

What it means to be human: fallen Genesis 3

Who here can clearly remember gaining their drivers licence? Can you remember the test, or tests, if it took you a couple of goes? I received my licence in year 12, but a couple of years ago I had to sit another driving test. I was applying for a new category of licence, one that would allow me to drive a vehicle in the light-rigid class, specifically I wanted to be able to drive a small bus for ministry purposes. So to get this licence I had to head off to the RTA (RMS) and hop in a bus with an instructor who put me through my paces.

After we drove back to the RTA I had to once more endure that nervous wait for my result. And because they are behind the glass screen at the counter they shout out your result so you can hear it, of course this means that everyone else can hear it as well. Thankfully, my result was a pass, but that didn't stop my examiner explaining how he almost failed me. "You've developed some bad habits as a driver" he shouted, "you ride the clutch, which means the vehicle isn't in gear. NOT. IN. GEAR! And when you stop at the lights you should leave one vehicle length between you and the car in front. YOU'RE. TOO. CLOSE!" Anyway, even though I had passed it was still a moment of truth, a moment when I realised that perhaps I wasn't as good a driver as I had thought.

Life is full of these moments, isn't it? Moments when some uncomfortable home truths are revealed. You might hop on a bike for the first time in months or maybe years and you realise just how unfit you are. Or maybe with the change of seasons you pull out the clothes from last year only to realise that they feel a bit tighter than what they used to. Sometimes we find we've been shielding ourselves from reality and the illusion is shattered by some test or by some revelation.

Genesis 3 is an illusion-shattering reality check. When it comes to understanding what it means to be human, often we can encase ourselves within an illusion. We can get so used to certain patterns and observations about human life that we become blind to what counts for healthy human living and what is actually a distortion of the ideal human condition. Do we have a clear perception of what human life is meant to look like, or have we allowed ourselves to live with a distorted point of view?

This is the question I'd like to ask today as we approach Genesis 3, and the first thing we see as we turn to that chapter is that human beings have always been lied to: to be human is to be constantly battling a programme of deception.

Genesis chapter 3 verse 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

In this first verse we are introduced to a new character. We've already met God, we've already met Adam and Eve, but here is a talking serpent! What is this creature that we have before us? Well, the New Testament associates this serpent figure with Satan: a being who is fundamentally opposed to God and his people, an agent of evil who is God's enemy. Whether this serpent *is* Satan or

merely *like* Satan or is a snake *possessed* by Satan, I don't know, but what *is* clear is that this serpent appears as God's enemy, an enemy who uses a strategy of deception to drive a wedge between God and humanity.

This much becomes obvious when the serpent starts questioning Eve: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" God said no such thing! God was very clear: "You may eat from any tree in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil" But right from the start the serpent is trying to distort what God is saying.

To begin with Eve's initial response is good one, she corrects the serpent: v 2 "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" But Satan is not easily deterred, the lies keep coming: Verse 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. A bald-faced lie.

Then the strategy shifts a little, and Satan says something that *is* true. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Yes, that much is true, but it's a truth that's spoken in an attempt to distort God's character. It's as if Satan is trying to say, "Look God isn't being straight with you. He's got these rules but they are all about protecting his position, he wants to keep you in your place so God is telling you a lie. Yes, the fruit is powerful but it will make you equal with God and not estranged from God. Don't listen to him!"

And so with this lie about God's character ringing in her ears, Eve finds herself with no reason to keep on trusting in her creator. "He doesn't really care about me, his rules are just about him, why should I listen?" And so looking at the fruit Eve likes what she sees, and feeling that she has no reason to keep on obeying God, Eve disobeys and eats.

So right from the beginning of our story as human beings we've found ourselves in danger of being deceived. In John 8:44 Jesus calls Satan "the father of lies". The devil will lie to us in order to lead us into sin. "God's way is not the best way" he'll whisper, "If you turn your back on God then you'll be much happier." John Piper is an American theologian and pastor, this is what he says:

The power of sin is the power of deceit. Sin has power through promising a false future. In temptation sin comes to us and says: "The future with God on his narrow way is hard and unhappy; but the way I promise is pleasant and satisfying." The power of sin is the power of this lie.

What lies do we hear about what it means to be human? "You'll only be happy if you can fulfil your every desire", that's one. "Humans are simply another product of biology, we don't have a creator and we're better off ditching God altogether", that's another. I'm sure together we could come up with a whole lot more. Genesis 3 is alerting us to the very real possibility of us being deceived about the human condition.

And it also makes clear what the results of this deception are. Have a look at the consequences which immediately flow out of Adam and Eve's sin. From verse 8:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

This part of Genesis reminds me of the story of the young minister who knocked on the door of an elderly church member and receiving no answer he left a card on which he wrote "Revelation 3.20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." The next Sunday the same card was found in the collection plate with an extra verse printed below: "Genesis 3.10 I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid!"

Verse 10 is actually a serious statement about the serious consequences of sin. Over the last few weeks we've seen how humans are created to enjoy certain relationships. We live under God with him as our creator, but even though there is a strict order to our relationship God and humanity are seen to be working together, ruling over creation as a kind of team. From what we have here in verse 9 it would seem that God and the humans would enjoy time together at the end of the day—kind of like after work drinks with the boss—Except at the end of this day when the boss emerges from the office Adam and Eve have already left the building. Why? We'll they've now realised that the serpent was lying and he's enticed them to overstep their position, offending God and putting their position with God at risk, and so they hide from him knowing the relationship is now ruined.

When God does follow them up we see that the damage extends beyond the human/divine relationship; the partnership between the man and the woman is also cracked. Verse 11 And God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Adam is fully responsible for his own actions but he starts pointing the finger at everyone but himself: The woman you put here with me... and so the tensions that so often characterises the relationships between men and women, between humankind and God, we see them all emerge as a consequence of the decision to ignore God's commands and to go our own way.

This brings us to another distortion that we can so easily fall victim to: the idea that when it comes to our relationship with God, there couldn't possibly be anything wrong with it! That when the day comes for us to stand before him, with a laugh and joke we'll be able to walk right in and enjoy eternal life. You could call this the Australian heresy: the idea that "God's a good bloke, he'll just let us in, She'll be right!" But not everything is right. There is a rift in the friendship. Starting with Adam and Eve and repeated by everyone ever since, the human race has always had this inclination to ignore God's law and do things our own way.

And the result is not only estrangement from God but also cursing from God. In Galatians 6:7 Paul warns us: Do not be deceived he says, God cannot be mocked. If we reject God's authority by giving in to other voices then we can expect his anger,

and this is exactly what happens to Adam and Eve. Once their failure is exposed, God brings judgment upon them: In verse 16 we read about painful childbirth for Eve; in verses 17-19 we read about hard labour in the fields for Adam; in verse 22 we read about physical death for both. God declares: They must not be allowed to reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.

Friends we ought to realise that our world has done a pretty good job in diluting the seriousness of our sin. These days talk about temptation and wickedness is more likely to be found in ads for chocolate coated ice-creams than in any serious discussion of human nature. But just think for a moment about the consequences that sin brings: lives of hardship which lead us to the grave. Surely there's a problem here that's worth thinking about rather than glossing over.

And the problem isn't only with the curses that God brings upon humanity; the world in which we live is reeling from the events of this chapter. In verse 17 God curses the ground, and in Romans 8 Paul says that the whole creation is groaning. This is what we Christians mean when we say that humanity is a fallen race living in a fallen world. Things are not the way they were originally created. Sin has had its effect and things are different now, things are harder now, things are ruined now.

Another big lie is the idea that we can excuse our sin because "this is the way God made me." God made me angry so I can act out the way I want. God made me ambitious so I can take advantage of the people around me. God made me gay so I can sleep with someone of the same sex. Have you heard people argue like this before? What this logic fails to take into account is the fact that the world God created has become broken. People love reading Genesis 1 and 2 but unless we also read Genesis 3 then we're not getting the full picture. The world and the people within it are living in a fallen mess. We've gone our own way, ruining ourselves and God's creation in the process, removing ourselves from friendship with God and provoking his anger. We need rescuing from this chaos.

Lucky for us, the God who we meet in Genesis isn't the type to stay angry. We get a really interesting moment towards the end of the chapter: Have a look at v 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. Even though God must have felt betrayed and disappointed and yes, angry, we still get this moment of care when he creates garments to clothe Adam and Eve's nakedness.

The type of love that God has for humanity is very much like the love of a parent for a child. Children can be exasperating and they can make you very cross but you never stop loving them, and God never stops loving us. So much so that he goes to great lengths to rescue us out of this mess that we've created for ourselves. Those parents who have stepped in at the last minute to get that homework assignment done on time will know how strong the urge is to rescue. And it's the same urge that God feels when he looks at us.

The moment of rescue eventually comes when, as one of Eve's decedents, Jesus Christ, arrives to crush Satan's power forever. We get a prophecy of this in verse 15 when God condemns the serpent, revealing that one of Eve's offspring will crush his head. And so in the New Testament we read of Jesus who reverses the

effects of Adam. Whereas Adam left us with sin, death and condemnation, Jesus leaves us with righteousness, life and forgiveness. In Christ, Genesis 3 need not be the last word about humanity.

Friends, the rescue is found in Jesus. If like me you realize that you have allowed yourself to be deceived, if you recognise that you have been tricked into going your own way, if your idea of the human life has been one where you set your own rules, and if you realise now that you're in danger of God's judgment, or simply if you recognise your brokenness and you want God to help, then know that God has never stopped loving you, and he asks you to trust in Jesus the saviour who brings us forgiveness and new life.

Come to him now, and don't let Genesis 3 be the last word.

I'll lead us in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we have heard your word this morning and we recognise what it says about us as human beings. We see that we have bought the lie that Satan brings; the lie that says we are better off without you. And we see clearly the consequences of us acting upon that lie. And so we turn to Jesus knowing that only he can reverse the situation we are in. In Christ may we find the righteousness, life and forgiveness that we so desperately need. Amen.