

**Question: What do you make of the term “inherited (or original) sin”?**

The account of the fall of humanity, the Adam and Eve story, is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. Everyone has a “bad day at the office” so to speak but this one was a real corker!<sup>1</sup> In **Knowing Your Faith** understanding what happens in this narrative and its long-term implications is an essential building block of the Christian world view. Everything that has happened historically, is happening in the world now and will happen in the future has its roots in the Garden of Eden.

We begin with the creation of humanity. Turning to Chapter 2:7 of Genesis we have the creation of humanity. The creation of Adam and Eve as actual specific individuals has been hotly debated for centuries. In Genesis 2:7 and 2:8 the Hebrew word used and translated ‘Adam’ in English is not the proper noun used for a person’s name. The term is rather **הָאָדָם** (‘ha-adam’) ‘the man’ a singular term for that which God has brought forth from the earth. In this case an earthling, a creature of the earth, from the dust of the ground. In other words what is being emphasised is that the created is created as part of the creation. What sets the created apart comes next, “[God] ... **breathed into the earthlings nostrils the breath of life; and the person became a living soul**”. This singular earthling, now having personhood, is the starting point of humanity. Once again, if we remember a key point from last week, the language is intended to convey a critical fact rather than be scientific. The fact is that God took from the ground God had already created and created a being from those elements. Life however came when God breathed upon the creature. If we follow the text God put this being in a beautiful garden God had created; the Garden of Eden. The emphasis on this is that God created, God provided and then God created a special being out of the Created to care for what had been created. The person, ha-adam, had only one job. To be obedient to what God wanted in caring for the garden and avoiding the fruit of a particular tree. Things started out really well. Ha-Adam settled into the task. Ha-Adam was told to care for the garden and to eat what whatever Ha-Adam liked – except for the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because to do so would mean death. God saw that it was not good for Ha-Adam to be alone. After all, even God was in Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit. Have you ever noticed that loneliness is the first thing in the Bible that God says is not good?

It is a sad truth that loneliness is a killer. In faith, we are always brought together. God places and blesses us in families, in fact God came up with the idea of family. God forms communities. God calls us out of isolation to be with others. The Body of Christ is the unity of believers across the world. In being a Christian, we should never allow a pattern of loneliness to develop – we are to encourage and embrace the lonely. If we are lonely, then we have to be proactive and get more engaged with community. In serving others we too are blessed.

<sup>1</sup> "A real corker" refers to an excellent, astonishing, or remarkable person or thing - something that is outstanding, impressive, or leaving one speechless due to its exceptional nature.

God saw that Ha-Adam was lonely and decided to do the most radical thing you could imagine – God pulled Ha-Adam in two, creating two beings, two people from the one. Then when you think about it, something of the Trinity is reflected here. The Hebrew text **הַצְלָע** translated “rib” in English is the same term for the side of the body or a side compartment in Hebrew. Again, the pictorial use of “rib” is an appropriate translation. The idea is to create an image, not a scientific document. It is about purpose not biology. George Knight, who was one of the world’s greatest Hebrew theologians and one of New Zealand’s greatest Biblical scholars, describes the Hebrew image like God creating two old fashioned western saloon doors from a single piece of timber. One without the other is functional, but less than it could or should be. They come from the same source, are of the same essence and are made to do slightly different things but work best together. Then original remaining side of the humanity ‘Ha-Adam’ then made a distinction calling the original side ‘man’ (**מֵאִישׁ ish**) and the side taken from him (**אִשָּׁה ishah**) or ‘woman’.

A little sidetrack here. This is not to say that a woman needs a man to complete her, nor that a man needs a woman to complete him. What it does say is that men and women, generically, are deliberately different from each other by design and will best be all they can be, when they work together and learn from each other. That the same would be true at an individual level is therefore also likely but what is emphasised here is equality in difference at a profound level. Men and women need each other, generically, to be fully what is intended, to be fully what God has created us to be.

Now in this context, whether or not Adam and Eve existed as individuals, as historical characters, is not vital, though I tend to believe they were historic individuals as the historical record, the genealogies, historical Jewish writings and Jesus all appear to reinforce this view. However, it is not a statement of faith that is critical, what is vital is recognising that God has created us, created each one of us uniquely, and has given us purpose and instruction.

Now some days you go to work and you know what you have to do but you just don’t want to. The sun is shining so brightly outside, you have a personal event coming up soon you are more interested in. You’re tired or not well or had a bad night’s sleep. Or you are over-worked and still coming to grips with what you have to do. We all struggle with this and sometimes we don’t respond the best way. But what about when life is good, everything at work is good, you are healthy and well. Can you still mess up then? Sadly yes, we all can.

Years ago, I was out on a cruise on a beautiful afternoon on a magnificent launch on the Auckland harbour. I’ve done quite a bit of sailing over the years’ and I noticed one hull was slightly lower than the other. As I watched over half an hour it seemed to get lower. Intrigued, I went and got the captain to have a look. He pulled up a cover that revealed the hull to be awash with water with more spilling into the centre section. Another few minutes and the boat would have sunk on one pontoon with the other holding the boat vertical in the water. We were out for a cruise not for a swim. As they bailed we pulled into Mototapu Island which was fortunately close by. It eventuated that during the day the boat had been serviced and on the dock a worker had pulled out the bung and silenced the hull alarm so they could do some testing on the new motor and screw. The boss had reinforced the importance of checking everything carefully before their boat went back in the water. Commercial cruises do not want mechanical issues to spoil things.

Job finished the worker forgot to put the bung back or turn the alarm on. As the boat was put back in the water the chaos below started, but no one noticed. It could have been very serious indeed. The dock worker had a few questions to answer.

Well then, you can probably relate to Adam and Eve. They too mucked up somewhat seriously. They were told what to do and what not to do. It's a bit like good parents or good bosses. When they tell you what you should do, why to do it and what you shouldn't do, and why not then, then you can act in a well-informed manner. But at the end of the day, you choose what you want to do, you bear the consequences of your action and no one else is ever to blame for the choice you make. Sometimes, maybe more than we realize, others bear the consequences of our actions as well. For both good and bad. When we had our first child Lorraine told me I had to slow my driving down because the kids needed their dad. I listened and good has come of it – for the kids and for my wallet! Ultimately, we bear the consequences of our decisions and so do others. For children of nations committing war crimes the guilt of those crimes lasts generations.

Adam and Eve had been told not to eat of a certain fruit. The injunction was clear – which bit of “No” do you not understand? Genesis 3 tells us that the serpent was more cunning or crafty than any other creature. So, a little detail here. Genesis doesn’t talk about “serpents” plural but about “the serpent”, a specific serpent. The reason for its craftiness is revealed later in the Scriptures. Ezekiel 28:13-19, Job 26:13 and Isaiah 51:9 all tell us that Satan, A serpent or a snake-like creature, was in Eden. Then Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2 speak of **“the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan.”** Satan, following his fall from heaven, took that which God created good and corrupted it, even in the garden of Eden. We might note how God will even redeem the snake in time, as is foreshadowed by Moses raising a Bronze Snake in the desert as an image of healing and Jesus’ redeeming death. The odd use of Bronze was the metal used in cleansing items by fire. Satan, working to corrupt God’s latest and greatest, turned his ire toward humanity.

Now temptations are ever before us and people have harped on for years that it is unfair that we are all supposedly impacted by the sin of Adam and Eve. When I ask them if they have ever done anything sinful in their lives, to which that obvious answer is “yes”, I ask them then why does it matter what Adam and Eve did? The reality is that sin is potential the consequence of having choice: we make bad decisions sometimes and the consequences can follow us around for a long time. Even when we change as people. Galatians 6:7 tells us, **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man sows reaps what he sows.”** When Satan presented Eve with the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil Satan did two things; he created a desire for something she didn’t and couldn’t have (let’s call that Marketing) and Satan questioned the will and intent of God, distorting what God had said. Eve’s greatest sin then was not so much taking and biting the forbidden fruit as in ignoring the voice of God. Temptation is ever before us but what voice do we listen to?

Adam doesn’t come off too well in the story either. He takes the fruit and eats it as well. But when God comes and challenges Adam as to what he has been eating, look at his response: **“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”** The cheek! In one breath Adam tries to blame both God and Eve because he ate the fruit. You gave her to me, so it’s God’s fault, and she gave me the fruit, so it’s Eve’s

fault! Adam's sin is actually worse. What's more, as the text reveals, Adam was right there the whole time. He did nothing to stop Eve taking the fruit and eating it. Then he tried to blame her that he copied her sin. I bet he stills feels bad about that!

As they immediately found out, disobeying God has its' consequences. Sometimes this is in the immediate timeframe and sometimes in the future or even in eternity. In their case the outcome came about immediately. Cast out the Garden of Eden Eve was punished with pain in childbirth and desire for her husband, Adam to raise the food they required from the soil by the sweat of his brow. In other words, by manual labour for the rest of their lives. Bad as this was there were three further, worse, consequences. Firstly, disobedience is sin and sin is death and in their sin death had entered the created order and all of the created order was impacted by death. Secondly, all of the descendants and the descendants of all the created order would now likewise be cursed with death. Once started, there was nothing they could do to redeem the destruction that was now spreading across the world like a plague impacting everything that has ever lived. Like the dock worker, they had no idea what they had done. But the third consequence was the worst of all. Until now they had walked daily with God in the cool of the evening. Now God was remote to them and the access that had to God was broken, not just for them but for all of humanity and the created order. So, God put in place a long-term plan, one that would be very costly for God and would take hundreds of generations to unfold. As sin is so serious so too would be its payment and the cost of restoration. Thank the Lord for Jesus or we would all be stuck in this cycle of death.

In Romans 5 Paul lays out God's essential plan. From Adam to Moses the world was without direction and subject to death. From Moses until Jesus the world was Given God's Law and path to redemption and pointing to the One who would ultimately do that work. From Jesus death and resurrection His grace rules. As death had come through one man so life would be granted afresh through One Man, the Man, Jesus. And once again humanity, person by person, would be given the choice to participate in this new life or to continue walking in sin. The ultimate cost for sin is paid by Jesus and appropriated to ourselves as we accept Him as Saviour and Lord – otherwise we are dead in our sins. Either we accept Jesus' free gift of grace and forgiveness paid by Him on the Cross and walk in His Way, or we continue on in our sin and will face God alone. The consequences are quite different. But the choice is always ours and no one else's.

But, as Joshua put it to the Israelites so long ago, "**as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord**" (Joshua 24:15), how about you?

AMEN

NEXT WEEK: How GOD SPEAKS HAS SPOKEN TO US AND SPEAKS TO US NOW