

## Prayers

### To God

*Weekly theme: Pray for the Lord's protection*

Dear Jesus, hear my prayers. Sometimes I do not know whether I am right or wrong in what I say to You, or whether I correctly hear what You are saying to me. But You graciously listen me, and You never refrain from speaking to me. I thank You for this, dear Jesus, because I trust that as time goes by I will better understand how You are guiding me, protecting me, and leading me through things that seem mysterious to me now. I place myself in Your hands, dear Jesus; I trust You: **AMEN**

### For myself

*Pray about your thoughts. So many things come into our heads, and they sometimes drive what we do and say, even though we have spent little time questioning where our thoughts have come from. Ask the Lord for courage to discern what is right and wrong in the thoughts that come into your own mind.*

### For others

*Look around you at the people you see each day, and imagine what they are feeling. Do your best to put yourself in the shoes of those who live very different lives to your own, and pray for them. It is not easy to do this, but it is right and just that we try.*

## Meditation

Is it just philosophers who ponder 'who am I'?  
No, there's always more to human life, and yet more ...  
Its not enough to talk of flesh and blood,  
Of brains and thoughts, intelligence and feeling;  
Of life's experiences, of childhood and adolescence  
And yet more, just to say '*that's it, that's me!*'  
These things cannot say why I'm conscious of my 'self',  
They do not say what's true about the things I do;  
They do not lead me to the touch of God; His Spirit,  
Which draws me ever on, despite myself  
To make in me a heart that's new, not selfish but others,  
Serving the Lord who served me, though I know not why?  
But this I do know; once touched by real life,  
Twice born by the Creator's selfless breath,  
All else is mere description and experience,

Except the Spirit's gifts by which I know the real 'me'  
Revealed in faith and hope and love eternal.

## Bible Passage

### Genesis 3:8-13

<sup>8</sup> The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden within the breeze of the day, and they hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him,

*"Where are you?"*

<sup>10</sup> He said,

*"I heard Your sound in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."*

<sup>11</sup> He said,

*"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree from which I forbade you to eat?"*

<sup>12</sup> The man replied,

*"The woman You put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate."*

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman,

*"What is this you have done?"*

The woman said,

*"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

## Review

What an incredible tragedy. At the end of chapter 2 we read about the man and the woman created from Adam and the sexual and physical purity of their relationship before God. Now everything has gone wrong! First the woman, and then the man have succumbed to the serpent's temptations and their world has fallen apart. The beautiful relationship the two had with God has now been compromised, and blame and shame cascade from their words as they responded to God's pained enquiries about them.

The man and the woman both know that they have disobeyed God; they have 'fallen' from their perfect state of obedience to their Maker. The damage has been done through both the serpent's words of temptation to the woman (3:1-4) and the frailty of the man (3:6,7). Moreover, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has now been eaten, and the pair have lost their innocent relationship with the creator. By choice, they have opened themselves up to all the possibilities of sin and evil in the world; they have chosen to know evil as well as good. But this does not mean that God does not still love them, and this is the remarkable message of this intriguing passage of Genesis.

The story of 'the Fall' is recorded in yesterday's reading, and it tells us something of the anatomy of temptation and sin, and how this works at a fundamental level to afflict humanity.

But the rest of this Genesis 3 now describes to us in graphic terms the consequences of this fall, and we will find that this has three main parts. First, scripture describes in today's passage the loss of fellowship between all the parties, that is, God, the woman and the man, but also the rest of Creation. Second, in tomorrow's reading, God announces the consequences of the fall on the three main participants in the story; on the serpent, on the woman and on the man (3:14-19). Third and lastly in Genesis 3, God confirms both His justice and His mercy by turning the man and the woman out of the Garden He had made for them (3:20f.); but within this tragic ending we discover God still cares intimately for Adam and Eve (3:20-24).

Now, if you were to ask people the question '*what is sin?*' and ask them to find a Biblical answer, you might expect them to turn to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1ff, Deut 5:6ff), and identify murder, adultery and the other 'sins' exposed by the law. If you were then to go further and ask what sin does to people and how it can be dealt with, you might suggest that sin separates us from God, and Christ has come to mend that separation. You would be right, of course, but there is more to the matter of sin than what we find by starting with the 10 commandments and the laws of Moses. These laws are all social standards designed to order society, and the work of Christ has fulfilled the work of Moses' laws (Matt 5:17). We need to go back to Genesis 3 for a better start to the quest for the origins of sin in humanity, and then we may come to understand why it is so pervasive, even amongst Christians!

Genesis is part of the 'prologue' to scripture which is specifically designed to reveal basic truths about human nature and our relationship with God in a fallen world. Genesis 3 describes the heart of God and the hearts of men and women, and through this passage and other sections especially of Genesis 1-11, it makes substantial comment on the roots of sin and its consequences. To begin with, we cannot read today's passage without noticing that God, the director of His creation and sole authority within it, has become sidelined from humanity by the presumptions of sin. As we read through our passage, we hear God almost plaintively calling out to His lost creation, the man and the woman. Separation has occurred of a fundamental nature, and God is searching out what he has lost because of the sin of His highest and best creation!

The serpent introduced temptation through innuendo and misinformation (3:1-7) and the woman and the man fell for it. They could no longer stand within the sight of God and hid from Him (3:8); they had chosen their own way and been disobedient, and their hiding (3:8) represents this tragic breakdown. The wonderful delights described in Genesis 1:27,28; 2:7 and 2:21-24 are lost in an instant to be replaced by self-centredness; this perhaps is one of the roots of sin?

Following these events, God was forced to act like a judge appealing for the truth, calling out to the man and the woman '*where are you?*' (3:9), a cry that has echoed throughout history ever since. The man and the woman were unable to respond with anything more than embarrassed self justification, made all the worse by their pathetic accusations against each other and the serpent (3:11-13). They were responsible for their own deeds and words, but were unwilling to accept this responsibility; is this another root of sin? If we look at the passage today, then the rights and wrongs of what was said, like most human arguments, become irrelevant. In the plethora of accusation, as in any argument, truth is a casualty as self preservation becomes the objective for both the man and the women (3:11,12). A heartbroken God is left to decide how to deal with the awfulness of the situation whilst watching his own loved and created '*image*' descend into bickering; another root of sin, perhaps.

At the very end, the truth is indeed told, and the woman says, '*the serpent deceived me and I ate*' (3:13). Ultimately, truth cannot be avoided, and it may be that God appreciates this confession. We will discover tomorrow what the consequences of God's judgement will be.

Yet this is a heartbreaking passage of scripture, and by accepting what it says about sin and evil, we begin to touch on the truths we need to know from this immensely important Scripture.

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Truth and lies***

The whole way through this sorry tale, the responses of the man and the woman displayed an inadequacy before the truth. This is true to this day of so much human endeavour. We have seen within the story how evasion, excuse and fear are a direct consequence of being separated from God the Creator. Indeed, even though no direct lies have been told, the evasion of the pair of them leaves us with the impression that they did not tell the truth, for neither of them answered God's question directly.

#### ***Guilt and its consequences***

Perhaps the most heinous problem created by 'the Fall' is a pervading sense of guilt in the words and actions of the man and the woman. They knew they have done wrong, but were unwilling to either face it or declare it when directly challenged, and this remains a characteristic of a great deal of human behaviour today. One could make a list of all the consequences observed in this part of the story of 'the Fall', but all who read it will spot even more, and see sin's all embracing consequences for what they are. The scripture is there for us to learn from, but it is also there for us to take heart, for 'the Fall' is but the beginning of the story of the Gospel, which is God's rescue plan to restore His Creation and the people He loves; but just as people chose to reject God as described in 'the Fall', God's solution in Jesus Christ must be chosen; not because of God's hardness of heart, but because of His love, and our need to repent of our sin.

One way that people attempt to deal with problems is to go to a counsellor or psychologist; someone who will give them time and take care 'get to the root' of problems. Yet this method so often flounders by looking for one cause for multiple problems or nothing more than human sin. Some find healing through such help, but Christians should be wary of trying to find any answer to the human condition which does not address human sin, as described in the story of 'the Fall'. Few are prepared to accept that their problem is sin, although their lives illustrate it abundantly; but the Gospel of Jesus both asks us to confess this and gives us the only answer to its awful truth.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Ask yourself about what excuses you use when replying to God's challenges. Each of us has stood back from something the Lord has asked of us, and our negative responses can be predictable. Ask the Lord to help you break any grip of negativity in your life and open to door to God's possibilities.
- Read a newspaper and see if you can find within it some modern day examples of ancient sins reflected in the Genesis 3 story, the evasion of personal responsibility, unfounded accusations, alienation, and more. Let scripture help you see the world around you in a different light.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Make a list of the failings of the man in the story of 'the Fall'. How seriously do you rate these, and how does Christ deal with them?
2. Make a list of the failings of the woman in the story of 'the Fall'. How seriously do you rate these, and how does Christ deal with them?
3. Discuss the feelings of God in the scenario of this passage of scripture. Is it possible to imagine how God 'feels'?

## **Final Prayer**

Make me always ready, Great Lord of All, to love as I am loved, to serve as I am served, to give as I have received, and to help as I have been helped. Make me always ready to show through what I do the thanks I owe to You, my Lord, for saving me. AMEN