

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 2 – The Harmony Broken

Key Questions:

- How did God's perfect Universe come to be so imperfect? Why do human beings suffer and die?
- Why do so many people have no knowledge of God?

Satan – Temptation and Deception (Genesis 3:1-6)

The **snake** who tempted the woman (Eve) was actually Satan – the enemy of God. The Bible does not clearly tell us about Satan's origin or how he became evil, but it is absolutely clear that only God is eternal and all powerful. Satan, therefore, was created by God, and, although he has power to influence human beings he cannot ultimately defeat God. Satan always wants to destroy what is good and keep people from trusting in and obeying God, and he does this in two major ways:

a) Deception – influencing people to believe thoughts or ideas that are not true

Satan used a clever trick to deceive Eve – he questioned what God had said (verse 1). Notice that when Eve replied to him she actually misquoted God (verse 3) because God never said that they could not *touch* the tree. Next, Satan directly denied what God had said, telling Eve that if they ate the fruit, rather than dying, they would become like God (verses 4-5). Satan was distorting Eve's view of God, by making Him seem like a selfish person who was limiting their power and His laws (which were intended to protect man) as something bad. Satan was challenging the authority of God as King and encouraging human beings to reject Him and become their own rulers in opposition to God.

b) Temptation – influencing people to do wrong by making the wrong choice seem attractive

In verse 6 we see three ways that the fruit appealed to the woman. These three things are still major sources of temptation for people today:

- **It was good for food** – although they had plenty of fruits they could eat, the woman thought this one would also be good to eat – perhaps even better than any of the others. This is an example of a good desire (hunger) gone wrong. God has given us many good desires that help us live good lives, but we need to control these desires, otherwise we will use them in selfish ways without considering the needs of others. Each of these desires can lead to harm (sin) if they are not controlled.
- **It looked nice** – often temptation appeals strongly to our eyes or one of our other senses. When we dwell on something wrong that we see or hear instead of turning away from it, we often become weaker to resist. We convince ourselves that we have the right to do what we want anyway (“if it seems good, it must be OK”), and that we are strong enough to cope with doing it, even though other people may not be.
- **The fruit would give them wisdom** – often we think that we will receive good results if we do something, even though it might be wrong. We convince ourselves that our lives will become fuller, happier, or more complete.

Sin – rejection of God (Genesis 3:6)

Eve obeyed the snake, and Adam obeyed her. The decision they made was to disobey what God had said and make themselves king in God's place. **They believed the lie that they could become their own gods, living life by their own choices instead of by obedience to God's laws.** Effectively what they said was, “I don't need God to be the King of my life, I can make my own decision and be my own King”. The Bible uses a very simple word to describe this rejection of God and rebellion against Him – **SIN**. Man wanted to have complete control over his own life, but he did not have the power to do it! This is the same choice every human being has made since Adam and Eve. In fact, the Bible tells us that we have inherited the principle of sin in our lives, and the result is that we do wrong things.

The results of Sin (Genesis 3:7-23)

As a result of eating from the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, the man and woman now had an understanding of what is evil as well as what is good. In this sense they had become like God (v22). They could not, however, have God's unlimited power and wisdom, so they were unable to cope with this new understanding. Sin makes people slaves – it traps them so that they are powerless to avoid doing wrong. Sin had immediate results for the man and woman:

Harmony with one another broken – innocence changes to dishonesty and distrust

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. (verse 7)

They had to clothe themselves as they were no longer innocent. This was an attempt to cover themselves and hide the shame they felt. They were no longer innocent before each other. There was also a loss of honesty and trust in their relationship as the man blamed the woman for giving him the fruit to eat.

Harmony with God broken – trust changes to fear and shame

I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked. (verse 10)

In verse 7 we see the first occasion of shame in a human being. Human beings from all cultures experience the sense of having failed when they are aware of doing wrong. In Western culture we normally interpret this as guilt (the feeling of having broken a law) and in many Eastern cultures it is more often thought of as shame (having failed to live up to the expectations of our family or community). When God came to the Garden Adam and Eve tried to hide from Him because they were afraid of Him, rather than trusting Him. Instead of admitting their guilt and shame and their need of him, they

to pass the blame – from the man to the woman and from the woman to the snake. Sin had destroyed their relationship with God. Ultimately, God acted in judgement to prevent man making another wrong choice and eating from the tree of life. The man and woman were banished from the presence of God and from the Garden He had made for them. We can describe this separation from God, the life-giver, as spiritual death.

Harmony with the Universe broken – God’s Curse on all Creation

Because of man’s disobedience God placed a curse on the entire creation. This had specific consequences for the snake, the woman and the man. Life would no longer be free of pain and trouble in the world. There would be pain in ordinary processes of life – for the woman in childbirth (verse 16) and for the man in the process of work (verses 17-19). Because of the loss of harmony with the Universe there are natural disasters and diseases, and the ultimate result of man’s sin was death. This is what verse 19b means when it says “*dust you are and to dust you will return*”. Because they could no longer eat from the *Tree of Life*, the man and woman could no longer live forever (verse 22).

Sin passes to all men (Romans 1:18-32)

In the New Testament book of Romans we discover that the sinful nature, which leads us to sin, has been inherited by every one of us, and, because we sin just as Adam and Eve did, sins results (spiritual and physical death) come to all of us:

Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Over many generations sin affected mankind and human cultures. Romans 1:18-32 describes this process in two stages:

1. The knowledge of God was replaced (verses 18-25) – WRONG WORSHIP

Over the generations instead of recognising the Creator and passing on the knowledge they had about God to their children people deliberately rejected God, and so later generations knew less and less about God. God has made human beings to worship Him, and when we reject Him other things take His place. People began to worship the moon, sun and stars, or to make idols that look like animals or human beings. They created gods in their own image instead of worshipping the true creator God. This also led to a great fear of evil spirits, who were often worshipped as gods or sacrificed to as a way of keeping them happy. Some philosophies try to free human beings from this guilt and need for religion, but they cannot solve the real problem of the human heart either. We need to know the true God!

2. Society became increasingly sinful (verses 26-32) – WRONG ACTIONS

Because they rejected Him, God allowed human beings to follow their wrong desires, and the result is a list of sins that hurt other people. The wrong behaviour we see in our world is actually a result of our rejection of God.

God’s love and a promise!

The news is not all bad. In this chapter we also see evidence of God’s continued love for mankind. God’s judgement of Adam and Eve in refusing to allow them to stay in the Garden (verse 22), was also a demonstration of His love. He knew it would not be good for mankind to live forever with sin and its results, so He put them away from the *Tree of Life*. Death, as well as being a judgement for sin, would actually allow them the opportunity to have a new life the way God intended it to be. There are also two other signs of God’s love in this chapter:

- a) **The clothes of animal skin (verse 21)** – this is the first death of an animal in the Bible, and God is the One who kills it. He does this to make a covering for their shame. This is a picture of **sacrifice**, an important concept in the Bible which we will return to in the next study.
- b) **The promised rescuer (verse 15)** – God gave a promise when He was speaking to the snake that one day a descendant of the woman would crush the head of the snake, although his own heel would be bitten. This refers to a person who will come to solve the problem of sin and destroy the work of Satan. It is the first of many promises in the Old Testament about a person chosen by God to rescue mankind. These promises are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Two Ways to Live (Genesis Chapter 4)

Genesis Chapter 4 shows how sin passed to Adam’s first sons, Cain and Abel. It revealed itself in Cain in two ways:

1. **Wrong Worship** – the real problem for Cain was a struggle in his heart – whether to do what was right or to give in to sin (verse 7). Cain disobeyed God in the offering he brought to Him. It is not clear whether this was because he brought the wrong type of offering (fruits instead of an animal) or because his attitude was wrong. Whichever it was, he thought he could choose his own way to worship God rather than the way God had given.
2. **Wrong Actions (murder)** – Cain’s murder of his brother shows just how powerful sin had become in the heart of man even one generation after Adam. Sin traps us and controls us, preventing us from doing what is right.

Cain and Abel represent two ways to live life:

a) Cain – *The way of disobedience*

Cain gave in to sin and made his own choices about how to live. He allowed his instincts to rule him (leading him to murder his brother), and refused to worship God in the way that God expected. Cain chose to ignore what he knew about God and to be his own king. This is ***the way of disobedience*** – rejecting God.

b) Abel – *The way of faith*

Abel obeyed God and worshipped Him in the way that God expected. Although he also had inherited sin from his parents, he trusted in God to save him. This is ***the way of faith*** (see what the New Testament says about Abel in Hebrews 11:4). Faith means recognising God as King, seeking to obey what He says rather than depending on our own ability to guide our own lives, and depending on Him to save us.

As we read through the Bible we will see that there have always been people who lived both of these two ways. Both Cain and Abel had sin, but they made very different choices about how to live because they had different attitudes to God.

Key Lesson: God's Kingdom was destroyed through man's sin (rebellion against God)

All human beings are born with sin. Sin separates us from God, leads to wrong worship and wrong actions, and eventually causes death. There are two ways to live: disobedience (rejecting God) and faith (seeking God).