

The Fall of Mankind

Genesis 3

BSF Lesson 3
Notes
Genesis

Focus Verse

“So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’ ”
– Genesis 3:14-15

- The Choice to Sin – Genesis 3:1-6
- The Consequences of Sin – Genesis 3:7-24

Engage

Something is severely wrong with humanity and the world. Why does it seem I never measure up? Why do I gossip, blame, lie, cheat? Why do I struggle with fear, anger, bitterness, hatred, lust, shame, pride, insecurity? Why do I experience grief and loss? Why do terrorism, murder, human trafficking and racism exist in the world? Why do I constantly think about myself, rather than God and others? Culture boasts that humanity is basically good. An honest look at myself and the world says otherwise. Let’s face it: The human race has fallen, and left to ourselves, we cannot get up.

Genesis 3 unveils humanity’s problem – sin. Sin and its consequences invaded the world when Adam and Eve rejected God’s perfect character, love and authority. Evil, suffering and death now pervade life on earth as a result. What can we do? As fallen sinners, we can do nothing. Only God, Creator of the world, has the right and power to redeem what was lost and broken. In this week’s passage, we witness both the devastation of sin and the astonishing display of God’s mercy. While sin’s consequences tragically remain, we are not left without hope. Our eyes eagerly look to the Savior who has come and will come again. **Sin offends God, destroys all and is inescapable without our Savior Jesus Christ.**

The Choice to Sin – Genesis 3:1-6

Genesis 1 and 2 conclude with God’s joyful declaration that all He had created was “very good.” Adam and Eve enjoyed unhindered fellowship with God in a beautiful paradise. Creation fulfilled God’s intended purpose, thriving under His will, authority and blessing. By the end of Genesis 3, things change dramatically. We see sin, death and exile from Eden – separation between humanity and God. Because Adam and Eve rebelled against God, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”¹ While the bad news is very bad, this sober chapter does not end without hope. **Nothing thwarts the sovereign plan of God.**

their identities intertwine.³ Somehow, Satan inhabited this real creature to attack God and His image-bearers, Adam and Eve. Later in the chapter, God judges the serpent with a physical curse.

Satan does everything he can to cast doubt on God, his real enemy. The serpent deceived Eve with twisted truth. Satan led her to question God, the One who designed her and gave purpose to her life. A master of deception, most of Satan’s lies contain enough truth to hook us. Satan openly accused God of withholding good things from His children. He crafted his deceptive words to conceal his deliberate intent, for Eve to disobey God and bring death into the world.

- **In verse 1, the serpent spoke a lie disguised as a question** – “*Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?*” Satan knew God had not prohibited them from all trees. Eve added to God’s loving restriction in verse 3 to say that God would not let them even touch the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. God’s command now seemed unfair.

The Serpent and His Deception – 3:1-5

Chapter 3 opens with the entrance of the “serpent,” a crafty wild animal who engaged Eve in a conversation with devastating consequences. Who was this talking serpent? **The Bible ties the origin of evil and sin to Satan, a fallen angel.**² Other Scriptures so closely associate Satan’s deeds with this serpent that

- **In verses 4-5, the serpent called God a liar** – they would not actually die as He said. He accused God of denying them the ability to be like Him by knowing good and evil. Had God not withheld the best from them? Satan pretended he cared more than God did about their welfare and personal fulfillment.

Eve's temptation teaches us important lessons. Eve knew God personally as her Creator, the One who walked with her in the garden. **Surely Eve did not stop loving God, but she let Satan cast enough doubt on what she knew that her view and understanding of God shifted and became distorted.** Her security and confidence in His love eroded. This opened the door for sin.

Temptation itself is not sin. The devil asked Jesus similar questions when He tempted Him in the wilderness.⁴ Jesus stood firm on what was true about His Father. He did not yield to the full force of Satan's temptation. The Bible warns about temptation but also promises the Holy Spirit's power to overcome sin.⁵ God never tempts us to sin. However, God may use trials or hard things in life as loving tests so we can grow in dependence on Him and experience His faithfulness.

Satan's ploys have not changed since Eve and the garden. He asks us the same questions. "Is God really good?" "Will He really provide?" "Is God holding out on you, giving you less than you deserve?" Have you wrestled with some version of these questions? **Temptation to sin escalates when our view of God shifts, perhaps even slightly.** Recognize the subtle ways this world and the enemy downgrade God and dismiss what He has declared true.

The Sorrow of Sin – 3:6

The doubt about God that was planted in Eve's mind led to a next step that seemed small and easy but reaped

huge and hard consequences. **The tragedy and sorrow captured in verse 6 should not be read quickly or taken lightly.**

Eve sinned – 3:6

Eve should have rejected Satan's words and turned to God and Adam for help. Instead, she followed Satan's leading.

- **Eve listened** – She let her mind dwell on Satan's suggestions.
- **Eve looked** – What God had forbidden looked appealing: "good for food," "pleasing to the eye," "desirable for gaining wisdom."⁶ The fruit appealed to her human cravings and pride.
- **Eve chose** – She ignored everything else she knew about God's goodness and life in Eden. She elevated Satan's lies over what she knew was true about God.
- **Eve took and ate** – The will of her heart and her cravings conceived and gave birth to sin. She physically ate in disobedience to God.
- **Eve shared** – Eve's sin led to Adam's sin.

Adam sinned – 3:6

Scripture says Eve "gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." We do not know whether Adam was present while the serpent tempted Eve. What tempted Adam? Was his love for and union with Eve stronger in the moment than his love for God? The issue is not their relationship, the wily serpent or the appealing fruit. **Adam and Eve first devalued their relationship with God, then disobeyed His Word.** That choice changed the course of humanity. Adam knew God personally, like no one since except Jesus, the God-Man. He understood God's Word, yet he chose sin. He ate. Satan disguised death to make it look desirable. Sin involves choosing a temporary, counterfeit pleasure instead of the lasting reality offered by God.

The Consequences of Sin – Genesis 3:7-24

The Immediate Consequence – 3:7

Sin entered the world and immediately destroyed the original peace and harmony of God's creation. It set off a devastating chain reaction. **Sin distorts our view of self and others.** Sin kills innocence and freedom. Suddenly, Adam and Eve felt naked as they realized something deeply wrong within themselves. Their focus now shifted from innocence and freedom to self which created painful self-awareness. Their realization does not reflect a lack of beauty in the bodies God fashioned but an acute awareness of the guilt and

shame they feebly try to hide. They fashioned clothes from fig leaves in a human attempt to feel right and whole, which always comes up short.

The God Who Seeks Sinners – 3:8-9

Adam and Eve heard the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, so they hid. The tragedy of their broken relationship screams out here. **The face-to-face, voice-to-voice communion with God that Adam and Eve had so enjoyed is now shattered.** Like many people today, they foolishly tried to hide

from the God who sees all and knows all. Even as they hid, the God who searches hearts and seeks sinners asked Adam a question, “Where are you?” God does not abandon us to our fallen state.

The Blame Game – 3:10-13

God tenderly offered Adam and Eve an opportunity to confess and repent. They answered God’s probing questions, but they blamed each other and failed to take responsibility for their sin. Adam blamed Eve and even God, who gave her to him. Eve blamed the serpent, who deceived her. True confession accepts full responsibility for every wrong motive and action. Rather than owning what they had done, they justified themselves and shifted blame.

We all play the blame game in some way. **Sin destroys a proper sense of self and others, and it elevates self-righteousness, self-promotion and self-protection.** Today’s society upholds self-help as the solution for almost everything – perhaps we should reconsider. Facing the reality of personal sin and brokenness offers a healing first step back to God.

The Tragedy of Sin – 3:14-19

The damage inflicted by sin cannot be overstated. **Sin brought sorrow and death into what God had designed for joy and life.** The sin in the garden infected every gene of every human and every relationship in every age. Every realm of creation suffers because sin tainted what God set apart for His glory. The man and woman, created to walk with God and rule the earth, are reduced to hiding. Rebellion against God brings much more than judgment. In choosing sin, people throw away something

wonderful. The tragedy of sin, for the whole history of humanity and our everyday lives, echoes loudly and sorrowfully.

Judgment of the serpent – 3:14-15

God cursed the serpent for deceiving Eve. All creation would groan under sin, but the serpent was cursed more than all.

God’s curse also contains His promise of restoration, recorded in Genesis 3:15. The full picture of this veiled promise grows louder and clearer through the pages of Scripture and the ages of history. We learn that the serpent was Satan, and God promised to send a Savior to defeat Satan and reverse the results of the Fall. God foretells the seed of the serpent will harm the seed of the woman. **The woman’s seed – the promised Redeemer – will crush the head, life, power and poison of the serpent’s seed.** This promise pointed to Jesus Christ’s victory on the Cross over sin and death.

Judgment of Eve – 3:16

Eve would suffer great pain in childbirth and in her children’s struggles against sin, suffering and death. God also said Eve and Adam would each desire to control and dominate each other. We live amid a very real struggle against disrespect, harshness, distrust and gender stereotypes that trace back to this original sin.

Judgment of Adam – 3:17-19

God told Adam that work would involve pain and struggle. Mankind faces sweaty toil, fighting thorns and weeds to provide food, shelter and other necessities. Anxiety about the economy, jobs and workplaces flow from this reality. Our promised labor terminates in death, as man returns to the dust from which he was created. Satan said God lied about death, but death remains a persistent and painful reality for all people. This resulting death goes far beyond dying physically.

Patterns of Sin and Repentance

Adam and Eve created a pattern of reacting in sin and shame commonly practiced by all people.

- **Judging** the sin of one another
- **Covering** their shame with inadequate human solutions
- **Hiding** from the Lord God
- **Fearing** exposure and judgment
- **Denying** guilt and blaming one another and even God

Instead, repentance involves the opposite steps in reverse order.

- **Accepting** personal responsibility for your sin
- **Trusting** God and responding to His loving call
- **Exposing** your heart to God with full assurance of His love
- **Claiming** Christ’s robe of righteousness instead of your works
- **Agreeing** with God’s provision of freedom and accepting His peace

God Offers Hope Despite Sin – 3:20-24

Adam and Eve received God's declarations of judgment, and the life they knew changed. God's mercy shines through the devastation. Three aspects of God-given hope for redemption first appear in Genesis 3. **The hope of a Savior includes a promised seed, a sacrificial offering and eternal life.** These aspects progressively develop through the Bible to find ultimate meaning in Jesus Christ.

Promised seed – 3:20

Adam named his wife "Eve," showing faith in God's promise that she would be the mother of all people. Perhaps Adam reflected on the mysterious promise recorded in Genesis 3:15, which reveals a greater destiny for Eve's offspring. This prophecy can be more fully understood in the context of the entire Bible but offers the first hint of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Through Eve's promised offspring, believers in Jesus Christ from every nation and language are redeemed and become God's new humanity.** To conquer Satan, the Savior suffered for us.⁷ In victory, He reconciled us to the Father, providing new life in Jesus.

Sacrificial offering – 3:21

God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins. God's provision assumes the first recorded physical death to provide a covering for Adam and Eve. **They wore symbolic reminders that sin caused physical death and the death of right relationships with God and other creatures.** God's sacrifice offered the first hint of the sacrificial substitution necessary to atone for sin.

God's requirement of a blood sacrifice reveals both the sacredness of life and the costliness of sin. The offerings substituted innocent life in place of the sinner. Blood offerings, established in the old covenant, find their fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain for the sins of the world. Only Jesus' perfect life and substitutionary death can atone for believers' sin. Only Jesus can redeem sinners broken by the Fall and reverse the damage of sin. The new covenant symbols of the cup and bread proclaim Jesus Christ's sacrificial death until He returns.

Eternal life: banished but protected – 3:22-24

God exiled Adam and Eve from Eden in mercy and love. They left the perfect garden God created in order to work hard and till the very dirt from which Adam had been fashioned. This banishment was not merely punitive; it was also gracious. Holy God

must separate Himself from sin. But God, in mercy, commanded they not eat from the tree of life and gain immortality. He did not intend for them to live forever in their sinful state.

God placed cherubim and a flaming sword east of Eden to guard the tree of life. The Bible links cherubim with God's holy presence. Figures of cherubim were placed over the ark of the covenant.⁸ Fire conveys the blazing purity and glory of the holiness of God,⁹ and swords often symbolize the Word of God and His judgment of evil.¹⁰ **Eternal life was kept safely in store for those who would be redeemed and cleansed from sin by Jesus Christ.** The tree of life appears again in John's God-given vision of the New Jerusalem.¹¹ There, the hope represented by the tree is fully realized – the renovation of God's creation and glorified humanity in resurrected bodies.

God Has the Final Word

Adam and Eve are the father and mother of all humanity. Their purity and privilege to walk with their Creator in a perfect garden was destroyed by their willing choice to sin. Their sin delivered dreadful consequences inherited by all humans. The brokenness of people and society reflects the loss suffered in Eden. Praise God that Genesis 3 is not the end of the story. **Sin never gets the final word.** God has the final word. This chapter ends with and the Bible expands on the story of God's love, grace, mercy and hope overcoming sin.

Only God can define what is wrong with humanity – sin. The door to God's presence, once closed by sin, now stands open to all who trust the perfect sacrifice of Jesus in their place. **Sin offends God, destroys all and is inescapable without a Savior.** God's promise of the woman's offspring who would crush the serpent's head began the unfolding drama of God's gift of eternal life. Jesus Christ bore the price of our sin for all who believe in Him. Only Jesus can restore what sin cost and lost. God covers our sin with Jesus' perfection. When God looks at a believer, He sees only the righteousness of His own Son. We are great sinners, but we have a great Savior!

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The Doctrine of Humanity: Fall and Judgment

Genesis 3 describes one of the most tragic events in human history – humanity’s fall and subsequent judgment. Before the events of this chapter, Adam and Eve flourished in perfect peace with God, the world and each other. Peace was broken when Adam and Eve disobeyed and rebelled against God and His Word. The consequences were catastrophic and far-reaching. At the moment of disobedience, sin, suffering and death invaded the world. The entire human race throughout all history was affected (Romans 5:12). Humanity now sits on death row (Romans 6:23).

God judged Adam and Eve and, thereby, all humanity, in specific and distinct ways because of the Fall. The penalty of death, God’s chief judgment, includes the horrors of physical death and so much more. **Humanity’s death penalty manifests itself in five primary ways:**

1. **Spiritual death** – broken peace with God (Genesis 3:8-11, Ephesians 2:1)
2. **Physical death** – broken peace with self (Genesis 3:19)
3. **Relational death** – broken peace with others (Genesis 3:16)
4. **Covenantal death** – broken peace in relation to God’s blessing (Genesis 3:14-19)
5. **Cosmic death** – broken peace across all creation (Genesis 3:17-19, Romans 8:20-23)

In other words, death now pervades every aspect of life on earth. We are fearful and insecure in relationships. We experience alienation, isolation, pain and a perpetual sense of guilt. We lose loved ones. We struggle to find significance and a sense of purpose. We are weak and limited in our abilities. Most devastating of all, we mistrust, minimize, doubt, reject and rebel against the love of God our Creator.

How important it is to understand the full ramifications of the Fall and its consequences! Fallen human nature treats sin lightly. **However, without a humble understanding of personal unfaithfulness, rebellion and pride toward God, we cannot know the grace and redeeming power of God.** If a sick person does not know he is sick, he will not seek out a doctor for healing. In a spiritual sense, fallen humanity carries a diagnosis far worse than a sick person, for we are “dead in [y]our transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Who can rescue me from this fallen, faithless, rebellious, pride-filled body of death (Romans 7:24)? Our only hope is our Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ, the promised offspring of Genesis 3:15. Rather than faithless, He was faithful. Rather than rebellious, He was obedient. Rather than being filled with pride, He humbled Himself to “even death on a cross” for our sake (Philippians 2:8).

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Sin shattered Eden’s perfection and continues to wreak havoc today. We are broken people who live in a broken world. Left to ourselves, we remain without hope. We see evil at work in every age of human history. The startling grip of evil emerging in the cyberworld, terrorism and mass shootings reveal that despite our hopes, humanity has not advanced. The ills of society dismay us, but our own perpetual love of self should trouble us more. The deepest root of sin, refusal to love and obey God, steals more from us than we imagine. The ugliness of sin makes the beautiful gift of Jesus even more wonderful. He came to seek and save the lost. In many ways, like Adam and Eve, we hide from God, insufficiently covering our guilt with our own version of fig leaves. Jesus came looking for us, lovingly calling out, “Where are you, (insert your name)?” **Only Jesus can restore what sin stole from us.**

God did not only love Adam and Eve in their sinless bliss. He loved them perfectly, even as they walked away from Eden. **God’s love for us is not based on our worthiness, but on His perfect, unconditional love.** Romans 5:5-8 explains that at the right moment in human history, Jesus entered our sinful world to die for the powerless. He went to the Cross, the fullest possible proof of that love, while we were still hopelessly caught in sin.

The news about sin is bad, but the news of hope and redemption in Christ is very good. We are all descendants of Adam, so all have sinned.¹² Jesus Christ is the Savior, the One promised through the seed of the woman. God’s great story, the gospel, overcomes evil, sin and death. He extends grace to humankind made in His image, even though we have offended Him in the worst possible way. Those who are in Christ, the new Adam, are redeemed. We become God’s new humanity in Christ.¹³

Apply It

Learning the profound impact of Adam's choice to sin in an ancient garden can be troubling. Why should and how could that one sin forever break something in every human, including you and me? While those questions and even frustration with Adam and Eve do not change the reality, perhaps they explain it. Every day, you wake up in a world where the news is bad. Every night, you go to sleep knowing you have not measured up in so many ways. **God, in His goodness, reveals the desperation of our personal and human condition intentionally.** We need a Savior; Jesus is that Savior. Has the truth about sin – not just Adam's but your own – saddened you this week? Do you mourn what was lost? Without a full grasp of the ugly reality of sin, we do not adequately gasp in wonder at God's amazing solution. How has Genesis 3 deepened your love for Jesus, the Savior?

Even believers in Jesus, delivered from sin's ultimate penalty, struggle against the power of sin in daily life. As a Christian, are you sometimes startled at the thoughts in your mind, your motives or even your actions? Do you long to be free from always thinking of yourself first and loving fleeting pleasure more than God? Your awareness of the struggle and desire to obey God prove that God, the Holy Spirit, is at work in your heart. Take these things to the Lord, whose arms are open wide. God uses our ongoing battle with sin to deliver us from sin's stranglehold, step by step in this life. This sometimes discouraging and perpetual battle with sin in this life makes us long for eternity. In the presence of our Savior, we will forever shed the curse of sin and worship God perfectly. Do you long for that day? Does the reality of personal sin send you straight to Jesus?

Has God uniquely positioned you in situations and relationships damaged by the Fall as an agent of reconciliation? **Christians follow Jesus' example when we love broken people like He does.** If you know Christ, you experience His presence, unconditional love and grace. God intentionally designed and positioned you to bring hope and life to specific people and places dominated by confusion and darkness. Believers often look at societal wreckage and retreat. You live in a world that displays the carnage inflicted by the Fall. How is God calling you to bring the beauty of Christ into your world? While full deliverance from sin awaits eternity, stories of God's deliverance happen today. Tell your story with boldness. Love broken people.

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

1: Evil one's control: 1 John 5:19

2: Satan: Luke 10:18

3: Satan judged with serpent: Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20; Revelation 12:9; 20:2

4: Jesus in desert: Matthew 4:8-10

5: Temptation to sin: 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:13-18

6: Sin: 1 John 2:16

7: Suffering servant: Isaiah 53

8: Cherubim in worship: Exodus 37:6-9

9: Fire: Exodus 3:2; 13:21-22; Hebrews 12:29

10: Swords: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 19:15

11: Tree of life: Revelation 22:1-3

12: All have sinned: Romans 5:12-17

13: New humanity: 1 Corinthians 15:21-58