

#1. THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

In this series of articles, we will study the core elements of the message of salvation by faith. But first, why was such a message needed? The simple answer is, had Adam and Eve remained faithful to God and refused to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would not have sinned, there would have been no fall, and no such message would have been needed. To understand then, just how good the good news or Gospel really is, we must look at what happened to Adam and Eve.

16) And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17) But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Genesis 2:16,17

Adam and Eve had been warned by God not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Should they remain obedient to God no harm would come to them for angels that excel in strength would be sent to their help. However, if they should once yield to temptation, they would fall. Their nature would become so depraved that in themselves they would have no strength and no desire to resist Satan.

However, the serpent in the Garden beguiled Eve and she ate. Adam succumbed and ate of the forbidden fruit as well.

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. Genesis 3:6,7

There were immediate consequences for the guilty pair. They lost their God-provided covering. Knowing they were naked, they fled the area around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for a cluster of fig trees, there to fashion a covering of their own. But rather than the fig leaf garments hiding their sin, they were a swift witness to their sin and the loss of their innocent garments. This is a key question regarding redemption: will man's covering ever be adequate again? Will God accept man's covering as a suitable replacement for the loss sustained by Adam and Eve?

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. Genesis 3:8-10

Adam and Eve, had loved communion with God. Now at His approach, guilt and the fear of impending wrath caused them to flee and hide in the midst of the garden. Though God's love for them had not changed, Adam and Eve had changed. Their natures were no longer pure. They were now fallen and they began to blame God for their predicament.

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. Genesis 3:11,12

Adam and Eve gained an experience in self-righteousness. Self-justification is one great manifestation of man's fallen condition. Their natures were now evil. Instead of being in harmony with God, they were now in harmony with the master they had chosen, Satan. All Adam's children down to our day suffered the consequences. Each of us is born with a fallen nature that has no desire to follow God and no power to do so even if we wanted to.

12) Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: Romans 5:12

It was by the one man, Adam, that sin entered our world. As a result, all have sinned. The tree is known by its fruit. This places each of us in the terrible position of deserving of death for the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). It is the law of God whose commands we have broken, that points out those sins and condemns us to death.

20) Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20

The knowledge of sin comes through the law. The law is the great detector of sin. The law condemns sin not only in our outward actions, but in the sins of the heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said sin can occur in our thoughts.

27) Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:
28) But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Matthew 5:27,28

Like other sins, adultery can be committed in the heart as well as in outward action. All that is lacking is the opportunity. Paul, the apostle, understood sin can be inward as well when he wrote of his experience of learning the law says, "Thou shalt not covet."

7) What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Romans 7:7

Covetousness is a sin of the mind. It is an inordinate desire to have something that belongs to someone else. Yet Paul wanted to do right, but 'the law of sin' in his members, in his body, made him do otherwise.

18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. 19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my

mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Romans 7:18-23

As a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, even when we want to do right, our nature does not have the strength to do what is right and pulls us in the opposite direction. There is an antagonistic principle within us that seems to dominate our actions. The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:22) went away sorrowful because he had great possessions he didn't want to let go of. He was inwardly covetous.

Paul, at one point in his life, thought he was perfect in God's sight.

6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Philippians 3:6

He felt that he was a good person, a noble person. He felt his character was flawless until he realized, as we've seen, that sin also has to do with the thoughts as well as the actions. How about us? If sin were only outward, we could dress right, eat right, and go to church, but still be in a lost condition. It is only when we see ourselves as sinners that we'll see our desperate need of a Savior. When Isaiah saw a vision of God, he said, "Woe *is* me! for I am undone (or lost)." Daniel said, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption." Nicodemus was startled to learn that God's kingdom is too pure for him. Peter said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man" and Paul said he was the chief of sinners.

So how deep does this problem go? How firmly rooted in us is this power that keeps us from being able to follow God.

7) Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Romans 8:7

The carnal mind or unconverted mind is not and cannot be subject to God's law. It's not capable of it, as a result of Adam and Eve's fall. Yet the mind is the source and spring of my actions; it's who I am. There is in my nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, I cannot resist.

Paul expresses this to the Ephesian church. He says in the past,

...we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 2:3

By nature, we were the children of wrath, people under the condemnation of the law, subject to eternal death. We were disobedient because we could not do otherwise. Sinfulness is our inheritance as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve.

3) The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Psalm 58:3

From our very births, we are estranged from God. The matter begins even before we are born.

5) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:5

We were shaped, or formed, in iniquity. This iniquity was not a sin on the part of David's mother. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that David was born out of wedlock or that in some way his birth was a result of the sins of his parents. There was no evil in the conception of David. But like every other child born to Adam and Eve's descendants, David, was born with a corrupt nature. Though the law of God still requires of every man, woman and child, perfect righteousness, perfect obedience, all we have to offer are fig leaf garments. All we can do is what the strength of our fallen nature allows.

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we're sinful and unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. As a result, we have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims God's law. But we are very good at crafting fig-leaf garments. We are very good at self-justification. Our heart has many ways of telling us, "You are not that bad, you are a good person." Our heart tells us the fig-leaf garment looks very nice on us.

9) The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?
Jeremiah 17:9

But our heart lies to us. It is deceitful and desperately wicked. It tells us we are not that bad. Perhaps you are thinking that of yourself right now! If so, your heart is deceiving you. Our heart, our nature, is depraved, deformed, and wholly unlike the character of God and we cannot change them.

This fallen heart is the fountain, the platform, the springboard of sin.

19) For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: Matthew 15:19

It is out of the heart that evil thoughts and actions proceed. Actions are first incubated in mind. Sin is more than just outward actions. Sin had to do with the mind. Paul saw his inability to keep the law. He understood the condemnation of the law towards his thoughts and actions. He knew, too, that the reward for his sins was eternal death. He thus cried out for deliverance.

24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?
Romans 7:24

Our fallen natures cannot keep the law of God, even if it wanted to. Without Christ, without union with him, we can do nothing... The law requires us to present to God a holy character. It demands of you today just what it demanded of Adam in Eden,—perfect obedience, perfect harmony with all its injunctions in all the relations of life, and under all circumstances and conditions. No unholy thought can be excused, no unlovely action can be justified. Because the law requires that which you of yourself cannot supply, you are found guilty before God's law, and it is not within the power of the law to pardon you. The bar cannot be lowered to meet you in your fallen condition. There can be no compromise made between you and the law to take less

punishment than you deserve. The law cannot acquit you, cleanse you, or give you power to raise yourself into a purer, holier atmosphere. Standing before a holy, good, and just law, and finding yourself condemned because of transgression, you may well cry out, What shall I do to be saved?

What a predicament we find ourselves in! The law demands unblemished obedience and we are incapable of ourselves of rendering it. This is why we need a gospel message. Before we accept Christ as our Savior, we have a nature with no desire to obey, with no strength to obey even if we wanted to, a 'deceiving heart' which tells us everything about our fig-leaf garments is 'OK' and a law that demands flawless obedience or suffer the consequences of eternal death. We thank God our situation is not hopeless.

5) Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: Hebrews 10:5

When Adam and Eve fell, the work of Christ's mediation began. He intervened and saved them from immediate death. They were placed on probation to give them time to return to their allegiance to God. This probation embraced all their offspring.

Some 2,000 years ago, a Voice was heard from the throne of God saying, 'Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart.' Jesus was to come to earth to seek and save the lost. He was to be born as a baby, grow to manhood and die as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He had a plan to solve the human dilemma, "How can a man be just with God?"

God has plan, but we must first see ourselves as sick in order to see our need of a physician. We must see ourselves as lost without the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. The rest of these studies will consider these questions.