

The Fall and You

BELIEVERS' BOOT CAMP

Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 10:28

November 2, 2003

Wesley J. Gabel

Over seven Sundays we are holding a boot camp for believers, so to speak. You will not be running through obstacle courses, waking up early in the morning and taking full-pack hikes, or hear the s-o-o-thing voice of a drill sergeant. Instead, we are examining seven truths that are basic and essential to walking with Jesus once you have enlisted with him.

Last week we began with the first issue the Bible addresses: "*Who am I?*" The words *I am* are powerful. They rob you, or they release you to fulfill your destiny. They define a vision that dominates your faith and life. You won't and can't know yourself accurately until you know your creator who made you in His likeness and begin thinking informed by his word.

Issue #2 is: "*What is going on?*" Why do you have trouble knowing who you are and knowing God? If you are God's child and prince or princess in this world, why do you suffer, struggle and experience evil in God's creation?

A store manager returned from lunch to find his clerk's hand bandaged. Before he could ask about it, his clerk said, "I have good news. I sold that ugly suit that's been here forever." "You don't mean that ugly pink and blue double-breasted monstrosity that the previous manager left us," asked the manager. "That very one!" the clerk nodded. The manager commented, "That's the ugliest piece of clothing I have ever seen. But say, what happened to your hand?" "Oh," responded the clerk, "after I sold the suit to the customer, his seeing-eye dog bit me."

Do you catch a whiff of manipulation or exploitation there? Do you realize that is how the Bible explains the presence of evil in this world? Adam and Eve weren't exactly blind, but they were exploited nonetheless. The exploitation came through a serpent. The serpent spoke to Eve:

Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden (Genesis 3:1)

Eve responded:

Of course we may eat it... It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die. (Genesis 3:2)

Satan speaking through the body of a snake exaggerated the prohibition that God had placed on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan sewed the thought that a loving God was oppressing her: not letting her eat. The focus was on exploring what was not permissible rather than on what was. He kept that focus:

"You won't die!" the serpent hissed. "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

Satan denied the consequences. It is his standard line! He always turns our eyes from the consequences. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about a rich hot fudge sundae that somehow won't hurt our diet, flirting at the office that can't possibly lead us to infidelity, clicking on a link to pornography that won't poison our attitude or relationships, or telling somebody off in anger that somehow won't cripple our relationship. Satan not only denies the consequences, he suggests that the action will bring fulfillment. We'll feel better. We'll be better. We'll become just like God, fulfilled, knowing better if not everything. The Bible says:

The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too. (Genesis 3:6, NLT)

Through a two-fold appeal: one to the physical senses – *“the fruit looked so fresh and delicious”* and another to her spiritual sense – *“it would make her so wise,”* Satan exploited Eve. He not only got her to mistrust and disobey God: *“she ate some of the fruit;”* he also got her to be his agent: *“she also gave some to her husband, who was with her.”*

Satan has used that same pattern of trickery and deceit over and over to rip apart lives, bury people in condemnation, divide people from God and destroy what God made. He schemes to use you and me as his agents. He even incited Peter to tempt Jesus to disobey God. Deceived and dominated, we become estranged from God (just as Adam and Eve hid from him); we become stumbling blocks to others (just like Eve to Adam and Peter to Jesus); we oppose the rule of God and live under the sentence of death. The Apostle Paul put it this way:

When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. (Romans 5:12, NLT)

Paul explained that rule of death has come to dominate everyone. The problem wasn't that everyone broke God's rules. God did not give people rules for a long time. Instead, people even without the rules violated the very essence of life. Made as God's companions and children, they were estranged by what they did. Made pure and loving, we corruptly destroy. Created to partner with God in governing creation, we ignore and reject his will. Paul chose the Greek term *'amartia* to speak of our sin. It is a compound word that puts *missing* and *mark* together: *missing the mark*. We've missed the mark in our actions. We've missed God's creation-target for our lives. Paul explicitly says that using the verb form of *'amartia* when he writes:

For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. (Roman 3:23, NLT)

Babies and small children do not trespass against God's laws. You can still see in them the innocence and purity in which we were created. Satan has not had as much opportunity to

dominate, corrupt and work destructive sins through them. However, you can quickly see the sentence of death in their fragility, the 70 to 90 childhood diseases (as I remember it) they on average undergo before starting school, and even some of the genetic defects.

This sentence of death, not age or time, oppresses. We don't suffer because we age; we suffer because of death's progression. Actually, this sentence of death mercifully accompanies sin. Without death a deepening separation and suffering would be our lot forever. There would be no hope. The torment of hell is the inevitable consequence of sin.

We've seen tastes of hell in the death camps of Germany and the sadism of Saddam Hussein and sons. Tastes of hell are observed on our highways. They secretly plague homes and occasionally visit campuses like Columbine and Rocori School of Cold Spring. Imagine this continuing with no end. Death brings an end to the physical work of sin, but not to the spiritual. Hell still looms in a spiritual way. Jesus said:

Don't be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28, NLT)

Jesus also said:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already... (John 3:16-18, NIV)

All people sin. All people die. All people are condemned, and all people need salvation. God sent Jesus to release people from condemnation and birth in them new and eternal life.

Have you embraced this gift from Jesus? Will you go as a witness and worker of this new life?