

## FREE FALL Genesis 3

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This story really begins in chapter 2, verse 25: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (3:1) “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.”

The word in Hebrew for naked is *'arummin*. And the word for clever is *'arum*. Clearly a play on words in the original language. We might read it something like this in English: The man and his wife were both nude, and they were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more shrewd.”

So the narrator begins with them innocent and nude until the serpent appears so shrewd.

I want us to notice some things about the free fall of humanity.

### **I. The root of all sin is found when we begin to believe that God cannot be trusted.**

Notice how crafty the questioning of the creature. He doesn't deny the command of God at first. He just raises the question. It's translated something like this: “Really now, did God say you can't eat from any tree of the Garden? Really?”

The woman gives him a less-than-completely-accurate paraphrase of what God had commanded. She introduces her own subtle changes. Eve actually made three changes, compared to what God had said.

First, she minimizes the provisions of the Lord. The Lord had said, “You may eat freely.” You can compare Genesis 2:16. But Eve simply said, “We may eat” (3:2)

Second, she added to the prohibition. The Lord had said nothing about touching the tree. But Eve claimed that God had said, “Neither shall you touch it.” It is almost as if she wanted to set a law for herself by means of this exaggeration, in order that she wouldn't even come close to breaking the word of God.

Third, she weakened the penalty for the sin. God had declared, “You shall surely die” (2:17). But Eve said, “Lest you die” (3:3) – meaning “you might die.” And now that she had changed “surely” to “lest,” the command had been questioned. And a questioned command is no longer the original command.

Finally, the sly serpent directly refutes the word of God. “You shall not surely die.” In fact, he more closely gives the command of God than Eve did, for God said “you will surely die” (2:18).

But the serpent contradicts, “You shall not surely die.” In fact, the Hebrew construction puts the emphasis on the “not.” It reads this way: “Not – you shall surely die.” It’s been a delusion of the human race from the very first couple: there is no punishment for disobedience.

All sin is based in the root of the serpent’s lie which claims that God is not to be trusted. The lie holds that there is a way better than God’s way. There is a way around the command of God because God is holding back on you. God is not really giving you the best. And even if God usually does know the best, in this one case is it not expected – yes, even required – of you to find a better alternative around His limits?

We place ourselves in a privileged position when we begin to believe the lie that God is, somehow, not giving His children the best – that God’s commands are holding us from the real joy we deserve.

The serpent claims exactly that: “God knows that the day that you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (verse 5).

This claim is not a complete lie because eating would cause them to know the difference between good and evil. But with knowledge came misery. Every time the tempter offers you something other than the command of God, he insinuates that there is something other than God’s way that will bring you more happiness, that will give you the greater good. After all, God is withholding the best and only giving you the good.

Once Satan convinces you – even for a moment – that God is holding back on you, he knows he can cause you to crumble.

Have you ever thought about the irony of the dialogue between the serpent and the humans? The serpent was supposed to be a subordinate because man was the crown of creation and he was supposed to subdue all the earth, he was supposed to rule over all other creatures. Being led by a subordinate snake is a curious way to achieve divinity, don’t you think?

## **II. When we seek to find our identity outside of service to God, we find ourselves in misery.**

The ultimate nature of sin is this: **Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity, apart from God. (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 168)**

The temptation facing Eve was more than just breaking the rule. She was trying to be equal with God. When you break God’s rules, you’re saying your wisdom is as great as God’s wisdom. “You’ll be like God” (v. 5), the snake had hissed.

The problem of building your identity on something other than God – whether it’s your success in business, your children, your lover, physical health or a political party is that they will all, eventually, be unable to fill the role of God for you. Identity apart from God is inherently unstable. Everyone else and all else will eventually disappoint you.

If you build your identity around your children, what do you do when they disappoint you? If you build your identity around your spouse, what do you do when he walks out, when she leaves? If you build your identity around business success, what do you do when you file for Chapter 13 or even retire?

But here's the irony. Not only will we be hurt when we don't get the other desires of our hearts, we'll be hurt even if we do.

**In a *Village Voice* column, Cynthia Heimel thought back on all the people she knew in New York City before they became famous movie stars. One worked behind the makeup counter at Macy's, one worked selling tickets at movie theaters, and so on. When they became successful, every one of them became more angry, manic, unhappy, and unstable than they had been when they were working hard to get to the top. Why? Heimel writes:**

*That giant thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything OK, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to fill them with ha-ha-happiness had happened, and the next day they woke up and they were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable. (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 173)*

You have to hand your whole self over to God. You have to trust Him. You cannot remain independent from Him. You can't find personal happiness in pleasure, relationships, ambition, or money. These are the things that will ultimately bring you sadness, even if they bring you success.

### **III. Life becomes most dangerous when we want to talk *about* God rather than *to* God.**

You cannot substitute theology in the place of obedience.

One of our staff members was talking about a special ministry situation he was in. He described the problem this way: We've got to get the message of Christ from the head to the heart. The guys in this ministry want something else to put into their heads, but they don't want anything to put into their hearts, into their lives.

Well, it's not a new problem. It's an old problem.

You see what happens when the serpent comes calling. No longer are Adam and Eve talking *with* God or *to* God (like in chapter 2), they're talking *about* God. In this text, God is treated as a third person. God is not even a party to the discussion. But He's involved as the object of the discussion. God, Himself, has become objectified. The serpent is the first creature in all the Bible to try to substitute theology – the study and discussion of God – with obedience, saying yes to the commands the boundaries of a God who knows you best and loves you most.

Notice how fast the sin happens (verse 6) once theology replaces obedience. She took. She ate. She gave. He ate.

As a result of their sins, indeed, they knew more. Satan had not completely lied to them. But the additional knowledge was evil. They saw more, but what they now saw they spoiled by seeing. Mistrust and alienation replaced the security and intimacy they had enjoyed. They once had life, but now they will have to deal with death. They'd had pleasure, and now they will have pain. They had abundance, but now they had a meager sustenance by toil. They were in perfect harmony before with God and with each other, and now there was nothing but alienation and conflict.

#### **IV. Sinners must offer confession and not excuses.**

God comes in the cool of the day. They run and hide. "Where are you, Adam?"

"I heard the sound of you in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked. So I hid myself."

"I was afraid," Adam protests. It's the same answer given by Abraham, and then by Isaac, and by all who cannot trust the goodness of God and submit to His wise provisions. When we sin, life turns back to self. "*I was afraid.*"

"How do you know you're naked, Adam?"

He wanted knowledge. He got knowledge. And knowledge ruined everything. He traded trust for knowledge.

"'You didn't eat from that tree that I commanded you not to eat from, did you?' And the man protested, 'The woman that You gave to me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.'"

Adam decides to pass the buck. "The woman that You gave me – hmmm, didn't turn out so good, God. She did it."

Then God turns to the woman. "What on earth have you done?"

And the woman says, "You know that snake? Why, he tricked me, and I ate."

It's so hard to say we're sinners, isn't it? Adam threw Eve under the bus. Eve threw the snake under the bus. And the snake just took the curse of God.

**Some years ago, Andrew Delbanco, a humanities professor at Columbia University, was doing research on Alcoholics Anonymous and was attending AA meetings around the country. One Saturday morning in a New York City church basement, he was listening to a "crisply dressed young man" who was talking about his problems. In his narrative, he was absolutely faultless. All his mistakes were due to the injustice and betrayals of others. He spoke of how he was going to avenge himself on all who had wronged him. "His every gesture gave the impression of grievously wounded pride," Delbanco wrote. It was clear that the young man was trapped in his need to justify himself, and that things could only get worse and worse in his life until he recognized this. While he was speaking, a black man in his forties, in dreadlocks and dark shades, leaned over to the professor and said, "I used to feel**

that way too, before I achieved low self-esteem.” Delbanco wrote in his book, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*:

**This was more than a good line. For me it was the moment I understood in a new way the religion I had claimed to know something about. As the speaker bombarded us with phrases like “got to take control of my life,” and “I’ve got to really believe in myself” – the man beside me took refuge in the old [doctrine] that pride is the enemy of hope. What he meant by his joke about self-esteem was that he learned no one can save himself by dint of his own efforts. He thought the speaker was still lost – lost in himself, but without knowing it.**

(Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God*, p. 167)

The problem with Adam, the problem with Eve, was that instead of confessing their sin, they wanted to deny and to justify. “It’s all the woman’s fault.” “It’s all the serpent’s fault.”

You get nowhere until you raise your hand and say, “I did it. I’m responsible. It’s my sin. I have not obeyed the word of God and the boundaries of God.”

Well, only the serpent is cursed, but pain comes to both the man and the woman.

#### **V. In the second Adam we find life just as certainly as we all find death in the first Adam.**

Perhaps we get the first hint in verse 6 with the verbs “take” and “eat.” The Lord Himself would have to taste death before these words become words of salvation. Take and eat.

Matthew 26:26

And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

The punishment ultimately upon the man and the woman finds its resting place in the second Adam, in the Christ. **With the New Testament, we’re able to see how the human race would ultimately gain victory – it would come through the one who took upon himself the curse of the whole world. The motifs in this chapter – toil, sweat, thorns, the conflict, the tree, death, dust, and the seed – all will be reflected in the experience of the Christ, who became the curse, sweat great drops of blood in bitter agony, wore a crown of thorns, hung on a tree until he was dead, and was placed in the dust of death (see Psalm 22:15). (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 141)**

God’s grace covered them with divine clothing. Verse 21: “God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.”

An animal’s life taken as a symbol of the death that must come with sin. Every time the Israelites would experience an animal sacrifice and a skin was given to the priest, they would remember: Disobedience leads to death.

To us, life is cheap and death is familiar, but Adam would recognize the death of the animal as punishment for sin. Sin could not be covered by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush – only by pain and blood. From the first sin to the last, the track of the sinner is marked by the blood.

God comes and suffers on our account. God dies on our account, that we might live.

Yes, indeed, at the end of Genesis 3 it is broken. Broken in such a way that only the crucifixion of the Christ will make right the cosmos.

Man was (and is) in a free fall from serpentine sin in desperate need of a Savior.

Sources include:

Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation Bible Commentary: Genesis*

Michael E. Williams, ed., *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*

Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God*