

HUMANITY'S FALL

Genesis 3:1-19

We interact with each other and the world around us. We do things and expect or anticipate responses. If we turn the ignition key in our car, we expect it to start. If we put it in gear and press the accelerator, then we expect it to move. We get responses from people. We speak and they reply. We learn how things work whether it is with objects or interacting with people. Sometimes we have to figure out the cause and effect relationships and sometimes we are told what will happen.

In our relationship to God, we are told how He responds to our actions and attitudes. Now we don't necessarily know the specific response but the general responses can be known. A lot of what we call "promises" are simply the responses we can expect from God. For example, one of the proverbs tells us to "trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not to our own understanding, to acknowledge Him in all our ways and He will direct our paths." On the other side, we are told "God resists the proud." The specifics are not spelled out, but we can expect God to respond. This situation has been around since the initial interactions that God had with mankind. If we go back in time to the account of the "fall" we see events unfolding that tell us about the condition of man and his relationship with God.

The Sham – 3:1-5

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' " ⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! ⁵ "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:1-5 (NASB95)

A new character (the serpent) entered the scene of the habitat of Adam and Eve. What is the origin of this serpent? In the Genesis account which is viewed from the perspective of humanity we know nothing of this creature beyond it being "crafty." We learn from other accounts in the Scriptures that this serpent was Satan. Some have argued that Satan had disguised himself as a snake and the entity talking with Eve was not one of the "created reptiles" since these did not have the ability to speak. This idea comes from the absence of the word "other" in verse one – "more crafty than any *other* beast" – which would suggest that this "serpent" was not just a beast of the field. Those who disagree with that idea question why the judgment of God (verse 15-16) would impact the physically created snakes.

Satan had challenged God's authority in heaven and had been cast out. When this rebellion happened is uncertain and in the realm of "eternity" the chronological time may not be a factor. In this encounter with Eve, he was (again) challenging God's authority by questioning God's Word.

The question was cunningly crafted to ensnare Eve. The question contained an element of truth and an obvious error. Obviously, the serpent knew what God had told Adam regarding eating of the trees in the garden. The lesson for us is that the enemies of God and His people know enough about the Word of God to distort it in such a way that it serves their agendas and diminishes the effectiveness of what we should be doing in the Kingdom of God.

The obvious error in the question was the insinuation that Adam and Eve could not eat fruit of any tree in the garden. Bonhoeffer termed this insinuation as a "cunning exaggeration" that was designed to draw Eve into a debate with the serpent so that Eve became a defender of

the word of God and to a certain extent was put into a position of being a judge of what God meant. This would make Eve the first theologian. Obviously, God did not say what the question implied.

Another implication in the question was that God (if He had said what the serpent's question suggested) wanted to withhold something "good" from Adam and Eve and that would be the fruit of every other tree in the garden that was good for food. Up to this point, all that Adam and Eve knew of God was that He was gracious and good. This question of the serpent had the ultimate purpose of dishonoring God by implying that His motivation for the commandment to not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was something less than gracious benefits for the well being of man.

The question also is cast in terms that sound pious and that was accomplished by the use of the word "indeed" or "really." The question he put to Eve could be stated in today's language as, "I can't believe that God told you that you shouldn't eat certain things." Or a little more modern, "I can't believe that God would care if you went to a R-rated movie." We might even cast the statement in religious terms: "I can't believe that God expects us to take the virgin birth (resurrection, creation, Second Coming) as literal." The tone of such questions is that "surely God is more reasonable than that." Anything Satan can do to undermine the authority of God, he will do.

Eve knew there was a prohibition against eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In fact, she told Satan about it. She also added to the prohibition something about not even touching it. We do that sometimes. As Christians we see things that are sinful and realize the dangers of being under the control of that sin. So, as a safety factor, we say, don't put yourself in the position of being tempted. The previous account given about the prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not include anything about touching the fruit. However, Eve may have been like we are sometimes and concluded that if she didn't touch it, then she certainly wouldn't eat it.

The consequence of eating of the forbidden fruit was death. One might wonder why it is wrong for us to have "knowledge of good and evil." After all, they already had some knowledge in this area: they were not to eat of the forbidden fruit. The Bible tells us that from the creation, we can know the invisible attributes of God. Furthermore, Adam and Eve were in daily fellowship with God and could know what He wanted. The answer to the question of "why it is wrong to have knowledge of good and evil" is found in the next two verses.

First of all, the lying nature of Satan took over and "questioning God's Word" moved immediately to denying and "contradicting God's Word." One might argue that Adam and Eve did not die when they ate of the fruit. They did not immediately die physically, but they did die spiritually in that they were cut off from the presence and fellowship with God. So, we need to be careful that we not only know what the Word of God **says**, but also that we know what it **means**.

Satan did not stop at lying about what God said. He also questioned the motives of God in giving prohibitions. God's intent was to protect mankind. We tell our children to not play in the street, not because we want to deny them the fun of doing so, but because there is serious danger of being harmed. In the same way, God's prohibitions are to protect us because He loves us. But Satan tried to attribute it to selfish motives.

In a subtle way, he introduced to Eve the desirability of becoming as gods or of being divine. Ironically, becoming as God is, is exactly what God had intended for mankind in the beginning. After all, He did say, Let Us make man in Our image. God wants us to be as He is –

we are His children. He wants us to be loving and kind, righteous and holy, merciful and forgiving. But Satan's appeal was that we become as gods, knowing good and evil. Which brings us back to the question of "What is wrong with knowing good and evil?" The word "know" could also be translated "discern." The real problem then lies in "discerning for ourselves" what is good and evil. If this ability were possible, then we might be independent of God. Another way to view this is that as we do so, we violate the boundary in the center and put ourselves in the place of God. This is exactly what modern man (Humanists) is doing today. They are determining for themselves "what is right and what is wrong" apart from the Word of God. The original sin is still being re-enacted on a daily basis.

The Scam – 3:6

⁶ 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 desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6 (NASB95)

Here we see the danger of neglecting the spiritual side of our life. The desirability of the fruit appealed to the physical body (it was good for food) and the soulish part of our being (it had beauty and could make us wise). There is no appeal to the spiritual part of our being. The result is that when we consider only the desires of the body and soul we will likely wind up sinning against God.

There is a tendency to equate knowledge with wisdom. The stated benefit (just from the name of the tree) of eating the forbidden fruit was knowledge of "good and evil." Presumably, since Adam and Eve were enjoying the benefits of living in the Garden of Eden and the blessings of their interactions with God, they already had knowledge of what was "good." They were oblivious to the idea of evil. As we well know and have seen in the actions of others and even our own actions, just knowing what is "right and wrong" does not always produce wise choices.

Another thing we see here is the tendency of people to want to validate their behavior by getting others to do what they are doing. The result was that she got Adam to participate in consuming the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The Shame – 3:7

⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. Genesis 3:7 (NASB95)

Did the serpent lie to Eve? Technically, he did not lie. Their eyes of discernment were opened. Did they become like God? To some extent they had become like God in that they gained the ability to know about or discern evil. It is possible to say something that is in itself true, but to give a completely erroneous impression. This is the work of the devil. We find such deception at work in our world today. "If you like your health care provider, then you can keep him" was the statement. What was not said was that you could not afford to do so.

What Adam and Eve thought would happen did not come to pass. They had not considered the consequences of being able to discern "good and evil" without having the "mind of God." Their incomplete understanding of "good and evil" destroyed the unity they had with God. They recognized that He was different from them. The unity they had with each other was also impacted. Before the fall, they viewed each other as being "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Now they discovered that they were different and that discovery led to disunity and distrust and shame. The disunity with God led to guilt.

In an attempt to correct this realization of difference that resulted in disunity, an attempt was made to cover up the evidence of the difference by using fig leaves. This did not change the

fact they now knew of the difference and that knowledge would impact their relationship in everything they did, but it was an attempt to “overlook” or to attempt to ignore it by a technique of “out of sight, out of mind.” We know that really does not work as we see from the obsession that people still have with the “differences” that exist between men and women.

In place of the expected glorious condition of becoming closer to God, their new knowledge produced a separation since they realized how far removed they actually were from His perfection and they could not find a way to restore the relationship they had in their prior innocence. So they simply hid themselves from God by blending into the cover of the world or hiding behind a tree. People are still doing this today as they try to hide from God by blending into the background of the world’s way of doing things.

The Scared – 3:8-10

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” Genesis 3:8-10 (NASB95)

Guilt is to sin as pain is physical injury. In our guilt we see ourselves as we are (exposed) and we then try to cover up the exposure rather than deal with the source of the guilt (the sin in our lives). Eventually, accountability comes in the form of encountering God. Our natural response is to hide and run away from God. This is tragic because He is the only One Who can help us.

Mankind’s initial reaction to the recognition of being different from God was to hide. The realization that “you can run but you cannot hide” resulted in man trying to correct the problem of separation by determining what was pleasing to God and then attempting to do everything in a proper way in order to restore what was lost. This resulted in humanity’s attempt of “salvation by works.” The Old Testament historical accounts are replete with the failures of this approach.

The Scrutiny – 3:11-13

¹¹And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Genesis 3:11-13 (NASB95)

God confronts us with the fact of our sin. That is conviction. He gives us an opportunity to confess our sin. He asked Adam, “Have you eaten of the tree?” I cannot help but wonder what would have happened if Adam had said, “Lord, I did it and I realize that it was wrong. Please forgive me.” God never changes and I John 1:9 tells us that “If we confess our sin, that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But Adam did not do that. He passed the buck and sort of blamed God for giving him that woman and Eve passed the buck and blamed it on the serpent. If we try to rationalize what we have done, then we will not be acknowledging sin as sin and confessing it. The response of God to such action was judgment. (Bonhoeffer contended in *Creation and Fall* that what Adam and Eve did was inconceivable and, therefore, was unforgivable. Considering all that God did to bring about a restoration in Christ Jesus, Bonhoeffer may be correct. The price of sin (death) could not be forgiven – it had to be paid – and Christ paid that price for us.)

The Sentence – 3:14-19

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more

than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; ¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” ¹⁶ To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.” ¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:14-19 (NASB95)

The consequences of sin are real. Sometime these consequences do not show up immediately but the long-term effects of sin eventually appear. The serpent was condemned to crawl and to warfare with humans. This warfare is seen in the physical realm in that most people either fear or hate snakes. The spiritual implication of their “enmity” points to the work of the cross in which Christ defeated the devil. Some see this as the “first gospel” and is a preview of what would happen throughout human history: Even in the face of judgment, God provides hope and His mercy is greater than His wrath.

The sentence on Eve is somewhat indicative of what all of fallen humanity experiences. Many times, our experiences of joy (birth of a child) are accompanied with pain or great costs. The joy of our salvation was accomplished though unimaginable pain and price in the death of God’s Son on the cross.

Before the fall, Eve was a suitable partner to Adam as they acted in partnership (good) in carrying the work God had for them in the garden. As Eve ignored that partnership by taking the lead in eating of the fruit without consulting Adam, she found herself being “ruled over” by man (evil). Originally, Adam was “at rest” in the garden as he carried out the work of tending and keeping the garden. With the rebellion, his rest (good) became hard work (evil) and a battle with weeds (the evil) to produce food (the good) that was desirable. Hard work would enable him to live (good), but eventually he would die (evil). This was an indication that he was about to be expelled from Eden and deprived of access to the tree of life.

Mankind left to himself will not become better and better but will go further and further into depravity. We see this tendency in drug abusers, the rock music phenomenon, pornography, and other areas. It happened that way with early man. The problem does not lie in our surrounding of external things – the problem lies in the heart of man. We will never get better by denying sin that is in our lives. We cannot escape our individual responsibility for our sin BUT we can come to God through Jesus Christ for forgiveness and experience His salvation and restoration.