

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. In all relationships there will be perfect love, joy, and harmony.
- B. We will experience both security and freedom.
- C. Everyone will look out for the needs of others.
- D. There will be no more grief, pain, or suffering.
- E. We will have 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

By talking through a serpent, Satan 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 Eve to focus on why God would say they couldn't eat from this tree? The incomplete message also enticed her into a conversation with Satan. She tried to clarify what God had actually said. See Genesis 3:2,3.

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

Satan implied that God was a liar. Satan tries to lead us away from God by lying, 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 (See John 5:40,41; 7:17; 8:31,32; 16:13).

Satan also 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 (2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34; 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. Instead of seeking the healing God can bring, many 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 gently seeking to restore the relationship with them. He still loved them. He had good news to share with them.

7. How did Adam and Eve respond to the questions God asked them? Genesis 3:10-13

A. Adam: _____

B. Eve: _____

Adam and Eve were honest with God. However, both added a hint of blame, as if to say, “I wouldn’t have done it if...” When we are honest about our sin and acknowledge our need for help, we will be open to receive the forgiveness God freely gives. We will also begin to understand how gracious and loving He is and appreciate the intimate relationship He offers. (Romans 2:4; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:20).

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

Since slithering on their belly is the curse, some have suggested that serpents originally had wings to fly and were beautiful like some colorful birds. This curse may have been a blessing for the human race to protect us from the fear of serpents flying wherever they wanted to go.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

9. What evidence is there that God is talking to Satan in Genesis 3:14,15? Revelation 12:7-9

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

Genesis 3:15 gives us a first glimpse of what the plan of salvation would accomplish. In the last half of the verse, God refers to the seed of the woman as He, referring to Jesus. “He shall bruise your head.” This is a promise that Jesus would bring an end to Satan (Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14). The verse also says, “You [Satan] shall bruise His heel.” While Satan would hurt Jesus, he could not destroy Him. He tried to keep Jesus in the grave, but Jesus was resurrected (Matthew 27:62-28:7).

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

When Adam and Eve chose to learn about evil, they joined Satan in his rebellion against God. They became sinners with a sinful nature and passed that nature onto the whole human race. Paul wrote, we all are “by nature children of wrath” Ephesians 2:3. With this sinful nature, we are naturally at “enmity against God” (Romans 8:7) and in harmony with the kingdom of selfishness. In other words, without a Savior everyone would remain united with Satan in a war against God.

In Genesis 3:15 God promised a Savior would be born to free the human race from Satan’s dominion (Colossians 1:12-14).

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. When He was lifted up on the cross, Jesus revealed His unconditional love for the human race. As a powerful magnet draws metal to itself, so Jesus’ love is drawing everyone to Himself.

Unfortunately, many will resist and reject Jesus’ love, for they love sin and hate the light (John 3:19-21). These are referred to as Satan’s seed in Genesis 3:15. Notice how Jesus referred to those who were fighting against Him. “You are of your father the devil, and the desire of your father you want to do” John 8:44. (See also John 15:18-20).

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? Genesis 3:16

A. _____

B. _____

Sorrow - The sorrow 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 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 attempt to prevent evil, only God can change the heart so that unselfish love flows from within.

Desire - This word hints there would be a longing for something that is desperately needed, but missing. God said it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). We were created as social beings. In Eden, Adam and Eve were able to freely give and receive love. They experienced the emotional, spiritual, and physical oneness that brought joy to their hearts.

After they sinned, selfishness entered humanity. This led to insecurity and broken relationships. That is why God said that Eve, along with other women, would desire for oneness with their husbands. This longing would create a vulnerability that could lead to manipulation and abuse.

Rule - Selfishness can lead husbands and wives to try to dominate and control each other in order to get what they want. Without love and security in the home, husbands and wives will not be able to experience oneness with each other. It will also be difficult for children to grow into maturity. When we've been hurt and are in danger, it is vital to create and maintain healthy boundaries so we can protect ourselves and seek the healing we need. However, people are also tempted to numb the emotional pain with addictive substances, pleasure-seeking, busyness, entertainment, etc. Instead of experiencing the healing we need, unhealthy coping will harden our hearts and prevent us from giving and receiving *healthy* love. When we experience healing and grow into maturity, we will be able to “rule” with loving service as Jesus did.

"Rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28.

Husbands are invited to take the lead in receiving Jesus' love and forgiveness and in creating a safe, loving, and forgiving atmosphere in the home. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" Ephesians 5:25. Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you" John 15:12. When we experience Jesus' love and forgiveness, we can begin to love and forgive others in unselfish ways.

Wives are counseled, "submit to your own husbands, *as to the Lord*" Ephesians 5:22. When we submit our lives to God, we are opening ourselves up to receive His love and healing. This enables us to grow into maturity and begin to love others as He has loved us. John 15:12.

Great healing can come when husbands and wives "submit to one another" (Ephesians 5:21), that they may give and receive love freely, without manipulation or resentment. When this happens in the home, there will be security in the family and a little taste of heaven on earth.

13. What consequences are communicated to Adam? 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 we would tend to 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 _____.”

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. Paul expressed the reality of what we are like, but don't want to admit.

- D. Romans 7:18-21 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) _____ good dwells.... I find then a _____, that _____ is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”

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

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

Realizing that my nature is wretched explains why I desperately need to abide in Jesus and let Him abide in me. I am not safe anytime apart from Him. 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 7:15-20

Jesus states a simple concept. A good tree getting good care will not be full of bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. The question is, “What kind of trees are we, 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 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” Matt. 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 promising the Holy Spirit will be given to all who ask, 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 can 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.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BAD NEWS

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

_____ (Verse 6) _____ (Verse 6)

_____ (Verse 8) _____ (Verse 10)

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, even though He knows our selfish 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, be honest with God, and let Him be our loving Savior from all sin. This good news allows us to grow into maturity by finding security in Christ. 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. Jesus was filled with the fruit of the Spirit. However, not everyone liked being around Him. Do you like being around people who have “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives?

_____ Yes _____ No

B. Explain your answer. Why did you mark the one you did?

C. Would you like to have “the fruit of the Spirit” growing in your life?

_____ Yes _____ No

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!