

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 5a Questioning Life in the Garden

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Hello and welcome to Unit 5 Session A, Questioning Life in the Garden. Today we'll begin to transition from our conversation about creation to considering the fall and the ramifications of the presence of sin in our world. Up until this point, we've been investigating heavily both the God of creation and the act of creation. Our main teaching idea today is that humanity chose to vandalize God's shalom. Let's start then by understanding this concept of shalom.

What we discover in Genesis 3 is that God lived with humanity in shalom or peace. We'll talk about peace or this word "shalom" in just a minute. But let's take this from Genesis 3:8. Now, this verse is actually talking about the scene after the fall, after sin has entered into the world, but we can reverse engineer from it the type of relationship that God shared with man and woman prior to sin. So we read here, "And they heard the sound." They speaking of humanity, man and woman. Man and woman "heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." So what we can discover here by reverse engineering is that it was a regular occurrence for God to walk with man and woman, for them to have perfect relationship. And one of the best ways that we can describe perfect relationship is with the Hebrew word "shalom."

So shalom is the Hebrew word that's translated "peace." Yet it's a peace that needs to be understood in its fullest sense. To quote the Theological Word Dictionary of the Old Testament, Harris says this: "Peace in this case means much more than the mere absence of war. Rather, the root meaning of the verb better expresses the true concept of shalom. It communicates completeness, wholeness, harmony, and fulfillment. Implicit in shalom is the idea of unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillments in one's undertakings. So this word "shalom" really means peace or unhindered relationship. One of the ways that we might be able to understand this is for us to consider one of our childhood friends, perhaps your best childhood friend, that person that you would go to and share anything with. Now, as you develop that relationship as a child with that other friend, you probably had a relationship that could be described with shalom. It was unhindered. You had complete and utter trust in that person. Now consider back to that first time that friend hurt you. Maybe it was intentional. Maybe it was unintentional. But you remember that moment. And hopefully, if you were good friends, you made up after that. You reconciled. But from that point of reconciliation on, you could always look back in this history of friendship and see that one moment when your friend, by accident or design, hurt you. And so, in a sense, you lost the initial shalom that represented your relationship. So what we discover in Scripture is that man and woman live in perfect shalom with God, in unhindered relationship. There was no awkward moment in their past. But what we discover is that through sin, all of this is going to change.

Now, what we discover also is that God set boundaries that were meant to be kept, and these boundaries were meant to keep the relationship that God shared with humanity in a state of shalom. So if we step back for a moment into Genesis 2, we read these two verses in verses 16 and 17. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat it you shall surely die.'" So this is the moment that we have to talk about because God, in fact, did set up boundaries. We've talked about the fact that God is sovereign. We've also talked about how God created us as morally free beings. And so we have to talk about how our 'creatureliness,' in other words, our creative nature, interacts with our freedom.

Here I want to quote a lengthy quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his work, "Creation and Fall," as he talks about the boundary that is being set up by God surrounding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Bonhoeffer says, "The relationship between freedom and creatureliness is expressed here in the picture language of the Bible, in the tree of knowledge, the forbidden tree that denotes human boundaries." The human being's boundaries. And note the fact that this stands at the center. Bonhoeffer goes on. "The human being's limit is at the center of human existence, not on the margins. The limit or constraint that people look for on the margin of humankind is the limit of the human condition, the limits of human technology, the limits of what is possible for humanity. The boundary, though, that is at the center is the limit of human reality, of human existence as such. Knowledge of the limit or constraint on the margin is always accompanied by the possibility of failing to know any internal limit. Knowledge of the boundary at the center means knowing that the whole of existence, human existence in every possible way that it may comport itself, does in fact have a limit. This is where the boundary, the tree of knowledge stands. That is, it is the very God who gives life. God is at once the boundary and the center of our existence."

It's interesting. And thank you for listening to that lengthy quote from Bonhoeffer. What I want us to grasp for a minute is that the boundary God set up initially for Adam and Eve was not a boundary at the extent of humanity, but at its center. That last sentence that we read from Bonhoeffer is so important. "God is at once the boundary and the center of our existence." And so what we've got to see is that God had the authority and, in fact, did define what was good for Adam and Eve. "You may do this. This is what is good for you. You may not do this. This is what's not good for you." And so, as we begin our conversation about the presence of sin, about the fall, we have to understand that it was God who set the boundary.

And what we want to see is that our primary concern should be about the nature of the command, not the nature of the *object* of the command. In other words, our focus shouldn't be on the tree, on was it an apple, was it a fig tree, or was it a pear tree? What kind of tree was it? Was there a fence around the tree? As interesting as the story is, that's not the focus. Perhaps we might even ask, "Why was it called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" We really don't need to worry about that. Berkhof says it's far more likely that the tree was so-called because it was destined to reveal (a) whether man's future state would be good or evil; and (b) whether man would allow God to determine for him what was in fact good or evil, or if man would undertake this for himself. So Berkhof is actually saying much of the same thing that Bonhoeffer says when he says it's not about the tree *per se*, but it's recognizing that it was God who set boundaries of what was good and evil. And the standing question was how would man and woman respond to the boundaries that God had put in place? So our primary concern should be about the nature of the command, not the nature of the object, right? Our primary question should be related to the act.

Berkhof goes on to say, again, it was a test of pure obedience. Since God did not, in any way, seek to justify or to explain the prohibition of not eating from this tree, Adam had to show his willingness to submit his will to the will of his God with implicit obedience. Perhaps you've never thought about the idea that God planted this tree in the center of the garden specifically as a test of obedience. That we don't know, but I love the idea of thinking about it from this way that God sometimes puts things in our life as a simple test of obedience. Are we willing to do what God has called us to do? What we discover is that humanity has vandalized God's shalom. So we read in Genesis 3:6-7 that man and woman violate God's boundary. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to

the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made for themselves loincloths.” Man chose to determine for himself what was good, and his choice violated God’s command. He vandalized God’s shalom.

So this brings us to the point where we begin to ask the question, “How are we to understand sin?” *Chatta'ath* is the primary Hebrew word translated “sin” in our Bibles, and *hamartia* is the primary Greek word translated “sin” in our Bibles. This is why we actually call the study of sin in theology hamartiology, right? The theological study of sin from the Greek word *hamartia*. Now, both of these words carry the same meaning. It’s to miss the mark. If we were archers and we were to draw back our bow and arrow, and we were to let loose, and our arrow missed the target we were shooting at, we could define that as a good visual representation of sin. It’s to look at, aim at, and miss a particular mark that has been set up.

So let me offer you two good definitions from two different places that I think will begin to help us rationalize, visualize, and understand sin at its core. First, one comes from Cornelius Plantinga. He says, “Sin is any act or its particular absence that displeases God and deserves blame.” What I like about this particular definition is the fact that he talks about active and passive actions, right? That it’s any act or the absence of an act. There are times when we will cross a boundary that God has called us not to cross, and there are times that we choose to stay somewhere where God has told us we need to leave. Both of these acts, one active, one passive, can in fact be sinful. So sin is any act or its particular absence that displeases God and deserves blame. The second, more historical from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, asking the question, “What is sin?” Sin is any lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

So now that we have an idea, generally speaking, of what sin actually is, it’s to miss the mark, right? It’s to not conform to God’s law. It’s to do something that displeases God. Let’s turn our attention to the actual act of sin that we discover in Genesis. So we have the act of this first sin coming to us in Genesis 3:1-7. On the left hand side of your screen there, you’ll see that text. We’ll read it in a moment. And what we’re going to look at in four consecutive moments is these four actions that take place. First, we’re going to see the snake misrepresenting God in verse 1. Then in verses 2 and 3, we’ll see Eve’s mistake. Then in verses 4 and 5, we’ll see the snake going from misrepresenting God to actually standing in opposition to God. And finally in verses 6 and 7, we will see humanity fall. Now, here on the left, we’ve got verses 1 through 5. We’ll bring in verses 6 and 7 in a moment. But let’s read verses 1 through 5. “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?’’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 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.’” But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Okay. Let’s take a look first at how the snake actually misrepresents God in verse 1. Again, to review, the serpent, more crafty than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made, said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” So there are three. And I’ve tried to color code these for you. Three specific misrepresentations that the snake makes in his conversation with Eve.

The first thing that he does is he misrepresents God's name. And this one is subtle. Notice in verse 1 here, we have two different usages of God's name. First, we see Lord God, right? That the Lord God had made the serpent, and the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field. And then next, we see the word God used in isolation there to describe how the snake is talking about God. That phrase LORD (you see it all in capitals) is an important designator. First of all, let's talk about the word God. *Elohim* is a generic word for God used in the Old Testament. *Elohim*. The word Lord here is the word *Yahweh*. It's the covenant God of the nation of Israel. It's a very specific way of referring to the God that we've been talking about in Genesis 1 and 2. And it's important for us to see that everything the snake is doing is trying to twist just a little bit what God had said. He'll later on outright oppose God, but here he's trying to confuse, to misrepresent, to draw in a question, a seed of doubt, into the woman's mind. And so, instead of referring to God through his covenant name *Yahweh*, he simply uses this more generic term *Elohim*. And this is the first misrepresentation.

Now, the second one comes to us. It's in green here. It's at the end, where he says, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" This in fact was not God's command at all. And if you'll recall, one of the things that we saw was that God gave the man and woman permission to eat of every tree in the garden save one. As we talk more about the impact of the fall, this is just a wonderful picture, if we can use the phrase "wonderful" when talking about the first sin. This is an accurate picture of what often happens in our minds when we think about sin. So many times, the enemy convinces us that following God is a restrictive thing, that there are so many things we cannot do, when in fact, following God is actually life-giving. The first command of God was "Stay away from one tree and enjoy all the rest," not "You cannot eat from any tree." And yet so many times, in our own walk with God and in our own culture, people incorrectly perceive that a relationship with God is restrictive. However, we see here that the snake actually misrepresents the command of God. "Did he say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

Finally, (and it's in blue), we see that the snake misrepresents the recipients of God's command. We see the phrase "you." The snake is specifically bypassing Adam in this dialogue. This command was given to humanity. It was given to Adam and Eve. And yet we see that the serpent is stepping past Adam, past his role of leadership, and stepping right to Eve. And so he is very much misrepresenting the law of God, the command of God, and the boundary of God. This is the first act we see in verse 1. Now let's turn our attention to Eve's mistake. Eve's mistake was not stepping on the snake. She should have done that, kicked him out of the dust, and we would have been good. But unfortunately, the snake's misrepresentation of God's command did its work. It enticed Eve into conversation. And so we see her responding to the serpent in verses 2 and 3. "And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.''"

Now, unfortunately, Eve is at a disadvantage to begin with because she's now answering questions that at their heart are incorrect to begin with. But she's been taken in by the serpent's questions. So we see her make three important mistakes. First in red, we see her speaking of the location of the tree rather than of its importance. We know that it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, yet she doesn't refer to it as this. So to her, she stripped away the purpose of the boundary and rather talks about the location of the boundary. You remember we talked about it's not so much the nature of the object but the nature of the command? It's not so much why it's the tree, but what the tree represents. And so she misses this and she talks about the proximity of the tree. "It's in the middle of the garden."

We can't eat from that one," not "We cannot eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." We see her carrying the same language of the serpent in green here. She admits LORD before God, again using that more generic term *Elohim* and foregoing that covenant name of God, *Yahweh*.

Finally, we see this third thing in blue that she adds to God's command. And why? We're not sure. But she takes it that next step. Perhaps she's confused. Perhaps she wants to overexert her own position. We're not sure. But what she says is "Neither shall we touch it, lest you die." Now, that wasn't part of God's initial command. We don't read anywhere that God said, "If you touch this tree, you will die." He said, "If you eat of this tree, you will die." And so we see her adding to God's commands. So first, the snake misrepresents God, drawing Eve into conversation, and Eve unfortunately takes the bait and is now having a conversation. And it's only half-true and it's only getting worse. Now that the snake has brought Eve into the conversation, now that he's brought her in, now that he's sown the doubt of God's command, he's going to move from misrepresenting God to now actually opposing God.

So we see in verses 4 and 5, "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" This is opposition to God's command. God said, "You will die." The serpent says to the woman, "You will not die." He stands in direct opposition to God and says instead, "Not only will you not die, but you will be like God in your ability to know good and evil." And so here in verses 4 and 5, we see the first direct opposition to God. But unfortunately, the snake had sown his seed of doubt in Eve's mind. He's gotten her to question God's clear command. She's now confused because she's added to it. And now the snake takes it that step further and opposes God and entices Eve to step in and join him in his opposition. And so we come to verses 6 and 7, that moment when humanity chose to vandalize shalom, God's perfect peace. They lived in perfect, unadulterated peace. There was no problems between God and man. They lived in unhindered relationship. But then man and woman set their will against God.

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made for themselves loincloths." Humanity saw their own good. The first sin was mankind choosing for himself what was good. We see parallels here in verse 6 to what we're told later on in the New Testament at 1 John 2:16. "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." Notice that when she looked at the tree, she saw that it was good for food. She saw it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desired to make one wise. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. This led her to transgress God's law, to cross the boundary. And so we read that she ate, she gave to her husband, and he ate. And sin was sown.

Now, an important note here, and we'll talk more about it in coming lessons. 1 Timothy 2:14 tells us that in this first sin, Eve was deceived, but that Adam willfully disobeys. 1 Timothy 2:14 reads, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." Both transgress the law of God. Both break God's boundary. Eve is led there through deception, yet Adam is led there willfully. And so the question that changed everything, the doubt that was sown ultimately led humanity to choose to vandalize God's shalom. They violated God's peace, and so humanity fell.