

Creation *and the* Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:21; Ps. 104:29, 30; John 1:4; Rom. 5:6–11; Gal. 3:13; Matt. 27:46.*

Memory Text: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (*1 Corinthians 15:22, NIV*).

In the biblical account, Adam and Eve were created in God's image without any moral defect. But they did have free will, a prerequisite for them to be able to love. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they fell under Satan's power (*see Heb. 2:14*), an act that brought the whole world under the enemy's power, as well. Jesus, though, came to destroy the works of the devil (*1 John 3:8*) and free us from his power. He did this by dying in our place and offering us life. On the cross, Jesus became sin for us (*2 Cor. 5:21*) and experienced the separation from His Father that sin causes. By His death, Jesus restored the relationship between God and humanity that had been broken by the sin of Adam and Eve.

All these points are logically linked to the Creation story. Creation comes into the picture again as the power of the Creator God is exercised to create a new heart in His children (*2 Cor. 5:17*), renewing the image of God within us and restoring our relationship with Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 23.*

Grace in the Garden

As we all know so well, the first humans, perfect beings created in the “image of God,” fell into sin, which brought death. They had been warned, and they understood what they had been told. Eve even repeated to the serpent what God had said. Yet, they sinned anyway. At times we, like Eve, are led into sin by deceit; while at other times, like Adam, we sin intentionally. Either way, we are sinners, guilty of transgressing God’s law.

Read Genesis 3:9–15. What was God’s response to the sin of Adam and Eve?

God held a trial, an “investigative judgment” even. The purpose of the trial was not so that God could learn the facts. He already knew them. The purpose was, instead, to give the couple an opportunity to accept responsibility for their actions, the first step toward repentance and restoration. God asked them what had happened, and they confessed, although reluctantly. Though they were guilty and though their sin brought immediate consequences—the first gospel promise was given (see lesson 6) to them in Eden.

Read Genesis 3:21. What further act of grace was revealed?

Death came in a most unexpected way. Instead of the immediate death of Adam and Eve, one or more animals died. Imagine Adam’s feelings as the animal died, perhaps in his place as a sacrifice. It was the first time that Adam had seen death, and it must have brought him enormous mental pain. Then the animal was skinned, and a tunic was fashioned from the skin. The skin was placed over Adam’s body to cover his nakedness. Every time he looked at it or felt it, he was surely reminded of what he had done and what he had lost. More important, it was a reminder of God’s grace.

No doubt we all should be very appreciative (to say the least) of God’s grace to us. What better way to reveal that appreciation than to show grace to others. To whom could you show some grace right now, however undeserving he or she may be?

Sin and Death

In Genesis 3:19, Adam was told that at death he would return to the dust from which he was made. The same thing happens to us. Notice—we do not return to being apes, because we were not made from apes. We were made from dust, and it's to dust, at death, that we return.

Read Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104:29, 30; John 1:4; Acts 17:24, 25. What is the ultimate significance of these texts for us? How should this truth influence the way in which we live?

Life is a marvelous phenomenon. We are all familiar with life, but there is still something mysterious about it. We can take apart a living organism, but in the end we find nothing there except various kinds of atoms and molecules. We can collect the molecules in a container and heat it or pass an electric spark through it or try any number of other experiments, but we do not get life again. There is no entity called “life” that exists within a living body or a living cell. Life is a property of the entire living system, not an entity that can be separated from the cells.

On the other hand, we know much about how to produce death. We have devised many ways of killing living things. Some of these methods reveal in astonishing detail the violence and cruelty of our sinful hearts. Death we can produce, but the creation of life is beyond our grasp. God alone has the ability to create living organisms. Scientists have tried to create life, thinking that if they could do so they would have an excuse for why they do not believe in God. So far, all such efforts have failed.

Read Isaiah 59:2. How does sin affect our relationship to the Life-Giver?

If life comes only from God, then separation from God cuts us off from the Source of life. The inevitable result of separation from God is death. Even if one lives 969 years, as did Methuselah, the story still ends with “and he died.” Sin, by its very nature, causes separation from life, and the result is death.

While We Were Yet Sinners . . .

All throughout the Bible we find that God’s response to human sinfulness is redemptive in nature and motivated by genuine, unselfish love. He would have been fully justified in giving Adam and Eve up to Satan’s destructive power; after all, they had made their choice. But God knew that Adam and Eve did not understand the full meaning of what they had done, and He determined to give them an opportunity to become better informed and to be able to choose again.

Read Romans 5:6–11. How do these verses help us to understand what God’s grace is all about?

When we are wronged, we like to have an apology before we accept the offender back into a good relationship with us. Of course, an apology is appropriate in such circumstances. Complete healing of a damaged relationship includes an expression of sorrow and acceptance of responsibility for the misdeed. But God did not wait for us to ask for forgiveness; He took the initiative. While we were yet sinners, He gave Himself to die on our behalf. This is a wonderful demonstration of divine love.

How does our behavior compare with God’s behavior? How often are we offended and angry and seek revenge rather than restoration? We should be eternally thankful that God does not treat us in that way.

God’s treatment of sinners shows the true meaning of love. It is not a mere feeling but a principled behavior in which every effort is made to reconcile the offender to the offended and restore the relationship. God’s treatment of Adam and Eve is an illustration of how He relates to our sin.

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend. The length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love we cannot fathom.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213. Maybe we can’t fathom this love, but why is it so important that we try?

The Sin-bearing Substitute

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (*Gal. 3:13, NKJV*). Dwell on the amazing implications of this text, keeping in mind the deity of Christ as you do. What does this tell us about what God was willing to do in order to save us? More so, what does this tell us about how tragic it is for anyone not to accept the provision that Christ made in our behalf?

In taking the guilt of our sins upon Himself and dying in separation from God, Jesus fulfilled the promise originally made in the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head. His sacrifice made possible the reconciliation of God and the human family and will eventually result in the final elimination of evil from the universe (*Heb. 2:14, Rev. 20:14*).

Keeping Galatians 3:13 in mind, read Matthew 27:46. What do Jesus’ words reveal about what He went through on the cross?

On the cross, Christ accepted the curse of sin in our behalf. This was a change in His standing with the Father. The sacrificial lamb, when brought to the altar, became a substitute for the death of the sinner. Likewise, when Christ went to the cross, His status before the Father changed. Shut out from the Father’s presence, He felt the curse that our sin had caused. In other words, Jesus, who had been One with the Father from eternity, experienced a separation from the Father, in what Ellen G. White called “the sundering of the divine powers” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 93, 1899). However hard it is to fully comprehend exactly what was happening, we can know enough to realize that an amazing price was paid in order to redeem us.

A New Creation

The great news of the gospel centers around the death of Jesus as our substitute. He took our sins upon Himself, bearing in Himself the penalty that would, otherwise, justly be ours. As we have seen, too, the whole idea of Christ as our Substitute, dying for the sins of the world, is inextricably linked to the Creation story. Death is an alien intruder in God's creation, and Christ came to destroy it. If evolutionary theory were the chosen way that God used to create humans, it would mean, then, that death, far from being an aberration and an enemy, would instead be part of God's original plan for humanity. Indeed, death would play an important role in the way in which God created us. It's no wonder then that Christians must reject theistic evolution as a viable way of understanding the Creation story.

The Genesis Creation account, however crucial in helping us to understand Christ's death in our behalf, also helps us to understand another aspect of the plan of salvation, that of God's work of creation in us, as we partake of His holiness now.

Read Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Colossians 3:10; and 2 Corinthians 5:17. **What promises are given to us here that are linked with the concept of God as Creator, as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2?**

A new heart is a creation that only God can make. We cannot make it ourselves but must depend on the same Creator who formed the world and created our first parents. David recognized his need and asked God to solve the problem by an act of creation.

Indeed, the person who is "in Christ" is a new creation. The old way of thinking must be taken away and replaced with a newly created mind. Our new mind is created for good works, in accordance with God's will. This kind of creation is a supernatural process, accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. The original Creation gives us confidence that God's creative power is able to change our lives and to bring us back into relationship with Him.

How have you experienced what it means to be a new creation in Christ? What does this mean in a daily, practical sense? What is it that changes in the life of someone who has had this experience?

Further Study: “‘The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.’ [Deuteronomy 29:29.] Just how God accomplished the work of creation he has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as his existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

“In that thick darkness God’s presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father’s presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 753, 754.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How is the gospel related to the story of Creation? What specific aspects of Genesis 1–3 are foundational to the gospel? How is the story of Jesus based on the historical veracity of Genesis? How would one tell the story of Jesus if there were no Adam and Eve?
- ❷ The Bible maintains that the Creation was accomplished by supernatural processes that are not accessible to science but that can be learned only by special revelation. Tension between the Bible and science is, therefore, not a surprise. Why is it a mistake, then, to expect science to be able to explain all of God’s creative works?
- ❸ As indicated in Revelation 14:6, 7, what links exist between the gospel, Creation, and judgment?
- ❹ Critics of Christianity will often argue that Jesus knew beforehand that, though He would die, He would be resurrected to life. Thus, they ask, what was the big deal about His death when He knew it would be only temporary? How does Matthew 27:4, supplemented by *The Desire of Ages* statement in Friday’s Further Study, help to answer that objection?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Genesis 3:7–21*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the plan of salvation as outlined in Genesis and perceive how evolution undermines that plan.

Feel: Give gratitude to God for finding a way to forgive others that does not subvert justice.

Do: Seek to practice God’s balance of accountability and grace in his or her dealings with those who commit offenses against him or her.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Creation and the Plan of Salvation

A How does what you believe about Creation or evolution impact the doctrine of salvation?

B How would evolution affect our need for salvation?

C How does God’s handling of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden reveal His character?

D Why did God institute a blood sacrifice for sin? Is God bloodthirsty? Why, or why not?

II. Feel: Gratitude for the Gift of Grace

A What does the relationship between justice and forgiveness mean to you as one who is called to forgive those who wound or offend you?

B How does knowing what God has done to save you deepen your sense of gratitude to Him for the gift of salvation?

C In what ways can you express your gratitude to God for His saving grace?

III. Do: Practicing a Balanced Approach

A How can you balance accountability with grace (as God does) when you deal with those who sin against you?

► **Summary:** Through blood atonement, God voluntarily absorbs the cost of justice for the sinner so that the sinner can renounce rebellion and transform into a loyal, heavenly citizen.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Creation is critically important to the plan of salvation. Evolution undermines the foundations of the plan of salvation in several ways.

Just for Teachers: As noted before, Creation is intimately tied to the rest of biblical theology. Help your class to keep this connection in mind as we focus on the plan of salvation in Eden.

Creation is crucial to our doctrine of salvation. Because God created with designs and purposes, there are ideals that can be violated. Free moral agents are capable of choosing to reject God’s ideals and revolt against His sovereign will. Hence, there is a basic concept of sin embedded in the created order. Sin has to do with the rebellious choice to reject God’s designs.

By contrast, it would seem that if God “created” the world through the unguided, purposeless processes of evolution, there would be no objective ideals that the exercise of free will could violate. And if there were no divinely given ideals to be violated, how could there be any concept of sin? Good and evil could be framed only in terms relative to the individual. Good and evil would have to be determined primarily by perceived self-interest. As such, in an evolutionary scenario there can be no true sense of sin. If we cannot have a meaningful concept of sin, then we have no need of a Savior. There would be no need for a self-emptying, self-sacrificial God, for there would have been no loss of ideals requiring a saving restoration. Creation, then, is vitally important to our understanding of salvation.

Discuss: Ask class members to share, in their own words, why an understanding of Creation is so essential to the doctrine of salvation.

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: The judgment story in Genesis 3 reveals both a God who holds humanity accountable and a God who desires to graciously save.

Bible Commentary

I. Our Gracious Redeemer *(Read Genesis 3:7–21 with the class.)*

In Genesis 3, we find the Fall of humanity and the first promise of the gospel. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and noticed that they had become naked. They sewed fig leaves into aprons to cover themselves. Then they heard the sound of God walking in the Garden. The word for “sound” can mean a voice, as in calling out and talking, or it can mean sounds in general. One way or another, God was making some kind of noise with His approach toward Adam and Eve. Why did God not just suddenly appear to, or by, the couple?

The fact that God conducts an “investigative” judgment in the ensuing verses informs us that He had indeed come to hold Adam and Eve accountable for eating the forbidden fruit. The noisy approach of God, however, indicates that God was approaching with more than goals of accountability and punishment. If punishment was *all* that God cared about, all He had to do was suddenly appear before the couple and they would have collapsed and died of fright. But God was conducting a judgment in order to help humanity to see their need of a Savior. God prefers transforming sinners instead of merely killing them.

So, God came gently, asking questions, reviewing the evidence that showed He had not lied to Adam and Eve. He did this prior to imposing judgments, attempting to rekindle their trust in Himself and His Word. And it worked! Furthermore, God made robes of skins to replace their fig-leaf aprons. But how did God get animal skins?

Animal skins come from dead animals. Why, then, do we suddenly have dead animals in the story? The story seems to imply that the first sacrifices for sin had been offered. The fact that Abel knew to offer a sacrifice would bolster this conclusion. Thus, that very day a substitute died, paying the penalty for Adam and Eve, so that they might regain intimate fellowship with God and live a new life of transformed obedience.

Does this mean that God is bloodthirsty, demanding cruel rituals in order to appease His anger? The gentle and gracious approach of God rebuts such thinking. Furthermore, Genesis 3:15 promises that God would defeat the deceiver and redeem humanity. Thus, the sacrifice points to a greater truth. Forgiveness is not achieved at the expense of justice. Rather, forgiveness becomes possible because God chooses to absorb the cost of justice in Himself. The penalty must be paid, or God’s law would become meaningless. The skins, then, point not

to a bloodthirsty God but to a gracious God who voluntarily chooses to absorb the cost of justice in order to make it possible for us to renounce our rebellion and realign ourselves with His sovereign will without having to be executed. In short, God’s gentle approach, His promise to crush the serpent’s head, and His provision of a sacrifice all point to His desire to restore us to right relationship with Him. The purpose of the judgment in Genesis 3 was redemptive, opening the heart of Adam and Eve to the plan of salvation.

Consider This: Forgiveness involves the victim’s volunteering to absorb the cost of justice in order to offer the perpetrator a means of entering a new, healthy relationship. What does it mean for you to forgive someone who has wronged you?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: In the Creation and in the Fall, God is revealed as gracious, desiring the best good of His creatures. As beings made in God’s image, each of us is called to reflect His character to others.

Thought Questions:

❶ How does God’s approach to sinners in Genesis 3:7–15 inform us about how we are to approach sinners when following Matthew 18:15–20?

❷ Compare and contrast God’s purposes for confronting Adam and Eve with the purpose of the procedure given in Matthew 18:15–20?

❸ When you need to confront someone about a problem, how can your attitudes and approach best model God’s character in Genesis 3:8–15?

4 What would have happened to God’s ability to rule if He had merely dropped the charges instead of actually conducting a judgment trial? How does amnesty differ from forgiveness? (Hint: it has to do with if and how justice is satisfied.)

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: The Genesis 3 gospel shows a wonderful balance of God being just (holding humanity accountable for wrong) and gracious (paying the penalty for Adam’s and Eve’s transgression against Him).

Application Questions:

1 How can you balance justice and grace, as God does, in your dealings with others?

2 How can you avoid creating an aura of cheap grace that leaves the sinner thinking that he or she can sin with impunity?

3 How can you avoid being so strictly just that you seem devoid of grace?
