

God's Gospel & Human Pride

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Bible Text: Genesis 3:5
Preached on: Sunday, September 18, 2016

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I'd like to say thank you for the warm welcome and the fellowship in the Gospel. It's good to be here to share in worship with you as we rejoice in the Gospel of grace and we turn in the word of God to Genesis 3 and we read the first 15 verses. Genesis 3 and verses 1 to 15.

1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. 8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. 11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? 12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. 13 And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. 14 And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Amen. May God bless his word to us.

It's verse 5 that we look at this morning. Verse 5,

5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

So this was the first temptation to the first human sin and it consisted of this temptation: ye shall be as gods. Ye shall be as gods and our theme this morning is "The Gospel and Human Pride." The Gospel and human pride.

A biblical view of sin is essential to a biblical view of God and of his character and of his way of salvation revealed in the biblical Gospel. Unless we get this right, we'll get everything else wrong. It is essential that we have a biblical view of God, of man, of sin, and of the way of salvation. God's glory is revealed in the way that he saves sinners, through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called the glorious Gospel of the blessed God or the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God because God displays his glory and shows how glorious he is through the way that he saves sinners, and his people whose hearts have been changed, they love the way God saves, they love God's salvation, they adore the God who is made known in that way of salvation, but in our society as a whole, the word sin is very unpopular but we must face up to its true reality if the Gospel of Christ is going to make any sense whatsoever. What is it that we need saving from? What is it that the Lord Jesus Christ came to save sinners from? He came to save his people from their sins. So we must face the fact of what the Bible says about man's sin. A headache tablet is not enough for a life-threatening illness nor is it right to pretend that the problem is a small one when, in fact, it's huge and we are utterly unable to meet it. So with salvation. If our view of sin is inadequate, so will our view of the cure be inadequate.

Now in Genesis 3, the account of the first human sin is rich in instruction as to what all sin is like. If we understand what this teaches about sin, we will understand what sin really is like. So the first thing is the unbelief of sin. The unbelief of sin. Sin always involves loving a lie. Sin always involves declaring that the truth of God is not true. It always involves a love of darkness rather than light and we see in this sin the characteristic of all sin including our own.

We see that sin prefers lies about God. Sin prefers lies about God. You see that the implication is from Satan's words, that God isn't fair in verse 1, "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said," has God said, "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Satan's suggestion is that there is an unfair restriction here. "Can you not eat of every tree? Why not every tree?" And surely there is an unnecessary limitation here and a denial of human rights. We have all sorts of rights but many of them are imaginary. The only rights that matter are God-given rights. That's the only human rights we have, but here you can almost run forward to our own day, being unnecessarily restricted.

In chapter 2, verse 16, "the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." There the emphasis is on what they could eat, but now there's a prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but against a background of abundant provision by God, but here the emphasis of Satan is on the restriction that, "This tree you can't eat. Is it really the case that you can't eat of all the trees?" And in verse 3, we find the woman saying, "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." She's already listening. She exaggerates the restriction and says, "neither shall ye touch it." Well, God hadn't said that but it's the implication that there is something sinister going on; that there's a restriction that isn't really necessary.

So she's already listening and already taking note that God has restricted what she imagines to be her freedom, her rights. She should have been suspicious why was the serpent talking to her in the first place, but she isn't. She willingly takes hold of the hint of unnecessary restriction and to this day, to this day men have characterized biblical Christianity as a killjoy affair involving ludicrous restrictions and caricatured Christianity, something that they would find intolerable and that the Christian life is dull, dreary, drab and opposed to any enjoyment of any kind. Of course if men love sins, then the Christian life does seem dreary and drab to them, that's because it's contrary to their nature, but young people often have this idea, "Well, I'd like to enjoy my life first. I'd like to have a good time before becoming a Christian," as if having Christ as our Savior is a bad time. That's really what it's saying, that to have a good time without Christ, means having Christ is a bad time, and it shows what they really think of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't fall for that deception. There is no good time apart from in the Lord Jesus Christ. But at any rate, men feel justified in rejecting God's word as intolerably restrictive.

Also you see that the implication that God can't be trusted. Verse 1, "Hath God said? Has God really said it? Has he really said you can't eat of all of the trees?" This is a suggestion that God can't really have said something so ludicrous, so outlandish but, you see, Satan is gradually stepping up his attack and in verse 4 he says straight out, "Ye shall not surely die. It's not true. It's not true." But he starts with a suggestion that this restriction is unwarranted, it's unreasonable, and you can't take God at his word, then he comes full on, "You shall not surely die."

Then he suggests in verse 5 again, that the reason for it all is a very sinister one, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." In other words, the implication is that God's motive is suspect, that what God is really concerned about is to retain somewhat unsteady supremacy. In other words, he's attacking the nature of God. His suggestion is entirely incompatible with what we know about God, that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Satan is suggesting he's none of those things, he is an unsteady dictator and it's time you tried something else.

So he deliberately suggests that what God has commanded is actually due to an ulterior motive, and then he suggests that God does not really know best. You can't trust him because his reasons are self-interest and you don't really, you shouldn't take notice of

him. So in verse 5 we read, "then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." You see, he's saying here, "Don't take God's word for it. You just work it out for yourself. God isn't to be trusted. His reasons are unsound, his character is not what it's cracked up to be, and his word cannot be relied on." And you see, Satan is the father of lies. He first suggests, then he asserts, and then he speaks against God.

That's how Satan works and the result, of course, is quite contrary to what Satan promised, but he's telling Adam and Eve to be independent of God. "Don't listen to God. Don't think you need God. You can manage well enough independently of God," and that is what is the essence of sin, the desire to be independent of God. Sin is transgression of the law, that is the law of God, and we transgress that law whenever we seek to deprive God, we can't but we seek to deprive God of his prerogatives and that's what's going on here. Sin in its essence is the desire to be independent of God and the result is because we as a human race don't accept God's rules, there are no rules, or there are rules imposed about the survival of the fittest. They impose their rules on the weak but there are no fixed rules with God as the only lawgiver and so man says, "I can work it out. I'll work it out for myself." And in an increasingly anti-God age and an increasingly ungodly age in your country and in mine, we find the outworking of this: the abortion clinics; the debate about euthanasia; same-sex marriage. What is it but man saying he knows better than God. He knows when human life begins. He knows when it should end. And God's creation distinction between male and female, we've got to obliterate that, we've got to get God out of it altogether and it seems that as a society in the West, we are determined to invent evil things and to deny God in every way possible so that even the basic distinction between male and female, obvious as it is, is nonetheless denied. Sin is irrational and you must reckon with that, that the fact that something is absurd does not mean that it won't be believed and embraced by even intelligent men.

The reason why society is in the mess that it is goes back to Eve, then to Adam, the one in whom all became sinners. That's why. This chapter explains the state that we're in and it's because man does not want to retain God in his knowledge, that is, the living and true God. At most, they either deny God or, at most, they substitute an idea of God that fits their own imagination, but this unbelief is of the essence of all sin, including ours. There is no sin which does not entail the sin of unbelief.

Every time we sin, and we do, we're saying Psalm 1 is not true. Every time. The Scripture says, "Blessed is the man who hath the God of Jacob for his help." And we're saying, "No, it's not true." "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord." And we're saying, "No, it's not true." Every time we sin, every time we sin we're saying that our blessedness and our happiness or our safety requires us to sin. That's why we do it. We think that we'd be happier or safer if we sinned. In other words, we're discontented with God. We are saying that the Lord, the Scripture says the Lord satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness, every time we sin we're saying, "That's not true. We need this sin." that's what sin is really like. When we view sin in that light, what we're really saying about God himself, sin should be abhorrent to the people of God.

If we knew the scope of the promise of God, for example in Hebrews 13:5 where he says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," we wouldn't be covetous, we'd be content in the Lord. If we knew the scope of that promise and understood it fully, why would we ever sin? It's interesting that in the book of Hebrews it's immediately following, "Be content with such things as you have. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." That promise is enough to kill covetousness and to kill every other love of sin.

Well now, secondly, the pride of sin. The pride of sin. "Ye shall be as gods," or as God, like God. The desire for independence of God in knowledge and in practice is, as we've said, the essence of sin, as if freedom was found in breaking loose from God. The devil is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning and he pretends that the threatened judgment of God will not come, and that it will lead to greater independence of him. The real result was that they became estranged from God. We remember when God was said to walk in the cool of the day and Adam says, "I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid." Fancy that, here is Adam afraid, afraid of God. He hadn't been afraid before but he's afraid now.

And the outworking of sin, how did it work out? By the offense of one, Adam, many were made sinners. How did that work out in practice? Well, you see that in Genesis 3:12, "And the man said," when God interrogates him about what they've done, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Shirking responsibility is not new and here we have Adam, "You see, it's not really my fault. The woman that was given to me, she gave me. In fact, you gave me the woman so it's not my fault, it's the woman's fault, in fact, it's God's fault." And the woman says, "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." You see, it's always somebody else's fault.

Then the first recorded death in Scripture was a murder and a martyrdom and within a family, Cain killed Abel. If you want to know where the origin of family dysfunction, it's all here. It's all here. This is a family and the man is blaming the woman that God gave him and she is blaming the serpent, and their two sons, Cain and Abel, Cain kills Abel because Abel was a believer. Right at the start.

Circumstances may bring out this sin but the problem is in the heart of man. The problem is human pride. We love sin. By nature we love sin, but you know, sin is not like holiness because it doesn't satisfy even those who love it. And it doesn't, the love of sin can never satisfy the soul because man is a creature of God and only God can satisfy the soul. But this God as the author and the only one who can give man blessedness, man by nature hates so he hates the very source of blessedness.

If we deny the one lawgiver, God, then we have no real rules but it doesn't work, and we're seeing that it doesn't work in our society. But it doesn't work. Have you ever wondered why celebrities sometimes commit suicide? They have everything that the

world thinks is important, fame, money, power, and yet a remarkable number of them end up in despair. Why? How do you explain that, that people who have everything should take their own lives? Well, it's really perhaps even more so than those who don't, and the reason is simple: they have the means to go through the whole range of sin more quickly than others. So Satan keeps us thinking that a certain sin, that'll really solve our problems, and we aspire to it and perhaps we get there but it turns out to be a damp squid, it's not what it promises, and so we listen to Satan and we try something else. Most people live and die still aspiring but celebrities, they have the means, they have the money, they can get through the whole range in a short space of time and each successive sin proves to be empty and they reach the end of the line quicker than the ordinary person. So while the more pedestrian types are still aspiring that something will fit the bill, they've tried it all and found that it doesn't and they despair and that's why people who seem to have the most reach despair more quickly often, not always, often than those who don't.

So man naturally denies God, wishes he didn't exist or was not, at least, like he truly is, and he craves a low view of God so that he can commit sin with impunity, he thinks, a good conscience, or at least an untroubled conscience, and he pretends that this is normal, and he pretends that death is normal. Now death is universal, in that sense it is normal. Physical death is normal in that it happens to everyone, but it is not normal in that man by creation was not born mortal, he was not born or rather not created in order to die. It was not built-in. It's not natural in that sense, it's not part of the created order. Although God knew and foreordained that it would happen due to man's sin, yet in his state of innocence, man was created without the corruption and without the mortality that later became his.

But death still comes. You see, sin said, "Ye shall not surely die," but man did die and is dying and will die in every sense of the word. Physical death comes, it comes to everyone. It's amazing how people who see themselves as practical people, they don't prepare for what is inevitable. People who prepare for every eventuality that might happen in this life, don't prepare for the inevitable fact of death. They say, "I'm a practical man and gauge whether the summer is going to be good or we're going to have a harsh winter," but they never prepare for death even though death is inevitable. There's nothing practical about not being ready for death.

You remember Pilate, he was standing in front of the Lord Jesus Christ, the truth itself, and Christ said, "He that is of the truth will hear my voice," and he shrugged his shoulders, he said, "What is truth?" and he walked away. That's the attitude of multitudes of men, even though they know that death is natural and they've tried to make physical death nicer because it's inevitable instead of preparing for what lies beyond death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." And Satan was telling a lie when he said, "Ye shall not surely die." Man is liable to the miseries of this life, to death itself unto the pains of hell forever.

So much for man's proud delusions of grandeur, his desire to be as God. As a result, he becomes estranged from the living God, he becomes subject to the miseries of his life, to death itself, and unless he's saved, he becomes liable to the pains of hell forever. The

third thing is the Gospel as the contradiction of human pride. The Gospel as the contradiction of human pride. In verse 15 we read, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Deliverance would come through the promised Savior suffering and dying as well as triumphing gloriously in his resurrection. God would reassert his Lordship in Jesus Christ both in salvation and in judgment. God will manifest that he is Jehovah, that he is the Savior of his people and that he is the Judge of his and their enemies in Jesus Christ, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So God has committed to the Son the work of redemption accomplished. He came to do the will of him that sent him. He came to live a life of perfect obedience and yet poured out his soul as an offering for sin and bore the wrath of God in the place of sinners. God spared not his own Son. God gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life and yet God will vindicate that he is the Lord not only in the salvation of sinners but in the judgment of sinners. He hath committed all judgment to the Son because he is the Son of Man. God will demonstrate that Jesus Christ is Lord and in so doing will reassert the finality, the kingship of God himself.

All false religion is not man seeking after God but seeking to get away from God. That's where false religion comes from whether it's pseudo-christian or whether it's openly pagan. It makes no difference. It is man trying not to retain the knowledge of the living and true God in his mind. He wants to hold down the truth in unrighteousness. That's what we're told in Romans 1. The idolatry of the pagan world is not there attributed to men seeking God but not making it, it's attributed to men holding down the truth, denying God, and all false religion, pseudo-christian and pagan, exists because men want to be as gods and because they don't want to submit to the only revelation of God. The true religion, biblical Christianity, contradicts this idea, "Ye shall be as gods," at every point. The way God saves sinners is at every point a contradiction of human pride.

Man, to be saved, has to learn, like Jonah as we've been hearing, that salvation is of the Lord in its entirety. You see, false religion either tells you you don't need to be saved, like liberal Protestantism, everybody's alright as they are, or else that you can do it in part or in full by yourself. You can save yourself, at least partly. Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation is shared between God and man and many false religions teach the same thing. It's a shared effort. Islam teaches that you can save yourself and if you're a failed Muslim, the way out is martyrdom. That'll wipe the slate clean. The suicide bomber is not the mystery that we think, all he is is an extreme form of self-righteousness that he knows he hasn't measure up even by Muslim standards but this will do the trick. But it won't. It won't. When he presses the button and he blows himself and others to pieces, the God of heaven is unimpressed. Not one of his sins is taken away. Only the biblical Gospel teaches that God is a just God and a Savior. That's why Christians and the so-called church leaders should be shouting from the housetops that we only believe in a holy and just and gracious God. The liberal is useless in the face of Islam but for all the severity of Islam and all the atrocity, they don't believe in a holy God. We do. We believe that the justice of God will be satisfied through the atonement of Jesus Christ alone. The necessity of the atonement, the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel should be proclaimed

as the real answer to militant Islam. Their God is not holy. Their God is not just. He'll be fobbed off with a mere suicide. What sort of God is that? But our God is holy, just, righteous. He condemns sinners to outer darkness forever but he receives sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ alone in him. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So the biblical Gospel contradicts the pride of man at all points. It tells him he does need salvation but he cannot save himself, and it tells him that even the willingness to depend upon Jesus Christ comes from God. Man is so dependent that even the willingness to believe comes from God. Not only have all sinned and all need Christ, but the willingness to depend upon Jesus Christ comes from God. God in election has chosen the heirs of salvation not for anything superior in them. 1 Corinthians 1 makes that clear, not many noble, not many wise are called but God has chosen the foolish things of this world. By and large, the elect, his elect are made up of nobody's in order to make it clear that God is utterly unmoved and unimpressed by anything in the individuals and so even the willingness to believe, to depend on Christ comes from God.

But you say, "Surely if anyone wants Christ, they can have Christ." Of course they can, but why is it the Gospel is preached and some people receive the truth and some people don't? Some people find Christ a rock of salvation but others find him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, why is that? Is that because one set of people are superior to another? No, it's because God makes the difference. You don't find the Apostle Paul congratulating the saints on their wise use of their so-called independent free will, on the contrary he says, "Let God be thanked that you obey from the heart that form of sound doctrine which was delivered unto you," Romans 6:17.

So the whole of salvation is of God and that's the difference between biblical Christianity and everything else. People say, "Well, it's all the same. Religion is all the same." No, it isn't. False religion one way or another flatters the pride of man. The true religion, biblical Christianity, attributes the whole of salvation to God.

And what is the effect of this new nature, this being born-again, this being quickened or made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins? It means that we want to do what by nature we are not willing to do, depend on Jesus Christ for acceptance with God. That's why there can be no faith in Christ without repentance. The two always go together because to trust in Jesus Christ means we turn away from this delusion, "Ye shall be as gods," and we say we're not, not at all, we're not God, not god of anything and we're not certainly god of our own salvation, not in any part, but we depend on Christ alone.

That church is most faithful who denies with the most complete consistency that man is God. That church is most faithful which denies with most consistency that man is God. The contradiction of this lie of Satan consistently is what marks a faithful church as the pillar and ground of the truth that the church is meant to be. Don't grow impatient with your form of worship. I hope you don't because it's the outward expression of this: we're not God. We don't know how to worship God unless God tells us and God blesses the means that he has appointed to our souls. That's what our form of worship is all about,

that we're not God and it's sad to see the church being reduced to a tug-of-war between whose will will prevail, whether what I like or what you like or what somebody else likes. Who cares. It's what God approves and appoints that matters.

He is God and we're not but it comes down to this at most basic level: has this work of submission to God as God begun? Has it begun? Have you been born from the Spirit? Do you depend on Jesus Christ alone for salvation? By nature we're not willing to depend. That's the essence of our sin, unwillingness to depend. Are you, have you been changed? Are you willing to depend on Jesus Christ alone for acceptance with God? If you are, then this is the work of the Spirit because it's not natural to you. Yes, the Gospel is freely offered to you but by nature we're much too proud to depend on Jesus Christ and the willingness to depend upon him is a sign that God has changed your heart.

But it's not the case, or is it the case, that you're still playing down the reality of your guilt before God? You're still saying, "Well, alright, nobody's perfect but my sins aren't that serious and God certainly shouldn't send me to hell for my sins. I haven't done anything terrible. I haven't done anybody any harm." Is that what you're saying, making excuses for your sin? Well, those sins that don't seem so bad in your sight, let me tell you, they are offensive to God and the living and true God, not the God of liberalism, not the God that society wants to believe in, but the living and true God who speaks in the Scriptures says you are a sinner and your sins are serious and your sins do deserve the damnation of God and your only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two places where God fully punishes sin. At Calvary, Christ the substitute bore the penalty of sin in the place of sinners. Those who are in him are safe. They're like in a forest fire, they're on the burnt ground, they're where the fire has been, they're safe. But those who are not in him are liable to the wrath of God themselves alone. Your sin, my sin, everybody's sin will be punished by the just and holy God of heaven but if we are in Christ, Christ has borne the wrath of God for us and in our place so the Christian's testimony is, "He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Trust him. Trust him. Depend upon him and you'll not go wrong, you'll not go astray. He is the Savior. He receives all sinners who trust in him alone. When he was in this world, he told men and women and he still tells men and women through his ministers, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Amen.