

THE NATURE OF SIN

- 1) **THE BASIC PROBLEM OF MANKIND** - It's important to stress the centrality of the sin problem in Scripture. *Sin is what's wrong with man and his world.* The Bible is a book telling of God's salvation mission to save mankind from the *guilt* and the *effects* of sin.

Not everyone sees sin as man's central problem. Here are some alternate views:

- a) **Man is not fallen but maturing** - He is in a process of evolving, and as he continues to evolve he will shed more of his baser animal ways. He is not *evil*, but *not full developed*. He is not quite a finished product and his best days are still ahead.
 - b) **Man is not yet sufficiently enlightened** - His real problem is one of ignorance, not wickedness. He must be better informed to master his circumstances. As he is increasingly educated, as he learns more about himself and his world, he will come to conduct himself with greater dignity and light. Once shown the right way to go, man will walk in it.
 - c) **Man must realize his own greatness** - His problem is really one of sufficient self-esteem and recognizing and actualizing his true potential. He needs to express himself more freely, casting off ancient taboos and repressive guilt ("I'm OK, You're OK").
- 2) **MAN'S FALL INTO SIN** - Mankind's entrance into the realm of sin is treated as space-time history in Scripture. The apostle Paul seems to take a very literal view of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden - "**Sin came into the world through one man**" - **Romans 5:12**).

The story unfolds in Genesis chapter 3:

- a) **Satan initiates the temptation process** - Satan is already present and ready to corrupt the created order. It is clear from the first three verses that Lucifer has committed himself to a sinful course *some time before* the fall of man. Passages that give some light, though not many specific details, on the fall of rebellious angels are **2 Peter 2:4** - "**For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment....**", and **Jude 6** - "**And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day....**"
 - b) **The permissive will of God is somehow involved** - Significantly, God chose *not* to squish Satan's rebellion or deception. There is a strange absence of Divine muscle flexing or coercion. But this is not to be taken as *helplessness nor indifference*. God will use even these events to reveal His holiness, love and grace through the Cross still to come. **Redemption will shine even more brilliantly against this dark background.** God will be seen to be not only more *powerful* than Satan and his angels, but more *gloriously desirable* as Satan is *abandoned* and *renounced* by the very ones he has deceived and captured.
 - c) **Human freedom and responsibility** - Both Eve and Adam function freely and responsibly. Both offer excuses - **Genesis 3:12-13** - "**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.**" Ultimately, however, while the serpent too shares in punishment, God seems to honor the power of the *free choices* of Eve and then Adam. They bear the brunt of the consequences of their decision
- 3) **THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL RUIN** - Two distinct steps unfold in the garden account:

- a) **Unbelief is sown in the human mind** - **Genesis 3:1-4** - "**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.'**

There's much practical truth here. Satan *admits* the reality of God. He even admits the reality of God's ability to communicate with His creatures. It's God's *goodness* that's questioned. The primary tactic of the enemy is always *deception and confusion*. Note the question he asks in **3:1** - "**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?''**"

Now look back to what God actually did say in **2:16-17** - "**And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] 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.'**" Satan's first step is to throw Eve off balance - to set her mind spinning - to plant questions she can't yet handle. It's not the *reality* of God that Satan attacks. It's Eve's *perception* of God that he's after. Satan's number one ploy has always been the same. He tries to switch hats with God. He plants the image of God as one who is taking away Eve and

Adam's freedom, while he himself appears to be the one to give them all they really want.

Now look at Eve's response in **3:2-3** - "**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.'**" In fact, God said nothing about "not touching" the tree. He also never said the tree to be avoided was in the "center of the garden". One of the trees placed at the center of the garden was the "tree of life" (**Genesis 2:9**) and there had be no restrictions placed on eating from that tree.

Satan's plan is working. Things are becoming jumbled and confused in Eve's mind. Her words are a mixture of truth and half quotes and flat-out errors. When Satan finally spits out his open lie in **verse 4** - "You shall not die" - Eve is in no position to even argue with him.

Here the importance of both knowing what God has actually said and responding immediately to error becomes so apparent. How differently things might have turned out if Eve had headed off error right at the start - "Has God really said...?" "**No! But He did say this... And I'm standing on that truth!**"

- b) **Selfishness is used to motivate disobedience** - Notice **verse 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.**" The implication is they will do better in life **servng their own interests** than honoring the will of their Creator. They begin to question whether God can be worshipped or trusted.

This has become the **root of all sin**. Man seeks his own glory rather than Gods Both Jesus and Paul talk about this death-dealing problem - **John 5:39-44** - "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. [41] I do not receive glory from people. [42] But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. [43] I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. [44] How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"** And Paul deals with the same issue in different words in **Romans 1:24-25** - "**Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."**

Both these texts deal, nor primarily with the **guilt** of sin (though that is certainly assumed) but the **hopelessness** sin produces. "**How can you believe?**", Jesus asks. As a result of Satan's attachment of his lies to our own selfish desires disobedience becomes both **attractive** and **habitual** in its ongoing deception. We become "**children of disobedience**" **Ephesians 2:2**. The **children** image speaks to sins **regenerating** power in our blind hearts. It propagates itself in deeper and deeper bondage.

More on the ongoing effects of sin next week.