

UNIT 2

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LET US MAKE

A NAME

FOR OURSELVES

“Only Wickedness All the Time”

by Ronnie Martin

Here’s what we know as our journey unfolds through the Book of Genesis: God had initially created an unblemished world. And not just a world but a universe that reflected the loving and communal bond that has existed for all eternity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And not just a universe but a union, which bore the image of Himself in the form of a man and woman who reflected the joyful attributes that would uniquely characterize Christ the Creator.

But when the serpent entered, and succeeded in deceiving Adam and Eve, rebellion against God reshaped the heart of humankind, and the decay process of all creation began. Unlike the lie the serpent told Adam and Eve, God proved true to His word. The day He told Adam and Eve that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would kill them—on that day, they would die—He was being loving, not lying (Gen. 2:17).

What follows are some of the saddest chapters in Scripture as we see the generations of Adam and Eve, now polluted by sin and spiritually dead, physically die off one by one, just as God promised they would if Adam disobeyed His gracious command.

At the root of Adam’s sin was pride, which is a desire to elevate ourselves above all others as a way to achieve significance. Although God had already planned to send a Savior—His Son—to atone for the sins of the world (Acts 2:22-23), this prideful heart would be passed down to all of Adam and Eve’s descendants for as long as the world existed.

LIFE IN A (BROKEN) NEW WORLD ORDER

As generations continued to live and die under this new world order, the world increased in wickedness to the point that God decided He would no longer tolerate this excessive evil. He would send a flood to destroy humankind, but not everyone.

Far more significant than making a name for ourselves, Jesus redeems our identity by restoring our desire to give glory and honor back to Him, where we find fullness of joy and eternal pleasures.

He would spare a family of eight led by a man named Noah, who found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). It was this unmerited favor, or grace, that led God to rescue Noah, who was described as a righteous and blameless man among the people on the earth. Rather than walk in the paths of his contemporaries, Noah “walked with God” (6:9).

Through no merit of his own, Noah was spared from God’s just and holy wrath against the wickedness of the world. And when the flood had subsided, God graciously gave Noah the same charge He had given Adam in the garden of Eden—to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (9:1). God established a covenant with Noah, promising never again to use a flood to destroy all of His sinful image-bearers and His sin-cursed creatures (9:15).

But as much as God blessed Noah, the man was still a sinner by nature who was saved from God’s wrath only by God’s grace. Though the world had been wiped clean, the hearts of Noah and his family

were anything but, as evidenced by Noah after the flood when he became drunk with wine and his shameful nakedness was witnessed by his son (9:20-23).

Despite their imperfections, Noah’s family obeyed God’s mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Unfortunately, by the time we get to Genesis 11, not only do we have a population explosion but we have an explosion of pride in the hearts of people who have become united together as one voice. We might read this today and wonder what was so bad about a people united under a common language, but what they desired to accomplish in their union with one another illustrates the problem.

God wanted His image-bearers to “fill the earth,” to reflect His glory across the globe. But like their forefather Adam before them, they desired to make a name for themselves through self-exaltation, garnering the glory that’s reserved for God alone. They would do this by building a tower that reached into the heavens (11:4). Like all humankind since,

the people of Babel sought significance and immortality through the allure of created things rather than through their Creator. In yet another act of grace through judgment, God dispersed the people by confusing their language, which divided them and sent them out to multiply and fill the earth as God had originally commanded.

TRANSFORMING OUR CRAVING FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Sadly, the rest of history reflects this tragic tendency we carry in our DNA to “make a name for ourselves.” The “name” is not the problem, however; it’s the “making it for ourselves.” We all crave significance, and we would do well to remember that the longing for significance is not an earthly or wicked desire. It comes from being made in the image of God, who created us, declared His creation good, and commissioned us to fill the earth with His glory and goodness. As image-bearers of God, we have been exalted above all other creatures. We are more valuable than many sparrows, as Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 10:31.

The problem is not whether we are significant, it’s that we seek our significance in things that are insufficient to provide significance for us. But there’s nothing new going on here! All of our new-school ways of making a name for ourselves—building platforms, achieving greatness, garnering fans, attaining financial success, or receiving clicks and likes—are as old school as the Tower of Babylon.

The sin of Babylon was just a repeat of what happened in the garden of Eden. And it happens again every time we elevate our own name above the name of Jesus, “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

Although the sin of pride will continue to be at the root of our most besetting sins, Babylon paves the way to a far more redemptive narrative. God came down to observe the people’s tower, and in His judgment, He disciplined the Babelites to limit the peril of their own pride. Jesus—God incarnate—humbly came down as one of us to lovingly deliver us from our pride. Far more significant than making a name for ourselves, Jesus redeems our identity by restoring our desire to give glory and honor back to Him, where we find fullness of joy and eternal pleasures (Ps. 16:11).

The problem is not whether we are significant, it’s that we seek our significance in things that are insufficient to provide significance for us.



RELATIONSHIPS BROKEN

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Adam and Eve's transgression of God's command resulted in dire consequences, both short-term and long-term, for them and all of humanity.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Genesis 3

+ **SETTING:**

God's creation was good (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25), and with the addition of the first man and woman, it was very good (v. 31). This couple resided in the garden of Eden, a glorious paradise for our first ancestors to tend and grow as they walked in communion with their glorious Creator. But then evil slithered into the garden of Eden and set off a chain of events that has affected humanity's experience with creation and the Creator to this day.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:1-5

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37:

SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word *transgression* means "to cross over" or "to pass by" and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

How do you define freedom? In the garden of Eden, before the Fall, Adam and Eve were the freest people. Free from sin. Free from oppression. Free from guilt. Free from shame. Free from trouble. Free from grief. Free to live as they were made to live. Free to enjoy. Free to laugh without end. Free to hope tomorrow would be even better than today.

Then deep inside their hearts, Adam and Eve came to a new definition of freedom and acted upon it. They considered their present sense of freedom, found it wanting, and reached for a greater portion. But instead of finding themselves to be like God, they only found slavery. By listening to the serpent, they offered themselves as obedient slaves to evil (Rom. 6:16).

What was the result? Death (Rom. 6:21). The serpent denied God's warning that death would result from disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent rather than God. The serpent opened the prison doors, and our original parents locked themselves inside to await their punishment of death.

God kept His word. They did die. But He also made a new promise (see Gen. 3:15). Eve's offspring has come, and now the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Jesus came to free the captives. Paradise was lost, but in Christ, it is found.

How are you tempted today to reach for a freedom that is, in reality, only enslavement to sin?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:6-7

NOTES

There are two broad categories of sin: sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are those sins we actively commit, such as lying and lusting. Sins of omission, on the other hand, are sins we commit passively by not doing what we should. In the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3, we find both types of sin present. While both Adam and Eve sinned by commission in eating the fruit, Adam provided the first example of a sin of omission.

Have you ever wondered where Adam was while Eve and the serpent talked? Genesis 3:6 says Adam was right there beside his wife. It is possible Adam didn't hear their conversation. Perhaps he wasn't close enough. Maybe they whispered. But in the Hebrew text, the serpent used the plural "you" throughout their conversation.¹ Adam passively watched it all. He took it all in and did nothing to stop it. His first sin was one of omission—not doing anything as his wife was deceived.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote that Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). Commentator Philip Ryken says, "Unlike Eve, [Adam] knew full well what he was doing when he ate the forbidden fruit. The woman fell partly because Satan blinded her to the true nature of sin, but the man sinned with his eyes wide open."² In other words, Adam stood by, let it happen, and then followed. His sin of omission led to his sin of commission.

What should Adam have done? He should have cast the serpent out of the garden. When Satan came twisting God's word, Adam should have straightened it out. But he didn't. Thankfully, a second and last Adam has come to make straight the crooked paths. He repelled the devil in the wilderness when Satan attempted to twist God's word. Jesus, the last Adam, is the model for us all.

What are some sins of omission you need to repent of today?

DAY 3

READ:

Genesis 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:1-11

NOTES

We all have them. They pop up from time to time and we go back and forth with them in our minds. We open a web browser and type it in, scrolling through the thousands of useless links that include some of the words but miss our meaning entirely. We go to the experts. We find podcasts. We ask our pastors. We read books. They drive us onward, but whether they drive us upward or downward depends all on the answers we find.

What are we talking about? Questions. We all have questions. Genesis 3 is filled with them. The serpent opens up the Q&A with its half-smiled, “Did God really say...?” Then Eve’s wheels start turning. She rolls the question over in her mind, considering it from all angles. In the end, she concluded God did not mean what He actually said but was holding out on them. They deserved better.

Not all questions are bad, of course. Not all lead down the tunnel to death and destruction. But they certainly have the power to do so, especially when behind the question is a questioner like the serpent. Satan wasn’t looking for answers; he thought he already had them. He sought to plant doubt through queries. We think of the devil with a pitchfork, but perhaps we would do better to imagine him like the Riddler: question marks are the clothes he wears.

There is another place questions can take us. When God came in the cool of the day to walk in the garden, He had questions of His own: “Where are you?” “Who told you?” “Have you eaten?” God’s questions have the power to undo the serpent’s questions. The problem was Adam and Eve didn’t answer well. God was drawing them upward, but the downward spiral of sin had begun.

Questions matter, and so do the answers because on the other side may be death or life.

How can you respond today to the grace of God’s questions and His searching of your own heart?

DAY 4

READ:

Genesis 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:8-13

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This is the picture of all of us as we are apart from Jesus Christ. We ought to run to God, as Adam and Eve should have run to him. He has not changed. He has not harmed us. He has done us no wrong. On the contrary, we have received nothing but good from his hand. No, we have wronged him. We have returned evil for good, and now we flee."³

-James Montgomery Boice
(1938-2000)

There's a cartoon I love that shows a red crayon and a blue crayon standing in a room together. Blue crayon marks cover the wall. Standing in front of a taller crayon representing the adult, the blue one points to the red one and says, "He did it."

Inside each of us is a blue crayon pointing the finger at someone else for our sin. Adam did it so long ago in the garden. God asked who told him that he was naked and if he had eaten from the forbidden tree. Adam replied that it was the woman's fault, the woman God had given to be with him.

It's called the blame game, and it's in our genes. By now, we're full-blown experts. When caught red-handed, it is the first of our many options. We could confess. We could be honest. We could apologize. We could ask for forgiveness. We could do any number of things. But so often we choose to point the finger elsewhere. We do that because we cannot stand to be found out. Our pride takes a direct hit each time our sin finds us out, but if we can deflect, we can reserve at least a little pride.

Or so we think.

But there is a better way. When our sin confronts us, it is an opportunity to repent. It is an opportunity to walk into the light of Jesus where we find His cleansing blood (1 John 1:7). The next time you feel the urge to point the finger and play the blame game, remember the One who took the blame for you. Forget your excuses and accept His pardon. That is the better path by far.

What sins are you blaming others for right now, and what would happen if you spent that energy in going to Jesus for forgiveness instead?

DAY 5

READ:

Genesis 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 3:14-24

NOTES

It is easy to miss simple graces. We overlook them all the time. It should not surprise us to see little graces everywhere in the Bible, even in the most tragic and devastating of passages, such as Genesis 3.

In Genesis 3:15, we find the first hint of the gospel, the protoevangelium. This is the forerunner to so much of the grace found throughout the rest of the Bible. But there is also a little bit at the end of verse 21 that we must not overlook—God clothed Adam and Eve. Such massive grace in such a small phrase!

Remember the context. Adam and Eve sinned. God was about to cast them out of the garden of Eden, away from His presence, out into the big, wide world without the comfort of His physical protection. There they were, aware of their nakedness and clothed in fig leaves.

What did God do? He made clothing from animal skins, and He clothed them. Grace upon grace.

The classic definition of *grace* is unmerited favor. The skin coverings God fashioned certainly qualified. Adam and Eve deserved their fig leaves that would wilt and rot, exposing them. But they received grace.

Throughout our lives, God is caring for us in thousands of ways we may never take notice of. Each moment under His gentle care, we are being provided for. We don't deserve any of it, yet He gives graciously to all.

Theologians call this “common grace.” It is the grace that God gives to everyone indiscriminately. Jesus described such grace in Matthew 5:45 by saying that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people, regardless of their goodness or the lack thereof.

God is the God of grace. Let us be on the lookout for evidences of it.

What are some evidences of grace in your life that you can praise God for right now?

GROUP

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

THE GARDEN OF EDEN	THE WORLD TODAY

POINT 1: Sin is transgressing God's commands (Gen. 3:1-6).

 How do temptation and sin relate to doubts about God and His Word?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word transgression means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a _____ command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is _____, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is _____.

POINT 2: Sin brings shame and harm (Gen. 3:7-13).

The lie of sin is that life will get better once we do or take what we want. But the first man and woman quickly discovered that sin brings _____ and harm, alienating us from _____ (fig leaves) and from _____ (running and hiding).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“As distrust of God’s command leads to a disregard of it, so the longing for a false independence excites a desire for the seeming good that has been prohibited; and this desire is fostered by the senses, until it brings forth sin.”⁴

-Carl Friedrich Keil (1807-1888)
and Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890)

Sin and shame lead to a compounding problem as those who sin against God and others try to _____ and _____ their sin by blaming it on others, even _____ Himself.

NOTES



What are some ways we try to cover up and run from our sin and shame?

POINT 3: Sin comes with a great cost

(Gen. 3:14-21).

God warned His image-bearers that sin would come with a cost—_____. Human beings also experience other _____ and _____ in life and relationships.



What are some ways people experience the cost of sin in their lives?

In the midst of pronouncing judgment, God also promised hope for humanity (Gen. 3:15). God saves through the _____ of _____.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been so greatly forgiven in Christ, with hearts full of gratitude, we carry the gospel message forth to the nations, sharing how others too can be forgiven of sin.

- **HEAD:** How does understanding the origin of sin and its consequences help us see our need for a savior?
- **HEART:** How do you need to receive or respond to the gospel, the remedy for our sin, today?
- **HANDS:** What sin do you need to confess before God and perhaps another person today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Wherefore, the seed, Jesus Christ, in his bruising the head of the serpent, must take away sin, abolish death, and conquer the power of the grave. But how must this be done? Why, he must remove the curse, which makes sin intolerable, and death destructive. But how must he take away the curse? Why, by taking upon Him 'flesh,' as we ... and by being 'made a curse for us.'"⁵

—John Bunyan (1628–1688)