

Fall of Mankind

Genesis 3.1–24

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God made our world so very good. Our world is a wonderful Temple for God, and humans are meant to be priests for God, and His representatives.

At the same time, we see so much misery. It is as if all good things also have a darker edge. Nature is wonderful, but it is also eat or be eaten.

And humankind, made in the image of God, has a destructive propensity. Something dark seems to lurk in us, something that is always able to mess with what God made so good.

Genesis 3 is about where this darkness originates. Like a good medical doctor it shows us the cause of our human disease.

1. Temptations

Nowadays you often hear the secular solution. If only all people would be better educated and raised in the right family environment, this world would be so much better.

I am all for better education and raising children well. But I assume that the people who ordered throwing the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were raised well.

Just as many leaders in the Nazi regime came from well to do families where they were raised well.

Adam and Eve show us that you can be living in the most perfect environment, and still mess up.

So do not blame circumstances. It is a matter of choice. Our own choice.

Adam and Eve lowered themselves by believing the creature that they were supposed to rule over.

As we lower ourselves for craving for things that are not good or us.

Man was made for managing, for ruling this world. Instead, we allow ourselves to be ruled by a snake, by our appetites, by stuff.



We want this, we want that. We are pushed around by advertisers, and they have an easy job, because we seem to crave for all sorts of things.

God created all things good, very good, and Eve saw that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was good. So she took a bite.

Not all thing we have an appetite for, must be taken. We may think that this or that cannot be bad, but if God has said no, then that should be it. God knows best.

God defines right and wrong, not we. That is really the issue in the Genesis story.

God is the source of wisdom - we are not. We lose our wisdom if we think we can set ourselves up as independent sources of wisdom, apart from God.

In the Ancient Middle East, life and wisdom were the prerogatives of the gods and they were reluctant to grant this to people.

In the Bible, life and wisdom are possessed by God, and they are made available to humans as long as they are in a relationship with him. The trouble comes when humans try to seize wisdom on their own terms.

It was always God's plan to give us, humans, the highest position in the universe. But when we try to grasp that position independently from God, we collapse.

We think we are sufficient to understand everything, without the aid of God.

Seduced by this temptation, the human mind appoints itself to be the centre of the universe, so thrilled with the prospect that 'you shall be like gods'.

So filled with love for oneself. And by doing so, we turn our back on the love of God.

Is this not our modern predicament? Man is totally intent on defining good and evil for himself without reference to God. And thereby we have lost God and we have lost life.

St Augustine wrote: "Whoever seeks to be more than he is, becomes less.

We were made to be like God, but by asserting our independence from God, we tumbled down.

2. Sin has consequences.

The first result of humanity's Declaration of Independence, was that the original, wonderful relationship with God was wrecked.

When Adam and Eve were pushed out of Eden, it was as if God made clear that He would no longer be accessible as He was before.



Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God; they shared in his life, and wisdom, and goodness, and beauty. But by taking an independent stance, the luster of their proximity to God was gone.

We are still made in the image of God. But our faces are smeared with the dirt of our efforts to go it alone.

And this has also badly damaged the relationships between people. Social relationships have often become chaotic, distant, and really hard to maintain.

The original harmony has been destroyed: the union of man and woman became marked by lust and domination — by the tendency of using one another.

Adam began to rule over Eve. That is not what God wanted. Mankind together was to rule over this world, to manage it well.

But what did we do? We began, as humans, to have dominion over each other.

This is destructive, as we all know. We lower ourselves by lording it over others.

While most people work hard to survive, living from hand to mouth, some clever chaps do better and let other people do the hard work while they just reap the fruits of the labour of others.

One of the presidential candidates in the USA, Michael Bloomberg, personally owns more than the 125 million poorest americans. This inequality between people was never part of God's plan.

The vast majority of people struggle for a living, trying to defeat the thorns and the thistles that make their work hard. And many have to live and work in conditions unworthy of human beings.

But we wanted independence from God, did we not? We know what is best, apart from God.

The chaos that Adam and Eve imported into the Temple of the World, reverberated to the furthest reaches of the universe. Nothing remained untouched.

The harmony between man and nature has been shattered: Eve realises this in childbirth - it can be very painful. Physical pain in general can be awful.

And God tells Adam that from now on, his work will be burdensome, and it will cause much distress. The earth will yield thorns and thistles.

And even our relationship with ourself has been wrecked. When God is forgotten we humans become unintelligible even to ourselves.

Many people no longer have much sense of who they are. Some even go as far as to love animals more than humans. That is where we are if you lose track of this universe as God's Temple, and Man as the Image of God.

Who am I? That is the existential question for many people who have lost their link with the God they owe their existence to. We try to be independent, but we cannot be. Here is our contradiction.

In order to be independent, we have lost far more than we have gained.

We are in one or another way linked to God, but we are mortal and we have no access to the tree of life anymore. We were made from dust and we return to dust.

And we know, that should not be! Even people who have lost track of God know this. Most people know very well that something is very wrong. Man is born with a sort of desire for paradise. But we lost it.

3. Grace at work

But not all hope is lost.

Even when we are deeply aware of our mortality, of our difficult predicament, that we are in fact naked, and that we have messed up badly...

God graciously comes to us.



After Adam sinned, God met with him. That is important. Even when we disobey, when we assert our independence from God - he does not let go of us.

Even when we have done something utterly dumb and bad, God comes to us and asks: 'Where are you. Why are you hiding from me...'

Surely, God came to judge Adam and Eve. Man's rebellion has consequences. Grave consequences.

But at the same time, God offered hope to mankind.

The words of God spoken to the snake have often been interpreted as the first time the Gospel was preached in the Bible.

I will put enmity between you - snake - 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 punishment God imposes on the serpent includes confrontation between Eve and her offspring on the one hand, and the serpent and his offspring on the other hand, between mankind and evil, in general.

And the promise is, that mankind will win.

But the words of God actually speak of one offspring. He. Who will come out on top? The one whose heel was bruised, but who was able to crush the head of the snake.

This passage is often called the “Proto-gospel”: it is the first announcement to mankind of the good news of the coming of a Redeemer, who will destroy evil.

So in spite of the awful judgment on Adam and Eve - God offered a glimpse of hope. And Adam caught this ray of hope:

The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. (Genesis 3.20)

It is as if Adam expressed his hope that through Eve, his life-giving wife, all would be well in the end. Her offspring was to destroy evil. Adam had faith in God.

And what does God do, after this expression of hope and faith by Adam?

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (Genesis 3.21)

God covered them with garments of skins. So, some animals died for the sake of Adam and Eve.

Do we get here the first indication of a sacrifice, that the shame of Adam and Eve was covered because someone else died for them? And God provided the sacrifice?

I think it is.

Another important hopeful thing to note. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were called to develop this world, and to fill it with new people.

And after the fall of humankind, we still have this same God-given task. He has not given up on us.



Eve still has to become the mother of all living, and Adam still has to work the land. It will be harder, but God does not give up on his world. He will - in spite of rebellious humankind - lead this world to its beautiful goal. To paradise restored.

Conclusion

God has done this, by sending to us a Second Adam - Jesus Christ. The one who was tempted but He did not sin. He was fully obedient to God.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. In these week we move toward Good Friday, when our Lord Jesus Christ brought the ultimate sacrifice.

When Jesus was crucified, He was wearing a crown of thorns.

Thorns. As if to symbolise that He died because of the curse that Adam brought on us and on our world.

But by doing so, Jesus crushed the snake's head; he broke the curse. He rose from the dead - He has become the tree of life for us.

In this time that leads to Good Friday, many Christians are fasting. As a symbol that with God we manage this world, and that we do not let food, or things, or bad advise rule over us. We will not let anything rule over us but God.

Fasting is, in a way, a symbol that we side with Jesus Christ against the dictates, even of our own desires. It is a statement against the Declaration of Independence of Adam and Eve.

They could not resist the temptation to be like God, to be independent. Let us use this time of Lent to express to God, that we enjoy our dependence on him, that we will listen to his word, that we are his disciples.

By doing this, God wipes the dirt of our faces; we live up to being made in the image of God; and we anticipate paradise restored.

Amen.