

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 20

THE FALLEN WORLD

*I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun,
and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.*
Ecclesiastes 1.14-15

Genesis 3 is commonly viewed as the account of *the fall* of mankind. The idea of the fall involves the sin that Adam and Eve committed, but it also embraces the consequences of that sin. The total view of sin and its consequences is presented in Genesis 3, and that is why we cannot simply call this important chapter of the Bible the story of the first sin but the story of the fall.

In our first study on the doctrine of sin, we noticed that both in the original languages of the OT and NT the word for sin means missing the mark. In every case of sin, the mark is missed by falling below it. The tempter moved Eve to aim higher than what God had made her. When she reached out to take the fruit, she was reaching up to become like God. But, in actual fact she was coming in below the mark set by God for human action. In our study on the human dimensions of sin we noticed that rather than being moved from above by God's word working through her mind, Eve was driven from below. In the act of sin, the human being was degraded. Sin was a fall. But, the fall was not limited to the nature of human action. Genesis 3 shows how this degradation of human action resulted in a fall in the human state of existence and in a fall of the entire world in which mankind must live. In this study, we will take a close look at these consequences of sin.

A. MAKING HISTORY

God created the world for man to act, to rule and fill the earth (Gen 1.26-28). Creation is God's unique work; making history is mankind's role. If God had left mankind only with creator's decree in Gen 1.28, history would simply be the story of the human race multiplying and progressively filling the earth and extending human rule over the globe. By giving Adam the first law, God added another dimension to the human role. He gave mankind a role in deciding the actual course of the future. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, all would have been left as God set it up. All we can say is that any change in direction would have been made by God in response to them overcoming the tempter, but scripture does not give us a view of this, for scripture only present what happened. What actually happened is sin entered the world, and through this the course of life on earth changed. Sin made history.

1. Seeing the fall in light of the creation accounts

We will begin our survey of Genesis 3 by gaining the vantage point provided by the introduction to this narrative of the fall.

Genesis 1 to 3 present three narratives: 1) the creation of the whole world, 2) the creation of man and his immediate world and 3) the fall. The introductions to these three narratives lay out the pre-existing conditions in a set pattern. First the negative conditions are introduced, which show that the world was not like it is today. This is followed by one positive condition on the basis of which the action that brought about the change and set up the world was carried out.

The first creation narrative (Gen 1.2)

1) Pre-existing conditions

- a) *Negative conditions*: the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep.
- b) *Positive condition*: and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. This made creation possible.

2) *The action* that brought about the change (vv 3ff.): “Then God said, ‘Let there be light.’ ...”

The second creation narrative (Gen 2.5-6)

1) Pre-existing conditions

- a) *Negative conditions*: there were no shrub and no plant of the field, no rain and no man to cultivate the ground (v 5)
- b) *Positive condition*: “...but a mist (or flow) used to rise from the ground to water the whole surface of the ground” (v 6).

2) *The action* that brought about the change (vv 7ff.): “Then the LORD God formed man....”

The account of the fall (Gen 2.25-3.1)

We can detect the same pattern in the introduction of the story of the fall in Gen 2.25-3.1. By taking Gen 2.25 as belonging to the narrative of the fall, we are contending with the chapter division. The observation that the man and the woman were naked and not ashamed does not connect with any theme in chapter 2. However, at two key points the narrative of Genesis 3 ties into this theme. The immediate effect of the knowledge of good and evil was that they knew that they were naked (Gen 3.7). After God passed his judgments, God took up the need of their nakedness (Gen 3.21). When we take Gen 2.25 as leading into the narrative of the fall, we can detect the same pattern that we found in the creation narratives.

1) Pre-existing conditions

- a) *The negative conditions*: the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. This stands in contrast to the state of people outside of the Garden.
- b) *The positive condition* that provided for the change: the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field (3.1).

2) *The action* that brought about the change (Gen 3.1bff.): “And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said....”

The parallel patterns that we have observed give us a perspective on the story of the fall. Like the creation accounts, this story shows how our world was shaped. The world in which we live is first of all God’s creation. But, it is also determined by human sin. This gives mankind a role alongside God in determining the shape of our world.

We have to be very clear about the difference between the roles of God and mankind. God is the creator, and everything he made was good. The first creation account closes with God looking at all that he had made and seeing it as very good (Gen 1.31), and God celebrated this by blessing the seventh day (2.1-3). The counterpart to this in the second account is Adam’s lyrical celebration of the creation of the woman by which his one lack was filled so that his state was good in every way. God’s good creation has endured the fall. All that God made is still with us. But, to it sin and its consequences have been added. This was due to the work of the serpent, Eve and Adam. The creatures have no share in the creative work of God. They raised nothing. They only brought about the fall. They only changed things and so made history.

To grasp the biblical view of the consequences of sin, it is important to observe that God did not reverse anything. We will see that he upheld and re-established the created order. Nothing in creation was reversed. But, he also did not reverse any of the effects of sin. History only has one direction, and that is forward. There can be no reversing. God moves ahead. He never moves backwards.

2. The scope of the change

There is a lot going on in Genesis 3. This is a witness to the fact that sin and its consequences are by no means simple and straightforward. Sin is very complex and complicates life immensely. However, Genesis 3 is tightly organized and well integrated. In our study, we will follow this order to keep everything together.

Genesis 3 presents a chiasm as follows:

A1. Becoming like God (vv 1-6)

The two issues defined by the first law are taken up:

- 1a) The serpent pushes the consequence of death out of view (vv 3-4)
- 2a) The focus is put on gaining the knowledge of good and evil (vv 5-6)

B1. The man and woman make loin coverings for themselves (v 7)

C1. God calls for Adam and inquires into what happened (vv 8-13)

Adam is pressed to respond to God

The order of blame:

- 1a) Adam
- 2a) Eve
- 3a) Serpent

C2. God judges (vv 14-19)

The order of judgment in reverse order to the blaming:

- 3b) Serpent
- 2b) Eve
- 1b) Adam

Adam responds to God (v 20)

B2. God makes clothes for the man and woman (v 21)

A2. Since they became like God... (vv 22-24)

God deals with the two issues defined by the law in inverse order to A1

- 2b) The acquisition of the knowledge (v 22), answering to vv 5-6
- 1b) The death sentence enforced (v 24), answering to vv 3-4

There are two types of consequences. The first is the immediate effect of the act of sin. Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of good and evil (A1), and this knowledge had the immediate effect of shame (B1), fleeing from God and pointing away from themselves (C1). The second type of consequence is imposed by God. God passed judgment on the parties involved in the act (C2) and carried out the sentence of the law, i.e., death (A2).

The consequences of the first sin fall into two categories. The first category is found in A1 and A2. The law defined two effects of sin. The name of the forbidden tree defined the immediate effect of eating from it—they would acquire the knowledge of good and evil. God's statement that they would surely die spelt out the final effect. The second category of consequences is found in C2. Here God gives his decrees for each of the parties (the serpent, the woman and Adam). These consequences are not the immediate result of the sin. They are judgments imposed on the creatures.

B. THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF SIN (Gen 3.7)

The knowledge of good and evil is not an effect that came in after Adam and Eve sinned but what they acquired through the act of sinning. In our previous study on the human dimensions of sin, we looked at the changes that overtook the human being in the act of this first sin. The mind was cut off from the word of God and decisions were made on the basis of stimulated desire. The change in the way Adam and Eve thought and made decisions took immediate hold of them. In Gen 3.22 the LORD God took note of the change and left them with it. The effect that sin had within the mental constitution of Adam and Eve was permanent.

Genesis 3.7 points out the first effect to follow the act of sin. This verse begins, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened...” In the act of sinning, the eyes were being opened, but the result was wide open eyes, and these eyes first of all turned on the sinners themselves. With the opened eyes, “...they knew that they were naked.”

In Gen 3.7, Adam and Eve found themselves in a state that is opposite to that described in Gen 2.25: they were naked and not ashamed. The link between nakedness and shame is assumed throughout the Bible. We must keep in mind that Genesis 1 to 3 was written for Israel in the fallen world. An Israelite only knew open and public nakedness as a shame, and he would understand from Gen 2.25 that this was not the case in the beginning. This sense of shame came about through sin. It is the first impact of the fall.

Adam and Eve’s shame has commonly been sexualized. A study of the themes of nakedness and shame in the Bible, however, does not confirm this narrow focus. Nakedness in the Bible means that one is stripped down to nothing, exposed to open view without any protection of one’s person. The word, shame, in English is an emotion term. It refers to the feeling of shame. The biblical words for shame, however, do not focus attention on the emotions but on the state in which one is found and seen. Shame comes about when one is found in failure or defeat or when one is disappointed by the fact that things have turned out contrary to one’s expectation and trust. A person who is naked is objectively in a state of shame, for he is found to be (and finds himself to be) without means, cover and protection. He is exposed.

The fact that Adam and Eve made loin coverings points to the fact that their sense of nakedness was focused on their private parts. But, this does not warrant us to speculate that they saw each other with roused sexual passion as objects of lust. Such passion is different from shame. There is nothing in the sacred text that brings in a sense of sexual lust. Sexual union of a man and his wife is presented as good and sanctioned by God for all time in Gen 2.24. When we read Gen 3.7 in connection with Gen 2.23-25, we can get a sense of the tragedy that occurred. The creation account ends with a celebration of the union of the man and woman in marriage, the sexual union. The climax of the creation is not the creation of the woman but the formation of the marriage union—two becoming one flesh. Sin had its first effect in this area. It was a fall from the climax and high point of creation. Their newly acquired knowledge brought in a sense of shame and deficiency in their gender identity, the very thing in which they were seen to be complementary and united in innocence. The separation between the man and woman was only deepened when Adam blamed his sin on the woman.

How did Adam and Eve (and through them mankind) come to find themselves in a state of shame? The answer lies in the phrase, “...they knew...” The verb, to know, refers to their newly acquired knowledge. This was not the acquisition of some information but the gaining of the power of knowing, the active knowing that the OT refers to when it speaks of knowledge. This knowledge of good and evil was the mental activity to look, evaluate and decide for oneself what is good or bad. Once Adam and Eve took this knowledge upon themselves, they could no longer see or accept things for what they were as given by God, for in that case it would be left to God to decide what is good and what is bad. Rather, they had to evaluate and decide for themselves, and the first object for this knowing process was themselves, and they found themselves lacking. Here lies the great trap for man. Once he took the power of knowing for himself, he no longer could accept himself as God made him. He had to evaluate himself and decide on his own dignity

and worth, but from within himself he could not establish his own dignity. He fell into self-doubt and self-depreciation.

God did not create man to have his identity and dignity within himself. As the image of God, man has his identity and dignity in God whom he is to represent. If he seeks his identity and worth in himself, he will never find it. His self-evaluation will result in a perception of deficiency and result in shame and deep disappointment with himself. Genesis 3.1-7 brings out an important feature of man's self-understanding. It is wrapped up with the way he relates to God. When he turned from God and sought to make himself like God, his self-understanding changed. Human beings' perception of themselves is inseparable from their relationship with God.

The mental powers activated by sin did not stop with the self-discovery of shame. Man was driven in his acquired knowledge. Adam and Eve turned from self-evaluation to invention, and found new uses for the leaves of fig trees and made loin coverings for themselves.

God took this human need up in Gen 3.21. Again we see that God did not reverse the effect. Rather, he provided suitable clothing, but in so doing he introduced the use of animals to meet human need. In Genesis 1 and 2, man was to rule over animals, but the creator gave no word that directed him to use animals to meet his own needs. This changed with the fall. Outside of the Garden, we see two industries. Cain, the farmer, continued in Adam's line of work to produce food from the ground. Abel, the shepherd, took up the work that would provide for mankind's need for clothing, the need that arose due to sin. When it came to bringing an offering to God, God chose Abel and his offering. The significance of this becomes evident when we read Genesis from the point of view of the role of animal sacrifice in Israel. God chose to relate to mankind in a fallen world through the provision for fallen life and not through what was provided for mankind before sin entered. Life had to be sacrificed to meet mankind's need in sin.

C. GOD TAKES OVER

During the temptation and act of sinning, God left Eve and Adam alone to decide and act. After they sinned, he left them to show how their knowledge would work out. Once they had satisfied themselves, God stepped in and took over. This action of God is the center piece of Genesis 3.

In Gen 3.8-19, God acts in two roles. First we see him walking in the Garden calling Adam and drawing him out (C1: Gen 3.8-13). Then we hear him pronouncing his decrees that set the course of the future (C2: Gen 3.14-19).

After the work of creation was completed, God rested. His work was finished. We see God stepping back into creation and undertaking his new work in Gen 3.8. God is not now creating as in Genesis 2 but walking and making his way through a world of sin. He is searching for the sinner and working out his judgments in a fallen world. God has continued in this role ever since.

1. The way God reconnects with mankind (Gen 3.8-13)

God did not suddenly appear before Adam and Eve. Rather, he made himself heard by them, and this means that he made them aware of his presence approaching at a distance. This gave Adam and Eve time to respond. Rather than seeking God in their plight, they hid themselves. This move shows how their newly acquired knowledge functioned in relation to God.

The loin coverings they sewed were sufficient to their human eyes. But, they proved worthless when Adam and Eve were made aware of God's presence. Get the picture—Adam was fully dressed to his own satisfaction but confessed to God that he was naked. But, even in hiding Adam and Eve show that they judge things only by the seeing of the eye. They think that if they are hidden to the human eye, they are hidden from God.

God does not move in on the hiding couple but calls the man and asks, “Where are you?” Throughout his discourse with Adam, God only interrogates. God’s intention is not to force it on Adam that indeed God has caught him and found him out. Rather, God calls him so that he has to answer and tell God where he is. This continues to be God’s approach to the sinner throughout the scriptures. He calls through his word, and the sinner must confess before God where he is. Jesus verified this reproach. In the parables of Luke 15, Jesus shows that he came to seek the lost, and then made it clear that the lost sinner is only found when he repents (Lk 15.7, 10). A sinner can be caught in the act and still be lost. He is only found when he locates himself before God in response to God’s word calling him.

Adam’s answer to God in v 10 further discloses the way the knowledge of good and evil works in the human mind. He told God how he felt (he was afraid) and gave the reason in his personal sense of lack (he was naked). Adam was focused on his emotions and what his eyes saw. He seemed to be oblivious to the fact the he had sinned. God had to point him to the act of sinning. This continues to be the case with people. They only see their problem before God in terms of their feelings and the deficiency they suffer in their self-evaluation. The word of God has to direct their attention to their sin as the problem.

The acquired knowledge has trapped Adam, and it does not release him to see things in light of God’s word. So, in response to God pointing to the sin, Adam pointed away from his act to the woman and to God who gave him the woman. God was pointing to *what* Adam did, and Adam answered with *why* it happened by pointing to the role of others. The woman followed his example, and pointed to the serpent. She, however, made herself more vulnerable in that she confessed that she was deceived. At least she confessed a fault.

The way Adam responded to God persists in the human race. John 3.19 and 20 says that “...the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

In the Garden, God gave Adam and Eve space to see how they would respond to him. Throughout history, God has continued in this way. In Acts 17.26-27 Paul says that God appointed to all nations their time and place “...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” Paul gives the verdict in his letters. In Rom 3.11 he quotes the OT saying, “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; they have all turned aside.” In 1Cor 1.21 he says that the world through its wisdom did not know God. The wisdom that Eve reached for prevented mankind from knowing or seeking God, and God left mankind to prove that this is indeed the case. Mankind was oriented toward the visible and toward human opinion. The Gentiles were locked in idolatry and the world they saw, while the Jews were oriented toward what is seen in the flesh and took their status from human opinion (Matt 6.1-6, 16; Jn 5.44; Rom 2.27-29).

After mankind proved its lost condition, God intervened. Paul announced this in Acts 17.30: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.” The apostle opens this up in 1Cor 1.21: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” People are wise in their own eyes and want to work out their wisdom. God also has his wisdom, and in that wisdom he has arranged things in such a way that mankind will prove that it will never find God by its own wisdom. This sets the stage for God to speak and save. We see God using this strategy from the beginning of the history of the lost race.

2. God’s decrees (Gen 3.14-19)

After Adam and Eve said what they had to say, God took over and gave his decrees for the fallen world. I call God’s pronouncements decrees rather than judgments because they function as the decrees that determine the course of life in the fallen world. God asserted his sovereignty over the fallen world.

The order in which sin entered was the inverse of God's created order. An animal (that in creation was placed under man) led mankind. The serpent worked through the woman who was created second and received everything from Adam. God placed Adam at the head and gave him the first law, and he had to impart it to Eve, but he took the last place in sin. When God came on the scene, he did not follow the order of sin. He followed his created order and called the man and drew him out to speak and give an account. Only when Adam pointed to Eve did God turn to the woman. This approach sets the way God will deal with sin in his decrees. He will work within his created order and establish that order in the fallen world.

Adam and Eve presented before God the chain of events through which they fell. While this deflected attention from their sin, it nonetheless pointed out all the parties involved and the lines along which sin worked. While the exercise of pointing fingers was not confession, it did provide vital information on the scope of the problem. God took this up and dealt with the full scope of the workings of sin.

In his decrees, God moves from the serpent, where sin began, through the woman to Adam. In each case, God gives a twofold decree. The first part deals with the party's place in creation, and the second part deals with the relationship in which the party stood in the process of sinning.

a. The serpent (vv 14-15)

The first part: the serpent is dealt with in its place among other animals (v 14). As the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field (v 1), so it will be more cursed than any animal.

The second part: the serpent deceived the woman, and God will turn the alliance into war (v 15). The serpent put the thought to sin into Eve's mind. In contrast, God said that he will put enmity between the serpent and the woman. The serpent worked on the woman, and through the woman its evil work reached the man. In parallel to this, the conflict begins with the woman, but it is extended to the male who will carry out the conflict, for the seed of the woman is masculine. The fact that the male seed must engage in the fight with the serpent and gain the victory may answer to the fact that Adam was given the role to guard the Garden against any possible danger, and the serpent posed the great danger.

God's announcement that he will instigate the conflict with the serpent through the woman's role in childbirth leads directly to God's decree for the woman.

b. The woman (v 16)

The first part: the woman's role in childbirth will have pain added to it.

The second part: the woman is put into her place in relation to the man (v 16b). In sin the woman led the man. God reasserted the created order in which the man was put in the first place both in the order of creation and in receiving the word of God. But, in the fallen world the created order would be re-established under stress, for the woman's desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her. The fact that the man will rule over her does not necessarily mean a despotic or forceful and hurtful rule. But, it definitely means that the man will assert his will over her, and this is not envisioned in Genesis 2. In the creation account, Adam is enthralled by the oneness between him and the woman, though he has the created order in view for he says that she was taken out of man. But, an adverse relationship is not in view in Gen 2.23. Through sin, the woman's self-will has stepped in, and she engaged the man in this self-will. God does not reverse that effect but imposes the created order over it.

The fact that God ended on the note of the man ruling over the woman provides a transition to his decree for Adam.

c. The man (v 17)

The first part: Adam was put in the Garden to cultivate it, and the food was given to him (vv 17-19a). In line with this, God assigned to Adam the task of working the ground to produce food. God put a curse on the ground for Adam's sake so that he would have to eat his food by the sweat of his brow.

The second part: the sentence of death was passed over Adam for two reasons. The sentence carried out the law that was given to him and not to Eve. Death would return mankind to the dust, and it was Adam rather than Eve who was taken directly from the ground. He stood in direct relation to the dust (v 19b).

The passing of the death sentence marks the end of God's decrees as well as the end of the narrative in v 24. The sentence of death was made to bear on man's state in life. In v 19, God does not say, "From dust you are, and to dust you will return." Rather, he says, "For you *are* dust..." The sentence of death was made to hang over his head and told him what he is separated from God. Similarly, being cut off from the tree of life, Adam and Eve had to live a dying life. The full force of this death sentence hanging over life is brought out in Heb 2.15. People through fear of death are subject to slavery all their lives.

3. Adam's response (Gen 3.20)

When God stepped into the fallen world, he engaged Adam and made him speak up. Under the divine pressure, Adam spoke reluctantly and evaded the confession of his sin. After God was finished giving his decrees for a fallen world, Adam again was made to respond to the divine word, but this time we notice a marked difference. God did not press him to speak against his own will. Adam spoke freely. This time he was not focused on himself, and he did not alienate his wife by pointing at her fault. In Gen 3.20 Adam spoke in a way that echoes his response to the woman in Gen 2.23. At that time, he discovered her as his wife and named her after himself and so conferred on her the full human dignity he had. This time, he learned of her role as the mother and named her Eve. Thus he conferred on her the honour of the role of mother.

We must see Adam's act of naming the woman, Eve, in its full context. God had just passed judgment over all the parties involved in the sin. The judgment fell particularly hard on Adam since the sentence of death was passed over his head. While Eve introduced the sin to him, he had to bear the legal responsibility for it. However, Adam did not respond to the doom and gloom. In the divine pronouncements of judgment, Adam heard the good news. The judgment on the serpent in v 15 assigned to the woman a seed, and God's decree over the woman gave her the role of bearing children. In this Adam heard a message of life. In the world into which death entered through him (and not through Eve), God would give life through the woman. Here is the one note in God's decrees that is creational—that new life would be given. This made Adam respond in the way he responded to the creation of the woman. It revived in him his created mindset.

Adam's naming of the woman as the mother of all living marks his own moment of faith after sin had overtaken his mind. We should step back and get a fuller view of this moment of faith. The knowledge of good and evil did not make Adam turn to God. God's search for Adam only drove him deeper into his disorientation. Under the searchlight, Adam sought to escape and evade the issue. Adam did not repent, and God did not stop over this to take another try at making him confess. Rather, God went ahead, asserted his role as the creator and decreed the way things would go forward. These decrees were divine judgments. But, God's judgments are the context for his salvation. The good news was couched in the announcement of judgment, and it was this good news that brought about faith in Adam.

What we are observing in the case of Adam is verified and confirmed in the NT. Jesus called people to repentance and faith as a response to the announcement that the kingdom of God had drawn near (Mk 1.15). The apostle Paul followed this logic in his message in Acts 17. He presented the truth of God in the context of creation and in this setting announced that God will judge the world. Then, in the setting of judgment he presented the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. Romans 2.4 says that the kindness of God leads to repentance. This kindness of God is seen against the background of God as creator and judge (Rom 1.18-2.16). People are brought to repentance by coming to appreciate the kindness of God in the

context of God's judgment. The law gives the knowledge of sin but does not change the heart. The searching light exposing sin only causes people to run away from the light because their deeds are evil. Judgment makes people gnash their teeth. Only the word of Christ brings about faith (Rom 10.17), and this is the good news of the hope of eternal life through the risen Christ.

In Adam's new faith and hope, we see a profound shift in his thinking. Acting under the effect of sin, he was self-centred. He was only concerned with his felt-needs. Now, he accepts a vision for life that is not about him. He will carry out his humiliating role of working by the sweat of his brow only to die in the hope of God giving life to a new generation. By taking up the future that God opened up, Adam showed that he was willing to offer his painful and vain existence to serve the purposes of God to bring life out of a world of death.

D. LIFE IN THE FALLEN WORLD

In the first law, God said to Adam that in the day he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die (Gen 2.17). As it turned out, he did not physically die on that day. The serpent cleverly pointed out to Eve, death was not the direct result of eating of the forbidden tree. Rather, eating of it would give knowledge, and this took place immediately. Genesis 3.22-24 show that it was the acquisition of this knowledge that made God carry out the death sentence over Adam, not by killing them but by cutting off access to the tree of life and so handing them over to live a dying life. True to God's word, in the day they ate their death was a certainty.

The delay of actual death meant that human life would have to be lived with the consequences of sin, and these consequences are mapped out for us in Genesis 3. All of the consequences of sin in Genesis 3 take effect in human life on earth. They are temporal and not eternal. The vision of eternal judgment is given later in scripture.

1. Inventory of the consequences of sin

The consequences of sin take in all of human life and all that mankind is related to. The first and immediate consequence is the effect that sin has on the human being himself. He has been loaded down with the knowledge of good and evil and cannot escape this burden. He found himself lacking and in need of something to make up that lack. This changed his relationship to the trees, using leaves to meet his personal and spiritual need, and God provided the animals to meet this need. So, man's relation to trees and animals has changed. In the last decree, God altered man's relationship to the ground. The ground was cursed because of him, and his personal relationship to the ground was reversed. The man who was made from dust would return to dust. The consequences of sin took over all of human existence and the whole of mankind's world.

God imposed the consequences of sin on Adam and Eve's roles and relationships within the created order.

Through the fall, the source of evil was also brought into the man's world and came under God's judgment on human sin. As revelation unfolds, we learn that the real tempter was Satan, the highest created angelic being. This means that sin drew in the heavenly order of created beings into God's judgment on human sin, and in his judgment on the serpent God engages the woman and the seed of the woman.

The consequences of sin also took over the entire history of the human race. The creator's decree that mankind rule and subdue the earth is now turned over to God's war with the serpent. Where the kingdom is invaded, war and conquest is the path to reigning. The war was not to be completed by Eve and Adam. It was only initiated through Eve in her role of bearing children. The children would be born in this conflict, and the future generations would have to play the conflict out in the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. This conflict will run through all generations, right to the end. The Book of Revelation closes the vision of history with the last battle, in which Satan will lead the multitudes of Gog

and Magog against the camp of the saints, and in this final battle history ends and the creation God made in Genesis 1 passes away.

To complete our inventory of the consequences of sin, we must also take note of how God was engaged by sin. He re-entered his creation to search for the lost and began to govern the course of life in a fallen world.

The consequences of sin draw in not just all of creation but all of being: the eternal God, the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

2. The continuity

Everything changed because of sin. But, all the changes had to go along the lines set by God's law and his created order. This fact is upheld throughout the scriptures. As Isaiah prophesies, while all flesh fades away, the world of the LORD endures forever (Ish 40.6-8). Jesus affirmed that the smallest part of God's word would have to be fulfilled before heaven and earth would pass away (Matt 5.18). He also said that heaven and earth will pass away but his word will not pass away (Matt 24.35).

The fact that the word of God endures forever in this world puts the spotlight on an important feature of our study. The dreams and intentions of the sinner do not continue. Only the consequences of sin as defined and decreed by God's word are irreversible. This gives us an important insight for dealing with sin. We must see sin and its consequences in terms of God's word.

3. Salvation and the consequences of sin

The consequences of sin are according to God's word, and they will never be reversed. In Gen 3.15, God announced his program of salvation, but this salvation is not a reversal of the effects of sin. Rather, it takes place within the consequences of sin in this life. God did not remove from Eve the knowledge of good and evil, and he does not remove the effects of sin on human nature in those who are in Christ. Rather, God works in us by the Spirit to yield to the Spirit's desires that are set against the desires of the flesh, and this is a painful experience. (Gal 5.17). The human burden of self-evaluation and the deep need to be covered is not removed in Christ. The need for clothing continues in our Christian life, and it is taken up in spiritual terms in the teaching to put on Christ (the image being that of a garment).

In Christ, the pain and toil added to the human roles in creation is not removed. The woman's pain in childbirth and the man's need to labour for food are not changed. The gospel did not bring changes in work conditions but only brought about changes in the worker who would do all as unto the Lord. Christ does not even change the end of life—that we live and labour in this world only to die at the end. Creation was subjected to futility (Rom 8.20), and the Christians as the heirs of salvation groan under the load alongside of creation (Rom 8.22-23).

The order of the relationship between husband and wife is not changed. The wife is to be subject to the husband in the Lord, and the husband is to be the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. The fact that the Christian marriage relationship is to be modelled after Christ and the church does not mean that the couple must never struggle against sin in the flesh that afflicts the relationship.

Just as God did not cut off the engagement of the woman with the serpent, so he does not isolate us from the evil one. Jesus prayer for his disciples was, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17.15), and they need this protection in the face of Satan's full assault on them. As God announced that he would engage the seed of the woman in his war with Satan, he engages us now. In fact, for us the battle is fully opened up. Our struggle is against the full hierarchy of the kingdom of darkness (Eph 6.12). The seed's victory of the serpent was guaranteed, for God said that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head. We struggle with promise that God will soon crush Satan under our feet (Rom 16.20). But, it still remains true that in so far as we gain a share in Christ's final victory over Satan, we will also have a share in his suffering. As sure as God has spoken, the serpent will bite the heel.

The direction and course of history has not changed. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Ac 14.22). The goal of entering the kingdom was set in the creator’s decree that mankind rule. The need to enter it through many tribulations is the ongoing effect of the fall—that we must enter it through conflict with the kingdom of darkness and only gain the victory through the bitten heel.

God’s entrance into the Garden was only a beginning. In Christ we see that the whole trinity became engaged in this work. The Father sent the Son to be the saviour of the world, and on the cross God became personally involved in man’s lost state in sin and death. The Father has to draw people to the Son. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and to empower the preaching of the gospel.

In Genesis 3 we see how God and all creation were beginning to be engaged in the consequences of sin. In the full revelation of God in Christ, we see how vast this engagement has become.

When we finally reach our eternal state, the effects of sin will not be reversed. We will enter our eternal state through resurrection. Resurrection is not resuscitation. In resuscitation death is reversed so that person comes back to life the way it was before death. Resurrection, in contrast, is life beyond death, and it is based on death. So, even in the new creation, the judgement of God on creation is not reversed. All will have been fully fulfilled, and that fact will be built into the very glory of the new creation.

Paradise lost is a fact, but the idea of paradise regained is a fiction. There is no reversal of sin or its effects. God only moves forward. The gospel does not call us to repent as an act of turning back to an ideal time and state in the past. It calls us to repent by turning forward to the coming kingdom, to what is to come and has not yet been. We turn to God’s future and not to our past. God is he who was and is and is to come. In light of him who was, we are called by him who is to turn toward him who is to come.

The closing scene of Genesis 3 shows that God knew that the human tendency would be to try to go back into the Garden and reverse the sentence of death. But, God blocked the way by stationing the cherubim with their flaming sword turning in every direction. In our study of the doctrine of angels, we saw that the cherubim are the guardians of God’s holiness. God is holy and apart from mankind. He alone is God, and this is sealed by the fact of death. Though man made himself to be like God in knowledge, he has his moment of truth in death. The death that looms before him confronts him with the fact that he is not a god. He is dust. To seek to reverse the death sentence over life in this world is fatal. Jesus confirmed this when he put down the law, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16.25).