

GENESIS—Seed of the Bible
Session Two: The Beginning of Sin

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Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael B. Smith

IN THIS SESSION WE SHALL LOOK AT THE FIRST OF TWO RELATED SUBJECTS. Today we shall look at **sin**; next time we shall consider **crime**. So, definitions are in order. The simple explanation is that sin is wrongdoing towards *God*, whilst crime is wrongdoing towards *man*. Yet we must realise that sin can have consequences for our fellows, and crime likewise has its god-ward ramifications. The Bible definition for sin is this: *Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.*—1 John 3. 4.

Genesis 3 gives us the account of how sin began in the history of humanity.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard You walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked." "Who told you that you were naked?" the LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?" The man replied, "It was the woman You gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, grovelling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike His heel." Then He said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you. " And to the man He said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return." Then the man – Adam – named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live. And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife. Then the LORD God said, "Look, the human beings have become like Us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!" So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and He sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And He placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

—Genesis 3. 1-24 NLT

SIN IS BREAKING GOD’S LAW. And Adam had been given *just one* simple law to observe—even before his wife was created: *And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."*—Genesis 2. 16-17.

Yet when Eve came to him with the forbidden fruit Adam seems to have had no hesitation in tasting: *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it*—Genesis 3. 6.

That is how sin began.

The fact that there was a law, a prohibition, made them susceptible to sin. The tragedy is that there was a tempter, but there was no need to *yield*, nothing could *force* them to sin.

And see how both of them made excuse and tried to pass the blame back: *The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*—Genesis 3. 12,13.

Here, perhaps, a *caveat*: when confronted by God, Eve doesn’t necessarily shift the blame when she admits the serpent deceived her and then she ate. This much was true, she had been deceived, and she ate.

Of Adam we have to say, he was not deceived, and so his guilt seems to be greater. *And it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law.*—1 Timothy 2. 14 GNB.

Both Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, and Eve clearly sinned first. Yet, the Bible never blames Eve for the fall of the human race, but always blames Adam—*Through one man sin entered the world*—Romans 5. 12.

PERHAPS THERE IS SIGNIFICANCE IN THAT THE LAW WAS NOT GIVEN TO THE WOMAN. At the time that God’s command was given Eve was not yet created from Adam. Therefore, Adam received his command and his authority direct from God. Eve received her command and authority from Adam. Adam is responsible because of there was a difference of authority. Adam had an authority Eve did not have; therefore he also had a responsibility Eve did not have. Adam failed in his responsibility in a far more significant way than Eve did.

The Apostle Paul sees these details of the Fall as having bearing upon the matter of authority, primarily in the Church, but also in human relationships in general. It was **because** the woman was deceived that he gave instruction to Timothy, his disciple and representative, as follows: *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.*

Was Paul thinking of God’s sentence over Eve: *"You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you"*—Genesis 3. 16 NLT?

These details are outside our present interest, but they are raised here to show that the question of relationship and authority between men and women is not a matter for human determination but something to be given over to the divine will.

SCRIPTURE DOES NOT TELL US HOW LONG the state of innocence and happiness our first parents enjoyed continued. This did not fall within the scope of his immediate design. It is generally assumed that man's life in Eden was of comparatively short duration. The present chapter relates the tragic incident which brought it to a termination. What happened before has no bearing on our lives. What happened on this last day is of the greatest interest and importance for us. It has shaped our lives and determined our destiny. It is not a question for debate but a truth to deal with.

LET US THINK ABOUT THE TEMPTATION ITSELF. The serpent enquired: "*Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?*" To this question she gave the reply that only one tree was proscribed ... the one in the middle. Actually there were two trees in the middle, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Yet Eve only had eyes for the latter. She recognised this tree held for her the danger of death, but its appeal *was at least as strong as its threat. The serpent knew this and played upon her desire: "That's not true; you will not die. God said that because he knows that when you eat it, you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad"* .

The serpent's telling her she would not die is not only a denial of God's words; it is also a clever trick to begin the process of listening and doubting.

WE SHOULD NOT THINK THAT THIS TREE PRODUCED "MAGIC FRUIT". The fruit was in the *eating*, not in the *tree*. Any tree could have been prohibited and the effect would have been the same. Having eaten, they "*saw that they were naked*"; the fruit was indeed the "knowledge of good and evil".

What a dreadful moment. Having eaten, they suddenly became aware of their sin. Aware that they could no longer face God because they were defiled. '*They knew that they were naked*'.

It was true indeed that they had received a form of knowledge, but it was a knowledge of what they had *lost*, a knowledge that they no longer enjoyed the approval of God, a knowledge that they stood naked before Him, a knowledge that they could no longer face Him. They had become aware that they had forfeited their position.

It is an amazing thing that even now we discover that clothing helps us. Adam and Eve, when they discovered they were naked, immediately made themselves aprons and covered themselves. Does this explain the fact that the whole human race finds it psychologically necessary to clothe themselves. In mankind's fellowship and intercourse with one another, clothing helps. It helps to make us feel more secure, more adequate, more able to face life. When they get blue or discouraged, women find it very uplifting to buy a new dress.

One lady said, "Whenever I get down in the dumps I get a new hat."

And her husband replied, "I wondered where you got them."

So, like Adam and Eve, we reflect the same thing; we find ourselves making clothes to cover our self-consciousness.

We find this true at the psychological level as well. This is what lies behind the universal practice of creating an impression, projecting an image of ourselves. That is a form of psychological clothing. Physically, clothing is a way of changing our appearance so that we look different than we actually are. So it is with the matter of projecting an image. It is a way of trying to get people to think of us as different than we really are.

This is why we sometimes find ourselves struggling with the matter of being honest, of being open. We find it difficult to be so. We do not want people to see us, or think of us, as we are. That is why we avoid too close contact with one another. We do not want to spend much time with any one person because we are afraid he will see us as we are.

You can see how this idea simply permeates the race, and has ever since the moment self-consciousness was born in an act of disobedience.

AND THEN GOD COMES ... comes looking for them. So they hide. A desperate and foolish attempt to hide from the all-seeing eyes of God. They were almost frozen with fear. They sought out the darkest place they could find among the trees of the garden, the trees which God had provided as a blessing and which had now become their only hope of hiding from Him. All they had gained by their sin was a discovery of their nakedness.

Poor creatures, how the serpent laughed as his words were fulfilled, "your eyes shall be opened"! They were opened, indeed; and Adam and Eve did know good and evil. Shame, remorse, fear - a sense of guilt - feelings to which they had hitherto been strangers disordered their minds and led them to shun Him whose approach they used to welcome.

SO NOW TO THE DIVINE SENTENCES. God's justice is always right—and always righteous. He begins with the serpent. As the instigator of the whole sorry business his condemnation is decreed first. You realise, of course that this is not just a serpent; it is *the* serpent—that old serpent, the Devil' and, as Luther's old hymn has it 'his doom is writ'. His head will be crushed. The Devil will one day be destroyed.

God's second sentence is pronounced upon the woman who was first to take the fruit, and who gave to her husband causing him to sin.

Then He said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you."

The things which mark her out as woman are the things which the sentence targets. It is as the mother and as the wife that she is to feel the weight of the sentence now pronounced. A *mother's pangs* (which otherwise would have been unknown); a *wife's dependence* (which too often is utter degradation); *sorrow*, not joy, in that appointed process through which the promised seed is to be born into the world; *inferiority*, instead of equality, in that relationship in reference to which it had been said by her husband, "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh" no longer the husband "cleaving to the wife," as at the first but the husband ruling over the wife.

Then finally sentence is passed upon the man.

And to the man He said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

— Genesis 3. 17-19.

"Woman was first given to man for a comforter, not for a counsellor, much less a controller and director." And therefore in the first sentence against man, this cause is expressed. "Because thou hast obeyed the voice of thy wife"

The sentence upon Adam includes a twofold punishment: first the cursing of the ground, and secondly death, which affects the woman as well, on account of their common guilt.

By listening to his wife, when deceived by the serpent, Adam had repudiated his superiority to the rest of creation. As a punishment, therefore, nature would henceforth offer resistance to his will.

By breaking the divine command, he had set himself above his Maker, death would therefore show him the worthlessness of his own nature.

OUR DISCUSSION HAS BEEN ABOUT SIN. Sin is the big problem. Too often we talk about *sins*. In doing this we tend to reduce our concept of the enormity of sin. We are told to ask God to "Forgive us our sins", but perhaps we do not realise is that they are the outcrops of a bigger issue.

It is easy to make a list of "sins", and either compare ourselves with others to comfort ourselves, or else to justify our criticisms of those who don't live up to our achievements [I thank thee that I am not like others, or even this publican].

Paul realised that sin is a big issue with us all, a giant against which we all struggle:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

— Romans 7. 24, 25

Sin began in Eden, and has troubled mankind ever since. Yet that is not the end of the story, for the ultimate Seed of the woman has overcome sin and death for us.