

## **Genesis 3 as a Model for Understanding the Nature of Sin and Salvation**

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Humanistic perceptions of evil and of human nature have deeply influenced Christian thinking about sin and its effects. Believers in God are very often naive about the nature of sin, and they deceive themselves by not taking the power and deceitfulness of sin seriously. Humans cannot change their sinful nature (Ps 51:5; Isa 64:6; Jer 13:23; Rom 7:14, 18), and evil is our deadly enemy. Many believe that there is a healthy or good core in each person and that people can overcome sin and temptations on their own and obey God if they concentrate enough and well. Mised thinking about sin is the cause of desperation for many and provides a feeling of false pride for others, which leads to perfectionism. On the other hand, people try to avoid speaking about sin and rather more lightly call it a mere mistake, fault, problem, foolishness, error, disease, illness, forgetfulness, statistical deviation, ignorance, or offense. In order to perceive the nature of sin clearly, it is necessary to freshly investigate what is sin and its consequences according to God's revelation.<sup>1</sup> This biblical-theological study is principally limited to

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<sup>1</sup> Insightful studies about sin include: G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971); Mark E. Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005); Gerald Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 373–411; Mark J. Broda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Iain D. Campbell, *The Doctrine of Sin* (Fearn, Great Britain: Mentor, 1999); Paul Chamberlain, *Can We Be Good Without God?: A Conversation About Truth, Morality, Culture and a Few Other Things that Matter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); John M. Fowler, "Sin," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 233–270; Norman L. Geisler, *The Roots of Evil* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002); Wayne Grudem,

Genesis chap. 3.

**I. Anatomy of the Original Sin and Dynamics of Temptation  
(Gen 3:1–6): Exegetical Observations**

The biblical explanation of the origin of sin on earth is given in the form of a story. In the Fall account of Genesis 3, the term sin does not appear, yet it is the best interpretation of what is sin. This model story is historical, telling what actually happened, but at the same time has a deep symbolic meaning that explains the nature of sin as a paradigm and archetype with its vast consequences. We like explanations in the form of definitions or philosophical treaties, but biblical authors under the inspiration of God give insights into profound issues of life through pattern narratives, a great example for pastors and teachers to follow.

The biblical narrative regarding the original sin<sup>2</sup> presupposes the knowledge of the Creation accounts (Genesis 1–2). According to these accounts, God created humans in His image in a pristine state not yet marred by evil and placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden.<sup>3</sup> The first Creation story demonstrates that the world was made

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*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 490–514; Norman R. Gulley, “Preliminary Consideration of the Effects and Implications of Adam’s Sin,” *Adventist Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1988), 28–44; idem, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 191–192, 436–441; Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 137–148; George Knight, *I Used to be Perfect: A Study of Sin and Salvation*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001); Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014); Chad Meister, *Evil: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Fallen: A Theology of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Derek R. Nelson, *What’s Wrong With Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009); Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013); Chris A. Vlachos, *The Law and the Knowledge of Good and Evil: The Edenic Background of the Catalytic Operation of the Law in Paul* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> In this study, the term *original sin* refers to the first sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and does not imply the bearing of the original guilt of the first couple by their posterity. Their offspring are not responsible for their committed sin, even though humans have now the sinful nature as a result of Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience.

<sup>3</sup> To be created in God’s image (Gen 1:27–28) means that humans were made with the capacity to communicate and relate to God, created to care for His creation as His representatives, and represent His character of love in their own character before God’s creation. They were not created as small gods but as special and unique persons to be able

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without a trace of sin by stating six times that everything was “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Moreover, after the completion of the physical creation, the Creation account culminates with a seventh expression: “God saw all that he had made . . . was very good” (Gen 1:31).<sup>4</sup> This means that Adam and Eve did not have a corrupted nature and that God had endowed them with the power of free will and choice (Gen 2:16–17). In addition, the first couple were “naked” (*’arom*), yet without “shame” (Gen 2:25). This innocence is an indication of their not yet broken or affected by the presence of sin state.<sup>5</sup> Allen Ross summarizes: “They were at ease with one another, without fear of exploitation for evil. . . . God has prepared human beings, male and female, with the spiritual capacity and communal assistance to serve him and to keep his commands so that they might live and enjoy the bounty of his creation.”<sup>6</sup> However, this verse is a springboard text that anticipates the changes in Genesis 3 that describe how the pre-Fall harmony, peace, love, and joy was abruptly interrupted and marred by sin with its tragic consequences.

Humans were not only created in a perfect world without guilt, shame, fear, corruption, or death,<sup>7</sup> but the Genesis Creation account teaches that they were primarily made for (1) close fellowship with God, (2) a total dependence on Him, and (3) cultivating His Presence in their lives.<sup>8</sup> This joy of life was sharply ended by the First couple’s disobedience. Enjoyment of the vertical dimension of life was a

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to be a blessing and contribution to each other as God is also unique.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations are taken from NIV translation unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>5</sup> There is a word play in the biblical text on the three Hebrew words *’arom* (pl. *’arummim*) “naked” (Gen 2:25), *’arum* “crafty,” “cunning” (Gen 1:3), and *’erom* (pl. *’erummim*) “naked” (Gen 3:7). The serpent took an “innocent nakedness” from Adam and Eve through his “cunning deception,” and brought on them “guilt/shame nakedness.” For details, see my article “Reflections on the Concept of Shame and Honor in the Biblical Creation and Fall Narratives,” in *Shame and Honor: Presenting Biblical Themes in Shame and Honor Contexts*, ed. Bruce Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2014), 30–33; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 71–72, 76; Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 55–58.

<sup>6</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessings: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 127.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, “When Death Was Not Yet,” in *He Spoke and It Was: Divine Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Pacific Press, 2015), 179–186.

<sup>8</sup> See my article “The Sabbath in the First Creation Accounts,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 55–66.

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safeguard for eliminating the risk of rebellion against God and a prerequisite for cultivating meaningful horizontal relationships.

The Fall account also presupposes the existence of Satan, who used the disguise of the serpent's form. Chapter 3 begins with the serpent as a known entity for the reader, which is alluded to in the Hebrew by the definite article. The insight into Satan's rebellion against God before humanity's fall into sin is provided only in a few biblical passages (e.g., Job 1:6–13; Isa 14:12–15, and Ezek 28:11–19).<sup>9</sup> We will not engage in a discussion about the identification of the serpent in the Garden of Eden but presuppose that he was used as a medium by Satan, our adversary of salvation, as it is biblically documented (Job 1:7–9; 2:2; Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:5–8; 10:18; John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rev 12:7–12; 20:2).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For the outstanding exegetical and theological discussion on the identification of the serpent in the Fall account of Genesis 3 and the fall and role of Satan before humanity's disobedience, see José M. Bertoluci, *The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil* (Th.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1985); Bray, 345–375; Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 137–139; idem, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 191–192, 390–453; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 38–42; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “The First Book of Moses (Genesis)” in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 57–59, 62–64; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 232–235; Afolarin O. Ojewole, *The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2002), 126–134; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 72–91.

The appearance of sin in the universe is an enigma. The Bible does not provide a reason for the existence of evil, and there is no logical explanation for its existence. To explain evil, to find a cause for its presence means to justify, excuse, and vindicate its existence. Evil is an unexplainable personified power; its origin is a mystery. Only a description of it was revealed to us. Because evil is illogical, it is impossible to find logic in the world where evil reigns. The irrational nature of evil makes its existence confusing (read especially Job 1:6–2:4; Ps 73; and Hab 1–3). Evil is a disorder just as one cannot find logical reasons for the disorder in a room so there is no logic behind the disorder on planet Earth.

<sup>10</sup> Good and evil are not equal powers. The Bible does not teach a dualism of two gods— the Lord being a God of good and Satan a god of evil—like being two opposite forces in a dualistic philosophy. Satan cannot be at all comparable to God. The Sovereign Lord created this being, not as Satan (an accuser and a deceiver), but as Lucifer (carrier of light), a morning star (Isa 14:12), a perfect cherub, who lived in the very presence of God (Ezek 28:14). Furthermore, this flawless individual became Satan, God's enemy, through his choice to stand against God (Ezek 28:15–16). He wanted to be like God, and his pride led him into a rebellion against God (Isa 14:12–15; Ezek 28:11–19; Gen 3:1–5; Matt 4:1–11;

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It is significant that the serpent as well as Eve do not speak about God in a personal relational term as the Lord (*Yahweh*), but simply as transcendent God (*Elohim*) as indicated in their conversation of Genesis 3:1–5. It is understandable for Satan, because there is no close or covenant relationship between him and God (as the usage of the proper name the Lord would presuppose). However, the lack of employment of the name *Yahweh* in Eve’s reaction to the serpent’s question is surprisingly missing, because chaps. 2–3 consistently use the term Lord for God (except in the dialogue between the serpent and Eve), which may indicate that Eve lightens the personal aspect of her relationship with the Lord.

The Genesis Fall account begins with three surprises. First, a serpent speaks. A very unusual phenomenon that should have immediately indicated to Eve that this creature was speaking with extraordinary and out-of-this-world power. Only once more in the Bible on another occasion did an animal speak, namely, Balaam’s donkey (Num 22:28–32). However, there is a striking contrast in these two situations; the donkey’s mouth was opened by the Lord but the serpent’s mouth speaks directly against the Lord’s command. Second, the serpent addresses the woman. The text does not explicitly give Adam’s location, but the imagery alludes that Eve was curious about the forbidden tree and walked there alone.<sup>11</sup>

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Luke 10:18; Rev 12:7–12). He is an opponent of God’s, who distorts and destroys what is good, beautiful, meaningful, and valuable.

<sup>11</sup> This is not contradicted by (1) the fact that serpent speaks to her in the plural form “you” (Gen 3:1–5), because this grammatical usage is just a collective “you” and may make her feel important to have the power to decide for both of them; she accepts this role according to v. 2 when she replies with “we” formula to the serpent statements; nor by (2) the phrase that “she gave also to Adam who was *with* her.” The preposition “with” (*im* in Hebrew) has here the meaning “whom she belonged to.” There are two preposition in Hebrew with the meaning of “with”: one is *’et* and the second is *’im*. The first preposition stresses space (standing by, being in close proximity with someone), however, the second is a more relational preposition in addition to meaning accompaniment, thus underlying closeness and relationship. See, for example, the usage of the preposition *’im* in its immediate context (Gen 3:12; and also in Gen 21:10; 24:54; Ps 121:2 and Mic 6:8). In addition, it is possible to interpret the preposition *’im* here in a comparative sense, “like” or “as.” In this case, the phrase would mean that Adam ate the forbidden fruit just like Eve. For this fitting translation, consult Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’ Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 219–220. Umberto Cassuto observes that the expression *with* (*’et* or *’im*) together with the pronominal suffixes “occur as a rule when a person is said to associate himself in a given action with someone who leads him” (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis [Part One]: From Adam to Noah* [Jerusalem:

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Third, the serpent knows exactly what God said previously in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:16–17) and directly contradicts His command. He engages in a deceptive activity even though he never forces Adam or Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He knows the art of seduction. The Fall narrative records the well-aimed serpent's (i.e. Satan's) statement when he probes the woman: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'" (Gen 3:1)?<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to observe that so far in the book of Genesis when God has spoken He has expressed Himself with authority, no questions were asked. But when Satan speaks, he questions God's word and authority ("Did God really say . . . ?"). If one takes this sentence as a declarative, then it has the sense of questioning God's command and authority even with greater force. Speiser states: "The serpent is not asking a question; he is deliberately distorting a fact."<sup>13</sup> So one needs to ask, what was the purpose of this very first emphatic question recorded in the Bible and expressed as a powerful attack against God?

The best way to discover the actual aim of Satan's utterance is to compare it with God's previous command. In the beginning, the Creator gave two commandments: the first was positive and the second negative (Gen 2:16–17). He first created free space for humans, because the Lord is the warrant of ultimate freedom: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." Thus, God commands freedom. He actually created Adam and Eve as free moral beings; and in order to enjoy this freedom, to be happy and grow in a healthy environment, humans need to accept their borders and limits. This is why He gives the restriction, the second command: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The gift of freedom presupposes choice and free will. Humans always need to acknowledge that they are created beings. They need to cultivate their total dependency on God. God's generosity is plainly explained—all is for you but one fruit. To respect their freedom they needed to respect their boundaries. Restrictions must be kept. Even in a perfect world there are limits that must be guarded for discipline is a crucial ingredient of life. They constantly needed to accept that they were not gods. By accepting limits, they were free; they had a safe space in

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The Magnes Press, 1989], 148).

<sup>12</sup> Scholars are debating if this sentence is a question or declaration, because of the difficult expression *'aph ki*. Cassuto argues that it should be understood as interrogative construction employed for the sake of emphasis. See Cassuto, 144.

<sup>13</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 23.

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which they could grow and develop all their potential, true humanity and the image of God in which they were created. In this way, they would not only keep their humanity but also their humaneness.

Satan's goal was more than simply an invitation to dialogue. He wanted to accomplish more than to create doubt, which is the usual answer to the purpose of the serpent's statement. Doubt will certainly come as a result of his tactics when suspicions are born. Satan could succeed in his intrigue only when he was able to create a wrong picture of God! Thus, his primary goal was to paint a false image of God, suggest a wrong impression of His character and intentions, and thus impregnate the mind with erroneous and incorrect thinking about God. Satan very well recognized that if he succeeded here and gained victory over one's thinking, he would then win the whole war, because everything in our spiritual life depends on the correct picture of God in our mind. How we view God determines who we are and how we behave. Satan knows that, therefore he does the maximum in order to distort our understanding of God's character. He tries hard to put God in a false light because humans will only be willing to do something against God if they do not perceive Him as a loving, caring, compassionate, gracious God, and the Warrant of freedom.<sup>14</sup> Only when trust is broken will doubts appear.

Thus, Satan knows where to strike first—against God's character of love. If this first step in the wrong direction is taken, a person embarks on a slippery slope, and the end will be obvious: doubting God's goodness and the purity of His intentions. This leads to no other result than that a person will gradually find himself or herself in the abyss of destruction. Eternal life is to know God existentially (John 17:3), and people are dying for lack of that knowledge (Hos 4:6; 5:4; cf. Rom 2:4). The matter swings on the following simple question: Who is this God who created humans as beings dependent on food, who gave them a

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<sup>14</sup> In God's revelation, different portraits of God are presented that form an absolutely beautiful mosaic of the divine character. The Lord as a Person is best described in God's self-revelation to Moses. Study carefully Exod 34:6–7: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished." This biblical passage is the golden thread throughout the whole Bible and often repeated by different authors who also elaborate on the meaning. See Num 14:18–19; Deut 4:31; Neh 9:17; Pss 103:8–18; 117:1–2; 145:8–20; Lam 3:22–27, 31–33; Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 4:2; Mic 7:18–20; Nah 1:2–3, 7; Luke 15; John 3:16–17; 5:19–30; 10:7–18.

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sense for esthetics, beauty, millions of taste buds, created plenty of pleasant smelling and appealing fruits, and then would forbid Adam and Eve to eat from any of them? The anatomy of the first sin begins with this attempt to create a false picture of God, to misrepresent Him, to put Him in a false light, discredit, caricaturize, ridicule, and create a monster out of Him.<sup>15</sup>

Trust is the essential and foundational element of all meaningful relationships; everything hangs on it. It is a quality of life without which nothing can function properly. We trust only a person we know that has our best interest in mind, who loves, cares, is unselfish, gracious, and has an understanding of our heart. Satan wants to break this trust relationship, and in order to do it, he needs to generate a distorted picture of God and present God in a different light than He is in reality. If he succeeds in putting this “bug” into the minds of people, his job is “done.” The rest will follow if humans buy this deceitful image. They will turn against God, because the result of this method is to question the motives, words, relationship, and authority of the Divine being. When a love relationship is put into question, mistrust starts to work. Doubts about His purposes, plans, and character are born and bring forth destructive fruit. By creating a false picture about God, it is easy for Satan to sow seeds of doubt. Loss of trust will produce fatal consequences.

Eve, instead of running away from the situation (the only proper reaction; cf. Gen 39:12) tried to defend God. This is her cardinal mistake, because one cannot engage in a dialogue with the devil, the master of all intrigues, and win.<sup>16</sup> However, in defending God, Eve is not quoting Him correctly. She alters His word a little bit, and her interpretation of the Divine statements creates a trap for her. Her small modifications give some hints to the reader of what was going on in this tragic moment in the mind of Eve.

Dialogue between the serpent and Eve is “the first conversation about God.”<sup>17</sup> Walter Brueggemann excellently explains: “God is treated as a third person. God is not a party to the discussion but is the involved

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<sup>15</sup> Satan repeats in the Garden of Eden the same strategy he used against God in heaven. He leads humans to sin by “the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, causing Him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950], 500).

<sup>16</sup> This is why in the Bible the contact with spirits, sorcery, divination, or spiritism is strictly forbidden (see, for example, Exod 22:18; Lev 19:31; 20:6; 1 Sam 28:6–10; 1 Chr 10:13; Isa 8:19–20). Satan appears like an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (London: Collins, 1959), 70.



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object of the discussion. This is not speech *to* God or *with* God, but *about* God. God has been objectified.”<sup>18</sup> Phyllis Tribble underlines: “The serpent and the woman discuss theology. They talk about God,” but “only using the appellative God, they establish that distance which characterizes objectivity and invites disobedience.”<sup>19</sup> Mettinger claims: “A motif that has a central role to the plot and pervades the text as a whole is the motif of the divine commandments. . . . The plot is focused on a divine test of the first two humans.”<sup>20</sup> It is a reflection on the precise wording and nature of the divine commandment from chap. 2.<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy to observe, that Eve by referring to the divine Person only as God (*Elohim*) instead of speaking about Him in a personal way with His proper covenant name, the Lord (*Yahweh*), is distancing herself from her Creator as we suggested above. In addition, Eve makes four changes to the Lord’s explicit command. First, instead of stressing freedom of being able to eat and enjoy every fruit of “any” tree in the Garden of Eden, she mentions only that they “may eat fruit from the trees in the garden.” Second, instead of speaking about the nature of the forbidden tree (“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”), she points to its geographical location (“which is in the middle of the garden”). For her this forbidden tree has become the most important, the tree, the center and focus of her attention<sup>22</sup> (instead of the tree of life which was also located in the center of the garden; Gen 2:9). Third, she adds to God’s words about the forbidden fruit: “We cannot even touch it.” Undoubtedly, this is a correct interpretation of what the Lord said, because if one cannot eat the forbidden fruit then such a person certainly cannot come close to admire, meditate on, smell, touch, or dance around it. But when she exaggerates and adds these words, she may suddenly realize that her empirical experience (what she sees by her own eyes)

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 109.

<sup>20</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 26–27.

<sup>21</sup> Ross, 131. He also carefully observes: “It is interesting that three times the Word of the Lord is quoted [in Gen 3:1–5], but never appropriately: once it is questioned in a misleading way, once it is paraphrased with major changes, and once it is flatly denied” (Ross, 132).

<sup>22</sup> Umberto Cassuto aptly comments: “Her interest is focused at the moment on the *forbidden tree*, and for her it is *the tree*—with the definite article—in the center of the garden” (145).

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contradicts God’s word (“when you will eat you will surely die”), because the serpent is on the tree, touching the fruit, and is not dying.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the serpent has the extraordinary ability to speak. The fourth tiny but significant alteration is in relation to God’s statement: “You will surely die.” She makes it not so serious by stating simply: “You will die,” omitting the crucial emphatic word “surely.”<sup>24</sup> Is it a textual signal that she questions the certainty of death after disobedience? In her thinking, it seems that death is not so absolute in case she should transgress the Word of God.

Thus, the next step in the anatomy of the first sin was to see apparent contradictions between empirical experience and the Word of God (our own interpretation of God’s word can sometimes lead to difficult situations ending with dangerously wrong decisions). This deepened her doubts, questions, and curiosity, and built distrust. After this, and only after this situation transpired, was the serpent able to come with a full frontal attack that would be totally opposite to what the Creator stated. The Lord said: “In the day you will eat, *you will surely die*,” and Satan boldly contradicts: “If you will eat *you will not surely die!*” Satan uses the same syntactical structure as God Himself in order to put certainty into his categorical statement, but reversing it with a forceful “not,” and putting this negation in front of the entire construction, thus literally saying, “not–you will surely die.” The conversation started with a subtle quasi-question regarding God’s prohibition, and it became a total “denial of the consequences of disobedience.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Satan categorically denied the penalty for sin and promised a false immortality. Eve now stood before the critical decision—whom would she trust? God or the serpent? Should she follow the Word of the Lord or the other word?

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<sup>23</sup> The biblical story creates the imagery that the serpent is on the tree and touching or eating fruit even though it is not stated explicitly. The text makes this assumption by the flow of the event and does not provide a detailed description of everything. Compare with Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 54–56.

<sup>24</sup> In the Hebrew language, there is a special grammatical syntactical structure when the infinitive absolute stands before its cognate verb. In this case, it serves to intensify or reinforce the verbal idea. This strengthening is expressed in English translations with words like “surely,” “verily,” or “indeed.” See *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. and enl. E. Kautzsch, 2d ed. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 342–343; Waltke and O’Connor, 584–586; Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 185, 189. Eve does not use this syntactical construction, and thus the statement does not look so strict and severe.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, 135.

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This was an opportunity for the serpent to act and bring his interpretation. With his cardinal attack, he brought two offers: (1) your eyes will be opened, and (2) you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Sin is never presented to humans as a loss but as a gain. However, sin is like a mirage in the desert. A thirsty traveler will go after it but at the end there is disillusion, bitter disappointment, and death. It seems that sin will bring something better, a solution to a problem, or fulfilment of an inner void, but in reality all enchantments of sin will disappear as a vapor. Both offers prove to be ultimately false, built on deception and illusions. The first couple actually and factually lost what they had.<sup>26</sup>

If only they would eat the forbidden fruit, the serpent insisted, they would not die but would be like God knowing good and evil. This specific gain would elevate them into a higher level of their existence, and God would no more be able to keep some secrets from them. Satan subtly suggested that the forbidden fruit had a unique power similar to the fruit from the tree of life which would give them access to the unknown and mysterious. Their immortality would have a new dimension which would now be secured by the act of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were created mortal (Gen 2:7) with the destiny for immortality on the condition of obedience (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:22–24). However, they now wanted to guarantee for themselves the gift of immortality, something that belonged and is reserved only for God as His prerogative.

Satan wanted to create in Eve a desire for something better, a feeling of deficiency. He persuaded her that she was missing something important that would make her better, wiser, and more capable. He suggested to her that she lacked liberty and self-realization and that she deserved more than she presently possessed. Satan desired to create a void in Eve and proposed that if only she got “it,” she would be indeed happy. He tried to construct a false perception and feelings of hurt that God was hiding something from her and that He had taken her freedom, as though God would suppress some information or gifts that could lead to her ultimate happiness.

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<sup>26</sup> Ellen White comments: “Man lost all because he chose to listen to the deceiver rather than to Him who is the Truth, who alone has understanding. By the mingling of evil with good, his mind had become confused, his mental and spiritual powers benumbed. No longer could he appreciate the good God had so freely bestowed” (*Education* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1903], 25).

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Satan also claimed that he knew God's motivation for the prohibition not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). He pictured God as a jealous, selfish, self-centered, and self-contained Deity, who retained ultimate good only for Himself. Ross eloquently explains: "Adam and Eve lived in a setting that God himself had pronounced 'good.' Yet they were now led to believe that there was greater good held back from them, that somehow they could elevate life for better. . . . In raising doubt about God's integrity, the serpent motivated them to sin with the promise of divinity. The idea of becoming like God has an appeal that is almost irresistible."<sup>27</sup> Eve in her rationalization fell into the temptation of divinization. She desired what did not belong to her at all, to get what she never could obtain or should ever be.

Verse 6 reveals that Eve engaged in incorrect meditation, perception of reality, and thinking about the forbidden fruit (the Hebrew text uses the term *ra'ah*, "see"). Eve was not blind before; this verb suggests intense inner struggle and intellectual activity. In her thinking she "saw" that eating from the forbidden tree was profitable on three different levels: "good for food," "delight of the eyes," and "desirable to gain wisdom."<sup>28</sup> Sin always starts in the mind. First a battle must be won in our thinking, which is supported or contradicted by our feelings, desires, and imagination. Eve observed the forbidden fruit, thought about it, and then made her decision. Satan seemingly promised a so-far unexperienced pleasure, a great future, and superior knowledge. He appealed to the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life, and a forbidden fruit was now associated with beauty and wisdom. However, the "benefits of sin" are like a golden castle in a fairy tale—they are not real, they exist only in a fantasy land, and lead to wrong decisions.

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, 136.

<sup>28</sup> A similar statement is in 1 John 2:16, which speaks of the trilogy of sin in the following terms: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. Ezek 16:49–58; Sirach 23:4–5). Also, the three temptations of Jesus reflect the same three areas of life: turning the stones to bread (the desire of the flesh), seeing all the kingdoms of the world and to rule over them (the desire of the eyes), and the spectacular throwing of himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (the pride of life; to demonstrate supernatural power; to be mighty like God). For the same sequence of items enumerated in Genesis 3, see Luke 4:1–13 and compare with Matt 4:1–11.

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“Eve’s reflection concentrates on the potential good of the fruit and ignores the evil that there is in disobedience.”<sup>29</sup>

When Eve lost the true picture of a loving and caring God, doubts about His word were cultivated, apparent contradictions were met without an answer, and offers were mentally accepted; then “she took it and ate.” Mistrust brought fruit—a visible act of disobedience. When a loving relationship is broken, then the word/law of God is broken. Note that Eve, as well as later Adam, were not forced by Satan to eat the forbidden fruit, to disobey, it was their deliberate action. Adam and Eve stood in front of the dilemma—who is right, whom to trust: God and His word or the serpent (self, their eyes, own feelings, experience)? Behind this description of the struggle and agony of decision lies a foundational issue, namely, if God can be trusted. Thus, at the core of each temptation lies the basic question: “Whom will I/we trust.” Misunderstanding of God’s character produces wrong thinking that leads to poor choices and false decisions, and then the tangible act of disobedience occurs.

### II. Definitions of Sin

Sin is described in Genesis 3 primarily in theological and relational terms as it is aimed against God the Creator and what He represents. David expressed it eloquently in his repentance after he acutely understood the demoralizing nature of his sinful actions in connection to his adultery with Bathsheba: “Against you [O, God], you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps 51:4). Joseph stressed the same conviction when he refused to engage in Potiphar’s wife’s lustful suggestions to sleep with her: “My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Gen 39:8).

A colorful wide-ranging terminology for sin in the Bible reveals its devastating nature. The rich biblical vocabulary demonstrates the complexity of sin. The trilogy of sin—the strongest biblical language consists of the following terms: *hattah* (most common term for sin in the sense of missing the target, deviate from a right way, or going astray

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<sup>29</sup> Ross, 136. Evil exists by destroying what is good, but it is more than only an opposite or distortion of good; it is a destructive force and an antagonistic power. Evil is a parasite behaving as an intruder. It does not belong to life and exists only as a temporary disruption in time (Ezek 28:18–19; Rev 20:9–10, 14). Moreover, Satan has no self-existent power. He cannot create, produce or give life, because he is not a creator but only a created being dependent upon God. In addition, Satan is by his nature a self-destroying force who is doomed to death.

from a straight path; the Greek word *hamartia* expresses the same idea), *avon* (transgression, something which is bent, twisted, or crooked), and *peshah* (rebellion, revolt). God forgives all these variants of sin and trespasses mentioned in the crucial passages of the Hebrew Scripture (see Exod 34:6; Lev 16:21; Ps 32:1–2; Isa 53:5–6, 8–12; Dan 9:24). Besides these three main words for sin, the Bible contains additional terms which describe the complexity of sin and of our sinful nature. Additional vocabulary includes evil, guilt, wickedness, trespass, impurity, deceit, dishonesty, falsehood, offense, abomination, desecration, perversion, unrighteousness, error, injustice, arrogance, failure, etc.<sup>30</sup>

One may summarize this explicit biblical colorful terminology that describes the vast array of the sin problem in five main definitions of sin that are all built and expanded upon in the theology of sin presented in Genesis 3:

1. Sin, according to Genesis 3, is a broken relationship with God; it is an attempt to live independently from God and a try to live an autonomous life (from Greek *autos* “self,” and *nomos* “law,” i.e., to be a law for oneself), life without God, His authority, and His law, and apart from Him. Sin is thus de-Creation, the undoing of God’s wonderful Creation. Sin reverses all three foundational functions and purposes of life to which we were created according to the first Creation Genesis account. Sin breaks our closeness with God, destroys a trusting fellowship, and alienates one from the Lord’s Presence. Thus, evil destroys the basic qualities of life, separates from God, and isolates us from Him. By living in sin, a person does not trust God, decides by his

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<sup>30</sup> “One may count over fifty words for ‘sin’ in biblical Hebrew, if specific as well as generic terms are isolated” (David Noel Freedman, et al., eds., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 6:31). There are 7 main Greek words which describe the plethora of sin in the New Testament (*hamartia*, *paraptoma*, *parakoe*, *adikia*, *asebeia*, *kakia*, and *opheiletes*). For details on the biblical Hebrew and Greek terminology on sin and the concept and understanding of sin, see *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:31–47; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, et al., eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:518–525; George Arthur Buttrick, et al., eds., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:361–376; Campbell, 18–68; William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 99–110; Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964) 1:267–316; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, et al., eds., *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 5:263–279; Merrill C. Tenney, et al., eds., *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 5:522–526; idem, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 5:444–447.

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own authority what is right or wrong and is a law to himself or herself. Sin comes as a result of refusing God's authority and an unwillingness to acknowledge Him as the Creator to whom one is and must be accountable. God's law must be first broken in the mind and then in real behavior. The same idea of Genesis 3 is stated by Paul in the New Testament: "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). Faith is a trust relationship with God, and breaking faith is sin (Mal 2:10–11). God commented on the sin of Moses in the same manner: "You did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites" (Num 20:12). So sin is a mistrust, a disbelief in God; it is a state of mind with a direct rejection of God's law.<sup>31</sup> This quest for autonomy leads to separation from God and His Presence. Peters excellently expresses it: "At the heart or essence of all sin is the failure to trust God. Sin is our unwillingness to acknowledge our creatureliness and dependence upon the God of grace."<sup>32</sup>

This crucial definition of sin leads theologians to differentiate between sin and sins by stating that sins derive from the basic understanding of sin as a broken relationship with God, an unbelief. Sin is thus something more than an action; it is an attitude and rebellion against God, His command, and His values. It is present where people love themselves more than God and His creation. Such an attitude leads to many sinful actions, wrong behavior. John the Baptist pointed to Christ and explained that He was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; see also Rev 22:14), because He is the solution to the problem of sin.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, sins are many, visible, concrete, and tangible (Ezek 18:5–9, 11–13, 15–17; 22:1–12; 33:25–26; Matt 15:18–19; Gal 5:19–21; Col 3:5–9; Rev 22:15). The difference between the sin and sins is like talking about the difference between the root and the fruit.

The Bible presents additional definitions of sin, however, they are in reality an elaboration and expansion of the above described essential definition of sin. All other biblical explanations spring from this principle understanding of sin provided in the Fall narrative.

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<sup>31</sup> Ellen G. White keenly defines the first sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as "distrust of God's goodness, disbelief of His word, and rejection of His authority, that made our first parents transgressors, and that brought into the world a knowledge of evil" (*Education*, 25). The nature of sin is thus explained by the concept of a broken relationship and a hostile state of mind toward God.

<sup>32</sup> Peters, 8.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Knight, 18–24, or Peters, 23–24.

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2. The well-known definition of sin in the Bible comes from the apostle John (rooted in Genesis 3): sin is a breaking of the law (1 John 3:4; Greek word *anomia* literally means “lawlessness”), a concrete act of disobedience. It is a visible result of a broken relationship, outcome of wrong thinking, effect of broken faith, and a product of mistrust. God’s question: “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Gen 3:11), revealed that disobedience is the result of disrespecting God’s commandment. In this way, sin is a defiant, arrogant, rebellion against God, and a proud rejection of His word, will, and authority. This was well explained by Samuel to Saul, Israel’s first king, after his disobedience: “For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry, because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (1 Sam 15:23). “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). Living in sin means living without focusing on God and fulfilling His will. Thus, sin is understood as an external deed or action.

3. Sin is a state in which we are born. This is already reflected in Gen 5:1–3 when it is stated that Adam was created in God’s image, but Seth was born in the image of Adam, his father. The difference between Adam created in God’s image (Genesis 1) and Seth made in Adam’s image (Genesis 5) can be explained by the event that brought this change: the Fall into sin as Genesis 3 describes. After Adam and Eve sinned, our human nature was corrupted, and their posterity was born with a sinful nature. David states it plainly: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). Also in Psalm 58:3 David speaks about the wrong attitude of the wicked people toward God: “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speaks lies.” The sinner does not take God into consideration when making life’s decisions. All our garments are filthy (Isa 64:6); our hearts are perverted and deceive us (Jer 17:9). The way seems straight to humans but its end is death (Prov 14:12). Humans are not able to change their nature just as a leopard cannot change its skin (Jer 13:23). Without exception, all are born sinners (Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8) naturally afraid and alienated from God, and dead in our sins (Gen 3:10, Eph 2:1, 12, 19).<sup>34</sup>

The apostle Paul explains it clearly: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I

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<sup>34</sup> Only Jesus was born as “the holy One” (Luke 1:35), all humans are born hostile to God (Rom 8:7), alienated from Him, and dead in their sin (Ps 51:5; Eph 2:1–3).



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do not want to do . . . but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature [literally “in my flesh”]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I wanted to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Rom 7:15–20). Sin lies in our human nature. Humans are not a sin, but are born with a sinful nature, and consequently born as sinners separated from God and in need of salvation. As sinners we love and produce sin, and our sinful nature is characterized by selfishness, tendencies to evil, propensities to sin, and inclinations to do wrong. The power of sin enslaves us (Rom 5:6; 6:6–7, 14a; 7:25b). As an apple tree bears apples and the fig tree figs, so we as sinners produce sin. Not only a part of a human has sinned, but the whole person, therefore everything is affected and corrupted by sin.

James in his epistles underlines the same truth when he explains that sin begins with the inner cravings, that the “evil desire” lies within us, and when it is cultivated it produces sin, a person reaches for the forbidden fruit. This wrong desire is not yet sin (unless cherished), but when it is yielded to, it leads to wrong actions and death. Wrong thinking and imagination urge the individual to have what he/she seemingly lacks; by yielding to the urge, sin is thus accomplished (Jas 1:14–15).<sup>35</sup> Notice that temptation according to James begins in our sinful nature. We are not culpable because of this sinful tendency and propensity to sin rooted in our nature, but this fact puts us under condemnation and alienation with God (John 3:36; Eph 2:1–3). We sin because we are sinners marked by wrong thinking and orientation in life. We are guilty when we play and associate with these evil desires.

4. Sin is a neglect to do good, an omission to do what is right (Jas 4:17). It means it is an attitude of indifference. This attitude can be also called apathy or lukewarmness (Rev 3:15–18). It is not enough not to do wrong. Sin of omission leads to sin of commitment to incorrect or no actions. Christianity is not about not doing wrong things even though this is included (Jas 1:27b), but true religion is about doing what is good, right, and profitable (Mic 6:8; John 5:29; Titus 3:8; Jas 1:27a; cf. Phil

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<sup>35</sup> It is interesting that James does not blame Satan when he explains how we sin. He points to our responsibility and accountability in sinning. Quite often we resemble a little girl who disobeyed her mother and ate sweets before lunch. Her mom then asked her: “Why did you do it?” and the sweet little girl replied: “Mom, it was not me who did something wrong; it was Satan who tempted me.”

4:5–6). Christianity is an active religion. The living God is a God of action, therefore He wants proactive and progressive followers. It is not enough only to confess faith, good deeds are important (Gal 5:4; Jas 1:27; 1 Pet 2:9; Eph 2:10).<sup>36</sup> To know the truth and practice it should always go hand to hand.

5. Sin par excellence is not believing in Jesus Christ as He is the only solution to our sinfulness (John 16:8–9). Humans cannot help themselves, cure the problem of sin, and heal their own brokenness. Christ is the only and unique Savior of the world (Acts 4:12; 16:31; Rom 8:1; 1 John 5:12–13). To reject His ultimate sacrifice for us—His death on the cross—is like drowning in the ocean and when help arrives refusing to take the offer of the lifeline. Sin is a disbelief in Jesus, a refusal of His saving activity on our behalf, because He is the only One who can rescue us from the bondage to sin. This truth can be expressed differently: No one will be condemned to eternal death at the last judgment only because he or she is a sinner (reality is that we are all sinners, we all sinned—Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8), but because they do not repent and decline to accept Jesus as the solution to their sinfulness. To fail to accept Jesus as one’s personal Savior and remain in sin is fatal (Prov 24:16; John 3:36).

### **III. Consequences of Sin According to Genesis 3**

One does not need to be a bright scientist to discover that we live in a world where evil and sinful behavior dominate. The world is incurably sick. The presence of evil brings terrible results to the human race. Genesis 3 not only explains how the paradise was lost, but also presents the consequences of disobedience and how God reacts to the transgression of His command.

After the sin of Adam and Eve, the imagery in Genesis 3 changes. Shame, guilt, fear, degradation, and humiliation are suddenly present. The brightness of life changes to darkness and the melody is depressive and melancholic. Brueggemann comments: “What had been a story of trust and obedience (chapter 2) now becomes an account of *crime and punishment* (3:1–7).”<sup>37</sup> Sin is a curse that brings terrible consequences; it

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<sup>36</sup> Good deeds are not the cause but the result and fruit of our salvation. Obedience and good works are not important for building our highway to heaven (we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus) but for the salvation of other people (Matt 5:16). They are also crucial to show us if we are consistent in our faith, if we are living a life of integrity, and if our faith is a living faith (Jas 2:14, 17, 20, 26).

<sup>37</sup> Brueggemann, 48.

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is like an avalanche—starting seemingly as nothingness but then breaks, tears down everything that is beautiful, valuable, and meaningful, and destroys life completely. It is only a matter of time when this destroying force is plainly visible. Where there is wrong thinking it follows automatically that there will also be evil behavior. Sin breaks down all kinds of meaningful relationships and brings only misery, suffering, separation, and complications. What was originally very good is now corrupted and marred by sin. No to God is the cause of all other evils. In Genesis 3, there are mentioned multiple consequences of sin:

1. Sin/disobedience opened the eyes of the first couple, and they saw their nakedness. After eating from the forbidden fruit, Satan offered that their “eyes will be opened” (Gen 3:5), and following their disobedience, the narrator states as a matter of fact that “the eyes of both of them were opened” (Gen 3:7). Yet, their eyes were opened in a different way than they contemplated. It was a deception, because Adam and Eve actually lost what they had, and they realized that they are naked. It means that they began to perceive the reality of life differently as they lost their innocence (Gen 3:7). Not only they lost their garment of light<sup>38</sup> but after the break in their relationship with God, their very nature was corrupted. The broken relationship with God led to the broken relationship to “self.” When Adam and Eve saw their nakedness, they realized and felt for the first time in their life the sense of shame and guilt. They felt miserable and experienced remorse of conscience (2:25; 3:7). Adam’s and Eve’s nakedness refers to more than to a physical bodily exposure. Genesis 3:7 and 10 reveal that when God appeared in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were no longer physically naked, because they were covered with fig leaves (v. 7), yet Adam stated, “I was afraid, because I was naked” (v. 10). They were “clothed” but still naked. Thus, this nakedness was greater than a physical phenomenon, As a result of their broken relationship to God, their nature was broken, and their posterity would inherit that sinful nature, a nature corrupted by sin, with its propensities,

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<sup>38</sup> Genesis 2:25 does not explicitly indicate in what manner Adam and Eve were without clothes, but the semantic range of ‘*arom*’ in connection with Ps 104:1–2 suggests that the original “garments” of Adam and Eve were “garments of light and glory” (Davidson, 56). God’s garment of light is described in Psalms: “Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent” (Ps 104:1–2 ESV). See also Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Literary Structure of the Genesis Creation Story*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 83–90.

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inclinations to evil, and tendency to sin (Gen 3:7, 10; 5:1–3; 6:5). It means that every part of our being is corrupted by sin, the whole person is lost, and cannot be saved without God's redemptive activity.

For the first time, Adam and Eve felt that bitter burning insight of themselves. It was more than a sentiment of shame, because their cover made out of fig leaves could not help them. The term *'erom* used in Genesis 3 denotes elsewhere in the Old Testament a shameful exposure of nakedness (see Deut 28:48; Ezek 16:7, 22, 39; 18:7, 16; 23:29), which they tried to cover with fig leaves (3:7). Victor Hamilton correctly clarifies their attempt as a self-justifying act: "Rather than driving them back to God, their guilt leads them into a self-atoning, self-protecting procedure: they must cover themselves."<sup>39</sup> Their covering activity can be theologically characterized as "righteousness by works."

The nakedness after sin signifies inner nakedness, being unmasked, a consciousness of guilt, total shame, loss of integrity, feelings of degradation, defeat, ruined innocence, and the disappearance of light. Gordon Wenham rightly asserts: "A more complete transformation could not be imagined. The trust of innocence is replaced by the fear of guilt."<sup>40</sup> Victor Hamilton describes their situation as the experience of shame, the loss of innocence, and guilt.<sup>41</sup> Sin deeply affected our human nature and how we are human. After sinning, people did not become stones or automatons. Something remained from God's image but it was shattered, and everything in us is marred by sin. We are not able to save ourselves. We are lost, broken, alienated, and condemned to death. Love for sin and inclinations to evil are now superposed on us and are an integral part of our human nature.

2. Sin/disobedience made Adam and Eve afraid of God. Instead of enjoying God's Presence and rejoicing in His company, they hid from Him. Their disobedience caused by a broken vertical relationship with God resulted in their separation from God (Gen 3:10). They were hiding in shame, guilt, and fear. Consequently, all human beings are born with an alienated and antagonistic attitude toward God and are naturally afraid of Him (Eph 2:1–3). In order to change this misleading picture, we need to see the true loving character of God (Rom 2:4).

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<sup>39</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 191.

<sup>40</sup> Wenham, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, 191.

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3. Sin/disobedience led Adam and Eve to blame each other for their failure (the horizontal dimension of life was broken). They now experienced a broken relationship with each other (Gen 3:12; 4:5–8). Sin thus alienates people from one another: “But something in them and between them *does* die. Their sense of themselves and their relationship with each other is shattered.”<sup>42</sup> “Sin has undermined both the sense of self and the sense of belonging to another.”<sup>43</sup> Sinners refuse to accept their accountability for wrong behavior. Eve blamed the serpent for the seduction. Adam not only blamed Eve for giving him the forbidden fruit but actually blamed God Himself because it was God who gave her to him. Self-vindication causes one to find fault beyond and not within oneself.

4. Sin/disobedience brought death, because the relationship with real life was broken (Gen 2:17; 3:3, 19; cf. Rom 6:23). Adam and Eve would return to dust, the symbol of fragility and death: “. . . until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen 3:19). Death was not a primary theme in Genesis 2 even though it was mentioned by God (Gen 2:17), because the God of Creation is about life and abundance. Death “was not a threat but a candid acknowledgment of a *boundary* of life. But the boundary is now altered to become a *threat*. It is transformed into a terror which puts everything in question. It is not God, but the serpent who has made death a primary human agenda.”<sup>44</sup>

5. Sin/disobedience would make giving birth and raising children a painful experience (Gen 3:16a).

6. Sin/disobedience would make marriage a place of fighting for dominance and supremacy instead of a loving, caring, emotional, and intimate relationship between equal heterosexual partners (Gen 3:16b).

7. Sin/disobedience would make work a painful experience (Gen 3:18). Sweat and tiredness would become part of that endeavor. On the other hand, the troublesome work was a blessing in disguise, a means for stopping the avalanche of evil and a learning process in how to do what was right and to help develop character. We need to realize that some of

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<sup>42</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 41.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Brueggemann, 48.

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the punishments described in Genesis 3 “were also promises of future relief.”<sup>45</sup>

8. The sin/disobedience of Adam and Eve resulted in harming their sense of good and in losing their ability of discernment between good and evil. Satan promised that after eating from the forbidden tree they would “be like God knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). This statement in Genesis 3:22 seemingly affirms Satan’s offer as correct, but it needs to be underlined that it looks so only because of the Septuagint Greek translation that renders the Hebrew term “*hayah*” as “become” (*ginomai*) instead of “be.” The idea of “becoming” in this particular context is foreign to the intention of the text and Hebrew thought. Such a translation and understanding is very problematic for several reasons:

- (A) A literal translation of Genesis 3:22 is as follows: “Behold, Adam [a man, i.e., humanity] was like one of us to know good and evil. And now he must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (translation is mine; compare with Young’s translation: “Lo, the man was as one of Us, as to the knowledge of good and evil”). According to this interpretation, Adam and Eve were like God in their capacity of making a difference between good and evil, namely to discern what was good and evil, but by sinning they lost this faculty, the sensitivity for detecting wrong and lies. When they crossed the boundaries and engaged in evil, they lost what they had. It is true that Eve thought that additional wisdom would come to her by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:6). Nevertheless, she was not lacking wisdom, the ability to distinguish between good and evil and the power to pursue what was good,<sup>46</sup> but by choosing to obey the voice of the serpent instead of loving God, she lost this dimension of life. Real wisdom means to know existentially only what is good, because “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). The knowledge of evil puts life not only in danger, but destroys what is good. By sinning

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<sup>45</sup> Ross, 142.

<sup>46</sup> True wisdom means to have the ability to discern between good and evil and to follow only what is good as it is evident from two biblical passages: (A) 2 Sam 14:17, 20 speaks about the king’s ability of discerning good and evil (similar to the angel of God); (B) Solomon asks God to have the capacity to “discern between good and evil” (1 Kgs 3:9).

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Adam and Eve lost their freedom, the natural ability not to sin that they had prior to the Fall. Peters powerfully states: “The freedom we have lost is the freedom to live effusively out of the divine wellspring. Subsequently to this loss, freedom in God can no longer be understood as a birthright.”<sup>47</sup> The taste of evil destroys the capacity to discern between good and evil. After experiencing the flavor of disobedience, humans love sin. Adam and Eve now knew more, because they overstepped their limits and disregarded their own status as God’s creation, but God never intended that humans would possess this kind of knowledge, because by it they would lose moral discernment. Disobedience does not bring higher capacities, but destroys and takes away the valuable.

- (B) In order to express grammatically the idea of “becoming” instead of “being,” the verb *hayah* should usually be associated with the preposition *lamed* as in Gen 2:9. However, our text has the verbal expressions of *hayah* with the same meaning as it is used in the immediate context, for example in Gen 1:2; 2:18, and 3:1, 5, which describes consistently the state of being, the concept or condition of something lasting and permanent.<sup>48</sup>
- (C) To be like God in knowing good and evil, does not mean to experience or do evil, because God does not know evil by experience. It has to be stressed that God’s knowledge of evil is only “intellectual.” Even though God had to deal with the real consequences of evil after Satan’s rebellion against Him in heaven, He has never experienced evil by doing it but only by

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<sup>47</sup> Peters, 27.

<sup>48</sup> About the use of the perfect in Hebrew and translation possibilities of the verb *hayah*, see Gesenius’, 309–313, and Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 226–228.

If the meaning of “becoming” would be maintained in this text, then it should be interpreted as God’s statement of bitter irony or even as His sarcastic expression. The Lord God would then state that humans now think that they have become like one of Us (i.e., divine) as for the knowledge of good and evil. They would in their arrogance attempt to decide what was good and redefine evil, so God needed to guard them from the tree of life in order for them not to become everlasting sinners with a perversion of the true values of life. To be a sinner and live eternally is a concept full of contradiction per se, because the natural consequence of sin is death. Sinners cannot live eternally. Life is not a matter of magic, but a gift received in a constant dependence upon God, the unique Source, Giver and Maintainer of life.

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reacting against it, because He is the *summum bonum*, the absolute good, and from Him comes “every good and perfect gift” (Jas 1:17). He is the Light, and there is no darkness in Him (John 1:4–5; 3:19; 1 John 1:5, 7; 8:12; 9:5; cf. Rev 21:23; 22:5). Forbidden knowledge of good and evil is related to the experience of sin.

- (D) Adam and Eve’s ability for discerning between good and evil before sinning was not associated with the entitlement to decide for themselves what was right and wrong, because they were only creatures and totally dependent on God as their Creator and Law Giver. Good and evil are given realities, and the first pair should only have followed what was good. To decide what is good or evil is only God’s prerogative (Gen 2:16–17), because He is the Creator, the Law Giver, and the supreme Good. The ability to distinguish between good and evil in our post-sin condition is only possible on the basis of God’s revelation. Humanity needs the revealed, divine, codified law in order to know the difference between right and wrong. God’s instruction provides this crucial knowledge, which is the reliable compass for the distinguishing between true and false values, something that is no longer within us. We need an external objective source of God’s revelation to know the real issues of life and follow what is right and are entirely dependent on it for knowing God’s will. There is nothing inside of us to alert us to spiritual danger. Even our conscience cannot give this awareness unless it is purified, informed by the Word of God, and led by the Holy Spirit (Rom 3:20; 9:1; 1 Cor 4:4; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 3:9; Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:16, 21).
- (E) Eve was enticed to eat forbidden fruit, i.e., to transgress and negate God’s explicit command, and it would be absurd to think that the first pair would gain the “desired” knowledge by experiencing disobedience. If humans obtained moral discernment by eating the prohibited fruit, this would be a contradiction in itself. It would be completely illogical, because then “humans would possess moral discernment by means of disobedience to the divine will.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mettinger, 62-63.



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(F) “The humans were created mortal but were destined for immortality”<sup>50</sup> on the condition of their trust and obedience. Instead of blessings and gain, for the first time the word “curse” appears in the biblical text (Gen 3:14, 17), thus demonstrating a close association with disobedience and sin. If humans will not cultivate the vertical dimension of life, they will live like animals (also created on the sixth day), and ultimately behave like brute beasts. Only God’s Presence makes them humane and prevents them from living a wild life. “Human disobedience did not make the humans ‘like the gods.’ Man is made from dust and ends as dust.”<sup>51</sup>

9. Sin/disobedience broke the relationship with nature. The ground would produce thorns and thistles, and it would be exploited and corrupted (Gen 3:18; 6:11). Sin brought climate change (Gen 8:22). The chill of the day necessitates clothes. Fear will appear also among the animal world (Gen 9:2). It is worthwhile to notice that after sinning, humans were not cursed, only the serpent/Satan (Gen 3:14) and the ground (Gen 3:17).

10. Sin/disobedience brings violence, pain, hatred, polygamy, etc. Everything good, meaningful, and beautiful was corrupted by sin (see Gen 6:11–13); and as time progressed, the thinking of humanity became evil all the time (Gen 6:5; 8:21). The condemnable behavior followed: (A) the first murder was performed in the context of worship by Cain; (B) bigamy starts with Lamech (Gen 4:19) and marks the degradation and exploitation of women as well as polygamy relations; and (C) anger, rage, and revenge is introduced in the stories of Cain and Lamech (chap. 4).

11. Sin/disobedience blinds people. Tragically, the serpent/Satan could easily deceive and persuade Eve to disobey, but God Himself could not calm Cain’s anger, convince him to do what was right in order to avoid murdering his brother Abel. People do not gain immortality by eating the forbidden fruit but stubbornness. One of the terrible characteristics of sin is that sinners deny their real condition, signs of lostness are not discerned and accepted. Sin leads to the denial of truth about our own sinfulness. Ted Peters in his outstanding study about sin describes the progressive nature of sin in its logical pattern (not so much in its chronological order). He points out the path toward the radical

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 26.

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nature of evil, which he defines as “evil pursued in the name of evil”<sup>52</sup> and explains the evolution of evil in the following seven steps: (1) anxiety, (2) unfaith, (3) pride, (4) concupiscence, (5) self-justification, (6) cruelty, and finally (7) blasphemy.<sup>53</sup> He describes the last step of blasphemy or radical evil not so much as “the defilement of God’s name” but rather as “the misuse of divine symbols . . . to prevent the communication of God’s grace.”<sup>54</sup>

**IV. God’s Solution**

Hope appears in Genesis 3 against all hopelessness. In the midst of darkness, disobedience, despair, judgment, and condemnation, God secures humanity’s future in spite of the fact that Adam and Eve do not deserve to live. Sin cannot be undone, the clock cannot be turned back and reality cannot be reversed. However, the solution to the problem of sin comes from God Himself: “Salvation comes from the Lord” (Ps 27:1; Isa 12:2; Jonah 2:9). Covenant theology is the key to the theology of sin and salvation. “The Eden Narrative speaks of a radical choice, a choice between obedience and disobedience to the divine commandments.”<sup>55</sup> Ross states: “Sinful rebellion against God brings pain, conflict, and death; but confession to God ensures God’s gracious provisions.”<sup>56</sup> However, God’s grace precedes human repentance and change. The Lord always takes the first step and is the Initiator of our salvation. God confronts evil and responds to it as the loving Creator and gracious Judge. “The scene becomes a trial.”<sup>57</sup> He did not abandoned or destroy Adam and Eve in their sin. On the contrary, He is in search for humanity. God is on His way to find them.

There are at least 7 indicators of God’s saving activities in regard to humanity according to Genesis 3:

First, God comes to Adam and Eve with grace. He cries for His lost and missing children: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). Because of the divine and undeserved grace that streamed from Calvary, they could live (Rev 13:8). Sinners are lost, however God graciously calls all sinners back to Himself as He called Adam and Eve (see, for example, Isa 45:22; Ezek

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<sup>52</sup> Peters, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10–17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>55</sup> Mettinger, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Ross, 150.

<sup>57</sup> Brueggemann, 49; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 252–255.

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18:31–32; Joel 2:12–14). This is a principle revealed in the Bible from the very beginning—humans sin, but God takes the initiative and invites them back to Himself. Humans thus respond to God’s amazing, prevailing grace, and His goodness leads people to repentance (Rom 2:4). God’s first question is an invitation of grace, an expression of His deep love in search of humanity and at the same time reveals God’s judgment (see Exod 34:6–7; John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 5:21).<sup>58</sup>

Second, God provides a real garment (Gen 3:21). As the nakedness of the first couple was more than a physical phenomenon, so it follows analogically that the garment represents more than physical dress. There is a contrast in the biblical text between “they made” and “He made.” What Adam and Eve could not do for themselves, to cover their guilt and shame, God did for them. He gave them His garment of skin, and thus He covers sinners with the garment of His righteousness (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Rev 7:14; 22:14), which indicates that He sacrificed the first animal in order to provide for them the solution for their sin problem in view of the Messiah (Rev 13:8; Eph 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20).<sup>59</sup> Forgiveness and their redemption was secured through God’s gracious sacrifice represented by the death of the animal whose skin they were wearing.<sup>22</sup>

Third, God creates enmity between the powers of good and evil (Gen 3:15a) in the context of spiritual warfare. This theme of the great controversy introduces the imagery of war and tension. Because as sinners we love sin, God helps humans by introducing enmity toward evil and enables them to hate evil.

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<sup>58</sup> God’s question: “Where are you?” had a multiple purpose: (1) an invitation to dialogue; (2) an offer of grace (God did not appear to kill them, but to provide a very costly solution to their new situation as sinners; Gen 3:15; Rev 13:8; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20); (3) help for them to realize what was their position/attitude toward God (instead of enjoying His presence they were now hiding from Him); and (4) a trial/investigative judgment, because they were accountable for their past actions to God as their Creator. God is presented here as their Judge.

<sup>59</sup> The word, “tunic,” and the specific Hiphil form of the verb *wayyalbishem* “clothed” belongs to sanctuary language, specifically referring to the dressing of the priests (Exod 28:41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev 8:13). In our text, the reference to the “skin” implies that an animal had been sacrificed. The ritual of sacrifice was instituted then, with all “the awareness of substitutionary atonement” (Richard, M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26, no. 2 [1988]: 127).

<sup>22</sup>The garments of skin God gave to the first couple symbolizes the righteousness of God which is given to sinners as a free gift of God’s grace accepted through faith. Adam and Eve did not ask for the garment, God provided it for them (Gen 3:21). Skin alludes to the first sacrifice in view of the fact that it was from the skin of an animal.

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Fourth, God promises to send the Seed (Gen 3:15b), who will do for humans what they cannot do for themselves: he will defeat their enemy, Satan. God's statement to the serpent lies at the center of chiasmic literary structure of chap. 3.<sup>60</sup> The Messiah will become humanity's Redeemer and Savior, and His victorious deliberate death will ultimately destroy Satan and consequently everyone and everything associated with him. The Messiah is the Victor and gives victory to all who connect with Him (Rom 8:1–4). The final victory is assured by Him (Rev 12:7–12; 19:6–7, 15–21; Jude 24–25). Thus, God has the solution to the problem of sin, but this solution is very costly, demanding, painful, and full of suffering in spite of the fact that it is a decisive and victorious action. God did not leave humans to the power of evil. He would step down and as a promised Seed would defeat our enemy even though He knew that it would cost Him His life. He deliberately died for us. "God does not give up his purposes for his creation and his kingdom. Though Adam and Eve flee from him, God graciously takes the initiative to seek them out. . . . The woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head—in other words, God promises to extinguish the evil forces Adam and Eve have unleashed. This is the first biblical promise of the gospel: Christ is to be woman's offspring and will defeat Satan, though at great cost to himself, as the serpent 'will strike his heel.'"<sup>61</sup> Geisler underlines it in a summary statement: "God *desires* to restore man to a vital personal relationship with Himself through man's faith in God through the death of Jesus Christ for man's sin."<sup>62</sup> Jesus Christ came to earth to reveal the true character of His Father, because the image of God was radically distorted among people and at the same time to unmask and destroy Satan (John 17:6; 1 John 3:8). Christ is the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45) as well as the Seed of the woman (Gal 3:16–19; 4:4; cf. Dan 9:24–27). Victory over evil comes only from outside of us; it comes through the Seed's ultimate sacrifice, humility, and unselfish service. He takes upon Himself the curse of the disobedience (Gal 3:13). The main motifs of Genesis 3 like "toil, sweat, thorns, the conflict, the tree, death, dust, and the seed—all will be reflected in the experience of the Christ."<sup>63</sup> Steps to victory for humans are made by God. The promised Seed will die, not humans, and His death will be a substitutionary death on our behalf. Jesus brings

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<sup>60</sup> See Ojewole, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Geisler, 81.

<sup>63</sup> Ross, 141.

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victory, liberation from the domination of sin and freedom from the power of evil.

Fifth, paradoxically, God expels Adam and Eve from the garden to prevent and protect them from becoming “eternal” sinners and to live under the curse of sin permanently. Ross aptly explains: “The story closes with the Lord’s reasoned decision to prevent humankind from extending life in such a painful state. . . . God acted to prevent them from continuing on perpetually in that condition.”<sup>64</sup> He will lead and teach them to trust Him and walk humbly with Him, and be transformed in their characters by knowing Him personally and factually. “The way to life is available, but only in the way God would provide it.”<sup>65</sup> Their future seemed uncertain, but they were in God’s caring hand. He would bring victory over their enemy and secure their salvation. If they turned to Him in faith, His victory would be theirs.

Sixth, He teaches humans how to worship (Gen 4:3-9). Giving to Adam and Eve garments made of skin (Gen 3:21) alluded to the death of an animal, a sacrifice for their sin. On that occasion, God gave insights into true worship, which is the cultivation of a genuine relationship with God.<sup>66</sup>

Seventh, God provides the gift of faith, the ability to cling to God’s word as an affirmative response to His kindness. Even though the word “faith” is not explicitly mentioned in chap. 3 (for the first time, the verb to “believe” appears in Gen 15:4 in relation to Abraham’s faith in God’s promises), it is implied in the actions of Adam and Eve: (1) they both accept the garments God provided for them (faith is trust in God’s grace and word); (2) Adam gave a special name to his wife—“Eve” (meaning “a mother of the living” according to Gen 3:20), a designation full of hope, a sign of trust, an indicator of life that will continue in spite of the existence of evil, and an expectation by which he expresses faith in God’s merciful guidance and that He will provide, care, and hold the future in the midst of crisis; (3) Eve expresses her hope in the coming Redeemer, the promised Seed (3:15), by naming her firstborn son Cain—“I have received a man, the Lord.”<sup>67</sup> She hoped that through him

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<sup>64</sup> Ross, 149.

<sup>65</sup> Ross, 141.

<sup>66</sup> Jiří Moskala, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, nos. 1–2 (2008): 33–34.

<sup>67</sup> Translation is mine. The Hebrew particle *'et* is to be taken as an indicator of a direct object (not as a preposition “with”). It means that the term “the Lord” is an apposition to the previous word “man.” Thus, Eve’s explanation should be translated in the following way:

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salvation would be secured and thus they would return to the lost paradise. What a disappointment when he became the first murderer. Humanity would need to painfully learn how to trust the Lord, and to patiently and consistently follow Him and His will.

Faith brings victory. “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4; cf. Jude 24). However, faith is not our Savior, but only a means by which we receive God’s victory for ourselves.<sup>68</sup> Faith is a relationship of trust; it is a reliance upon God’s Word. Saving faith is not an innate quality of believers and not our achievement but a gift of God (Eph 2:8; Phil 1:29; Jude 3). At the same time, it must be stressed that we are responsible if we do not believe, because faith is communicated through hearing the Gospel (Rom 10:17). This is a biblical paradox. There is no way we can on our own overcome sin, only God can solve the problem of sin and give us victory over it by His extra-human power. Victory comes from an external source outside of us as a gift from God through faith. We can fight against different symptoms of sin, try to overcome wrong habits, but what we really need is a transformation of heart, the experience of a new birth, a pure heart (John 3:3, 5; Ps 51:10), because our real problem is our unchanged heart.<sup>69</sup>

Where the first Adam failed, the Second Adam won (Rom 5:14–21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45–49). What humans lost in the Garden of Eden, Christ has come to restore at the cross. Our new true identity can be and must be shaped and built according to the victory accomplished by Jesus Christ. God did not leave us to the power of Satan and sin—the Spirit of God brings victory when we by faith cling to God and His word, because only the Holy Spirit and the Word of God can produce true life (Ezek 36:25–27; Rom 8:4, 14).<sup>70</sup> The solution to sin involves not only

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“I have received a man, namely (that is) the Lord.”

<sup>68</sup> In Greek it is expressed by the preposition *dia* plus genitive of *pistis* “faith,” *dia pisteos*, meaning literally “through faith” (and not by *dia* plus accusative of *pistis* which would then mean “on account of faith” or “because of faith”).

<sup>69</sup> Victory comes from above as a gift from God. We need to be born again, and it means to be born from above (the Greek word “*anōthen*” means “again,” but also “above”). Only when we decide for God, surrender to Him, allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, and accept continually the Word of God are we sons and daughters of God (John 1:12–13; Rom 8:14), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

<sup>70</sup> The first verses of the Bible provide the first definition of true life. Life can happen only when the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2b) and the Word of God (Gen 1:3) come together and reign (in the first Creation account the phrase “and God said” occurs ten times). Spirit + Word = Life. This is correct not only for the creation of physical life but also for the birth

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forgiveness, but also the renewal and restoration of the image of God and freedom from slavery to sin (sin addictions). A new life is Word and Spirit oriented (Rom 8:2–6; Col 3:1–4, 10). Those who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, and those who are led by the Holy Spirit are sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:14). Only when we surrender to God, decide for Him, and allow Him to be God in our lives do we experience the difference and a new life. So we need to fight every day for a close relationship with God so that nothing and nobody can take it away from us (Rom 8:31–39). Only Jesus can give the true joy of a new victorious life (Rom 7:25). To Him alone be glory (Jer 9:23–24; Rom 11:33–36).

The good news is that Jesus Christ regenerates and changes our hearts (John 3:3–5), forgives all our sins (Isa 1:16–19; 1 John 1:8–9), liberates us from the bondage of sin (John 12:31–32), and transforms our lives (Rom 12:1–2; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 3:1–3). If the Son gives freedom, we are indeed free. Sin began with pride but is defeated by humility. There is hope for us because sin was overcome by the humble person Jesus Christ who is the Guarantor of freedom, peace, and joy. Our sinful nature does not change nor disappear through conversion or repentance, however, our sinful nature, tendencies, or inclinations (inherited or cultivated) can be controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit, His word, and God's grace (Rom 7:25; 8:1–11). Until the second coming, we will have our sinful nature and only then will believers be completely transformed and receive an incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:50–57; Phil 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2–5). We are not able on our own to do good deeds. Good deeds are a result of the transforming power of God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit (John 1:12; 15:1–5; Rom 1:16–17; 8:1–4; 1 Cor 1:18–25, 30–31; 2:12–15; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 1:10; Phil 4:13; 1 Pet 2:9–10).

### **Conclusion**

God created a perfect world that was distorted by sin, and this fatal wound brought terrible consequences. Eugene Peterson describes our lost situation: “A catastrophe has occurred. We are no longer in continuity

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of the spiritual life. A person can be born again only when he or she is born from above—when this person opens himself or herself to the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8; Rom 8:14; Titus 3:5) and believes in the Word of God (John 1:12–13; 1 Pet 1:23; Jas 1:18). Regeneration is possible and can be experienced because God is our Creator. He creates in us a new life (Ps 51:10).

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with our good beginning. We have been separated from it by a disaster. We are also, of course, separated from our good end. We are, in other words, in the middle of a mess.”<sup>71</sup> Because of the sin problem, we live in a “deeply wounded”<sup>72</sup> world destined to death. In addition, God endowed humans with a free will, and being human means to have freedom of choice. However, our freedom has been compromised, because we have tasted the forbidden that misleads and perverts our judgment of what is good and evil. The problem is our sinful nature with inclinations to evil, love for sin, and a desire for selfish self-realization and self-centeredness. Humans no longer respect God’s word and will. Mettinger correctly states: “The Eden Narrative speaks of a radical choice, a choice between obedience and disobedience to the divine commandment.”<sup>73</sup> This disrespect for divine guidance tragically complicates life.

Due to God’s revelation we know about the origin of sin and evil in the world. In Genesis 3, sin is described as a broken relationship, a mistrust of God, a refusal to follow His word, and unbelief. It is an egocentric life, selfishness, and a rejection of God’s authority, His word, His command, His law which is not a mere code of norms but an expression of His loving and holy character. Sinners do not recognize and appreciate His goodness, love, justice, order, and care. Sin underestimates, blurs, and blinds the real values of life and the severe consequences of sin. Sin is a wrong attitude, an enslaving power, changes human nature, and leads to violence, problems, and death.

Today’s tendency is to come up with a shallow, mechanical, and one-sided definition of sin as a deed or simply as an external act. However, sin has a deeper basis and larger connotations. We cannot define it only as the transgression of the law. Sin is first of all a theological term aimed against God (Gen 3:1; Ps 51:4) that ruins relationships and personal integrity. Transgression dishonors humanity but primarily dishonors God, and disobedience robs God of His honor as our Creator. When God’s creatures rebel against Him, His glory, reputation, and name are belittled, and the splendor and majesty of His Person and of His character is degraded. When the vertical relationship with God is broken, it causes the breakdown of all other relationships (to

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<sup>71</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 82–83.

<sup>72</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Mettinger, 52.



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ourselves, each other, life, and nature). The result of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Its negativity is plainly seen in the Flood account where everything was corrupted, i.e., destroyed by sin,<sup>74</sup> and the antediluvian people are portrayed with continuously evil thoughts (Gen 6:5). Sin is very complex, and it has more than one definition even though its nature is clear. One can summarize sin not only as an inner brokenness, but also as a deed of disobedience, as a depravity of the heart with selfish tendencies and propensities to sin as well as a dominating power—sin is all inclusive (Rom 1:18–3:20; Gen 6:5; Isa 1:5–6; Jer 11:8; Matt 7:18–23; Rom 5–8). Sin is a state of thinking and being as well as a concrete act of active rebellion. It is a life without love.

Sin steals vitality, diminishes strength, brings fleeting excitement, demands courage to live and face the difficulties of life, leads to phobias, discouragement, and disappointments. First we play with sin and then sin plays with us. Sin becomes our lord, and we serve him. The taste of sin makes us weak, and we like it. We have the inclinations to sin, a very strong drive to satisfy our “need,” and cravings for the forbidden. We want to decide what is good and evil by ourselves. We reject God’s word and His law. We want to be free of His command, His authority. We want to be gods. Sin is pride, ingratitude, selfishness, self-gratification, and self-justification. Sin is a wrong attitude, false orientation, a self-centered state of mind. Sin is stubbornness and indifference. Sin is not a private matter; it has social dimensions with terrible and mortal consequences. Because of disobeying God’s explicit command, humans detach themselves from the Source of life, consequently they will die (Gen 2:17; 3:19, 23).

Sin starts with our sense of emptiness, our selfishness expressed in lustful thinking (Jas 1:13–15). Sin has an addictive power, and this circle

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<sup>74</sup> Moses plays with one Hebrew word *shachat*, which has two meanings in English: (1) corrupt and (2) destroy. This play is best described in Genesis 6:11–13 where is shown that God is not coming to destroy what is good, meaningful, beautiful, and has a potential to grow, but on the contrary, He intervenes to destroy what was already destroyed (corrupted), and those who are agents of destruction: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.’” Compare with the statement of John in the book of Revelation, which is an allusion to Genesis 6, where the purpose of the second coming of Jesus is explained in the following way: “The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18).

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of addiction may be described in the following way: first there is a sense of a deficiency, the feeling of lacking something important that can bring us happiness, then a desire to obtain it and the cultivation of those desirous thoughts (lust), finally a reaching for the forbidden fruit that brings momentous excitement, satisfaction (for a while), and instant comfort. Nevertheless, there follows disappointments and negative consequences of the decision and action. So a person looks and searches again for the lost feelings of excitement, satisfaction, and comfort by repeating the same previous actions. And the circle goes round and round.

Sin may bring relief and some sense of satisfaction to the problems of life but only for a moment. Sin is a temporal reality that does not think about the past or future, or about the consequences. Its focus is on now, and its inflated emotional experience, good feelings, or excitement do not last long. One cannot be satisfied with a constant searching for what to eat, what to drink, how to dress, with whom to have fun and amusement, or with whom to sleep. *Carpe diem!* A satisfaction based on “instincts.”

The Fall account teaches people not to be ignorant of the power of sin and Satan’s devices (Rom 6:5–7; 2 Cor 2:11). John Toews makes a point: “The serpent asked the woman and Adam to make a judgment about God. They did. They . . . decided to mistrust God, to mistrust the word of God, in quest for autonomy that would make them wise. Their mistrust of God led them to disobedience, to disobey the word of God.”<sup>75</sup> Sin is a separation from God, and salvation is a restoration of that broken relationship with God. In the Bible, sin is associated with alienation from God, self-love, going astray from the right path, missing the target, injustice, guilt, slavery, death, darkness, hopelessness, selfishness, and twisting truth. Different Hebrew and Greek terms testify about the vast array of sin’s influence and decay.

The anatomy of the first sin and the dynamics of temptation is as follows: First, a wrong picture of God is created that puts Him into a false light and distorts who He is. Second, if this deformed view is generated then as a result doubts will appear regarding His love and purposes, misunderstandings are on the way, and distrust is born. Third, the discrepancy between God’s word and observations in life are pointed out or found out. Fourth comes the direct attack against the validity of God’s word, against His law and will. Fifth, the offer of something apparently better will culminate the deception (Gen 3:13). Finally, an act

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<sup>75</sup> Toews, 6.

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of disobedience will follow. Satan first wants to get a hold on our mind, to impregnate our thinking, and then he takes over our behavior. The most decisive battle is fought over our mind, over our thinking. If he succeeds here, he will win the whole war. In other words, first there is a breaking of the law in the mind of a person, and then there is a breaking of the law in actual behavior. Sin affects the whole life of an individual.

The narrative on the Fall teaches that God is not the author of evil, but that God is the only One who brings a lasting and thorough solution to the sin problem even though this resolution is extremely costly, painful, and surprising. In spite of our sinfulness, brokenness and lostness, God loves people and wants to save them. Specifically, our human will is bent in on itself, so we do not desire to seek God on our own. There is no special point in us by which we can connect with God. It is God who condescends, pursues, and connects with us. He initiates this encounter; He takes the first step. God's cry "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) is a model of how God is in search of humanity all the time.

Thus, we can comprehend the dynamics of victory over sin and know that this experience of a new life in Jesus comes as a result of the power of the Spirit of God and His word in our lives. The Spirit of God and the Word of God bring life (Gen 1:1–3; Ezek 2:1–2; 36:26–27; 37:4, 9–10, 14). Perfectionism is an erroneous attempt to solve the problem of sin by human effort, a very cheap and deceitful solution that cannot work because sin is stronger and more powerful than we are, permeates and perverts our nature, and enslaves us.

Only when we understand the true nature of sin, can we better comprehend and know ourselves and admire even more what Jesus has done and is doing for, in, and through us. Our world is in desperate need of healing. The realization that the solution of the sin problem necessitated the incarnation and the death of Jesus Christ (Gen 3:15; Isa 53:1–6; John 3:16; Rom 6:23; 2 Cor 5:21) helps us to see the true and horrible nature of sin with its seriousness and depth. God had to leave His position in heaven, live as a human being, go through immense suffering and death in order to save and deliver us from the power of sin. This solution was high priced because it cost the life of God's Son Jesus Christ. John Wenham profoundly declares: "At the heart of the [biblical] story stands the cross of Christ, where evil did its worst and met its match. It is there that roots of evil are fully revealed and it is there that the almighty God of love shines forth."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Geisler, 90.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

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