

## **Genesis 3**

### **The Fall of Man**

In order to understand the need for a Savior and for the Incarnation of the Word, we must look to the story of fall in Genesis 3.

*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made (Genesis 3:1).*

According to Saint John Chrysostom, before the fall, the serpent was the friend of man and the closest of those who served them. It was God who made the serpent an enemy of man after He cursed it (Genesis 3:14-15). Saint John Chrysostom compares the relationship of the serpent to mankind in the same way that dogs now manifest friendship toward man. Perhaps, because of this closeness, Satan chose the serpent as a tool for deception. How did the serpent speak - with a human voice, or with a serpent's hissing? Saint John Chrysostom simply answers, "Before the transgression Adam was filled with wisdom, understanding, and the gift of prophecy. . . . The devil noticed both the wisdom of the serpent and Adam's opinion of it - because the latter considered the serpent wise. And so he spoke through it, so that Adam might think that the serpent, being wise, was able to mimic the human voice also."

The devil tempted Adam out of envy. "But death entered the world by the envy of the devil" (Wisdom of Solomon 2:24). The devil and his angels had already been cast out of heaven because of their pride. Seeing that man, although he was created from the dust of the ground, was chosen to be an inhabitant of Paradise, the devil saw in man an inferior creature who had hope of eternal life. Whereas he, a creature of superior nature (an angelic spirit), had fallen.

*And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:1-6).*

The devil still tempts in the same way today, but offering not an obvious evil, but something which seems good and true. Men were indeed created to be "gods and sons of the Most High," and were aware that they were to ascend to a higher condition - the likeness of God, so the devil used this idea to deceive them. Adam and Eve looked to the good thing of becoming like gods, while forgetting that "small" commandment which was the way God had ordained for them to achieve this goal.

Why did the devil tempt Eve rather than Adam? Simply, Adam alone heard the command of god, whereas Eve knew it only indirectly and thereby might be considered more likely to disobey it.

It was not so much the devil who caused Adam's fall, as much as his own desire. Satan would not have succeeded in his temptation had Adam and Eve not been guided by their own desire. Even if the tempter had not come, says Saint Ephraim the Syrian, the tree itself by its beauty would have led their desire into battle.

Eve was tempted in three stages: (1) she saw that the tree was good for food, (2) that it was pleasant to the eyes, and (3) that it was desirable to make one wise.

This corresponds to the temptation of all that is worldly - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). The lust of the flesh is the weakening of the authority of the spirit over the body; a subjection to lower, fleshly desires. The lust of the eyes means false idols and attachments, greed and hunger for the world, envy. The pride of life is self-esteem egoism, self-exaltation, a despising of others who are weaker, love of self, and vainglory.

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings (Genesis 3:7).*

The opening of their eyes was not a physical opening of the eyes but a realization of their nakedness and loss of the glory they had enjoyed. With the opening of their eyes, Adam and Eve already lost the life of Paradise, even though they were not yet banished from it. From now on their eyes would be open to the lower things of this earth, and they only see with difficulty the higher things of God.

*And they heard the sound 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 among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).*

Of course, God does not walk. In fact, how can He who is everywhere, walk in Paradise? Rather this is written in the Holy Scriptures to indicate that Adam and Eve felt God's presence and were aware of His closeness. They felt this and tried to hide themselves. In the dialogue that follows, God does not come to Adam to condemn him or banish him from Paradise, but to bring him to his senses. God is long-suffering, delays, asks and listens to the answer, wishing to draw out a confession out of His love for mankind.

*Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).*

God is not asking Adam where He physically is. Of course, God knows all. Here, He is trying to draw out a confession saying, 'in what circumstances are you?' or 'From what condition of goodness, beatitude, and grace have you fallen in this state of misery?'

*So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:10-13)*

Adam did not respond with repentance, but with self-justification and excuses, thereby bringing punishment upon himself. God would have still had to meet out the consequences of eating from the tree, since He must stay true to the commandment given, but who knows how God's response may have differed if they repented and confessed. Saint Ephraim the Syrian says, "If our first ancestors had desired to repent even after the transgression of the commandment, then, even

though they would not have restored to themselves what they had before the transgression of the commandment, at least they would have been delivered from the curses that were uttered to the earth and to themselves.”

This is true of us today - in our unwillingness to repent and our deep-seated desire to justify our own behavior even it is exposed as sinful by God Himself.

The serpent, who was beyond repentance, having already fallen, receives judgment and a curse straight away.

*So the LORD God said to the serpent:*

*“ Because you have done this,  
You are cursed more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field;  
On your belly you shall go,  
And you shall eat dust  
All the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity*

*Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15-16)*

Why was the serpent cursed when it was simply a tool for the devil’s deception. Saint John Chrysostom says that this was a work of God’s unutterable love for mankind. As a loving father, in punishing the murderer of his son, breaks also the knife and sword by which he performed the murder, and breaks them into small pieces. Saint John also speculates that before the curse the serpent, without having legs, went about in an upright position similar to the way it now stands up when ready to strike. Now, we have an instinctive reaction against snakes. This shows that our nature has changed somehow.

The enmity in our fallen life, much more than between man and serpent, is between mankind and the devil. The “seed of woman” is Christ. This is a promise that the Christ will completely defeat the devil and take away from him all power to harm men. Until the Second Coming the devil will have the opportunity to harm men, but his wounds will be easily healed, like wounds in the heel, which are not dangerous because in the heel, which is covered with hard skin, there is little blood. Christ gave us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions. The wound

in the heel represents the small amount that the devil is able to harm us since the coming of Christ.

*To the woman He said:*

*“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;  
In pain you shall bring forth children;  
Your desire shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)*

While cursing the serpent, God is awaiting the repentance of Adam and Eve. Alas, they did not. God addresses Eve first, because by her hand sin was given to Adam. Saint John Chrysostom says, as if speaking as God, “At first I created you equal in honor (to your husband) and wished that, being of one dignity with him, you might have communion in everything with him; and I entrusted to you, as to your husband, authority over all creatures. But since you did not make fitting use of the equality in honor, for this I am subjecting you to your husband. . . . I subject you to him and proclaim him your lord, so that you might acknowledge his authority; since you are unable to lead, therefore learn to be a good subject.”

Father Seraphim writes, “St. John Chrysostom provides the answer to the problem of ‘women’s liberation’: become saints and your problems are ended.

Even before the fall, there was a certain order even though Adam and Eve were equal in honor and dignity, and Adam is blamed for not guiding and correcting Eve. The head followed the rest of the body, turning things upside down (Saint John Chrysostom).

*Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:*

*“Cursed is the ground for your sake;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life.*

*Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,  
And you shall eat the herb of the field.*

*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread  
Till you return to the ground,*

*For out of it you were taken;  
For dust you are,*

*And to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:17-19)*

Now, the earth is cursed and man has become mortal. The meaning of disease and death in fallen man was given to stop the spread of sin. It was not just a punishment, but it was also a good, because once man fell, if he were to still be immortal, there would be no way out for him. Imagine being in a state of being unable to redeem yourself, unable to get to Paradise, and then living and living, with no hope of getting out of this state. Death puts an end to sin. The fact that we are afraid of death already wakes us up to begin to struggle. Even if we forget about Paradise, we will be afraid of death and begin to struggle, to overcome our fallen nature.

*And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:20-24).*

While Adam and Eve literally received coats of skin, it also means figuratively, that they were clothed in a different kind of flesh; that is, their nature was changed. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden so that they would not eat the Tree of Life. Eating of this Tree would make man immortal without being good, and God does not want that.

### ***Summary***

Man's fall into sin was possible because the Creator gave us the gifts of freedom, reason, and love. These gifts could have been used for good or evil. God wants us to come to Him out of our free desire to love Him and to obey Him and not as slaves - but rather, as His children.

By eating of the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve violated the direct commandment of God. The fulfillment of this commandment would have shown obedience to God and trust in His words, as well as humility and continence - a summing up of the simple and natural virtues.

The moral consequence of the fall, is that this was the first push on a path toward further resistance against God. Blessed Augustine says, "Here was pride, because man desired to be more under his own authority than under God's; and a mockery of what is holy, because he did not believe God; and murder, because he subjected

himself to death; and spiritual adultery, because the immaculateness of the human soul was defiled through the persuasion of the serpent; and theft, because they made use of the forbidden tree; and the love of acquisition, because he desired more than was necessary to satisfy himself.”

Therefore, the law of sin entered into the world and into man. It took root in man and began to develop in him.

As a physical consequence were disease, hard labor, and death. Man became subject to the corrupt elements of the world. It was a spiritual death and a physical death. They lost Paradise or the Kingdom of God. For this reason, the Old Testament is filled with dark thoughts concerning existence beyond the grave: For in death there is none that is mindful of Thee, and in hades who will confess Thee? (Psalm 6:5). This is not a denial of immortality, but rather a reflection of the hopeless darkness beyond the grave. This awareness was only eased by the hope of future deliverance through the coming of the Savior.

God was merciful to fallen man, in that He took away from him neither His image (which became corrupt, since we lost our divine likeness), nor the freedom of his will, nor his reason, nor his other capabilities. God subjected man to physical death so as not to hand him over to final spiritual death - that is, so that the sinful principle in him might not develop in the extreme, so that he might not become like Satan.

However, this death does not uproot the very source of evil. There was still a need to have a supernatural power and help which might perform an inward reversal within man and give to man the possibility to turn away from a gradually deepening descent and towards victory over sin and death and a gradual ascent to God.

**Glory is due to God forever. Amen.**