

Q. Did God create us unable to keep His law?

A. No, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature and unable to keep God's law.

Text: Romans 5:12

LSB: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all, because all sinned.

Literal: "Because of this, just as through one man the sin into the world entered – and through the sin the death – so also into all men the death spread, upon which all sinned."<sup>1</sup>

Our [Literal] First Parents

Before we even unpack the events in **Genesis 2-3**, it is worth pausing to highlight the significance of Genesis 1-11 being literal and historical events that actually took place thousands of years ago.

- Sadly, many commentators and professing evangelicals treat Genesis 1-11 as myth.
- This arises not from a careful analysis of the text, but out of the fear of man: apparently, evolutionary "science" has "proven" the world to be [hundreds of] millions [billions??] years old, and therefore that man could not have been miraculously [divinely] created out of the earth, but is merely the product of chance, time, and evolution.
  - Many professing evangelicals adhere to what is called "Theistic Evolution," a teaching that suggests that God "sovereignly" has been

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<sup>1</sup> This is my own extremely wooden translation of the Greek text (Διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντα ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον·).

overseeing and directing the millions/billions of years of evolution, including even “Adam” descending from apes and Neanderthals.<sup>2</sup>

Though perhaps unsatisfactory to Christ-rejecting cynics and skeptics, we must content ourselves with the Biblical witness of [the historical] Jesus and Paul, to the veracity and truthfulness of the historical creation account.

### Their [literal] Disobedience

After personally forming Adam<sup>3</sup> and placing<sup>4</sup> him in the Garden, we are told that Yahweh God gave the man commands<sup>5</sup> with respect to his commission.<sup>6</sup>

- Theologians have observed both a ‘positive’ and a ‘negative’ component to Yahweh’s command.<sup>7</sup>
  - Positively, “Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, ‘From every tree of the garden you may surely<sup>8</sup> eat.’” (**Gen. 2:16**)<sup>9</sup>
  - Negatively, “[Yahweh God commanded the man, saying] ‘but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it.’” (**2:17**)

Now, before their transgression in chapter 3, Moses notes, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (**2:25**)

- Their unashamed nakedness<sup>10</sup> is a picture of their sinless innocence.

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough and rigorous (1006 pages!!) rebuttal of Theistic Evolution, see *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Crossway, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> **Genesis 2:7** (LSB)

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew verb (*nuakh*) is in the hiphil form and can thus be literally translated, “He caused to rest.” This is theologically significant (note how a different verb is used in **2:8**), but for the sake of time and space, cannot be teased out at this time.

<sup>5</sup> This is the first time this Hebrew verb (*tsavah* [piel]) appears. It *always* means “to command.”

<sup>6</sup> I use this word both intentionally and theologically, being highly influenced by G.K. Beale’s book, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (IVP Academic, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Or as John Goldingay says, God here gives “the human being permissions and instructions” with regards to his role in God “succeeding” in creating and filling the world with His glory. See his *Genesis* (BECOT: Pentateuch), p.49.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, “eating, you will eat.” The imperfect (i.e., “will”) is rightly translated “may.” The infinitive absolute adds emphasis to God’s gracious provision: “you may *freely* eat”, or even, “you may eat to your heart’s content” (see NET footnote).

<sup>9</sup> Their obedient and regular eating of the tree of life would have enabled them to live forever. In the Bible, obedience by faith is linked to wisdom, which in the book of Proverbs is also linked to the Tree that gives Life.

<sup>10</sup> There is a play on words in the original Hebrew that is missed by our English translations between 2:25 (“naked”, עָרוֹם [*‘arom*]), and the very next verse, 3:1 (“shrewd”, עָרוֹם [*‘arum*]). The ‘*arum*’ is about to exploit their ‘*arom*’.

However, the very next verse/chapter begins with the introduction of another character, who in his “shrewdness” is about to exploit Adam and Eve’s imperfect wisdom.<sup>11</sup>

- Satan undermines their trust in God’s goodness, grace, and generosity by [subtly] distorting the word/promise/threat/command He gave them (**3:1**).
- The woman, being deceived,<sup>12</sup> follows the serpent’s lead by also distorting – through addition<sup>13</sup> – God’s word (**3:2**).
- The man, in his lack of wisdom/fear of Yahweh, also disobeys<sup>14</sup> God’s commands to guard the Garden and protect his bride (**2:15**); instead of rebuking the serpent for slandering God and trying to beguile his bride, he allows one of the ‘beasts’ – which he had been granted dominion over (**1:28; 2:19-20**)<sup>15</sup> – to rule over him [and his wife].
- Rather than trusting God’s [kingly] “definition” of what is “good” and “evil”, Eve tries to become like the Creator by determining<sup>16</sup> for herself<sup>17</sup> that what God has forbidden is actually “good.” (**3:6a**)<sup>18</sup>
- Not to be outdone, the man – demonstrating his cowardice – is now ready to eat of the forbidden fruit, as it *seems* that his bride indeed did not “die” (despite God’s warning/threat in **2:17**).

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<sup>11</sup> Now is not the time to introduce the redemptive-historical importance of “wisdom,” which, says Solomon not only characterizes God, but is also to be sought and imbibed by His image-bearers if they are to enjoy eternal life and live rightly as His image bearers. However, that “the beginning/foundation of wisdom is the fear of YHWH” reminds us that Adam and Eve’s lack of fear/reverence of YHWH and His commands becomes the crack in the foundation which the serpent will “wisely” exploit. As we see from the very beginning of the Bible *faith in* God and *fear of* God are inextricably linked in the Bible.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. **1 Timothy 2:14**

<sup>13</sup> According to **Proverbs 30:5-6**, to add to God’s sufficient word is foolish, and stems from a lack of fear/trust in Yahweh. Her addition, equally as subtle as the serpent’s whisper, has catastrophic implications.

<sup>14</sup> Just as true obedience to God is rooted in faith (cf. **Romans 1:5; 16:25**; see especially how *pistis* (“faith”) is used this way in **1 Thessalonians**).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. **Psalms 8**. According to **Colossians 1:15-17**, Jesus – the second Adam – is the true ruler who exercises full dominion and authority over the [first] creation. And according to **1:18-20**, through His resurrection (cf. **Romans 1:4**), He also is the ruler over the new creation: *now* through the church, and for eternity in the new heavens and earth.

<sup>16</sup> There is another play on words in the Hebrew in **3:5**, where the same participle (“knowing”) is used, first of God, then of the woman, who would become like God. Thus, “knowing good and evil” is a prerogative that belongs to God alone. For understanding “know” as “determine,” see Henri Blocher’s book, *Original Sin* in NSBT.

<sup>17</sup> This is where the [ugly] word “autonomy” comes from. Literally, it means “self law.”

<sup>18</sup> As D.A. Carson has so memorably put it, “they tried to de-God God.”

Tragically, after their blatant transgression,<sup>19</sup> their “eyes were opened” (3:7; cf. 3:5) to “know good and evil.” But the knowledge they gained through their rebellion proved rather to be bitter than sweet: now they “knew,” that is, they had intimately experienced, “evil”<sup>20</sup>, whereas before they had only “known” God’s “good” and life-giving blessing.

- Following their transgression, we see “evil” spread, as the man blames the woman for his sin, and the woman blames the serpent for her sin (3:12-13).
- That this new sinful disposition was passed on to their “seed”, is clearly seen in Cain’s sinful anger against, and shrewd murder of his brother Abel (4:5, 8).
- Within a few generations, polygamy is being practiced (4:19), another direct violation of God’s original design (cf. 2:24).
- By the time we get to **Genesis 6**, we are told that “Yahweh saw that the evil of man[kind] was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (6:5, LSB, emphasis mine)

Instead of the *blessing* of God spreading to the ends of the earth, the *curse* of man is filling God’s world.

- This is because, as Paul says, “sin spread to all men.” (Romans 5:12)

This is not new to Paul, who is likely referring to **Genesis 5:1-3**, which says,

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. When Adam lived 130 years, he became the father of *a son* in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.” (LSB, emphasis mine)

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<sup>19</sup> For an excellent treatment of “transgression” as willful rebellion, see The Bible Project’s video on *pesha’* (Hebrew) and *paraptoma* (Greek): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq-r9FFN5ew&t=1s>

<sup>20</sup> This is how David uses “know” in **Psalms 51:3**.

Just as Adam bore God's sinless "image" and "likeness" before the Fall (cf. **1:26**), so now all his "seed" bear his sinful "image" and "likeness" after the Fall.

- And just as Adam "died", we see repeatedly in **Genesis 5**, that all those born in his image likewise "died."

*Before* the Fall, Adam and Eve had the *ability* to keep God's law, which would have led to eternal life for them.<sup>21</sup>

However, *after* the Fall, all those who are born "in Adam" – those whom Paul says are "in the flesh" – this is no longer true.

- **Romans 8:7** – "Because the mind of the flesh [is] hostile toward God; for to the law of God it is not subjected, for it is not even able [to do so]."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, for those in the flesh, [the L]aw can only bring death and condemnation.

- **Romans 7:5** (LSB) – "For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." (emphasis mine)

This is why we must preach Jesus Christ alone, and Him crucified, who alone is able to remove God's just condemnation of lawbreakers.

- **Romans 8:1-4** (LSB) – "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (emphasis mine)

### Adam's Disobedience has Corrupted **all** Creation

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<sup>21</sup> See the study notes from NCC Question 13. Cf. **Romans 7:10; Gal. 3:12**

<sup>22</sup> This is my own wooden, literal translation of the Greek (emphasis mine).

The Fall has not only affected humanity; it has also brought death to all of God's "good" creation.

- **Romans 8:20-22** (LSB) – “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” (emphasis mine)

Amazingly, through the disobedience of the one – the first Adam – the curse of sin and death came upon the entire initial creation.

Even more amazingly, through the [perfect] obedience<sup>23</sup> of the One – the second Adam – the curse of sin and death will be removed and reversed in the entire new creation.

- **Colossians 1:17-20** (LSB) – “And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For in Him all the fullness *of God* was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace by the blood of His cross – through Him – whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

This work of “new creation” – which Jesus Himself has purchased, and now rules over as cosmic Lord – has begun in the church,<sup>24</sup> who has been commissioned as His ambassador to declare and extend His heavenly reign to the ends of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> That is, both His passive obedience (His death on the cross) and active obedience (His perfect keeping of God's law).

<sup>24</sup> This is clearly seen in the contrast between **Colossians 1:15-17** and **1:8-20**. Jesus is Lord of creation because of His role in creation (**v.16**); Jesus is also Lord of new creation because of His role in redemption (**v.20**). This reflects perhaps one of Paul's most important theological emphases, namely “the now and the not yet.” The new creation has irrupted into the old, originally in Christ, and now in the church. Cf. **2 Corinthians 5:17**.

<sup>25</sup> **Matthew 28:18-20**; cf. **6:9-10**. As many commentators and scholars note, it is interesting how mountains play a huge theological role in Matthew's understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven, as they serve as a sort of ‘pulpit for the King.’

- The previous “sons” – Adam and Israel – failed their commission. The true Son – Jesus – will not.

According to **Matthew 24:14**, when the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and the last of the elect is saved, Jesus will return to set up the realization of the new heavens and earth, where He will perfectly rule as God’s Son forever and ever.

- Unlike the first Adam, who not only allowed sin into Eden, but even committed sin, the second Adam will neither sin Himself, nor let sin [or sinners] into the true Eden.
  - **Revelation 20:10, 14-15** (LSB) – “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are also, and they will be tormented day and night forever... Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
  - **Revelation 21:1-2, 27** (LSB) – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband... And nothing defiled, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

This is why the original creation is “eagerly waiting for the revealing of the sons of God” – that is, when He brings them in their resurrection bodies<sup>26</sup> to forever dwell in and enjoy His new heavens and earth.

### So What?

The gospel is the answer for both dilemma’s, whether mankind’s inability to keep God’s law, or creation’s slavery to corruption.

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<sup>26</sup> See **Romans 8:23**

Christ crucified and raised is the world's only hope, and so let us be faithful to preach His gospel, in season, out of season, and to the ends of the earth.

Soli Deo Gloria!!