

GRACE

The God/Man Relationship

The Fall of Man

Crime and Punishment

As a child living under your parents' roof, did you ever mess up? Did you ever draw on your bedroom wall with a crayon? Did you ever sneak an extra cookie from the cookie jar? Did you ever hit your brother or sister or a friend who had come to visit? Did you ever kick the dog or rip the head off your sister's doll? Were you ever punished by being sent to your room, or grounded, or by being tasked with extra chores? Did you ever have a privilege or freedom taken away because you had demonstrated that you were not ready to deal with the responsibility? Did your parents ever say to you, "I'm taking this away from you until you can prove to me that you deserve to have it back? Well, I think you get the idea. We have all messed up at some point in our lives and we have had to deal with the consequences.

Last week we studied the beginning of God's relationship with man, and we witnessed four acts of grace.

First, God made man in His own image.

Second, God breathed His own breath of life into man.

Third, God gave man control over everything God had created.

Fourth, God provided everything man needed to live comfortably.

This week we are going to take a look at the wreck man made of God's creation. We will see how God dealt with His rebellious children. We will take a look at God's plan for repairing the damage. We often call man's mess up The Fall from Grace. In this lesson we will find that it may be more appropriate to call it Man's Fall into Grace.

Paradise Lost

Let's begin our study by reading two passages from the second chapter of Genesis.

"The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2:8-9 NASB)

"Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17 NASB)

In these two scriptures we see that God provided everything that man needed. It is obvious, however, that man was not to laze around and simply grow fat off of the land. He was to cultivate and keep the garden. As God worked to create the garden. Man was to participate in God's creation by being a good steward of what God had given him. God's purpose was for Himself and man to work and live together in harmony.

While God created many trees and placed them in the garden, scripture specifically mentions two of them. First was the tree of life. We will take a closer look at the tree of life later on, but for now we will simply observe that man had free access to eat the fruit of this tree. The fruit of the second tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was not to be eaten.

One might ask why God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden to begin with? He must have known that man would disobey the rules. The most direct answer is that being made in the image of God, man is free to make choices. You remove choices you remove man's free will. Man was given a choice to obey God's rules or disobey them. Man could choose the tree of life to live forever being provided for by God, or man could choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. James 4:17 tells us, "Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do, yet fails to do it, is guilty of sin." And sin separates man from God. Man chose to disobey God's rules.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us about man's decision to disobey God and about the consequences.

"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'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 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.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 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." 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. 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 3:1-7)

In verses 8 through 13 we read what happened next.

“They 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. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Then 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 3:8-13)

God went for a walk in the garden. It doesn't seem to be the first time either. Adam and Eve recognized His sound. You know how you can be sitting in one room of the house and hear someone moving about in another room of the house. You can tell by the sound who it is because you have heard the sound a thousand times. You can tell from the sound if it is your spouse or one of your children. It's like that. Adam and Eve were familiar with the sound of God walking in the garden. It must have happened many times before.

God went for a walk in the garden and Adam and Eve hid from Him. Evidently this was quite different from previous times when God came to the garden. God seems to have expected Adam and Eve to come out to meet Him, as though He had come to them many times in the past, but this time something was different. God's first question was, “Where are you?” This a “what is your condition” question, similar to me asking my son, “Are you alright,” after he wrecked my car. In God's first question we see Him expressing His concern for Adam and Eve's well-being. Adam said he was hiding because he was naked. God's second question was more along the lines of, “What have you done?”

Adam said he hid from God because he was naked, but there may have been an even deeper reason. Now, knowing the difference between good and evil, it is possible that Adam recognized he had disobeyed God and he was ashamed to face his maker. The Apostle John may have been thinking of this incident when he wrote in 1 John 2:28, “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.” But Adam and Eve did not abide in God. They had sinned. It was sin, not nakedness, that caused Adam to hide from the presence of God. It was Adam's choice to disobey God that separated him from God. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. The truth is both Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent rather than obey God. And because of Adam's choice, mankind was doomed to a sinful nature.

Something else catches our attention. Adam and Eve survived the day. God had said that if they ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on that day they would die. In

two very real ways they did die. They died a spiritual death. Separation from God is spiritual death. And though they physically continued to function, their physical death began on that day. In Genesis 3:22 God said,

“Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” (Genesis 3:22)

Had they been able to stay in the garden with access to the tree of life, Adam and Eve would have lived forever. Their rebellion had caused both spiritual death and the beginning of physical death.

God’s judgment was swift and certain. The serpent would be defeated and destroyed by the offspring of the woman. Adam and Eve were separated from God and banished from the garden. They had wrecked God’s creation and now they would have to deal with the consequences.

The Fall into Grace

We sometimes refer to the fall of man as the fall from grace. I would like to suggest that in God’s remedies for the rebellion we see not only punishment, but we also see grace. This was not a fall from grace but a fall into grace.

Even in the punishment given mankind we can see grace at work.

“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. “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 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. ... therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.” (Genesis 3:17-19, 23)

One might ask, “Where’s the grace in this?” Man got to survive. Man got a second chance at life. He would survive but now he would have to work hard for his food. God gave him something to keep him occupied and to give him purpose.

The writer of Ecclesiastes put it this way, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 NIV)

More important than the punishment was God's promise to fix what man had broken.

From the beginning of time God knew that man would fall, and from the beginning of time God had a plan for redeeming and reconciling man to Himself. He had a plan to restore the type of relationship God desires to have with mankind.

First, God put Satan on notice. God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The Old Testament provides the story of how God worked with Israel to bring the Messiah into the world. The New Testament tells how it is through the Messiah that God has made all things right. Please read along with me as we see how God's plan from before time began, is realized in Christ Jesus.

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God." (1 Peter 1:18-21. NIV)

On the day of Pentecost Peter said, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." (Acts 2:22-24 NASB)

In his letters to Christians in Rome and in Corinth, Paul wrote, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ... But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ... The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:8-10, 15 & 20-21 NASB)

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14 NASB)

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4 NASB)

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19 NASB)

It is by grace that God has redeemed and reconciled mankind to Himself. This is an unmerited gift from God. No man could be good enough to deserve it. There is no work man could do to earn it. He could not purchase it. Mankind was completely and utterly lost. Only by the grace of God are we saved.

This is the end of our lesson for tonight. Over the next three weeks we will take a closer look at God’s redemptive plan. In this series of three lessons entitled “Man, Faith, and Assurance in God’s Promises,” we will look at the human condition, study what it means to be saved by faith, and try to come to an understanding of the grace of God by which we have the promise of salvation.

Good evening. May God be with you and give you peace.