

# Gospel of The Fall.

## Part 2 of 4

St Matt's - June 2021

### **Genesis 3:1-24** NRSV

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" **2** And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" **4** But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." **6** So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

**8** And 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. **9** But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" **10** And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." **11** He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" **12** The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." **13** Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

**14** The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,  
    cursed are you above all livestock  
    and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
    and dust you shall eat  
    all the days of your life.

**15** 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."

**16** To the woman he said,  
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
    in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
    but he shall rule over you."

**17** And to Adam he said,  
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
    and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
    'You shall not eat of it,'  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
    in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
**18** thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
    and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
**19** By the sweat of your face  
    you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
    for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
    and to dust you shall return."

**20** The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. **21** And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

**22** Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" **23** therefore the LORD God

sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup>He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

**John 8:1-11** NRSV

**8** <sup>1</sup>while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup>Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ <sup>11</sup>She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’]]

**Series Introduction:**



This is the second in a four-part sermon series where I want to trace out the Gospel from Genesis to Revelation.

The four Gospel acts or chapters will come individually on a given Sunday so that they build up the total story of God’s relationship to humanity, past present and future.

The four headings I am using for each part are:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Transformation



**Sermon Introduction**

Today I want to explore the Gospel of The Fall, part two of four.

At the end of Chapter Genesis 1 the first creation story ends with God declaring that it’s all ‘very good’. In chapter 2 we read a second creation story which is more focused on humanity within creation.

So, Creation is very good but we need to understand it is not complete or set at some point of static perfection. That was never the intention. We can say that because God commissioned humanity to be his stewards to enjoy and care for his creation in an ongoing relationship. He told them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth. Meanwhile God was sustaining and developing his creation in

collaboration with humanity as his assigned friends on the earth. Creation was an ongoing adventure and still is.<sup>1</sup>

However, something else had happened which was about to really disturb and threaten God's creation. There are several scriptures in Old and New Testament that make reference to a rebellion among the angels in heaven resulting in one third being cast out. 2Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 refer to angels being cast down and in 1Timothy Paul refers to the condemnation of the devil.<sup>2</sup> The result of this rebellion was fallen angels as evil spirits seeking to pervert God's creation and particularly those whom God had placed in glory and honour to care for it. This was a development that would feed into the human context.

So a question and an observation:

**Q** Why did God allow this?

**A** As with the problem of evil, real friendship and a voluntary association of love requires free acting players. Freedom and love are very messy! One in Three Angels were not happy with God's arrangements and so they spit the dummy and rebelled. Would this remain contained to the spiritual realm? Genesis 3 will tell:

### **The Fall in Genesis 3**

Humanity lives in a royal garden park provided by God as King of the Universe known as 'Paradise'.

There are two trees in this garden. The 'Tree of the knowledge of good and evil' alerts us to the fact that good and evil already existed. I think this reflects the rebellion that had taken place but also the fact that being good is a choice and that choice remained totally open.

What was not yet part of Adam and Eve's knowledge was the experience of this awareness. Good and evil would have been at best theoretical and not something they knew in any experiential sense. A bit like explaining 'hot' to a small child as opposed to the being burnt by 'hot' so they know.

God instructed Adam and Eve -or man and woman- not to eat from this tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The issue is this: Humanity lived in God's provision and care so long as they trusted and obeyed allowing God to be sovereign. That trust involved believing that God was truthful and loving in what he told them and allowed them to experience.

We might label this as 'benign paternalism' and it's not at all popular today. Teenagers really kick against it!

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<sup>1</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the most sophisticated things Europeans knew were clocks and watches. The idea formed that God had made the universe like a clock, wound it up and left it to run by itself. This view is known as 'Deism'. This is not what Genesis suggests.

<sup>2</sup> 2Peter 2:4 - For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgement;  
Jude 6 - And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day.

1 Tim 3:6 - He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

It's the same response often made to the thought of being a sheep with the Lord Jesus as Shepherd. Who wants to be a sheep? Who wants to only believe what you are told without a Plan B?

So, the temptation is always there to seek more than what is provided.

Genesis 3 tells the story of this temptation being formed and pressed upon Eve and then Adam.

What is at work here is the temptation to rely not on relationship values of love and trust but on personally experienced knowledge.

So, if you are standing on the side of the road with a car breakdown.

Do you want to trust the AA when they say, "We'll be there in 30 minutes and get you going?"

or,

Would you prefer to have the knowledge to fix it yourself?

Our age is described as the 'Information Age'. That gives a clue for how we have chosen to rely more information and knowledge than relationships.

Adam and Eve were tricked and manipulated into buying this vision of self-acquired knowledge as setting up their future. "Despite what God may have said, trust you own eyes to recognize something that will provide wisdom when you want it without needing to trust God. You will then be on better terms with God and able to keep him honest."

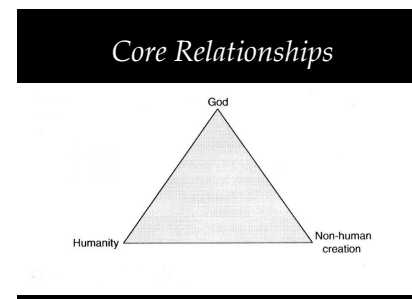
So again, the choice, personal power or relationship. That's the choice at the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

Do you want to trust God's definition of 'Good' or would you like to learn for yourself?

Do you want to trust God as a passenger or would you like to gain access to the controls?

Adam and Eve did not realize this but changing their relationship with God would change everything.

The relationship between humanity and God determines the relationship between Creation and Humanity as well as between God and Creation.



When Adam and Eve turned their hearts from God to accept the serpent's sales pitch they damaged the connection between God and Humanity.

The mechanism for change was admitting a new power into the relational system, we call it 'sin'. Adam and Eve sinned and in so doing gave space to sin as a part of their reality when it had not been.

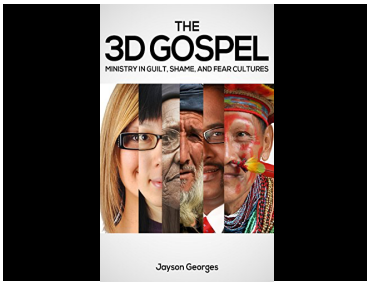
Their choice to disobey God involved sinning in weakness, ignorance and their own deliberate fault.

With sin come consequences and there are three immediate consequences for Adam and Eve which remain part of the human experience today in our knowledge of Good and evil.

Those immediate consequences were:

- Fear
- Shame
- Guilt

When we start looking at salvation it will need to meet all of those experiences and consequences of Sin. It needs to lead to innocence, honour and power.



One passing comment to make on these three consequences is that different cultures tend to experience them in different ways.

Westerners are most attuned to guilt. Our talk is like Adam's lame excuses to God about Eve, or Eve's excuses about the serpent.

Eastern cultures tend to be more concerned about shame. Sometimes the real issue for the Eastern mind is the shame of being exposed as guilty rather than actually being guilty.

Then Africans often focus on fear of power being used against them.

This model is labelled the 3D Gospel and does in my view reflect tendencies but need not be taken strictly. Westerners can suffer shame and fear too even if we think most about guilt.

Beyond these personal experiences God declares consequences within the network of relationships that form our human experience:

- The serpent will crawl on its belly.
- The offspring of woman and of the serpent will be in conflict.
- Woman will suffer in child birth and have complicated relationship with their dominating husband.
- The ground will be hostile to agriculture forcing men to work hard with stress and strain.

Creation is no longer 'very good' but it is about to get worse beyond Adam and Eve as the power of sin grows to wreak havoc.

Scholarship describes what happens in chapters 3 to 11 as 'Uncreation'. God's Good creation continues to fall.

After Adam and Eve take the forbidden fruit - disobedience

- Cain kills Abel – fratricidal murder
- Lamech kills a man for brushing past him – trivialization of killing
- The Nephilim break the boundary between heavenly beings and earthly beings – Spiritual disorder
- Evil reaches flood proportions and God laments his work but saves Noah and family to allow a remnant.
- Finally, the Tower of Babel tells of civilizations rising to defy God and once again attempt to wrest knowledge from God and hi-jack the universe.

So by chapter 11 of Genesis this primeval history of Creation and Un-Creation ends with the world a fallen mess. Six days of creation were followed by six events of 'uncreation'.

### **Some Implications**

1. The Bible and the Gospel take sin seriously.

The consequences of rebellion against God are very grim and no light matter.

I am very concerned when people think they do well by denying or minimizing this chapter of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

If God did not consider sin as serious then it would not be worth a drop of blood.

## 2. Sin is deep.

In keeping with the Western focus on legal guilt attention concentrates on personal behavior which is not deep enough. This inadequacy has some unsatisfactory consequences:

Children evangelists tell 5-10 year olds that Jesus wants them to say sorry for their sins. This creates the impression that what God is really concerned about are the naughty things that we do. If we say “sorry” then God will deal with their guilt.

This can even be the case at the confessional in a church service for adults.

It is inadequate because while we all do sin in commission or omission, sin is more than our failed behavior.

Sin is an infection of God’s creation and the human condition by a hostile power right down to our DNA.

Speaking personally, I am sinful in my being, and my doing.

The consequences of humanity’s rebellion against God through the millennia has messed us up physically, spiritually, socially and psychologically.

So when the case is made that something is not sinful because of genetic predisposition that indicates a narrow behavioral understanding without understanding how deep it has gone and how deep salvation must go too.

This is very clear in Christian debates around sexuality where a genetic excuse is sought for sinful behaviours.

## **Conclusion:**

Let’s end by asking:

**Q** What’s good news here?

**A** This chapter of the Gospel accounts for why the world is as it is.

It accounts for reality and that is a gift so that world as it is and our experience of it is explained in a way we can live with.

The World certainly still reflects God’s glory, The Creator’s fingerprints are to be seen and enjoyed, but it’s not what it should be, it’s fallen and broken. We are each individually and collectively fallen and broken.

This account of the Fall saves us from both denial and despair.

So while troubled by the reality, we can face it for what it is and that is so helpful.

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<sup>3</sup> A former bishop of Dunedin is reported as denying The Fall which must reflect in his subsequent thinking.

**THE FOUR CHAPTER GOSPEL**

<b>CREATION</b> Chapter	<b>FALL</b> Chapter	<b>REDEMPTION</b> Chapter	<b>RESTORATION TRANSFORMATION</b> Chapter
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
			
			
The way things were	The way things are	The way things could be	The way things will be