

## A) *The Greek God and the Mortal Woman*

The story goes that once there was a Greek god who winged his way down from Mt. Olympus to look over the happenings of the human race. In roaming back and forth throughout the earth he fell in love with a mortal woman. Disguising himself as a mortal man, he struck up a loving relationship with her.

Quite some time later, when everything was going so well with the two, this Greek god decided to leave Mt. Olympus and visit with her as was his newly adopted custom. But on arriving he found her lying on the side of the road in a pool of her own blood, apparently having been involved in some terrible accident. At the sight of it all, this Greek god – being so perfectly holy and immortal, was repulsed by what he saw and winged his way back to Mt. Olympus, vowing never to return again.

### Questions to ponder?

1. Could you imagine a god repulsed by our human condition – our suffering, our pain, our failures, and our very mortality? Could you imagine a holy god choosing to dwell among such fallen creatures so different from himself? Yet, what other choice would a holy perfect god have after roaming through the earth and considering our fallen human race?
2. How far fallen are we as a human race? How distant and how desperate are we in relation to a holy perfect god?

## B) *Christianity*

As the vast majority of all religions point out, Christianity teaches that there is a deep need which humans have to be made acceptable before god and that a person's living on forever depends on this. However, where Christianity again completely distinguishes itself is in its teaching of the absolute distance between our fallen race and God's holiness – his glory and perfection. The *risen Messiah*, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, teaches that God created us to be perfect and still expects nothing less of us today - Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. As most religions teach – and to the greatest degree Christianity teaches – that our human race is in need of salvation. Christianity alone teaches that we have an absolute/extreme need of being saved from our fallen condition of suffering, pain, failures, and our own mortality. And unlike all other religions, Christianity teaches that a human being is entirely incapable of saving themselves, even in part.

### More Questions to ponder?

1. How did the human race end up in such a fallen state?
2. If God is an all holy, perfect, and powerful God, how is it that he did not prevent this? Wouldn't he then ultimately be responsible for all our suffering and all evil too?
3. If God is a loving God, how could he have allowed this to happen?

**C) The Fall (Genesis 3:1-17)** (NOTE: Jesus the risen Lord affirms that this account is true in his reference to the whole Old Testament and specifically to the beginning when God created the human race (cf. John 10:35; Matthew 19:4...) As to the context of Genesis 3, what precedes it is the creation account of the world where God is recorded as saying upon completion that it was all "very good / beyond perfection." This was especially true of the human race which was made in his own image of holiness and righteousness – ultimate perfection.)

**Genesis 3:1** 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'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but 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." 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.

8 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. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 Adam answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11 And God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 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 (hostility/warfare) between you and the woman,

***and between your offspring and hers;***

***He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* – See John 3:8**

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." (ca 4500BC)

### **Questions Answered...**

1. How did the human race end up in such a fallen state?

*By free will, Adam and Eve rejected God and his image and ate of the forbidden fruit.*

2. If God is an all holy, perfect, and powerful God, how is it that he did not prevent this? Wouldn't he then ultimately be responsible for all our suffering and all evil too?

*God never wanted this, yet God was compelled to allow his children the possibility to destroy their relationship with him in the hope that their love for him would be freely given. Once we divorced ourselves from God by our sin, he naturally had to begin withdrawing himself from us – perfection, love, happiness, life, eternity, and every good thing (void = evil; total void = hell).*

3. If God is a loving God, how could he have allowed this to happen?

*The fact that this happened, would not mean God is unloving. His allowing humans to originally have free will was indeed ultimate love. And the fact that before God announced the consequences of sin, that he promised to send a Savior to restore our relationship with him and all God's goodness along with his providence until that time, proves God is all-loving.*

## ***D) Our Sin is the Source of All Problems***

In order to fully understand salvation, we need to not only understand how it is that we fell but to comprehend the full damage sin brings. In this part, we'll look to answer these three questions...

1. What is sin?
2. What are the consequences of sin?
3. Why is sin serious?

### **1a. What is sin?**

1. The Bible, which the resurrected Lord alone pointed to as God's inspired inerrant Word, has various words to describe sin. Some of those words are:

a. Transgression / Trespass

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. (Psalm 51:3)*

b. Lawlessness

*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:4)*

c. Wickedness/Evil

*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5)*

NOTE: We are all naturally sinful due to "**original sin**": When Adam and Eve sinned, they became infected with sin (sinful) and that "disease" spread through all.

*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12). – But Jesus was born unnaturally.*

### **1b. What ways do we sin? (A few are listed below)**

a. *Sins of commission and omission*

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Romans 13:9)

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (James 4:17)

b. *Sins of thought*

For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup>greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' (Mark 7:21-23)

c. *Sins of ignorance*

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. <sup>13</sup>Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. (Psalm 19:12-13a)

**Illustration: 1 sin a minute = 1,440 sins a day, 525,600 a year, 42 million by 80**

## 2a. How does sin affect us? (What are the consequences of sin?)

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| a. It totally corrupts us                     | <u>Genesis 8:21</u> (See below)   |
| b. It makes us worthless                      | <u>Romans 3:10-12</u> (See below)   |
| c. It enslaves us                             | <u>John 8:34</u> (See below)  |
| d. It makes us spiritually dead.              | <u>Ephesians 2:1</u> (See below)  |
| e. <i>It is the reason we physically die.</i> | <u>Romans 6:23</u> (See below)  |
| f. It makes us hostile to God.                | <u>Romans 8:7</u> (See below)   |
| g. Impact of 1 sin                            | <u>James 2:10</u> (See below)   |
| h. Sin curses us                              | <u>Galatians 3:10</u> & <u>Matthew 25:41, 46</u><br>Luke 16:19-31 pictures hell's torment |

*(a) The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood... (b) There is no one righteous, not even one;<sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.<sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless... (c) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin... As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... (e) the wages of sin is death... (f) the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so... (g) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it... (h) All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." & Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire..."*

## 3a. Why's sin so serious?

### Illustration: Just One Punch

**Summary Illustration: 1 sin = 1 inch manure; 42,048,000 sins/inches manure a life-time; 42,048,000 inches = 663 ½ miles of manure. Without salvation we would be trying to approach God wearing manure piled up high - the distance from Minneapolis to Chicago.**

## *E. The True God and the Fallen Human Race*

Think back to the opening story of the Greek god repulsed by our human suffering, our failures, and our death. Wouldn't the story have been better if that holy god would have rescued the one he loved in spite of all her failings and all she had done wrong?

That, of course, is the true ending to the human story. We have a God who gave us his only Son who saw our misery and in spite of the fact that we did this to ourselves, he came to take away our sin by undergoing all our suffering, experiencing all our pain, and paying the price for all our sins on a cross. Jesus' resurrection, then, is the proof that all that was lost to us is now being restored for us. It's proof that we have an all loving God who desires that no one should perish but have life forever in peace, joy, happiness, and holiness with God. It is his desire that we return to paradise, have his image restored in us, and that we would never be able to fall again.

***John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."***

***For next discussion: Continue to work through one of the four gospels, preferably John's gospel, and begin to write down any questions you have to address when we meet again.***

### ***Questions for You (Food for Thought)...***

- 1) *What does it mean that God would give his only precious Son for you that he could now rescue you from all your pain, suffering, sins, guilt, and even death simply by trusting in him?*
  
- 2) *What does it mean to know that Jesus was raised from the dead and that this is the sign God has given of his approval of his work - that all which is wrong with this world and us is being made right, especially in the hearts of those who believe?*
  
- 3) *What are the implications of having such a loving God as this who cares so deeply about you and your everyday life, especially when it comes to our most difficult times and our final moments?*
  
- 4) *What are the implications for you in having a God who has so loved you, in spite of all the damage we've done to creation and all the hurt we have caused him with our sinfulness as it relates to you in your relationships with others? 1) Your spouse who may often hurt you; 2) A friend who may one day betray you? 3) Even your enemies that want nothing but to see you suffer?*
  
- 5) *What does it mean that the Bible is alone fully trustworthy as God's revelation to you about the things of this life from happiness, to purpose, to perseverance in suffering, to wisdom for all situations?*
  
- 6) *What parts of what we've gone through, if any, are things you have questions about or are struggling with? I believe God wants an environment where we can openly discuss any thing with each other – there is no such thing as a foolish question. This is how his Love and his Truth might prevail!*