

The Fall of Man

BIBLE BASICS

The Woman and The Serpent

In the Garden of Eden, amidst the lush greenery and vibrant blooms, stood a tree that held both beauty and mystery—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Its presence introduced a profound concept: free will. God, in His infinite wisdom, crafted this tree as a medium for humans to exercise their ability to choose. It's as if God deliberately places temptation in our path. A beautiful tree with delicious-looking fruit, but we're forbidden from touching it. It's like telling a child "don't touch that" even if they had no prior interest. Suddenly, the forbidden object becomes highly alluring. Similarly, when we tell ourselves “don't eat this chocolate”, how long can we resist the temptation?

However, it was not a trap or a test but rather an opportunity for Adam and Eve to demonstrate their love and obedience. In His infinite wisdom, God understands the nature of humanity. When He commanded humans not to touch or eat from the Tree of Knowledge, He knew that this prohibition would evoke an intense desire to do the opposite. By presenting this choice, God granted them the opportunity to demonstrate their obedience or disobedience, reaffirming their commitment to Him or choosing to stray from His path. In the absence of choice, true love cannot exist. Imagine if God had created Adam and Eve in paradise, devoid of any options or the ability to choose Him. In such a scenario, there would be no free will, rendering the concept of love meaningless. Without the freedom to choose, love loses its essence, becoming an obligatory act rather than a genuine expression of affection.

The serpent, a cunning creature, recognized the significance of this tree and approached Eve with a tempting proposition. It questioned God's command, planting seeds of doubt and curiosity in her mind.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”
Genesis 3:1-6

Eve engaged in conversation with the serpent, despite the warning from God to not touch or eat from the tree. This initial engagement was a pivotal moment, as St. John Chrysostom notes, " Her mistake in the first place was engaging, or even having a discussion with the devil." "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces" (Matthew 7:6).

The serpent's words were carefully crafted to appeal to Eve's desires. It promised that by eating the fruit, her eyes would be opened, and she would become like God, knowing both good and evil. This half-truth, mixed with deception, was intended to sway Eve away from God's command. Eve succumbed to the serpent's temptation, violating God's command. She took a bite of the forbidden fruit and shared it with Adam (Genesis 3:1-6). This pivotal moment teaches us a valuable lesson about discerning God's will and aligning our actions accordingly. At its core lies the importance of knowing and understanding the Word of God. The Holy Bible serves as a guide, providing us with divine wisdom and principles. By diligently reading and studying the Scriptures, we gain insight into God's character, His desires, and His expectations for us.

When faced with moral dilemmas or choices that require discernment, we can turn to the Bible as our ultimate authority. Its teachings provide a framework for decision-making, helping us to differentiate between what is in line with God's will and what is not. By aligning our thoughts, words, and actions with the principles outlined in the Bible, we demonstrate our trust in God's wisdom and sovereignty. St. John warns against the devil preaching what a person wants to hear, then he strikes to pull them away from the true Word of God. He wrote in 1 John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Additionally, the story of Adam and Eve reminds us of the consequences of disobedience. God had given clear instructions, but they chose to disregard them, leading to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the introduction of sin and suffering into the world. This serves as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the importance of obedience and humility in our relationship with God.

However, God, in His boundless love and mercy, did not abandon humanity. He had foreseen the fall of man and prepared a plan for redemption. The ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His Son, would provide a way for humanity to be reconciled with God. Through His death and resurrection, believers can receive forgiveness for their sins and restore their broken relationship with the Creator.

The Divine Dilemma

In his book "On the Incarnation," St. Athanasius presents a profound theological concept known as the "Divine Dilemma." This dilemma arises from the scenario that unfolded after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. God had warned them that if they ate from the tree, they would surely die, yet they chose to disobey.

St. Athanasius uses the term "Divine Dilemma" to describe the situation God found Himself in as a result of their actions. While God is not subject to human limitations and emotions, St. Athanasius employs this language to emphasize the gravity of the situation. God had made a clear declaration, but human disobedience had placed Him in a predicament.

On the one hand, God could have chosen to leave humanity to face the natural consequences of their decision. He had warned them of the outcome, and their choice to eat from the tree was an act of willful disobedience. However, this option did not align with God's goodness and His desire for humanity's salvation.

On the other hand, God could have simply forgiven humanity and let the punishment go. Yet, this would have undermined the seriousness of their transgression and compromised the principles of justice and accountability.

Thus:

- Option 1: just leave man to the natural consequences of his decision, I said you should die, you ate of it – which is not fitting of God's goodness
- Option 2: let the punishment go

To resolve this dilemma and save humanity, God needed to fulfill a unique set of criteria. First, the one who would save humanity had to be inherently capable of doing so, free from any need for salvation themselves. This savior had to be infinite and remarkable, able to take the place of everyone throughout history and into the future.

The second dilemma arose from the fact that God is a spirit and cannot die. To overcome this obstacle, the solution was the Incarnation—God becoming man. Through the Incarnation, God took on human flesh and entered into the human realm, becoming subject to the same conditions as humanity, including the possibility of death.

By becoming man, Jesus Christ fulfilled the necessary criteria to save humanity. He was both fully divine and fully human, capable of paying the price for humanity's mistake and redeeming them from their fallen state. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus overcame sin and death, reconciling humanity with God and opening the way for eternal salvation.

The Divine Dilemma and the Incarnation reveal the depth of God's love and His unwavering commitment to redeeming humanity. It demonstrates that God is not distant or indifferent but actively involved in human history, willing to sacrifice Himself for the sake of His creation.

God's Approach to Sin

In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation and disobeyed God's command, God did not immediately rain down punishment upon them. Instead, He gently approached them, asking, "Where are you?" This question was not merely a query about their physical location, but also an invitation for them to reflect on their actions and acknowledge their mistake.

God's approach to Adam and Eve demonstrates His deep love and compassion. He knew they had made a mistake, yet He did not condemn them or cast them aside. Instead, He engaged them in a dialogue, allowing them to express their feelings and come to terms with their sin. This gentle approach reveals God's desire to restore their relationship with Him, rather than simply punishing them for their transgression.

It is often assumed that God is quick to punish those who sin. However, the story of Adam and Eve teaches us otherwise. God is not eager to condemn us but rather longs to bring us back from our mistakes. He understands that we are imperfect and prone to making errors, and He is always ready to forgive and restore us to fellowship with Him. “If man paid back the love of God by rebellion, God still treats man with love, to draw his heart away from sickness that overcame him, and to raise him up from the death that reigned over him” – Fr. Tadros Malaty

This reminder is particularly important for us today. In a world that often emphasizes shame and condemnation, we need to remember God's unyielding love and gentleness towards us. When we fall into sin, we may feel tempted to hide from God in shame and guilt. However, as the prophet Jeremiah reminds us, there is no place we can hide from God's presence. He fills heaven and earth, and He sees all that we do. The best place to hide from God after we fall in sin is...in Him! “Am I a God near at hand,” says the Lord, “And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?” says the Lord; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord.” – Jeremiah 23:23-24

Rather than trying to hide from God, we should run to Him. He is our loving Father who longs to embrace us and forgive us for our sins. When we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful to cleanse us and restore us to fellowship with Him. Let us not forget God's gentle approach to sin. May we always turn to Him in repentance and faith, knowing that He will welcome us with open arms and restore us to His loving embrace.

God's Approach vs Our Approach

In contrasting God's approach to our approach, it becomes evident that we often attempt to justify our sins and shortcomings through excuses and incomplete solutions. The sinner, like the angry person, devises pretexts to rationalize their behavior, even citing religious texts to bolster their arguments. This act of "sewing together fig leaves" represents a rejection of genuine repentance and a resort to superficial remedies.

St. Didymus the Blind illustrates this concept by pointing to the example of Elijah, who displayed anger and destroyed the captain of fifty. While Elijah's actions may have been divinely sanctioned, they do not serve as a model for the average individual. Anger, without proper discernment and moderation, can lead to destructive consequences. That is what is meant by “sewed together fig leaves,” by rejecting the fruits, and resorting to incomplete protection as coverings. The angry person, for instance, mentions Elijah as a role model, when he got angry and destroyed the captain of fifty (2 Kings 1:9-12)”

“Sometimes the sinner sews for himself excuses for his sins. Is that not what we see with many people?! The angry person, for instance, invents excuses to justify his anger, to try to prove that he is right, quoting sometimes from the Holy Scripture. That is what is meant by “sewed together fig leaves,” by rejecting the fruits, and resorting to incomplete protection as coverings. The angry person, for instance, mentions Elijah as a role model, when he got angry and destroyed the captain of fifty (2 Kings 1:9-12)” – St. Didymus the Blind

In contrast, God's approach is one of love, compassion, and redemption. Instead of condemning Adam and Eve for their disobedience, He demonstrated His love by making coats of skin to clothe them (Gen. 3:21), replacing their inadequate fig leaf coverings.

These coats, as interpreted by Fr. Tadros Malaty, symbolize God's revelation to Adam and Eve about the significance of sacrifice, foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The coats, made from animal skin, represent the slain Lord Christ, whom we put on as a cover for our sins.

“And now, as our first parents fell under divine chastisement, God proclaimed His love for them, before driving them out of the garden, “He made coats of skin, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21), in place of the fig leaves they sewed together to make themselves coverings. These coats, probably, proclaimed God’s revelation to the first man about the importance of sacrifice as a symbol of that of salvation... It is as though God has given Adam and Eve the rite of the bloody sacrifice. As to the coat of skin, that do not get dry, it symbolizes the slain Lord Christ, Whom we put on as a cover for our sins, and a remover of the disgrace of our old nature.” – Fr. Tadros Malaty

The coat of skin, which does not dry, signifies the unchanging and eternal nature of Christ's sacrifice. It serves as a constant reminder of the forgiveness and redemption available to all who turn to Him. By putting on Christ, we shed the disgrace of our old nature and embrace the righteousness that comes from Him.

God's approach toward sinners stands in stark contrast to our tendency to make excuses and seek imperfect solutions. His love, mercy, and provision of salvation through Christ offer hope and transformation to all who seek His grace.

The Second Adam and Eve

Jesus (2nd Adam) & Adam:

Adam succumbed to greed, indulging in the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. In contrast, Jesus Christ demonstrated remarkable self-control when He fasted in the wilderness, resisting Satan's temptations. Christ declared, "Man shall not live by bread alone..." emphasizing the importance of spiritual nourishment over material desires. As St. Basil the Great wisely observed, "Through lack of fasting, man was kicked out of paradise. Let us fast now that we may one day return there."

Conceit and ambition also plagued Adam, driven by the desire for more knowledge and power. "Your eyes will be opened, and you will know things," the serpent enticed. Christ, however, rejected such worldly ambitions when He refused the devil's offers of fame and fortune. He understood that true fulfillment lies not in material possessions or earthly glory but in serving God and others.

Pride was another significant factor in Adam's downfall. He desired to be like God, equating himself with the Creator. In contrast, Christ ignored the tempting offer of angelic glory if He threw Himself down from the temple. St. Augustine eloquently stated, "They listened to the voice of the deceiver who

told them: 'You will be like God.' So they deserted God, who wished to make them gods, not through their isolation from Him, but through their fellowship with Him."

St. Mary (2nd Eve) & Eve:

Eve's disobedience in partaking of the forbidden fruit stands in stark contrast to St. Mary's incredible obedience. St. Mary willingly accepted God's plan for her life, becoming the vessel through which Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, would enter the world. Her humble submission to God's will allowed her to play a pivotal role in the redemption of humanity, reversing the consequences of Eve's disobedience.

The Punishment

The serpent, Adam, and Eve were all cursed with a punishment that brought sorrow, regret, and a harsh ending. Death was given as a remedy to limit the evils that could have ensued. Saint Ambrose believed that death served as a way to put an end to the cycle of sin and suffering. "Death was given as a remedy as it puts a limit to evils" (St. Ambrose) Death allowed individuals to face the consequences of their actions and ultimately seek redemption through repentance.

Saint John Chrysostom offered a unique perspective on the punishment by focusing on the expulsion from Paradise. He argued that while Paradise was initially given to man as a gift, it was ultimately taken away as a means of showing compassion and care.

"Just imagine what would be the situation of Cain if he stayed in Paradise in his condition as a blood-shedder?! Paradise was given to man, and when he proved not worthy of it, he was driven out, for staying out and feeling insulted, he would turn to a better condition (through repentance), to be worthy of returning. That actually happened, as the Lord said to him (the thief): "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Look how, not only giving us the Paradise, but also sending us out of it, is a sign of great care and compassion! If man did not suffer being driven out of Paradise, he would not have been worthy of it again." – St. John Chrysostom

Staying in Paradise in a state of sin would have prevented man from recognizing his shortcomings and seeking forgiveness. Instead, being driven out allowed man to experience suffering and come to terms with his actions, leading to the potential for repentance and eventual return to Paradise.

The Orthodox understanding of original sin differs from certain churches that believe in inheriting the specific act of picking the fruit from the tree. Orthodoxy recognizes that while we are not directly responsible for the actual act committed by Adam and Eve, yet we are born with a corrupted nature that carries the consequences of sin. This is supported by passages in Psalm 51 and Romans 5:12, which state that we are born in iniquity and sin, and that death entered the world through one man, affecting all humanity. The Orthodox view emphasizes the inherited nature of sin and the need for redemption through repentance, faith, and the grace of God. Psalm 51, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." As we also read in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Turning punishment into salvation

In summary, engaging with evil forces, represented by the devil, leaves us vulnerable and exposed to harm. To determine whether something is against the will of God, it is essential to have a deep understanding of God's Word. Jesus Christ, as the new Adam, provided a model for us to avoid the mistakes made by Adam when he was tempted by Satan. Christ successfully overcame Satan's temptations on three occasions.

The act of not fasting and being disobedient to God's commands resulted in humanity's expulsion from Paradise. Therefore, to return to a state of grace and favor with God, we must embrace fasting, as exemplified by Christ's 40-day fast, and practice blind obedience, as demonstrated by the Virgin Mary.

When we stumble or make mistakes, instead of hiding in our shame and guilt, we should seek refuge in God's presence. God offers us a covering of spiritual protection and strength, symbolized by leather, while our attempts to cover ourselves with fig leaves, representing our own efforts and remedies, will never be as enduring or effective as Christ's sacrifice.

The words of the Gregorian liturgy "You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into Salvation" express the profound gratitude and recognition that God's intervention and grace transform even the most challenging circumstances into opportunities for redemption and salvation. By turning away from sin and embracing God's love and forgiveness, we experience the transformative power of His grace, which brings healing, restoration, and eternal life.



Review Questions

1. What was Eve's mistake that led to disobeying God's will?
 - A. She ate from the forbidden tree.
 - B. She engaged in a conversation with the serpent.
 - C. She believed the serpent's lies.
 - D. All of the above.**
2. Where was the tree that the serpent told Eve to eat from?
 - A. The tree in the midst of the garden.**
 - B. The tree in the corner of the garden.
 - C. The tree on the edge of the garden.
 - D. The tree in the center of the garden.
3. What were the consequences that God told Adam and Eve if they ate from the tree in the midst of the garden?
 - A. They would become immortal.
 - B. They would be banished from the garden.
 - C. They would surely die.**
 - D. They would be turned into animals.
4. What is the sure way to know if someone or something is against the will of God?

[Knowing the Word God through learning the Holy Bible.]

5. According to St. Athanasius what were the 2 options for God to punish Adam and Eve? [Option 1: Let man die, Option 2: Let the punishment go.]
6. Why is Jesus called the 2nd Adam? [Jesus overcame temptations. He was not prideful. He obeyed God.]
7. What is God's approach to sin? [God is not quick to punish us but He is gentle with us to bring us back from our mistakes.]
8. Where is the best place to hide from God when we fall? [The best place to hide from God after we fall in sin is...in Him!]
9. What is the Orthodox understanding of the original sin? [We do not inherit the actual act, but we inherit the corrupted nature and the consequences.]
10. How can we recognize evil? [Know the true Word of God. Learn the Holy Bible.]