

Genesis: Foundations of the Faith 5) The Loss of Paradise

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Could you imagine having to be the clean-up crew for nuclear radiation contamination? I'm sure you heard of the Chernobyl disaster. It was a catastrophic nuclear accident in 1986. Sure, there were only 31 direct deaths when it occurred over thirty years ago, but its effects were far greater. Radiation contamination rendered innumerable lives miserable with birth defects, cancer, and other abnormalities associated with radiation poisoning. The area around the site remains desolate. After the Chernobyl accident, it took 14 years just to decommission and shut down all the nuclear reactors. Some cleanup efforts are still ongoing. Nine years ago, an event occurred in Japan which scientist now say far outweighs all the radioactive harm done in the past. Even far surpassing all the nuclear tests combined in the Pacific. Though there were no direct deaths the contamination is now regarded worse than Chernobyl. In 2011 an earthquake and tsunami led to a partial meltdown at Fukushima Japan. Some estimate that it will take thirty to forty years just to decommission the site. Scientists are now pointing to the long-reaching effects of this catastrophe. A perfect cleanup is impossible. The contaminated water is still leaking. It has even started to affect the west coast of the United States thousands of miles away. The catastrophe has far reaching effects and will continue for the foreseeable future and generations after us. These things make you feel helpless. Imagine being tasked with cleaning it all up! Still today many places contaminated by nuclear accidents or weapons tests are uninhabitable -at least for any duration of time without horrific side-effects.

These are terrible disasters. But far more widespread is the damage recorded in Genesis chapter 3. What we read there is the cause behind every other catastrophe and every other malice in life. And the effects extend not just in a twenty-mile radius or drift across an ocean. What happened in Eden permeates through all the earth. It has contaminated all people and all of creation. This is the ruin of Eden which Adam brought about. And we stand helpless to contain it or fix it. Yet as we read about it, we see something spectacular. God steps in and gives us hope. He will not just contain the damage done. He will undo it. We'll look at that ruin and that hope today in Genesis 3.

When nuclear contamination occurs often the analysis reveals that it was due to human error and faulty design. But when God created this world, he did not set it up for failure. He gave Adam and Eve a perfectly ordered creation. He gave them perfect minds. They were created "in the image of God," namely, righteousness and holiness. They weren't "doomed to failure" but were created to be "like God" knowing his will and able to follow it perfectly. Yet it all came to ruin, not because of God's failure or design failure, but human failure.

We are introduced in this chapter to our enemy, the devil. His target? God's perfect Eden. And he knows just how to bring it to ruin. Taking the form of a serpent he is described as cunning. His mode of operation is to disguise himself. The Scriptures make it clear the serpent is in fact the devil speaking. He only reveals himself in a manner which he can engage in battle against us. Don't think that the devil and his attacks will come against you with warning or a label. He disguises himself as he comes against us. "Satan masquerades ..." (2 Cor 11:14) His lies are shared through trusted companions, self-help guides, seductive tv ads. He plays to our own foolish reasoning as he sets his traps.

His first tactic is to get us to doubt God's Word. The serpent spoke to the woman, "Did God really say that you cannot eat from any tree in the garden?" God had, in fact, given Adam and Eve every tree to eat from except for the one. The devil's tactic is two-fold. He's not only trying to get Adam and Eve to doubt God's Word. He wants them to doubt God's goodness too. Like Eve we sometimes know at least enough of God's word to make a reply. When someone says, "Did God really say that you cannot have or do certain things?" We might know enough Scripture to say, "Yes. He did." But the devil's goal isn't always to get you to deny God's Word outright. He can't always win that. He couldn't with Eve. But he did start to create a dialogue that allowed her to entertain the question if God was loving or holding back. That's the lie he'll use today. The tactic he takes is to get us to wonder if God really does have our best interest in mind.



Eve defended God. But she wasn't prepared for Satan's next tactic. He is determined and persistent. Don't expect spiritual warfare to be easy or simple. The enemy is incredibly determined and knows just which buttons to push.

Satan's then resorted to distorting the truth and twisting God's Word. If he can't get us to doubt God's Word or goodness, he will either distort or directly speak against the Word. "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil." This is only a half-truth. Would Adam and Eve die the day they ate of it? Not right away. Not physical death. Would they know good and evil? Yes. But not as God knows it. They would experience evil. Would their eyes be opened? Only to see just how horrible sin is and what it does! They would see shame, guilt, and fear. And in fact, Satan would blind their eyes to the goodness of God. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

So it is with the serpent's tactics today. He gets us to doubt God's Word, God's goodness and he distorts the truth. He tells the high school student who knows it is wrong to use illegal drugs or abuse legal drugs, "Come on, you have to know what it is like." The young virgin is made to feel out of the loop because she hasn't had sex yet like all her peers say they have.

“You won’t know what you’re missing.” An underage boy is at the party with the drugs passed around. “I don’t want to miss out on the fun,” he tells himself as he partakes. Eve was just the beginning. The devil has seen it all ever since.

And then after he deceives, he abandons us to face the sting of sin! Sin always bites in the end. The promise, “you can now be free to live your life the way you want” bites in the end. It always does. The young mother is promised abortion will free up her time and career, but the guilt is overwhelming, and the sense of emptiness and loss will never be filled by any career or romantic relationship. The man who forces himself on a woman believes he’ll find pleasure in it. But the latest assault victim won’t fulfill the desires of the sex offender. He’s ruined a life and continues to ruin his own. This is how it is with every false promise of Satan. He lies, “Do this and you’ll be happier.” His promise is never fulfilled in the end. We know this to be true! Brothers and sisters, don’t we read this account of Genesis and think, “Don’t do it Eve! We know it’s a lie!” But what do you and I do when we have a false promise or half-truth that twists us away from God’s will? Only when it’s too late do we realize how we fell for one of the oldest ploys.

We’ve seen some of the devil’s tactics. Now we begin to see his ultimate strategy. Eve looked at the fruit. She desired it. She saw it as more than good for food but good for fulfilling herself. Sin starts here (point to heart); and here (point to eyes). Satan knows this is the case. That’s why he seeks to take our eyes from God’s Word. To take our hearts away from him. What is sin? It is when we try to find goodness apart from what our God has already graciously given us.

And we can’t lose sight of Adam. He was part of every tactic and part of the trap all along. The woman ate. She then gave some to the man who was with her. Scripture doesn’t pick on Eve. As the Hebrew indicates Satan addressed both Adam and Eve when he said, “you.” The serpent spoke right in front of Adam. He only carries on conversation with the woman instead of the man in hopes that Adam would do what so many men shamefully do: spiritually shutdown and leave the woman to lead alone. Adam was with her but said nothing.

This is another tactic of the serpent. He wants me to be passive and lazy. Satan often counts on inaction from men. Brothers, are you a father? Have you stood up for God’s Word or did you sometimes stay silent and leave it to your wife to do all the spiritual work in your family? Is it sometimes, “my wife takes care of that,” when it comes to spiritual matters? Do you sometimes leave her alone to battle Satan while you do nothing? Satan I’m sure was hoping that Adam would be so passive. Men, cannot, however, just choose to be silent. Adam is the one who is held accountable in Scripture. God tells men, brothers, to first be the one responsible for the spiritual life of their family. It is Adam he calls to first after they have sinned. I know I’ve too often not shared this task and left it to my wife. How about you?

We’ve examined the devil’s tactics. Now we must consider the ruin! What follows is tragic. Adam and Eve did have their eyes opened. Not to see the goodness of God but their own shame and sinfulness. No longer pure in thought they had to cover themselves. And when the presence of God was known they fled in fear. Paradise was ruined as Adam and Eve lost perfect communion with God. They couldn’t be in his presence. Sin does that. When the devil gets you and I to fall into sin we hesitate to bring it to the light. We don’t approach God. Rather we hope to cover it up and pretend it didn’t happen. We want God to not really notice. Foolishness! We can’t hide our sin any more than they could hide from God behind a few fig leaves and Eden’s mango groves.

Mankind’s attempt to clean up the mess failed. It is impossible. We try to cover the shame, hide, and hope God doesn’t notice the sin. We run and hide and cower in fear when confronted by him. We try to toss the blame or say it wasn’t human error but faulty design. We don’t have time to go into it all today, but this chapter shows just how terrible Adam and Eve were at responding to the contamination of sin. We are helpless and hopeless to fix this mess!

In 1957 the Soviet Union hid information about an extremely dangerous radiation leak. They couldn’t fix it, so they just tried to hide it. Certain ethnic groups were left out of the evacuation orders and made into a decades-long horrific experiment on the long-term effects of radiation poisoning. But God did not do that with us when mankind fell into the ruin of sin. Instead of just watching mankind suffer under the effects of sin, he made clear the consequences of sin. He told us what was in store for us. He explained how we had ruined everything and contaminated creation. But he didn’t leave us helpless. He shared his response plan. The first thing he did was to promise far more than containment of sin. He would crush it and take away all the curse. He would completely wipe clean his creation and restore it for us.

God’s solution for such a rescue plan is centered on one man, Jesus. The first thing which God says after all the destruction is a call to repentance from Adam and Eve. And it is a pronouncement of a curse. But the curse is not placed on the man and woman directly. He pronounces a curse on the devil and the world, but not directly on the man and woman. That’s because the man, Jesus, would take that curse. All the deadly contamination would be absorbed in his body. And the devil would be crushed. He would come just as promised and put an end to the devil’s destruction. And though we will someday die, we will not remain under a curse. Jesus has said “whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies.” We will rise from the dust to live with Jesus forever and free from the devil and sins’ curse.

Next week we’ll look in greater detail at the promised deliverer who would restore what was ruined. This is a foundational truth of the Christian faith found in Genesis: We understand that we live in a world ruined and contaminated by sin. Human error caused it, and divine intervention alone can clean it.