***The Fall: Finding My Story in Creation***

**Creation 2023 #3, Genesis 3 February 5, 2023**

***Then the man and wife heard the sound of the Lord God  
as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day,  
and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.  
But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*Genesis 3:8**

A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated

**The first** כִּֽי־אָמַ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֔ים

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*

Genesis 3:1 (Tim Keller’s message on this text is very good)

1. This text tells our story, not the serpent’s story

2. This “sneer” is the first attack on belief in God

3. This “lie” is the first attack on the character of God

**Rebellion against God and its consequences**

*6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Genesis 3

*18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

Romans 5

1. The first result of the fall is alienation, from each other and then from God

2. Romans 5 explains the “algebra” of federal headship

**The curse**

*14 So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,*

*“Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!*

*You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.*

*15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman,*

*and between your offspring and hers;*

*he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

*16 To the woman he said,*

*“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.*

*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”*

*17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’*

*“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.*

*18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground,*

*since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

Genesis 3

1. For the serpent, the curse is a reminder that Satan is a subject, not king, and that a child of the woman would be the agent of Satan’s ultimate defeat (see Romans 16:20; Revelation 12:9)

2. For the woman, the blessing of family will be a reminder of the curse

3. For the man, the curse corrupted every relationship, even with the ground

**Living under the curse (with a lot of grace!)**

*20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.*

*21 The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” 23 So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

*Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.*

Genesis 3:20-4:1

1) The grace begins with God’s provision (and the first pictures of substitution)

*29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

John 1 (see how Paul applies this in Romans 5:8 and Romans 8:31-32)

2) The man and the woman are already reflecting the line of promise

*Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.”*

Genesis 4:1

3) God’s creation story reveals the priority of grace over power

But if life is shaped ultimately not by conflict but rather by a transcendent Creator, then we have a singular driving concern: that we, through faith and repentance, act in harmony with God’s will . . . .   
The Bible’s conflict-free story of creation stands worlds apart from the conflict-saturated myths of our pagan ancestors. It also nourishes our confidence to hold fast to God’s Word no matter the odds, leaving the consequences to Him. In the end, as at the very beginning, it is not chaos and conflict that shape the ultimate outcome of our lives, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who made heaven and earth.

Matthew Miller’s “The Bible’s Conflict Free Creation Story”

4) The cherubim are there to point the way back to God!

*1 The Lord reigns,*

*let the nations tremble;*

*he sits enthroned between the cherubim,*

*let the earth shake.*

Psalm 99 (see also Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16; and the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant)

**Resources for the Genesis**

Be sure to check the [Bible Project’s poster](https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/) on Genesis.

[*Bible.org*](https://bible.org/book/Genesis) has some wonderful sermons on Genesis, especially those by Deffinbaugh (see <https://bible.org/seriespage/fall-man-god%e2%80%99s-perfect-plan> ) and Stedman.

Maclaren has a helpful commentary at on many of these passages at [*https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/bible\_book/genesis\_maclaren.html*](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/bible_book/genesis_maclaren.html)

Many of Spurgeon’s sermons on Genesis are collected at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/scripture-index/genesis/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/scripture-index/genesis/) Spurgeon’s wonderful gospel sermon on Genesis 3:15 is at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols22-24/chs1326.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols22-24/chs1326.pdf) . Spurgeon also has a more general sermon on sin from 2 Kings 7 at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-sin-of-unbelief/#flipbook/> . Spurgeon also has a “God’s First Words to the First Sinner” sermon at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs412.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs412.pdf)

There are several more good Monergism resources on Genesis 3-4 at [*https://www.monergism.com  
/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/genesis/chapter-genesis/chapters-03-05-fall*](https://www.monergism.com/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/genesis/chapter-genesis/chapters-03-05-fall)

Carl Trueman is Doug’s best analyst of the modern condition. See his shorter “Myth of the Modern Self” at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/07/the-myth-of-the-modern-self> or his much longer *Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020). His *Strange New World* (Crossway, 2022) is a little easier read.

To dig more into Doug’s “would Jesus still have come even if Adam and Eve hadn’t sinned?” question compare Michael Horton who answers “no” (see [*https://www.monergism.com/fall-humanity*](https://www.monergism.com/fall-humanity)) with John Murray who hints “yes” in his [*https://www.monergism.com/fall-man*](https://www.monergism.com/fall-man)

For more details on the connection between the creation story and other traditions see [*https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/the-bibles-conflict-free-creation-story/*](https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/the-bibles-conflict-free-creation-story/)

Very Poythress has some very interesting thoughts on reading Genesis at [www.frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013ChristianInterpretationsOfGenesis1.pdf](http://www.frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013ChristianInterpretationsOfGenesis1.pdf) and [*http://faculty.wts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PoythressVernCorrelationsWithProvidenceInGenesis2.pdf*](http://faculty.wts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PoythressVernCorrelationsWithProvidenceInGenesis2.pdf)

This “framework” article comes from a theistic evolution perspective, but I appreciate the background work on Genesis 1, at [*https://biologos.org/series/science-and-the-bible/articles/the-framework-view-history-and-beliefs*](https://biologos.org/series/science-and-the-bible/articles/the-framework-view-history-and-beliefs)

Doug’s starting points for further studies of the three major Christian positions on creation:

YEC: start with Answers in Genesis, <https://answersingenesis.org/creation-science/>, and Institute for Creation Research at [*https://www.icr.org/*](https://www.icr.org/)

Intelligent Design: begin with Strobel’s *The Case for a Creator* (Zondervan, 2004) and the Discovery Institute at [*https://www.discovery.org/*](https://www.discovery.org/)

OEC, or Progressive Creation: anything by Hugh Ross, Canadian astrophysicist, and especially Howard Van Till’s *The Fourth Day* (Eerdmans, 1986)

Theistic Evolution: start with *Biologos* at <https://biologos.org/> and anything by Deb Haarsma, Calvin University astrophysicist who wrote *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design* (Faith Alive, 2011)

Tim Keller has a wonderful series of sermons on the fall at [*Monergism.com*](https://www.monergism.com/) at [https://www.  
monergism.com/paradise-crisis-%E2%80%93-genesis-31-9](https://www.monergism.com/paradise-crisis-%E2%80%93-genesis-31-9) and [https://www.monergism.com  
/paradise-lost-%E2%80%93-genesis-38-24](https://www.monergism.com/paradise-lost-%E2%80%93-genesis-38-24) and for Genesis 4 at [*https://www.monergism.com  
/%E2%80%9C-history-world-nutshell%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-genesis-41-10*](https://www.monergism.com/%E2%80%9C-history-world-nutshell%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-genesis-41-10)

**Paradise in Crisis – Genesis 3:1-9**

Dr. Timothy Keller at <https://www.monergism.com/paradise-crisis-%E2%80%93-genesis-31-9>

Series The Bible: The Whole Story Part 2 – Creation and Fall

Preached in Manahattan, New York, January 11, 2009

*1Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” 2The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”*

*4“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

*7Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”* - Genesis 3:1-9

In this series of sermons we’re trying to get across that the Bible is not a series of disconnected stories, each one with a little moral for how to live, but it’s actually primarily a single story about what went wrong with the human race and what will put it right. Figuring out what went wrong with the human race is actually really important.

Beatrice Webb, who was one of the architects of the modern British welfare system … She and her husband and some others founded the London School of Economics. She was a socialist, an activist, a British leader. She kept a diary, and in 1925 she went back and looked at her older diary, and she wrote, “In my diary, 1890, I wrote, ‘I have staked everything on the essential goodness of human nature.’

Now, 35 years later, I realize how permanent are the evil impulses and instincts in us and how little they seem to change, like greed for wealth and power, and how mere social machinery will never change that. We must ask better things from human nature, but will we get a response? No amount of science or knowledge has been of any avail, and unless we curb the bad impulse, how will we get better social institutions?”

That’s a remarkable statement from somebody who ought to know. She is saying there is something so wrong with us that leads to selfishness and violence, that leads to corruption in business and corruption in government, that leads to war and atrocities, and that’s consistent across history.

She says science hasn’t dealt with it. Education hasn’t dealt with it. Social machinery hasn’t dealt with it. Who will explain it? Chapter 3 and chapter 4 of Genesis do, and we’re looking at them for four weeks. Let’s start with this very famous text, and let’s learn what we can by noticing four features of the narrative: *the sneer, the lie, the tree,* and *the call.*

The story starts with a sneer. It says, *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”?*’ ” Satan is speaking through the serpent. Right away readers say, “Who is Satan, and where did he come from, and what’s wrong with him, and how did he get that way?” but this text is about us. It doesn’t tell us anything about that. It’s here to explain how *we* got to be the way we are, and how we are now.

If we read it that way, it’s incredibly instructive, but if we ask, “Where did he come from, and what’s all this?” it doesn’t. It’s all right. That’s not what we need to know right now. It’s not the most important thing we *ever* need to know. What we see is the fall of the human race starts not with an action, but with an attitude, not with an act, but with a sneer. This word translated *really*, which could also be translated *indeed* … “Indeed, did he really say …?” It shows the sense of this is not that the Serpent is *denying* what God said; he’s *mocking* what God said.

He’s not saying God didn’t say it; he’s saying it’s ridiculous. It’s laughable. The sense of it is if you ever hear somebody say something like this: “Did he really say *that*?” That doesn’t mean he’s asking, “Did it really happen?” No, he’s saying, “Was he such an idiot, such a jerk, to say that? Did he really say that?” He is not denying God said it; he’s mocking it. He’s trying to get Adam and Eve to laugh at it. He’s trying to change their attitudes toward it. Therefore, the fall of the human race starts not with an action, or even with a thought, but with an attitude of heart.

We’re going to learn two things from this. The first thing (though this doesn’t always happen, I think this happens a lot) is, more often than not, we lose God not through argument, but through atmosphere. For example, here’s a little speech in a novel. It’s about two people who went to college and lost their Christian faith, and then one person gets it back later.

The person speaking got the faith back and is talking to the other person about how they “lost” their faith in college. He says, “Let’s be frank. We found ourselves in contact with a certain current of ideas and plunged into it because it seemed modern and successful. At college we started automatically writing the kinds of essays that got good marks and saying the kinds of things that won applause.

We were afraid of the label ‘fundamentalism,’ afraid of a breach with the spirit of the age, afraid of ridicule. Having allowed ourselves to drift, accepting every half-conscious solicitation from our desires, we reached a point where we no longer believed the faith, in the same way a drunken man reaches a point in which he believes another glass will do him no harm.”

I don’t want anybody to think I’m saying that’s how people lose the faith in college. Very often people lose their faith through argument, but not usually. They usually lose it through sneers. Everybody is sneering. Everybody is snarky. Everybody is saying, “You really believe that?” or “He really believes *that*?” “Does she *really* believe that?” You just want to go into your shell. You want to go along. You very often lose God not through argument, but through atmosphere.

Over the years, I have to say, for every one argument I’ve gotten against Christian belief I get 99 sneers. When somebody says, “Do you really believe that?” a proper measured response would be, “Well, that’s an assertion trying to create an atmosphere; it’s not really an argument. So could you please tell me why you think what I believe is untenable?” Just file that. So first of all, I think we learn here we tend to lose God as much, if not more, from atmosphere than argument.

Secondly, humor. The fall of the human race happened through an attitude of the heart that was expressed through a particular kind of humor. Here’s what I’d like us to think about, at least briefly. There’s a kind of humor that is actually an expression of humility. It persuades, it’s humble, and it says we’re all alike. And there’s a kind of humor that is an exercise of the will for power. It’s serpentine. It’s a way of putting somebody else down so it puts you up.

There’s a kind of humor that brings us all down and deflates and gets us to talk, and there’s a kind of humor that puts one group or one person up and smashes everybody to the ground. It’s serpentine. Do you know the difference? One brought about the fall of the human race and will bring about *your* fall, and one actually can be healing.

W.H. Auden wrote some wonderful essays and did some wonderful lectures on Shakespeare, doing literary criticism of Shakespeare. In a couple of his essays, he says he believed Shakespeare, whether he was personally a Christian or not, had a Christian view of human nature and the world, and therefore, Shakespearean comedy was different than Greek classical comedy.

Auden says in Greek classical comedy, the comedy ends with the audience laughing and the characters on stage in tears, but in Shakespeare comedies, like *Much Ado About Nothing*, it always ends with everybody laughing. The people out there are laughing *and* the people up here are laughing. Why? He says the Greek classical idea was what is funny is “Look at those fools up there. They’re not sophisticated like us.” Therefore, the audience is led by the comedy to laugh *at* the people up there because they lack the sophistication of the audience.

But, he says in one of his essays, there’s a different kind of humor Shakespeare had. He says comedies like *Much Ado About Nothing* are based on the belief that all men are sinners, and therefore, no one, whatever his rank or talents, should claim immunity from the comic exposure. Then Auden goes on and talks about the fact the Christian gospel turns the Greek idea of excellence and sophistication on its head.

In Christianity the ultimate excellence is to know you need the comic exposure to see your own pretensions and pride exposed and to seek forgiveness. He says, “Therefore, in Shakespeare the characters are exposed and forgiven, and when the curtain falls, the audience and the characters are all laughing together.”

David Denby, a movie critic for the *New Yorker*, wrote a book that’s coming out this week called *Snark.* In it he’s talking about how there’s a kind of humor that puts everybody down and says everybody is full of it and everybody is out for themselves. *New York* magazine this week wrote a snarky review of the book. It says, “When you have a society filled with BS, you just have to get up and say it’s filled with BS, and I’m *going to* get up and say it’s filled with BS.”

Auden would say that’s classical. That’s Greek comedy. What you’re really saying is, “Everybody but *me* is filled with BS. Everybody but *me* is out for themselves.” There is a kind of humility that says we human beings need to be laughed at. Look at our pretensions. And there is a kind of cynicism that is corrosive, that laughs at any truth claims, any claims that this is right and this is wrong, and is, therefore, basically serpentine, putting yourself in the judgment seat.

What will happen is that kind of cynical, corrosive, serpentine humor that says “Everybody is filled with BS but me, everybody is on the take, everybody is out for themselves but me,” leaves you in the end with no meaning in life. That can’t give you meaning in life. It leaves you in the end without friends. It’s serpentine. The Serpent laughs at you. If you laugh like the Serpent, the Serpent in the end will laugh like you.

Secondly, the fall of the human race proceeds with a lie. The next thing you see is after the attitude of the heart comes a lie for the mind. We see it here in verse 4. God has said, “Don’t eat of this tree,” and the Serpent comes back in verse 4 and says, “You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.”

Here’s what he’s saying. “God, if you obey him, will keep you down. God knows if you do this and this you’ll broaden your horizons, but he doesn’t want you to.” What Satan is trying to get into the heart of the human race is “If you obey God, you’ll miss out. If you obey God, you won’t be happy. If you obey the will of God, it’ll cut you off from other options. It will keep you from being all you want to be. You will not thrive and flourish.”

What’s so extremely interesting to see here is that Satan knows what is really crucial to destroy. Notice Satan does not go after the existence of God. He doesn’t say, “The only way I’m going to destroy the human race is to get everybody to disbelieve in God.” Heck no. He knows the whole human race can believe in God. Practically the whole human race *does* believe in God, and it’s a mess. That’s not the issue.

He also doesn’t actually go after the law or the will or the holiness of God. He doesn’t say, “Oh, God doesn’t care what you do.” He doesn’t say, “God doesn’t say you can’t eat of that tree.” He doesn’t deny the existence of God. He doesn’t deny the law of God, the will of God, the holiness of God. He denies the goodness of God. He denies the goodness and the love and the grace and the good will of God *behind* all of those decrees.

He says, “If you obey God, you can’t trust his good will. You can’t trust him. You’re going to have to take your life into your own hands.” That lie went in, and that lie is in my heart and that lie is in your heart. Do you know what it’s doing? It’s doing a lot. Why is it we say, “I know the Bible says I shouldn’t sleep with this person I’m not married to, but it would be great”? “I know the Bible says I shouldn’t spend all this money on myself; I should give it away, but it would be great to spend it all on myself.” “I know I’m not supposed to hold a grudge against this person and try to seek revenge, but boy, it feels good to seek revenge.” You’re tempted.

Do you know why you’re tempted? There would be no temptation unless, underneath, you already believed you can’t trust God. Your heart is saying, “If you obey, you won’t be happy.” The fact that Satan has destroyed our trust in the love of God is beneath everything else. Remember, in the fall we did our series on the Prodigal Son in Luke 15.

There were two different guys, weren’t there? There was the elder brother. He was very religious. He was very moral. He lived a very good life. He followed all of the rules. Why? So that forced God and everybody else to respect and reward him. Then there was the younger brother. He went off, and he had sex with prostitutes, and he lived it up with all of his material possessions. They look very, very different, but look at the bottom of each one.

Why is the moralist, the moralist? Why does he say, “I’m going to earn my salvation”? Because he doesn’t trust in the grace of God. Why does the younger brother go off and say, “I’m going to live any way I want; I’m going to do what I want to do”? Because he doesn’t trust the grace of God. He doesn’t believe if he obeys God he’ll be happy. They don’t believe in the love of God. They don’t believe in the good will of God. It’s at the root of everything. We’ll talk about this more next week.

Philip Roth has a novel called *The Human Stain.* It’s a metaphor for evil. At one point, one of the characters in the book talks about it. The human stain is the evil of the heart that makes everybody want to put everyone else down. It’s there before. It’s underneath all our wrongdoing. “I want to put other people down, and I have to prove myself.” Do you know where that comes from?

Erick Erickson in his book *Childhood and Society* says if a child, in the very earliest years, learns not to trust the dominant personality of the parents because they’ve been abused or because they’ve been neglected or abandoned … If a child in the very beginning of their life cannot trust the dominant personality in their life, then they have a fundamental inability to attach or trust ever again, and it’s a taproot for all other kinds of pathologies.

Now listen. I’m not a psychologist. I have no idea whether Erick Erickson is right about childhood pathologies or not. I do know it’s really weird that Genesis says that is exactly what happened in the beginning of the human race. When we were in our infancy, we believed the Serpent that we can’t trust God, that we can’t trust his love.

There are people right now working themselves to death in their jobs because they’re trying to prove to themselves and everybody else that they’re valuable because they don’t trust the love of God, and there are people putting everybody else down and exploiting and lying to everyone. The human stain. Why? They don’t trust God. If you don’t trust God, you don’t trust anybody. We’ve been ruined by the lie.

So first there was a sneer for the heart. Then secondly there was a lie for the mind. Finally, that leads to an act of the will. But it’s a tree sin. Take a look down here at verse 6: *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”*

What was the great sin? What was this great horrible action? What is it that ruined the human race? They ate of the tree. What is this thing? What was wrong with that? What in the world could be wrong with a tree? By the way, a lot of people say, “I don’t get it. We have Ten Commandments. Sometimes to not kill somebody is actually rather hard to obey. Sometimes not to steal is hard to obey. But not to eat of a tree?

You can see why stealing could be bad, and you can see why killing can be bad, you can see why adultery can be bad, but not eating from a tree. What was the big deal about the tree? What was so bad about that? What was the logic behind the prohibition? God says, ‘You can do anything. It’s paradise. But you can’t eat from that tree.’ What was so bad about that?” Here’s what’s so bad about that.

What if God had actually given Adam and Eve an explanation? You can see Adam and Eve walking up to the tree and saying, “What’s so bad about eating from this tree?” and God saying, “Well, if you eat from the tree, there will be infinite suffering and misery and death for the rest of human history.” They would have gone, “Never mind. There’s a whole other … I mean, the rest of the world. There are all of these other trees.”

You know what? The reason God didn’t give them the explanation is crucial to why the decree was so important and what it was all about. If he had given them the explanation and they had said, “Oh, I’m not going to eat from the tree …” Why? Because cost-benefit analysis. “It’s not worth it.” That’s not really obedience, is it? That’s cost-benefit analysis. That’s self-interest. You’re still in the driver’s seat.

No, no. Here’s what’s going on. God was saying to Adam and Eve, “My children, I am God, and your life is a gift to you, and this world is a gift to you. I want you to live as if I’m God and you are living by my power. I want you to live as if this world is a gift and, therefore, not your possession to do with any way you want. I want you to see your lives are a gift from me and, therefore, not yours and something you can do with any way you want.

Therefore, don’t eat from that tree. This is your chance. You can either choose to treat me as God and to treat your life and the world as if it belongs to me and, therefore, you have to use it as I direct, or you can put yourself in the place of God. You can act as if your life is yours and that you generated it. You can act as if this entire world is yours and you can use it any way you want. You can treat me as God, or you can put yourself in the place of God.”

The Serpent knows that, because the Serpent says, “Take of the tree, and you will be like God.” That’s what Adam and Eve do. What’s so important for us to see is you need to look beyond all of the rules. You have to look through the rules. “Don’t lie. Don’t cheat. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t do fornication. Don’t spend all your money on yourself. Don’t be selfish.” All of the things the Bible says. There are the rules.

Behind the rules is, “Don’t put yourself in the place of God. Obey the rules because you’re not God.” God says, “Obey my rules not because of cost-benefit analysis, not because you see why, but because I’m God.” Do you realize that virtually everything that’s wrong with us in this world is you and I putting ourselves in the place of God? This is the problem.

On the one end, it’s not that hard to see that killing, murder, that kind of thing (which is awful, of course, and happens all the time all over the place in the world every day), is certainly putting yourself in the place of God, but have you ever thought about your anxiety? Some of us are eaten up with anxiety. Some of us are going to the doctor because of the way in which it’s corroding our bodies. We’re so anxious. Why? I’ll speak for myself. You’ve heard me say this before.

I get anxious because I have an idea of how my life has to go, how the church has to go, how things have to go in history, and I’m afraid God, who’s in charge of history, isn’t going to get it right. He’s not going to do it the way it needs to be. I know better. What am I doing? Why am I eaten up with anxiety? I’m in the place of God. See this is the sin behind these other sins. This is the thing that’s staining us.

Because of the mistrust, we put ourselves in the place of God. “I can’t trust God, so I have to do it myself.” How do I deal with worry? I deal with worry by saying, “I don’t know; God knows.” I pull myself a little bit out of the place of God, and I start to feel better, and by tomorrow I’ll be back. See, from anxiety on the one hand to murder on the other hand to grudges …

If you won’t forgive somebody, it’s because you’re putting yourself in the place of God. You think you know what they deserve. How do you know? You think you have the right to see them until they get what they deserve. You don’t have the right. You’re putting yourself in the place of God. All of our problems are coming because we’ve done what the Serpent asked us to do.

Do you know what this means? Let’s get down to nitty-gritty. One thing New Yorkers hate doing … They don’t mind obeying the will of God. They see what the Bible says. They don’t mind obeying the will of God as long as it makes sense to them, but if they feel like, “This is not very progressive,” or “This doesn’t meet my needs …” Do you know who William Borden is? You probably don’t.

William Borden grew up in Chicago in the late nineteenth century and went off to Yale in the 1890s, I believe. Yes, he was one of *those* Bordens. He was extremely wealthy. The Borden’s dairy. He was part of that family, and he was the heir of a great wealth. When he was at Yale, he sensed God’s call to the mission field, and he decided he was going to go to North China and work amongst Mongols and Chinese people.

It was very, very dangerous at the time, and when he announced to his family he was going to go into missionary work, this was appalling to everybody. A man of his stature, of his wealth, of his station in society didn’t do that. He got opposition from his family. He got opposition from his class of people. But he was absolutely resolute. When he graduated from Yale, he gave his entire inheritance (which at that time was $1 million, which was a heck of a lot of money) to mission agencies. He gave it away.

Now in relative poverty, he moved to Cairo to learn Arabic. Just out of college, with his whole life ahead of him, bright … Within a few weeks he had contracted spinal meningitis, and within a few weeks after that he was dead. Scratched on an ordinary piece of paper, which he wrote in his diary as he lay dying, found in his bedroom after he died, were these three phrases: “No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.”

Why wouldn’t he have written in his diary, “God, what are you doing? All my obedience, all my commitment, all my promise, all of my money, all of this preparation. Why would I die now? What possible good …? What are you doing?” Oh no. “No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.” Why? Because he didn’t obey the will of God for reputation. He didn’t obey the will of God for results. He didn’t obey the will of God for impact. He obeyed the will of God just for God’s sake. Not because it made sense, not because he understood it, just because it was God, because God is God and he wasn’t.

Don’t you see that is the ultimate deconstruction of the human will to power that’s ruining the world? If you say, “I’m going to be religious,” or “I’m going to believe in God and I’m going to obey,” but it’s calculated, it’s part of a career move, it’s part of a way of helping you get the inner strength so you can get out and do all of the things … There has to be at some point, “I’m doing this because God says so, because he’s God and I’m not. Period.”

That’s the ultimate deconstruction of the human will for power, which the Serpent got into our systems and poisoned us with. Even though I’m not saying William Borden overcame sin in his human nature, in that one act, where he was faithful to the end, he completely overturned the will of the Serpent. He disbelieved the lie that you can’t trust God. He refused the action of putting himself in the place of God.

By the way, we happen to know he ended up inspiring thousands and thousands of other missionaries over the next generation to go into missions. But he didn’t know that, and you don’t *have* to know that. See this is the stain. This is the thing that has come into our lives. In the next couple of weeks we’re going to see how this plays out, but we want to end with this. What does God do? Here’s the end.

At the very end, in verses 8–9, you see the rest of the history of the human race in a nutshell. Do you know that? The rest of the entire history of the world in a nutshell. *“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ ”*

Please notice two things. The first thing is we are now hiders. If you take that idea and go back over your entire life and think about it, if you rethink your life in terms of that, you’ll see a lot. It’ll be an illuminating exercise. Because we don’t trust God, we now hide from ourselves. We cannot bear to know who we really are. We can’t have a realistic honest appraisal of ourselves. That’s what therapy is all about. If it wasn’t for verse 8, you wouldn’t have a job, therapists.

We hide from ourselves, we hide from each other (spin, dishonesty), but most of all, we hide from God, because in the presence of God we see what we don’t want. We’re hiding. We’re running from the truth, from God, from each other, from our very selves. We’ll look at more of that in the next couple of weeks.

The other thing that is so remarkable is that while we hide, according to these texts, God seeks. It’s our nature to hide; it’s God’s nature to seek. God comes back saying, “Where are you?” Now does he really need information? Does he really not know what happened? Of course not. If he knows what happened, what is he doing?

He’s engaging. In love he’s coming after them. In love he’s counseling them. He’s trying to get them to answer. We learn two things. The first thing we learn is we hide; God seeks. If we ever find God it’s because God found us. There’s that little hymn that goes like this:

‘Tis not that I did choose thee,

For Lord, that could not be;

This heart would still refuse thee,

Hadst thou not chosen me.

My heart owns none before thee,

For thy rich grace I thirst;

This knowing, if I love thee,

Thou must have loved me first.

Anybody who ever finds faith with God feels like that. “You must have come after me; I never would have come after you.” That’s just a fact. The Bible from the very beginning to the end teaches that. More importantly, God going out in love finds its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. It’s in Jesus Christ all of the things the Serpent gave us are dealt with. Jesus comes back and smashes the Serpent’s head, because he deals with the tree, he deals with the lie, and he even deals with the joke.

First of all, how does Jesus Christ deal with the tree? In the garden of Gethsemane, he’s struggling. There’s a garden. See centuries after Adam and Eve are struggling in the garden over a command about a tree, Jesus is in a garden, and *he’s* struggling over a command about a tree. It’s called the cross. He knows he has to go to the cross and die for our sins and pay the penalty we owe, and he’s struggling.

Think about this. Adam and Eve were in a bright sunny garden, and God said, “Obey me about the tree, and you will live,” and they didn’t. Jesus Christ was in a dark garden, and God said, “Obey me about the tree, and you’ll be crushed,” and he did, for us. Here’s what he did. He climbed the tree of death and turned that tree of death, the cross, into a tree of life for you and me. There’s the reversal of the tree sin.

What’s the tree sin? Us putting ourselves where only God deserves to be, putting ourselves in the place of God. The tree salvation is God putting himself where *we* deserve to be, on the cross. See the original tree sin was us putting ourselves where only God deserved to be, taking prerogatives only God deserves to have, putting ourselves in the place of God, but the tree salvation, which is a salvation of Jesus Christ, his death on the cross, is God coming down and putting himself where *we* deserve to be and taking it for us.

That not only deals with the tree, but that deals with the lie. The lie is, “You can’t trust God,” and all the poison in your life is because you don’t believe God loves you. You don’t believe in the grace of God. What’s going to overcome that? “Well I just believe in a god of love.” That will never overcome it. That’s too weak. It’s weak tea. It won’t work. This is the only thing that will overcome it.

You have to see Jesus Christ climbing a tree of death and turning that tree of death for him into a tree of life for you and me. That will finally begin to take the toxins out of your soul, and you’ll finally start to actually believe God loves you. This is the only thing that will take that out. It’s the only crowbar strong enough to wedge out of your heart the belief that “Basically I’m on my own.”

Lastly, Jesus even deals with the joke. He turns the sneer into something else. Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to say the way in which he could tell the difference between a person who was a Pharisee, who believed they were saved by their good works, because they lived a good life, and a Christian who understood the gospel of grace, was to ask them, “Are you a Christian?”

If you ask a pharisaical, moralistic person, “Are you a Christian?” the person gets very … “What do you mean? Of course. Why would you even ask? How dare you ask?” But if you ask anybody who understands the gospel of grace, “Are you a Christian?” they laugh. They say, “Yes, what a joke. Me, a Christian. But it’s true.”

If you’re not a joke to yourself that you’re a Christian, that God is in the middle of your life, that God is using you … If that doesn’t make you laugh, you don’t understand the gospel. It’s a whole different kind of laughter than the laughter of the Serpent. Jesus Christ has dealt with the tree, he has dealt with the lie, and he has even dealt with the sneer and turned it to laughter. Let’s pray.

*Our Father, we have a lot to plow through this next month as we try to understand how we got to be the way we are and as we begin to try to understand the various aspects of that and to know how to try to overcome it using the grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ. So we pray you’d be with us, and we pray you will remind us of what a great joke it is that we belong to you because of your grace. Help us to smile. Help us to laugh at that. Help us to rejoice for the rest of our lives that your Son did what he did. We pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.*

## The Sin of Unbelief

 Charles Spurgeon at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-sin-of-unbelief/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-sin-of-unbelief/%23flipbook/)

##### "And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes but shalt not eat thereof"—2 Kings 7:19

     One wise man may deliver a whole city; one good man may be the means of safety to a thousand others. The holy ones are "the salt of the earth," the means of the preservation of the wicked. Without the godly as a conserve, the race would be utterly destroyed. In the city of Samaria there was one righteous man—Elisha, the servant of the Lord. Piety was altogether extinct in the court. The king was a sinner of the blackest dye, his iniquity was glaring and infamous. Jehoram walked in the ways of his father Ahab, and made unto himself false gods. The people of Samaria were fallen like their monarch: they had gone astray from Jehovah; they had forsaken the God of Israel; they remembered not the watchword of Jacob, "The Lord thy God is one God;" and in wicked idolatry they bowed before the idols of the heathens, and therefore the Lord of Hosts suffered their enemies to oppress them until the curse of Ebal was fulfilled in the streets of Samaria, for "the tender and delicate woman who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness," had an evil eye to her own children, and devoured her offspring by reason of fierce hunger (Deut 28:56-58). In this awful extremity the one holy man was the medium of salvation. The one grain of salt preserved the entire city; the one warrior for God was the means of the deliverance of the whole beleaguered multitude. For Elisha's sake the Lord sent the promise that the next day, food which could not be obtained at any price, should be had at the cheapest possible rate—at the very gates of Samaria. We may picture the joy of the multitude when first the seer uttered this prediction. They knew him to be a prophet of the Lord; he had divine credentials; all his past prophecies had been fulfilled. They knew that he was a man sent of God, and uttering Jehovah's message. Surely the monarch's eyes would glisten with delight, and the emaciated multitude would leap for joy at the prospects of so speedy a release from famine. "To-morrow," would they shout, "to-morrow our hunger shall be over, and we shall feast to the full."

     However, the lord on whom the king leaned expressed his disbelief. We hear not that any of the common people, the plebeians, ever did so; but an aristocrat did it. Strange it is, that God has seldom chosen the great men of this world. High places and faith in Christ do seldom well agree. This great man said, "Impossible!" and, with an insult to the prophet, he added, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be." His sin lay in the fact, that after repeated seals of Elisha's ministry, he yet disbelieved the assurances uttered by the prophet on God's behalf. He had, doubtless, seen the marvelous defeat of Moab; he had been startled at tidings of the resurrection of the Shunamite's son; he knew that Elisha had revealed Benhadad's secrets and smitten his marauding hosts with blindness; he had seen the bands of Syria decoyed into the heart of Samaria; and he probably knew the story of the widow, whose oil filled all the vessels, and redeemed her sons; at all events the cure of Naaman was common conversation at court; and yet, in the face of all this accumulated evidence, in the teeth of all these credentials of the prophet's mission, he yet doubted, and insultingly told him that heaven must become an open casement, ere the promise could be performed. Whereupon God pronounced his doom by the mouth of the man who had just now proclaimed the promise: "thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." And providence—which always fulfills prophecy, just as the paper takes the stamp of the type—destroyed the man. Trodden down in the streets of Samaria, he perished at its gates, beholding the plenty, but tasting not of it. Perhaps his carriage was haughty, and insulting to the people; or he tried to restrain their eager rush; or, as we would say, it might have been by mere accident that he was crushed to death; so that he saw the prophecy fulfilled, but never lived to enjoy it. In his case, seeing was believing, but it was not enjoying.

     I shall this morning invite your attention to two things—the man's sin and his punishment. Perhaps I shall say but little of this man, since I have detailed the circumstances, but I shall discourse upon the sin of unbelief and the punishment thereof.

I. And first, the SIN.

     His sin was unbelief. He doubted the promise of God. In this particular case unbelief took the form of a doubt of the divine veracity, or a mistrust of God's power. Either he doubted whether God really meant what he said, or whether it was within the range of possibility that God should fulfill his promise. Unbelief hath more phases than the moon, and more colors than the chameleon. Common people say of the devil, that he is seen sometimes in one shape, and sometimes in another. I am sure this is true of Satan's first-born child—unbelief, for its forms are legion. At one time I see unbelief dressed out as an angel of light. It calls itself humility, and it saith, "I would not be presumptuous; I dare not think that God would pardon me; I am too great a sinner." We call that humility, and thank God that our friend is in so good a condition. I do not thank God for any such delusion. It is the devil dressed as an angel of light; it is unbelief after all. At other times we detect unbelief in the shape of a doubt of God's immutability: "The Lord has loved me, but perhaps he will cast me off to-morrow. He helped me yesterday, and under the shadows of his wings I trust; but perhaps I shall receive no help in the next affliction. He may have cast me off; he may be unmindful of his covenant, and forget to be gracious." Sometimes this infidelity is embodied in a doubt of God's power. We see every day new straits, we are involved in a net of difficulties, and we think "surely the Lord cannot deliver us." We strive to get rid of our burden, and finding that we cannot do it, we think God's arm is as short as ours, and his power as little as human might. A fearful form of unbelief is that doubt which keeps men from coming to Christ; which leads the sinner to distrust the ability of Christ to save him, to doubt the willingness of Jesus to accept so great a transgressor. But the most hideous of all is the traitor, in its true colors, blaspheming God, and madly denying his existence. Infidelity, deism, and atheism, are the ripe fruits of this pernicious tree; they are the most terrific eruptions of the volcano of unbelief. Unbelief hath become of full stature, when quitting the mask and laying aside disguise, it profanely stalks the earth, uttering the rebellious cry, "No God," striving in vain to shake the throne of the divinity, by lifting up its arm against Jehovah, and in its arrogance would

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,  
Re-judge his justice—be the god of God."

Then truly unbelief has come to its full perfection, and then you see what it really is, for the least unbelief is of the same nature as the greatest.

     I am astonished, and I am sure you will be, when I tell you that there are some strange people in the world who do not believe that unbelief is a sin. Strange people I must call them, because they are sound in their faith in every other respect; only, to make the articles of their creed consistent, as they imagine, they deny that unbelief is sinful. I remember a young man going into a circle of friends and ministers, who were disputing whether it was a sin in men that they did not believe the gospel. Whilst they were discussing it, he said, "Gentlemen am I in the presence of Christians? Are you believers in the Bible, or are you not?" They said, "We are Christians of course." "Then," said he, "does not the Scripture say, 'of sin, because they believed not on me?' And is it not the damning sin of sinners, that they do not believe on Christ?" I could not have thought that persons should be so fool-hardy as to venture to assert that, "it is no sin for a sinner not to believe on Christ." I thought that, however far they might wish to push their sentiments, they would not tell a lie to uphold the truth, and, in my opinion this is what such men are really doing. Truth is a strong tower and never requires to be buttressed with error. God's Word will stand against all man's devices. I would never invent a sophism to prove that it is no sin on the part of the ungodly not to believe, for I am sure it is, when I am taught in the Scriptures that, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light," and when I read, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he believeth not on the Son of God," I affirm, and the Word declares it, unbelief is a sin. Surely with rational and unprejudiced persons, it cannot require any reasoning to prove it. Is it not a sin for a creature to doubt the word of its Maker? Is it not a crime and an insult to the Divinity, for me, an atom, a particle of dust, to dare to deny his words? Is it not the very summit of arrogance and extremity of pride for a son of Adam to say, even in his heart, "God I doubt thy grace; God I doubt thy love; God I doubt thy power?" Oh! sirs believe me, could ye roll all sins into one mass,—could you take murder, and blasphemy, and lust, adultery, and fornication, and everything that is vile and unite them all into one vast globe of black corruption, they would not equal even then the sin of unbelief. This is the monarch sin, the quintessence of guilt; the mixture of the venom of all crimes; the dregs of the wine of Gomorrah; it is the A1 sin, the master-piece of Satan, the chief work of the devil.

     I shall attempt this morning, for a little while, to shew the extremely evil nature of the sin of unbelief.

     1. And first the sin of unbelief will appear to be extremely heinous when we remember that it is the parent of every other iniquity. There is no crime which unbelief will not beget. I think that the fall of man is very much owing to it. It was in this point that the devil tempted Eve. He said to her, "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" He whispered and insinuated a doubt, "Yea, hath God said so?" as much as to say, "Are you quite sure he said so?" It was by means of unbelief—that thin part of the wedge—that the other sin entered; curiosity and the rest followed; she touched the fruit, and destruction came into this world. Since that time, unbelief has been the prolific parent of all guilt. An unbeliever is capable of the vilest crime that ever was committed. Unbelief, sirs! why it hardened the heart of Pharaoh—it gave license to the tongue of blaspheming Rabshaket—yea, it became a deicide, and murdered Jesus. Unbelief!—it has sharpened the knife of the suicide! it has mixed many a cup of poison; thousands it has brought to the halter; and many to a shameful grave, who have murdered themselves and rushed with bloody hands before their Creator's tribunal, because of unbelief. Give me an unbeliever—let me know that he doubts God's word—let me know that he distrusts his promise and his threatening; and with that for a premise, I will conclude that the man shall, by-and-bye unless there is amazing restraining power exerted upon him, be guilty of the foulest and blackest crimes. Ah! this is a Beelzebub sin; like Beelzebub, it is the leader of all evil spirits. It is said of Jeroboam that he sinned and made Israel to sin; and it may be said of unbelief that it not only sins itself, but makes others sin; it is the egg of all crime, the seed of every offence; in fact everything that is evil and vile lies couched in that one word—unbelief.

     And let me say here, that unbelief in the Christian is of the self-same nature as unbelief in the sinner. It is not the same in its final issue, for it will be pardoned in the Christian; yea it is pardoned: it was laid upon the scapegoat's head of old: it was blotted out and atoned for; but it is of the same sinful nature. In fact, if there can be one sin more heinous than the unbelief of a sinner, it is the unbelief of a saint. For a saint to doubt God's word—for a saint to distrust God after innumerable instances of his love, after ten thousand proofs of his mercy, exceeds everything. In a saint, moreover, unbelief is the root of other sins. When I am perfect in faith, I shall be perfect in everything else; I should always fulfill the precept if I always believed the promise. But it is because my faith is weak, that I sin. Put me in trouble, and if I can fold my arms and say, "Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide," you will not find me using wrong means to escape from it. But let me be in temporal distress and difficulty; if I distrust God, what then? Perhaps I shall steal, or do a dishonest act to get out of the hands of my creditors; or if kept from such a transgression, I may plunge into excess to drown my anxieties. Once take away faith, the reins are broken; and who can ride an unbroken steed without rein or bridle? Like the chariot of the sun, with Phaeton for its driver, such should we be without faith. Unbelief is the mother of vice; it is the parent of sin; and, therefore, I say it is a pestilent evil—a master sin.

     2. But secondly; unbelief not only begets, but fosters sin. How is it that men can keep their sin under the thunders of the Sinai preacher? How is it that, when Boanerges stands in the pulpit, and, by the grace of God, cries aloud, "Cursed is every man that keepeth not all the commands of the law,"—how is it that when the sinner hears the tremendous threatenings of God's justice, still he is hardened, and walks on in his evil ways? I will tell you; it is because unbelief of that threatening prevents it from having any effect upon him. When our sappers and miners go to work around Sebastopol, they could not work in front of the walls, if they had not something to keep off the shots; so they raise earthworks, behind which they can do what they please. So with the ungodly man. The devil gives him unbelief; he thus puts up an earthwork, and finds refuge behind it. Ah! sinners, when once the Holy Ghost knocks down your unbelief—when once he brings home the truth in demonstration and in power, how the law will work upon your soul. If man did but believe that the law is holy, that the commandments are holy, just, and good, how he would be shaken over hell's mouth; there would be no sitting and sleeping in God's house; no careless hearers; no going away and straightway forgetting what manner of men ye are. Oh! once get rid of unbelief, how would ever ball from the batteries of the law fall upon the sinner, and the slain of the Lord would be many. Again, how is it that men can hear the wooing of the cross of Calvary, and yet come not to Christ? How is it that when we preach about the sufferings of Jesus, and close up by saying, "yet there is room,"—how is it that when we dwell upon his cross and passion, men are not broken in their hearts? It is said,

"Law and terrors do but harden,  
All the while they work alone:  
But a sense of blood-bought pardon  
Will dissolve a heart of stone."

     Methinks the tale of Calvary is enough to break a rock. Rocks did rend when they saw Jesus die. Methinks the tragedy of Golgotha is enough to make a flint gush with tears, and to make the most hardened wretch weep out his eyes in drops of penitential love; but yet we tell it you, and repeat it oft, but who weeps over it? Who cares about it? Sirs, ye sit as unconcerned as if it did not signify to you. Oh! behold and see all ye that pass by. Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die? Ye seem to say "It is nothing." What is the reason? Because there is unbelief between you and the cross. If there were not that thick veil between you and the Saviour's eyes, his looks of love would melt you. But unbelief is the sin which keeps the power of the gospel from working in the sinner: and it is not till the Holy Ghost strikes that unbelief out—it is not till the Holy Spirit rends away that infidelity and takes it altogether down, that we can find the sinner coming to put his trust in Jesus.

     3. But there is a third point. Unbelief disables a man for the performance of any good work. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," is a great truth in more senses than one. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." You shall never hear me say a word against morality; you shall never hear me say that honesty is not a good thing, or that sobriety is not a good thing; on the contrary, I would say they are commendable things; but I will tell you what I will say afterwards—I will tell you that they are just like the cowries of Hindostan; they may pass current among the Indians, but they will not do in England; these virtues may be current here below, but not above. If you have not something better than your own goodness, you will never get to heaven. Some of the Indian tribes use little strips of cloth instead of money, and I would not find fault with them if I lived there; but when I come to England, strips of cloth will not suffice. So honesty, sobriety, and such things, may be very good amongst men—and the more you have of them the better. I exhort you, whatsoever things are lovely and pure, and of good report, have them—but they will not do up there. All these things put together, without faith, do not please God. Virtues without faith are whitewashed sins. Obedience without faith, if it is possible, is a gilded disobedience. Not to believe, nullifies everything. It is the fly in the ointment; it is the poison in the pot. Without faith, with all the virtues of purity, with all the benevolence of philanthropy, with all the kindness of disinterested sympathy, with all the talents of genius, with all the bravery of patriotism, and with all the decision of principle—"without faith it is impossible to please God." Do you not see then, how bad unbelief is, because it prevents men from performing good works. Yea, even in Christians themselves, unbelief disables them. Let me just tell you a tale—a story of Christ's life.

     A certain man had an afflicted son, possessed with an evil spirit. Jesus was up in Mount Tabor, transfigured; so the father brought his son to the disciples. What did the disciples do? They said, "Oh, we will cast him out." They put their hands upon him, and they tried to do it; but they whispered among themselves and said, "We are afraid we shall not be able." By-and-by the diseased man began to froth at the mouth; he foamed and scratched the earth, clasping it in his paroxysms. The demoniac spirit within him was alive. The devil was still there. In vain their repeated exorcism, the evil spirit remained like a lion in his den, nor could their efforts dislodge him. "Go!" said they; but he went not. "Away to the pit!" they cried; but he remained immoveable. The lips of unbelief cannot affright the Evil One, who might well have said, "Faith I know, Jesus I know, but who are ye? ye have no faith." If they had faith, as a grain of mustard seed, they might have cast the devil out; but their faith was gone, and therefore they could do nothing. Look at poor Peter's case, too. While he had faith, Peter walked on the waves of the sea. That was a splendid walk; I almost envy him treading upon the billows. Why, if Peter's faith had continued, he might have walked across the Atlantic to America. But presently there came a billow behind him, and he said, "That will sweep me away;" and then another before, and he cried out, "That will overwhelm me;" and he thought—how could I be so presumptuous as to be walking on the top of these waves? Down goes Peter. Faith was Peter's life-buoy; faith was Peter's charm—it kept him up; but unbelief sent him down. Do you know that you and I, all our lifetime, will have to walk on the water? A Christian's life is always walking on water—mine is—and every wave would swallow and devour him, but faith makes him stand. The moment you cease to believe, that moment distress comes in, and down you go. Oh! wherefore dost thou doubt, then?

     Faith fosters every virtue; unbelief murders every one. Thousands of prayers have been strangled in their infancy by unbelief. Unbelief has been guilty of infanticide; it has murdered many an infant petition; many a song of praise that would have swelled the chorus of the skies, has been stifled by an unbelieving murmur; many a noble enterprise conceived in the heart has been blighted ere it could come forth, by unbelief. Many a man would have been a missionary; would have stood and preached his Master's gospel boldly; but he had unbelief. Once make a giant unbelieving, and he becomes a dwarf. Faith is the Samsonian lock of the Christian; cut it off, and you may put out his eyes—and he can do nothing.

     4. Our next remark is— unbelief has been severely punished. Turn you to the Scriptures! I see a world all fair and beautiful; its mountains laughing in the sun, and the fields rejoicing in the golden light. I see maidens dancing, and young men singing. How fair the vision! But lo! a grave and reverend sire lifts up his hand, and cries, "A flood is coming to deluge the earth: the fountains of the great deep will be broken up, and all things will be covered. See yonder ark! One hundred and twenty years have I toiled with these my hands to build it; flee there, and you are safe." "Aha! old man; away with your empty predictions! Aha! let us be happy while we may! when the flood comes, then we will build an ark; but there is no flood coming; tell that to fools; we believe no such things." See the unbelievers pursue their merry dance. Hark! Unbeliever. Dost thou not hear that rumbling noise? Earth's bowels have begun to move, her rocky ribs are strained by dire convulsions from within; lo! they break with the enormous strain, and forth from between them torrents rush unknown since God concealed them in the bosom of our world. Heaven is split in sunder! it rains. Not drops, but clouds descend. A cataract, like that of old Niagara, rolls from heaven with mighty noise. Both firmaments, both deeps—the deep below and deep above—do clasp their hands. Now unbelievers, where are you now! There is your last remnant. A man—his wife clasping him round the waist—stands on the last summit that is above the water. See him there? The water is up to his loins even now. Hear his last shriek! He is floating—he is drowned. And as Noah looks from the ark he sees nothing. Nothing! It is a void profound. "Sea monsters whelp and stable in the palaces of kings." All is overthrown, covered, drowned. What hath done it? What brought the flood upon the earth? Unbelief. By faith Noah escaped from the flood. By unbelief the rest were drowned.  
And, oh! do you not know that unbelief kept Moses and Aaron out of Canaan? They honored not God; they struck the rock when they ought to have spoken to it. They disbelieved: and therefore the punishment came upon them, that they should not inherit that good land, for which they had toiled and labored.

     Let me take you where Moses and Aaron dwelt—to the vast and howling wilderness. We will walk about it for a time; sons of the weary foot, we will become like the wandering Bedouins, we will tread the desert for a while. There lies a carcass whitened in the sun; there another, and there another. What means these bleached bones? What are these bodies—there a man, and there a woman? What are all these? How came these corpses here? Surely some grand encampment must have been here cut off in a single night by a blast, or by bloodshed. Ah; no, no. Those bones are the bones of Israel; those skeletons are the old tribes of Jacob. They could not enter because of unbelief. They trusted not in God. Spies said they could not conquer the land. Unbelief was the cause of their death. It was not the Anakims that destroyed Israel; it was not the howling wilderness which devoured them; it was not the Jordan which proved a barrier to Canaan; neither Hivite or Jebusite slew them; it was unbelief alone which kept them out of Canaan. What a doom to be pronounced on Israel, after forty years of journeying: they could not enter because of unbelief!

     Not to multiply instances, recollect Zechariah. He doubted, and the angel struck him dumb. His mouth was closed because of unbelief. But oh! if you would have the worst picture of the effects of unbelief—if you would see how God has punished it, I must take you to the siege of Jerusalem, that worst massacre which time has ever seen; when the Romans razed the walls to the ground, and put the whole of the inhabitants to the sword, or sold them as slaves in the market-place. Have you never read of the destruction of Jerusalem, by Titus? Did you never turn to the tragedy of Masada, when the Jews stabbed each other rather than fall into the hands of the Romans? Do you not know, that to this day the Jew walks through the earth a wanderer, without a home and without a land? He is cut off, as a branch is cut from a vine; and why? Because of unbelief. Each time ye see a Jew with a sad and somber countenance—each time ye mark him like a denizen of another land, treading as an exile in this our country—each time ye see him, pause and say, "Ah! it was unbelief which caused thee to murder Christ, and now it has driven thee to be a wanderer; and faith alone—faith in the crucified Nazarene—can fetch thee back to thy country, and restore it to its ancient grandeur." Unbelief, you see, has the Cain-mark upon its forehead. God hates it; God has dealt hard blows upon it: and God will ultimately crush it. Unbelief dishonors God. Every other crime touches God's territory; but unbelief aims a blow at his divinity, impeaches his veracity, denies his goodness, blasphemes his attributes, maligns his character; therefore, God of all things, hates first and chiefly, unbelief, wherever it is.

     5. And now to close this point—for I have been already too long—let me remark that you will observe the heinous nature of unbelief in this—that it is the damning sin. There is one sin for which Christ never died; it is the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is one other sin for which Christ never made atonement. Mention every crime in the calendar of evil, and I will show you persons who have found forgiveness for it. But ask me whether the man who died in unbelief can be saved, and I reply there is no atonement for that man. There is an atonement made for the unbelief of a Christian, because it is temporary; but the final unbelief—the unbelief with which men die—never was atoned for. You may turn over this whole Book, and you will find that there is no atonement for the man who died in unbelief; there is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin, if he had but believed, he would have been pardoned; but this is the damning exception—he had no faith. Devils seize him! O fiends of the pit, drag him downward to his doom! He is faithless and unbelieving, and such are the tenants for whom hell was built. It is their portion, their prison, they are the chief prisoners, the fetters are marked with their names, and for ever shall they know that, "he that believeth not shall be damned."

II. This brings us now to conclude with the PUNISHMENT.

     "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Listen unbelievers! ye have heard this morning your sin; now listen to your doom: "Ye shall see it with your eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." It is so often with God's own saints. When they are unbelieving, they see the mercy with their eyes, but do not eat it. Now, here is corn in this land of Egypt; but there are some of God's saints who come here on the Sabbath, and say, "I do not know whether the Lord will be with me or not." Some of them say, "Well, the gospel is preached, but I do not know whether it will be successful." They are always doubting and fearing. Listen to them when they get out of the chapel. "Well, did you get a good meal this morning?" "Nothing for me." Of course not. Ye could see it with your eyes, but did not eat it, because you had no faith. If you had come up with faith, you would have had a morsel. I have found Christians, who have grown so very critical, that if the whole portion of the meat they are to have, in due season, is not cut up exactly into square pieces, and put upon some choice dish of porcelain, they cannot eat it. Then they ought to go without; and they will have to go without, until they are brought to their appetites. They will have some affliction, which will act like quinine upon them: they will be made to eat by means of bitters in their mouths; they will be put in prison for a day or two until their appetite returns, and then they will be glad to eat the most ordinary food, off the most common platter, or no platter at all. But the real reason why God's people do not feed under a gospel ministry, is, because they have not faith. If you believed, if you did but hear one promise, that would be enough; if you only heard one good thing from the pulpit here would be food for your soul, for it is not the quantity we hear, but the quantity we believe, that does us good—it is that which we receive into our hearts with true and lively faith, that is our profit.

     But, let me apply this chiefly to the unconverted. They often see great works of God done with their eyes, but they do not eat thereof. A crowd of people have come here this morning to see with their eyes, but I doubt whether all of them eat. Men cannot eat with their eyes, for if they could, most would be well fed. And, spiritually, persons cannot feed simply with their ears, nor simply with looking at the preacher; and so we find the majority of our congregations come just to see; "Ah, let us hear what this babbler would say, this reed shaken in the wind." But they have no faith; they come, and they see, and see, and see, and never eat. There is some one in the front there, who gets converted; and some one down below, who is called by sovereign grace; some poor sinner is weeping under a sense of his blood-guiltiness; another is crying for mercy to God: and another is saying, "Have mercy upon me, a sinner." A great work is going on in this chapel, but some of you do not know anything about it; you have no work going on in your hearts, and why? Because ye think it is impossible; ye think God is not at work. He has not promised to work for you who do not honor him. Unbelief makes you sit here in times of revival and of the outpouring of God's grace, unmoved, uncalled, unsaved.

     But, sirs, the worst fulfillment of this doom is to come! Good Whitefield used sometimes to lift up both his hands and shout, as I wish I could shout, but my voice fails me. "The wrath to come! the wrath to come!" It is not the wrath now you have to fear, but the wrath to come; and there shall be a doom to come, when "ye shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof." Methinks I see the last great day. The last hour of time has struck. I heard the bell toll its death knell—time was, eternity is ushered in; the sea is boiling; the waves are lit up with supernatural splendour. I see a rainbow—a flying cloud, and on it there is a throne, and on that throne sits one like unto the Son of Man. I know him. In his hand he holds a pair of balances; just before him the books,—the book of life, the book of death, the book of remembrance. I see his splendour, and I rejoice at it; I behold his pompous appearance, and I smile with gladness that he is come to be "admired of all his saints." But there stands a throng of miserable wretches, crouching in horror to conceal themselves, and yet looking, for their eyes must look on him whom they have pierced; but when they look they cry, "Hide me from the face." What face? "Rocks, hide me from the face." What face? "The face of Jesus, the man who died, but now is come to judgment." But ye cannot be hidden from his face; ye must see it with your eyes: but ye will not sit on the right hand, dressed in robes of grandeur; and when the triumphal procession of Jesus in the clouds shall come, ye shall not march in it; ye shall see it, but ye shall not be there. Oh! methinks I see it now, the mighty Saviour in his chariot, riding on the rainbow to heaven. See how his mighty coursers make the sky rattle while he drives them up heaven's hill. A train girt in white follow behind him, and at his chariot wheels he drags the devil, death, and hell. Hark, how they clap their hands. Hark, how they shout. "Thou hast ascended up on high; thou hast led captivity captive." Hark, how they chant the solemn lay, "Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." See the splendour of their appearance; mark the crown upon their brows; see their snow-white garments; mark the rapture of their countenances; hear how their song swells up to heaven while the Eternal joins therein, saying, "I will rejoice over them with joy, I will rejoice over them with singing, for I have betrothed thee unto me in everlasting lovingkindness." But where are you all the while? Ye can see them up there, but where are you? Looking at it with your eyes, but you cannot eat thereof. The marriage banquet is spread; the good old wines of eternity are broached; they sit down to the feast of the king; but there are you, miserable, and famishing, and ye cannot eat thereof. Oh! how ye wring your hands. Might ye but have one morsel from the table—might ye but be dogs beneath the table. You shall be a dog in hell, but not a dog in heaven.

     But to conclude. Methinks I see thee in some place in hell, tied to a rock, the vulture of remorse gnawing thy heart; and up there is Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. You lift up your eyes and you see who it is. "That is the poor man who lay on my dunghill, and the dogs licked his sores; there he is in heaven, while I am cast down. Lazarus—yes, it is Lazarus; and I who was rich in the world of time am here in hell. Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue." But no! it cannot be; it cannot be. And whilst you lie there, if there be one thing in hell worse than another, it will be seeing the saints in heaven. Oh, to think of seeing my mother in heaven while I am cast out! Oh, sinner, only think, to see thy brother in heaven—he who was rocked in the selfsame cradle, and played beneath the same roof-tree—yet thou art cast out. And, husband, there is thy wife in heaven, and thou art amongst the damned. And seest thou, father! thy child is before the throne; and thou! accursed of God and accursed of man, art in hell. Oh, the hell of hells will be to see our friends in heaven, and ourselves lost. I beseech you, my hearers, by the death of Christ—by his agony and bloody sweat—by his cross and passion—by all that is holy—by all that is sacred in heaven and earth—by all that is solemn in time or eternity—by all that is horrible in hell, or glorious in heaven—by that awful thought, "for ever,"—I beseech you lay these things to heart, and remember that if you are damned, it will be unbelief that damns you. If you are lost, it will be because ye believed not on Christ; and if you perish, this shall be the bitterest drop of gall—that ye did not trust in the Saviour.