

Session 2

THE STORY OF SEPARATION

John 1:10-13; Genesis 3:1-7

Memory Verse

² *The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. ³ But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’”*

– GENESIS 3:2-3, CSB

The Story of Separation

THEOLOGICAL THEME: All people are born with corrupted hearts that have a propensity toward rebellion against God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). None is righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10).

❓ Have you ever heard anyone refer to a car as a “lemon”? What are some characteristics of a car that is described this way?

❓ Have you ever had the experience of purchasing a car that fit this description? How did you deal with the situation?

The word “lemon” has long been used to refer not only the citrus fruit that is a staple in southern iced tea and with fried catfish, but to a product of substandard quality. It is especially used to refer to a used car that is presented as being in good condition, only to be discovered to be the opposite after purchase. Most states have laws known as “lemon laws” that help protect buyers from being deceived into purchasing a vehicle that is in bad condition but is presented as being in good working condition.

In our study of the Scriptures today we will consider a different kind of lemon: a spiritual lemon. The Bible teaches that all people are born into this world with a

“lemon” of a soul. There are many folks that look from the outside as though everything is in good working in order, but inside is a corrupted, malfunctioning soul.


The Bible says that the “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9) and that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:10) The common belief in Western culture today is that people are inherently good and that people do evil things because they have been pushed to do so due to their circumstances. In this view of the world, the way to foster a safer, more just, and productive society is to work to remove all influences that might cause people to do harm to one another. Thus, much effort is made to alleviate poverty, create jobs, secure medical care for everyone, and expand educational opportunities. These are noble causes and would benefit any community. However, they leave the root of the problem untouched. We might as well put a new coat of paint on a vehicle that has a cracked block.

Session Summary


John wrote his Gospel to show that Jesus was the Christ so that people would believe. John’s message isn’t simply informational for information’s sake. He wasn’t endeavoring to create an accurate record simply for historical reference. John’s message is timelessly important, applicable, and life changing. Why? Because of the fix that John’s readers (including us) were in. John expressed this at the beginning of his gospel.

In this lesson we will consider John’s words and what he meant. We will examine the problem of sin and man’s relationship to sin. We will specifically consider the origin of man’s sinfulness, the depth of man’s corruption, and the consequences of our sinful state.

1. Lest You Die (Genesis 3:1-7)

 After God rested from creating the heavens and the earth and all that they contain, what did He see according to Genesis 1:31? How does this compare to our experience of the world today?

The book of Genesis records that “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed.” All of God’s creation was good and pure and right. The quality of the creation reflected the character of the Creator. The creation was good because God Himself is good. It lacked nothing and gave testimony to the greatness and glory of God. Furthermore, God’s creation is self-revealing. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20) God’s general revelation of Himself to the world through creation is an act of mercy and grace by which He prepares hearts to respond to the gospel with faith and repentance.

 Look back at Genesis 1 and 2. What do we know about the nature and purpose of mankind from the creation account? How was mankind intended to bring God glory?

Mankind has been given the great privilege to bring glory to God by our own freewill. All of creation glorifies God simply by existing and fulfilling their roles by nature and instinct. Mankind, however, was given the capacity to glorify God beyond our natural state of existence, as well as to blaspheme Him. Thus, our nature is distinct from the rest of creation in that we are image bearers of our Creator, and our purpose is distinct in that we may choose to glorify ourselves instead of God.

Adam and Eve were to give glory to God by trusting and obeying Him. God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden where they enjoyed God’s good creation and an intimate relationship with the Creator. Not only did God speak the world into existence, but He also spoke directly to Adam. God told Adam that he was permitted to eat freely from every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He promised that death would come if Adam partook of that tree. (Genesis 2:16) All matter obeyed God in Genesis 1, and God was glorified. Would Adam and Eve trust and obey God’s words and bring Him great glory?

The result of Adam and Eve’s (and ours) sin was full and final spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Yet, they still had physical life and they weren’t completely cut off

from God. They were able to look to God for the hope of redemption because of his promise to them in Genesis 3:15, but their hearts of flesh had been replaced with hearts of stone. The communion that they enjoyed with God was shattered (Isaiah 59:2). Instead of basking in the warmth of God's love they now had to seek shelter from His consuming wrath. Yet God promised that He would send a Redeemer. The seed of the woman would one day come to destroy the work of the enemy. The curse would be lifted. A Rescuer would come (Genesis 3:15).

? Application Question: Do you believe that God's character and His Word are completely trustworthy? How do your life and actions give evidence for what you believe?

2. Bent from Birth (John 1:10-13)

The tragedy in the garden and the ensuing drudgery that is the story of mankind's constant rebellion against a merciful and gracious God was the backdrop of John 1 and the coming of the Redeemer. Intermingled with the astounding news that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us is the description, "the world did not know him" and "his own people did not receive him" (vv 10c, 11b). How can this be? How could people see the power, teaching, and compassion of Jesus Christ and still not recognize Him and reject Him? The answer can be traced all the way back to the garden.

? How was Adam's sin connected to the reality that mankind rejected Jesus at His coming? Why are we unable to change the impact of sin in our lives apart from Christ?


In Adam we all sinned (Romans 5:12ff). Our sin problem started with Adam. When sin infected the heart of Adam and Eve, it infected all that would come after them. It may be helpful to think of sin as a disease that is passed from parent to child. Sin is the spiritual disease that infected Adam and Eve and has been passed down to

every person throughout history. In sin we were conceived (Psalm 51:5). This means we are born in need of a spiritual heart transplant (see Ezekiel 36). It also means that we are bent from birth toward sin. Have you ever noticed that sin comes naturally to children? They don't have to be taught how to lie to their parents or steal from their siblings. Sin is already in them waiting for opportunities to be exercised.

You may have noticed this in your own life. Have you ever wondered why sinning comes so easily and righteousness is so difficult? Paul said, "For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15). We know this from experience. If we can't relate to Paul, it isn't that we have become so mature that we forgot what it feels like to battle, it's that we have become extremely adept at self-deception (1 John 1:8). Like Adam, we have all acted without any outside compulsion and deliberately transgressed God's law. If we are honest, even Christians still battle this tendency. However, those of us in Christ will increasingly hate sin, grieve when they commit sin, and walk in humble repentance rejoicing in the effectual work of Christ on the cross for their sin.

This cancer of sin that infects our souls is in stage 4. It's reached every organ, every appendage, and every cell. We are radically corrupted. There is no part of our being that has been left untouched by the scourge of sin. We are indeed in a hopeless situation. If you are wondering about the net effect of our radical corruption, flip on the news this evening. Visit the Holocaust museum. Look up the latest numbers on children in the foster care system.


It may seem hard to believe, but the human heart and the actions that follow are only the opening act. Not only are we infected by and enslaved to sin, but also all are under the wrath of God facing the price for our sinfulness unless some outside force intervenes.

 **Application Question:** How have you experienced the reality that you are unable to turn from sin on your own? Have you experienced freedom from areas of sin in your life through Christ? If so, share what this has been like.

3. Under God's Wrath (John 1:10-13)

The sinful condition itself is terrible. The thoughts, words, and actions that our sinfulness produces are nauseating. But what makes a corrupted state so desperate and hopeless is the fact that it places us against God. Those who remain in their sin are God's enemies and under His wrath.

 How can we reconcile the wrath of God with the great love of God? What does it mean to be under the wrath of God?

 Why must Christians tell others the truth about God's wrath in order to truly love them?

God has shown His lovingkindness to all his creation in a multitude of ways. He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). All things have their existence because of God's grace and kindness. It is not wrong to say that God has shown His grace, mercy, and lovingkindness to all people. However, this show of love does not indicate that all people won't be held responsible for their sins. The fact is that all sin will be accounted for. Every transgression will be punished. Everyone who remains in his or her sin also remains under the wrath of God.

Ephesians 2:3 says that we "were by nature children under wrath." To be under the wrath of God means to be exposed to the just anger of God. Romans 1:18 says that "God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness." These verses describe the fitting position of a person who remains in their sin and rebellion against God. This reality is seen as unkind and intolerant by many, and is often outright rejected as elitist, antiquated, and dangerous. Christians, however, are called to believe and tell the truth no matter what the social climate is. It is right and fitting for the divine Judge to exercise righteous retribution and be revolted by evil.

To be clear, God's personal anger against transgression of His law by people isn't arbitrary. On the contrary, God's wrath is a direct expression of His holiness, goodness, and righteousness. The OT describes several manifestations of God's wrath (e.g. Exodus 32:10-12; Numbers 11:1; Jeremiah 21:3-7).

? **Application Question:** Have you come to grips with the reality that God's wrath against those who remain in their sin is just and fitting? Why or why not? How does this reality affect the way you respond to God with your life?

Conclusion

In our lesson today we dove deep into the state of man since Genesis 3. It's a desperate picture of apparent hopelessness. Adam and Eve, although they had the clear Word of God, disobeyed God's Word and chose to trust their own wisdom and the words of the enemy. They metaphorically shook their fists in God's face and did what was right in their own eyes. They were meant to glorify God, not only through the magnificence of their physical bodies and mental capacities, but also through their willing obedience to and love for their Creator. Instead of bringing Him glory they transgressed His law.

At that moment, sin infected their hearts and with them we fell also, for that spiritual cancer has been passed down until today. Every person, though created by God and bearing His image, is infected with sin all the way to the core. Mankind is radically corrupted and absolutely incapable of self-help. In fact, it is more plausible for a stage 4 cancer patient to go home and remove his own cancer than for a person to cleanse himself of his own sinfulness. Both are impossible.

Yet we are not left to despair. John wrote his testimony, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that dead sinners might hear the message of life and be raised. He wrote down what he saw and heard so that slaves of sin might be set free. There are two movements in our passage. The first focuses on who Jesus was. He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, God in flesh. The second describes what He did. We have concluded that we are without hope unless someone greater than us acts on our behalf. Thankfully, that is exactly what God has done through Jesus.

❓ Are there any passages of Scripture that have been especially meaningful to you as you have sought to obey the Lord and give Him glory in your context? What are they? How do they connect with your present life?

❓ What sins are you most often drawn toward? How do you battle against sin and battle for God's glory in your life? How can your fellow church members and pastors help you?

❓ If you are in Christ and no longer under God's wrath, have you truly let that reality set in? How might you be shaped by meditating on the fact that God now feels no wrath whatsoever toward you—even when you sin—because Christ has already bore that wrath? How should this make you a more joyful, thankful, loving person?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Sin is the curse. Christ is the cure. God, in His kindness and mercy, has appointed Christ to be the sacrificial lamb for all sinners who call upon His name in repentance of sin and faith in the sufficient substitutionary sacrifice.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Every person in every tribe, tongue, and nation is born under the law, condemned for sin, guilty of infraction. The cure for sin is the same on every continent, in every language, in the midst of every culture.



FOR NEXT WEEK

The Story of Redemption

Main Passages

- John 1:10-13; Romans 3:23-26

Session Outline

1. Believers are Receivers (John 1:12)
2. He Gave the Right (John 1:12)
3. By God's Will (John 1:13)

Memorize

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. ³ But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'"

- Genesis 3:2-3, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Genesis 3:8-15
- Tuesday - Genesis 3:16
- Wednesday - Genesis 3:17-19
- Thursday - Genesis 3:20-24
- Friday - Genesis 5:12
- Saturday - Genesis 5:23