to prepare us for our annual remembrance of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. This lesson in particular helps us to better understand and appreciate the reason why Good Friday happened. On Good Friday the head of that ancient serpent was crushed by the bloody heel of Jesus. The blood of Jesus, however, was not merely shed as a result of Satan's attack. He shed his blood unto the point of death to be an eternal and forever sufficient sacrifice for our sins. No one from has been able to reverse the curse of sin, not even one. Everyone who tried, even by following the law, was no more successful than the first couple. All our effort only amounts to sewn leaves or filthy rags. Human history clearly demonstrates that humanity cannot save itself from the condemnation of neither the

original sin in Eden nor the personal sin we commit. But God, from the very beginning, purposed to send His Son for sinful humanity to die on behalf of sinful humanity. How can we respond to such an act of mercy, grace, and love? Looking back in this story and looking ahead to Easter, I see at least three ways we can honor the initiative of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

1. We must come to God daily in faith believing. The enemy came to sow the seeds of doubt. The opposite of doubt is faith. We need to cultivate faith in our lives and in our communities. Faith is not only a New Testament concept. God has always desired for His people to live by faith and respond to God in faith and with faithfulness. During this season of Lent, let us examine the condition of our faith. Faith is not a set of beliefs we affirm to join a church or get baptized. Faith in our trust in God and his word that exists even in times of trouble or confusion. Are we trusting in God more or less? Is doubt growing or shrinking in our life? Trusting in God is not just believing in his existence. Adam and Eve walked with him but still doubted him. Trust is confidence in God above all else. Let's commit to building up more of this confident, trusting, faith in God.

2. We must develop trust in God's word. Adam and Eve knew God's word but didn't trust it. Many believers know Scripture from memory and have constant access to the word of God in the Bible yet fail to trust in that word. Let's reignite our passion to study the word of God and practice trusting in his word more and more. Obeying God's word is the goal but obedience is made possible by trust and faith in God and his Word.

3. We must embrace humility. Adam and Eve exalted selfish desires above the plan of God. They shunned being like God in character and sought to be like Him in inappropriate ways. Many of us live in cultures that promote self and selfishness. People are determining for themselves what is good and evil rather than accepting the word of God. Such attitudes stand in contrast to the kingdom of God. In fact, God promises in multiples places to exalt the humble but humble the exalted (Proverbs 3:34; Luke 18:40; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6). Humility is the product of deep trust in God. When are confident in who God is and what God says, we can rest in him and be free from the desire to make ourselves great. Lent is the perfect season to practice humility in light of what God has said and what God has done for us. To be a humble servant is a might calling. For we would rather be humble in this world and exalted by God than exalted in this world and humbled by God.

### **Conclusion:**

As we saw with Adam and Eve, acts of sin arise out of doubt and pride. The enemy is still at work tempting us to doubt God and exalt self. Perhaps he has been more successful recently than we care to admit. Let the serpent linger no longer in our thoughts or in our homes. His head is crushed and we too can resist him and oppose him and he must flee from us (James 4:7). Let us uproot his evil seeds from our garden and cultivate faith, humility, and obedience.

Of course, the greatest application from this text is to respond to God's call and initiative for your salvation. God has provided the remedy for our sinful condition. By the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we can be right with God for eternity. If we repent and believe we shall be saved.

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<sup>i</sup> The origin of sin itself must be found outside of the Garden of Eden. As Larry Hart points out, "There must have been a transcendent fall in the heavenlies prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. The serpent is clearly portrayed as pursuing evil intentions. Sin already exists prior to the fall of humankind. . . The fall account in Genesis informs us of the entrance of sin into the human race, not of the origin of sin itself, which took place in the spiritual realm when Satan and his angels rebelled." Larry D. Hart, *Truth Aflame* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 219.

<sup>ii</sup> Here I am presenting the product of my personal study of Genesis 3 and I recognize that others may hold different but equally valuable understandings of the nature of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Christopher Wright also offers a helpful perspective: "What was being offered by the serpent and then claimed by the human pair through their disobedient act was not just the ability to recognize the difference between good and evil . . . but the right to define for oneself good and evil." Wright explains that defining good and evil is totally the prerogative of God and humans seeking to define for themselves right and wrong are essentially trying to usurp God. Wright continues, "Humans have not now become gods but they have chosen to act as though they were – defining and deciding for themselves what they will regard as good and evil." Christopher J. W. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 164.

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<sup>iii</sup> J. Rodman Williams emphasizes that Adam and Even “cannot be absolved of responsibility for sin’s entrance into the world. Their action was wholly contrary to God’s command, and done in the freedom God had granted. Nor was it a matter of ignorance or naivete, but an actual decision of the will to be deceived rather than to follow God’s bidding. Such is the sad, indeed tragic, picture of mankind’s action in the beginning.” J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 229.

<sup>iv</sup> In Genesis 3:22 God says, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” God’s statement here is somewhat surprising, “the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” As we already mentioned, God created Adam and Eve in the image and likeness of God. God also gave them understanding between right and wrong. So how did Adam and Eve become more like God in knowing good from evil? Until Adam and Eve sinned, they were unaware of the horrible results of sin. God, however, was aware for sin’s destruction and horror. It was displayed in heaven with the rebellion of Satan and other angels. The response of God to both Satan’s rebellion and Adam’s rebellion was the same. They were cast out of the place God had originally placed them. In both cases, God was not worried that Satan or Adam might usurp or overthrow Him. Rather, their personal experiences with sin disqualified them from remaining in God’s presence. God had no personal experience with sin but he has seen firsthand its terrible effects. Adam had not. Thus, when Adam attained this knowledge through sin, he had a knowledge that God also had but a knowledge he was not intended to have. I think this is what God meant by saying, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” J. Rodman Williams writes, “God in His grace would have the human race excluded from a knowledge of the irruption of evil into the heavenly spheres – all its malice and perversity – and live in a world that He made ‘very good,’ with nothing but perfect fellowship with Himself and all else in His creation. This would not mean simple innocence but developed character. . . But such was not man’s situation. By partaking of a knowledge that God would have foreclosed from him and viewing this as wisdom – something ‘to be desired to make one wise’ – man thereby became a participant in the realm of darkness and evil.” (*Renewal Theology: Volume 1*, 236).

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