

1 - IN THE BEGINNING: THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BAD NEWS

LOVE AND FREEDOM GO TOGETHER

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” Genesis 1:1, 31.

It is wonderful to visit manicured gardens that have been thoughtfully planned and properly cared for. The colorful flowers, the varieties of shrubs and trees, and the thick, green grass are a reminder of what the Garden of Eden must have looked like: beautiful, peaceful, paradise!

God created a world that we could thoroughly enjoy, planting the Garden of Eden as a gift to Adam and Eve. Love reigned in their hearts and all of the animals were friendly, living peacefully together. Indeed, everything God made was very good. There was no pain, sorrow or death. And God’s plan was that it would always be this way. He didn’t want us to learn what evil was like.

However, there was something He valued even more: freedom! He wanted love to be given freely, not manipulated or forced. In fact, it is impossible to have love without freedom. That is why He chose to place “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” in the garden.

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” Genesis 2:15-17.

Adam and Eve already had the knowledge of good. If they wanted to learn about evil, they could communicate that choice by eating the fruit

from this tree. That is the only reason they would need to eat from this tree, for there was an abundance of food available on all the other trees. Unfortunately, rebellion in the universe had already occurred and Satan wanted Adam and Eve to join him in rebellion against God.

“War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” Revelation 12:7-9.

Heaven! The place where we all want to be someday is where the war began! Amazing! That raises some questions:

- A. If war broke out in heaven in the first place, how can God prevent it from happening again?
- B. Does He turn everyone into robots, preventing them from rebelling? Does He take everyone’s freedom of choice away?
- C. If God is going to take human beings to live with Him, how does He know which ones are trustworthy and which ones are not?
- D. What ultimately happens to Satan and his angels and the humans who are not taken to heaven?

In the Bible God reveals the truth about Himself and how He will bring a complete end to sin and the sin problem. He revealed the following scene to John. It shows us the kind of life God originally intended for the human race and the promise that it will be restored.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there

shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.... There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” Revelation 21:1,3,4,27.

All that is beautiful and valuable will be completely restored:

- A. Perfect joy, harmony, and love in all relationships.
- B. A place where there is both security and freedom.
- C. A place where we won't get hurt and where everyone looks out for the needs of the other.
- D. The opportunity to explore the wonders and beauty of God's creation throughout the universe without any fear.

SATAN'S LIES

In Revelation 12:9, the phrase, “that serpent of old,” is a reference to Genesis 3, where Satan uses a serpent to speak to Eve. He deceives her, persuading her to eat the “forbidden fruit.”

1. Why did Satan talk through a serpent? Genesis 3:1,13

A carefully disguised plan of Satan's was talking through a snake. This aroused Eve's curiosity. She might have wondered if eating the fruit from this tree would do something miraculous for her as it apparently did for the serpent. Satan is very clever, deceptive, and persistent. Therefore we are counseled: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” 1 Peter 5:8. “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” Matthew 26:41.

2. Compare what God said in Genesis 2:16,17 with what Satan said in Genesis 3:1? What were the words that Satan chose to quote?

God said, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:16

Satan said, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” Genesis 3:1

Satan quoted a portion of what God said and changed the order of the phrases. His words encouraged her to focus on why God would say they couldn't eat from this tree? The incomplete message also enticed Eve into a conversation with Satan. She tried to clarify what God had actually said. In his reply, Satan implied that God was a liar and selfish.

Satan tries to lead us away from God by sharing half-truths, mixing truth with error, or by leading people to emphasize one part of the Bible and ignore other parts. This will always lead to an unbalanced experience. Fortunately, we do not have to be led astray. When we maintain a humble and teachable spirit, the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as we prayerfully study the Bible (John 5:40,41; 7:17; 16:13).

3. How did Satan contradict God? What did he imply? Genesis 3:4

Satan implied, “You don't need to obey God. You will not die! The consequences that God said would happen, will not happen.”

He uses this same tactic today: “You can do it just this once. It's not that big of deal. No one will know. What can possibly happen? It feels so good, what can possibly be wrong with it? God is a loving God, He'll forgive! Go ahead. You'll be ok.” In various ways, Satan tries to get us to believe, “You don't need to obey God.”

4. What did Satan suggest that Eve should know about? Genesis 3:5

Satan implies that they should not obey God, for they would miss out on “being like God, knowing good and evil.” Adam and Eve had no knowledge of evil. Out of mercy and love, God did not want them to understand or experience it.

however, Satan implies that evil would be something positive and wonderful. He tries to convince us of the same thing today: “You will miss out on so much pleasure if you obey God. Following Him is boring. Times have changed. The Bible is out-dated. Following its laws may lead to pain. God would not want you to suffer. He wants you to enjoy life. You need to follow your heart. If you really want to be happy in life, you should not obey God.”

Eve believed Satan and ate the fruit. She then gave some to Adam, “and he ate” (Genesis 3:6). Their action communicated their choice to learn about evil and join in the rebellion against God.

As a result of Adam's choice, everyone has been born with a sinful nature. As a result, we can't help but sin (John 8:31-36; 15:4,5). Satan takes advantage of our condition and tries to make us believe, “You cannot obey God!” Without a Savior to save us from our sin, Satan is correct. Fortunately, we do have a Savior and we don't have to remain as slaves to sin and Satan.

THE CHOICE OF ADAM AND EVE

5. What did Adam and Eve do after they ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Genesis 3:6-8

Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked. (Before this, they may have been clothed with light, as Moses was after he spent time with God. “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai ...the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him” Exodus 34:29-35. Moses needed to put a veil on his face so he could meet with the people.)

Adam and Eve attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves, but it was very inadequate. They were ashamed and hid from God when He came to talk with them. Sin always leads to shame, pain and broken relationships. Shame leads people to hide from God and others and use “pain-relievers” to numb the emotional pain and spiritual emptiness.

A SERIOUS GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

6. What did God ask Adam and Eve? If God knows everything, why did He ask them any questions? Genesis 3:9

God respects our freedom of choice. By asking a question, God gives Adam and Eve the opportunity to avoid Him or be honest with Him. When we acknowledge our failure, we are more open to receive the help and healing God can bring. We can think of God’s question as a serious game of “hide and seek.” Adam and Eve were hiding because of their guilt and shame. God was seeking them because He loved them and He had good news to share with them.

7. How did Adam and Eve respond to the questions God asked them? Genesis 3:12, 13

A. Adam: _____

B. Eve: _____

They were honest with God, but each of them added a hint of blame, as if to say, “I wouldn’t have done it if...” How easy it is to point the blame at others and justify ourselves. God is able to bring healing into our lives only when we are honest and acknowledge our need for help.

8. What limitation was placed upon the snake as a consequence for being used by Satan to tempt Eve? Genesis 3:14

9. What evidence is there that God is talking to Satan in Genesis 3:15? Revelation 12:7-9

Satan is referred to as “that serpent of old,” referring to when Satan talked through the serpent. Genesis 3:15 gives us a first glimpse of what the plan of salvation would accomplish

CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

10. What did God say would happen to Satan? What would Satan be able to do to Jesus, the Seed of the woman? Genesis 3:15b

In the last half of the verse, God refers to the seed of the woman as He. “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” This is a promise that Jesus would bring an end to Satan (Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14). While Satan would attack Jesus, he could not destroy Him. He tried to keep Jesus in the grave, but Jesus was resurrected (Matthew 27:63-28:7).

11. What did God say He would put between Satan and the woman and between his seed and her Seed? Genesis 3:15a

When Adam and Eve chose to learn about evil, they joined Satan in his rebellion against God. They became sinners, with a sinful nature that was naturally at enmity against God (Romans 5:19; 8:7; Galatians 5:17). They passed their sinful nature onto the whole human race. Without a Savior, everyone would remain united with Satan in a war against God.

In Genesis 3:15 God promised that a Savior would be born to free the human race from Satan's dominion. This freedom allows each person to choose to be reconciled to God or persist in rebellion against Him.

Since God respects our freedom of choice, He will never force anyone to love Him. Instead, He draws us "with loving kindness" Jeremiah 31:3.

Jesus said, "If I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all peoples to Myself" John 12:32. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, revealing His unconditional and sacrificial love for the human race. That love is drawing everyone to Jesus like a powerful magnet draws metal to itself.

Unfortunately, many will resist and reject Jesus' love, for they love sin and hate the light (John 3:19-21; 15:18-20). These are referred to as Satan's seed in Genesis 3:15. Notice what Jesus said to Jewish leaders who were fighting Him. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" John 8:44.

The seed of the woman is identified as Christ and His followers. He is the Head and they are the members of His body (1 Corinthians 12:12,13; Ephesians 4:15,16; 5:23). The woman's seed or offspring are identified as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. They cling to the blood of the Lamb, share their testimony, and are willing to die rather than hurt God or others. (Revelation 12:17,11).

12. What consequences were communicated to Eve as a result of sin? Genesis 3:16

A. _____

B. _____

The sorrow that God is talking about refers to the physical pain of giving birth. It also refers to the emotional pain of giving birth to children with selfish human natures. When Cain killed Abel, the emotional pain for Eve had to be much worse than the physical pain of childbirth.

As a result of the sinful nature that everyone is born with, much of the time, energy, and resources in society are spent trying to keep evil under control. While laws, punishments, and rewards go a long way to stop evil and motivate good behavior, they cannot change the heart.

Not only would there need to be authority in society to keep evil in check, God established authority in the home by saying, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

The Bible instructs husbands to “rule” by loving the wife and the family as Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her” Ephesians 5:25, 26. Christ loved and gave because His bride needed help, not because she was worthy of His love. As a Ruler, Jesus is a Shepherd who cares for His sheep (Matthew 2:6; John 10:10,11).

Wives are also instructed to submit to their “husbands, as to the Lord” Ephesians 5:22. This is part of the healing process. When we have been hurt, our tendency is to build invisible walls to protect ourselves from getting hurt again. These walls make it more difficult for us to freely give and receive love.

Submission is not about being a doormat, but about opening ourselves up to receiving love. When we submit our lives to God, we are opening ourselves up to receive His love and healing.

In the same way, great healing can come when husbands and wives “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21) that they may freely give and receive love without manipulation. When this happens, there will be security in the family. The home will become a little heaven on earth.

The phrase, “as to the Lord,” is an important qualifier. We are to respect and submit to all authority (Ephesians 5:22; Romans 13:1), it has often been misused and abused. When someone in authority asks us to do something that is contrary to God’s will, we are to respectfully say no.

When Peter was faced with this kind of situation, he said we are “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29, 4:19).

In the same way, a wife’s first responsibility is to submit to the Lord and then to her husband. If there is a conflict, she is “to obey God rather than men.”

13. What consequences are communicated to Adam as a result of sin? Genesis 3:17-19

When Adam and Eve sinned, they communicated their desire to be independent from God and to learn about evil. God honored their choice. Before sin, God enabled the plants and trees to produce food spontaneously (Genesis 1:29; 2:9). After sin, the ground would naturally produce “thorns and thistles” Genesis 3:18.

While God never wanted us to experience this “curse,” work is truly a blessing. Without it, our sinful nature would pursue the sinful indulgence of appetite and passion.

But even hard work would not keep people alive forever, for everyone would “return to the ground.” Sickness and death are part of the painful consequences of choosing to learn about evil.

OUR HUMAN CONDITION – THE BAD NEWS

14. What impact did Adam’s choice have on everyone?

- A. Romans 5:12 “Through _____ man sin entered the world.”
- B. Romans 5:18 “Through _____ man's _____ judgment came to all men, resulting in _____.”
- C. Romans 5:19 “By one man's _____ many were _____.”
- D. Romans 7:18-21 “For I know that _____ (that is, in my _____) _____ dwells.... I find then a _____, that _____ is _____ with me, the one who wills to do good.”

When God created Adam, He was creating the human race. For the human race is the multiplication of Adam’s life (Acts 17:26). When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost something. The Holy Spirit no longer dwelt within them and they became selfish by nature. This was the only nature they could pass on to their children. As a result, we are all condemned and “by nature children of wrath” Ephesians 2:3. Being sinners by nature and performance, we are helpless without a Savior.

15. How were David and others born? Psalm 51:5; 58:3

The literal meaning of the word translated “iniquity” is “to crook,” to bend or make crooked (See Strong’s Concordance). We could describe it as love bent inwards: self-centered or selfish.

16. How does Isaiah illustrate our true condition? Isaiah 53:6

Because of our sinful condition, we are by nature self-centered. We go astray and follow our own way the moment we are born. The good news is we have a Savior who saves from all aspects of the sin problem.

17. How does Jeremiah describe our human condition? Jer. 17:9

18. What did Jesus say about those in Laodicea? What do they think about themselves? Who is right? Revelation 3:17

Those who think they are pretty good people do not feel their need for a Savior. Jesus describes the condition of our sinful human nature as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.” It is hard for people to believe this. As humans, we like to think that we are basically good people who do some things wrong, but Jesus describes us differently.

19. How much fruit can we produce apart from Jesus? John 15:4,5

Understanding this truth is as important as understanding what Jesus has done for the human race. Without the conviction that we are helpless on our own, we will not see our need for a Savior.

20. What kind of fruit do bad trees produce? What kind of fruit do good trees produce? What kind of tree are we? Matthew 7:16-20

Jesus states a simple concept: a good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. The difficult question is, “What kind of tree am I, good or bad?”

In other words, “Are we basically good people who do some bad things, or are we bad people who can do nothing good?”

Since we have sinful natures and are helpless without Jesus, we can only be described as bad trees in ourselves. But when we have the Holy Spirit living within our lives, He will produce the righteous fruit within us.

21. What kind of “fruit” is produced in our lives when the Holy Spirit is living within us? Galatians 5:22,23.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ | 9. _____ |

God waits for us to ask before He will send the Holy Spirit to live within us (Luke 11:13). When He comes, He will transform us on the inside and produce these qualities within us. It is called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not fruit that we produce ourselves.

That is why Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matthew 5:16.

They will glorify God, for He is the source of all the good works.

22. What else does Jesus say that can help us see God’s perspective?

A. Matthew 19:16,17 _____

B. Luke 11:13 _____

Matthew 19:16,17 – Jesus was asked, “‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.’” In other words, no human can be described as “good.” Only God is good.

Luke 11:13 - In the context of an incredible promise, Jesus gave a general description of what we are like. “If you being evil...” Since we are sinful and selfish by nature, Jesus must describe us according to the truth. We are evil. However, since evil people are able to give “good gifts” to others, it appears that we are basically good.

The truth is we are able to give good gifts out of selfish motives. We can give in order to get something in return. Or we may give so that others will think well of us. Paul says if I do these things, “but have not love, it profits me nothing” 1 Corinthians 13:3.

23. How does Paul describe us in Romans 5:6-10?

_____ (Verse 6) _____ (Verse 6)

_____ (Verse 8) _____ (Verse 10)

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BAD NEWS

24. How does God respond to us when we are this way? Rom. 5:6-10

Instead of rejecting us, God takes the initiative to love and redeem us. The good news about the bad news is this: We don't have to try to be good in order to make God love us, for He already does. We don't have to pretend that we are good out of fear of rejection, for Jesus came to save us, not to condemn us (John 3:17).

God's love for us is not based on our performance. He loves us in spite of our condition. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. We can relax and be honest with God. This good news allows us to experience security and peace with God. It enables us to grow up into maturity. Bill Gaither wrote a song that sums it up well:

“I am loved, I am loved, I can risk loving you,
For the One who knows me best, loves me most.
I am loved, I am loved, won't you please take my hand.
We are free to love each other, we are loved.”

“I said, ‘If you knew, you wouldn't want me;
My scars are hidden by the face I wear.’
He said, ‘My child, my scars go deeper;
It was love for you that put them there.’”

25. What kind of clothes did God make for Adam and Eve? What is the significance of this? Genesis 3:21

The fig leaf clothes Adam and Eve had made were very inadequate. God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” As God promised, death did occur that very day (Genesis 2:17). The garments of skin from animals were a constant reminder that the wages of sin was death. The animals that died represented their death and also pointed forward to Jesus dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Rev. 13:8). They knew they were alive because Jesus promised to be their Savior.

26. Thought questions:

- A. Do you like being around people who have “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives? ____ Yes ____ No
- B. Would you like to have “the fruit of the Spirit” in your life?
____ Yes ____ No
- C. How would your life be different if you had “the fruit of the Holy Spirit” in your life right now?
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IT'S OK TO DISOBEY?

By Clinton Meharry, © 2008, 2011

“It’s OK to disobey,
It doesn’t matter what you do!
Go ahead” Satan said,
“The fruit is really good for you.”

“You won’t die! That’s a lie!
God just wants this for Himself!
Adam and Eve, you can believe
You’ll become like God yourself!”

“Come and see, look at me!
How could a serpent really talk?
Open your eyes; you’ll become wise!
Adventure waits you on this walk.”

“Knowing the good, you really should
Experience evil too.
Don’t hold back, take the snack.
Evil will be good for you!”

When they took, all heaven shook
With grief and tears that day.
Heaven knew what was true –
Sin would take their life away.

When God came,
The pair felt shame.
They ran away to hide.
Filled with fear with death so near,
They knew that Satan lied.

When God spoke,
The pair felt hope!
They heard amazing grace.
While sin brought pain,
God’s love would reign –
He’d redeem the human race!