

LIVING THE LIVING WORD
Bible-Based Bible Study and Application

Grace Chapel
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CREATION TO CURSE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the next ten weeks I want to pose a question to you: **How should we use the Bible?** Please notice that I did not say “*study* the Bible,” but “*use* the Bible.” As we’ll see, we should indeed study the Bible, but our responsibility doesn’t stop there. If we’re going to take the Bible on its own terms, we’ll need to do much more than just study. In fact, as we’ll see, the Bible itself significantly shapes how we approach the Bible. So I’d like to refine our question a little bit: **How does the Bible say that we should use the Bible?**

In his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey famously wrote that one should always “begin with the end in mind.” As we approach the Bible with our question—or with any question—it seems prudent to begin with the beginning in mind. If we’re going to take the Bible on its own terms, we’ll have to start where the Bible starts: in the beginning.

2. CREATION TO CURSE

Creation: Overview

The First Day: Genesis 1:3-5

Notice that God speaks the world into existence, and the things that He says come to be. This immediately implies a unity between language and reality, but it goes a lot further than that. God passes a value judgment on what He created: He sees that it is good. There’s no record that he *says* “This is good” at the time, but as Moses records the account, he is able to state God’s value judgment in language. God then names what He has just created.

We’re only five verses into the Bible, and already we know that reality was created with language, and can therefore be described with language both in terms of its value and its name. We won’t go through every day of creation here, but the pattern established in the first day holds throughout, except that God stops naming what He created on the third day (remember that; it will be important later.)

We also have seen the incredible power of God’s word. God’s perspective is not just another opinion; when He wants to, His very act of speaking makes what He speaks true.

The Fifth Day: Genesis 1:22

On the fifth day, God creates animal life for the first time, and here He does something new: He blesses what He has created. As with the act of creating itself, the blessing is spoken.

God in Counsel: Genesis 1:26

As you read through the accounts of the first five days of creation, you notice that there is a certain rhythm to the account. In the sixth day, though, that rhythm is broken by something new: God talks to Himself. Here the three Persons of the Trinity take counsel together about what they are about to do, and then they do what they have planned among themselves.

Instructions to Humanity: Genesis 1:28-30

Here we have yet another break in the familiar pattern set up in the first five days. As on the fifth day, God blesses them, but the communication here goes far beyond that. He gives them basic orienting instructions about their place in the world (vv.28-29), as well as describing the animals' place in it (v. 30).

Notice that God doesn't just make them smart and leave them to figure it all out. God doesn't make man to be autonomous; He makes man to live in obedience to Him and in reliance on His word.

Creation: More About Man

Genesis 2:15-17

In the expanded account of the sixth day, we learn that God intended Adam to work at cultivating the garden, and from the beginning God instructed him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here we also encounter God's first prediction of consequences, if Adam should disobey.

Genesis 2:19-23

Remember back on the third day when God stopped naming what He created? Here He instructs Adam to pick up where He left off. We have a vivid picture of God's image in man, as Adam sees the nature of the creation for what it is, and accurately names it.

The Fall: What Not to Do with the Word of God

Traditions of Men: Genesis 3:1-3

We do not know who the first "rabbi" was that formulated this false idea of God's instructions, whether it was Adam who failed to pass on God's instructions properly to his wife, or whether she took it on herself to add to God's word. Either way, humanly-formulated theology is off to a very bad start.

The Lie: Genesis 3:4-5

Once Woman (her name isn't Eve yet) has drifted away from what God actually said, she is ripe for the lie. Compare the statement here to Genesis 3:22. Even part of this lie turned out to be true...but not the way Woman thought it would.

What Was She Thinking? Genesis 3:6

No, seriously, let's look at what she was thinking. We pass over this easily because in modern storytelling, it is very common to delve in to a character's thoughts, but in Scripture, it is rare that the narrator tells us what motivated someone

to do what they do. There are three elements to Woman's thought here: she saw that...

1. the tree was good for food, and
2. it was pleasant to the eyes, and
3. a tree desirable to make one wise...

...and on that basis she made her decision and ate the fruit.

Now what are these three elements? Let's take the first one: she "saw that the tree was good for food." How did she know that? Is "good for food" something that you can see? Of course not. But what has she been eating all this time she's been in the garden? Every green herb, and fruit from the trees in the garden. So she has seen other fruit trees, and tasted their fruit. She sees that this is a fruit tree resembling other fruit trees, with fruit resembling other fruit, and concludes that this must also be good for food, as the other fruit in her experience has been. In philosophical terms, this is a rational induction based on prior experience.

The second element is simple sense experience: she saw that "it was pleasant to the eyes." The third element, of course, she acquired straight from the serpent. So her decision was based on reason, empirical evidence, and a satanic lie.

But let's leave the serpent out of it for a moment and just look at the first two elements. As Woman tries to interpret the world independently based on reason and sense experience, where do her reason and sense experience point her? In the wrong direction. Why? Should we not trust our reason and our sense experience? Adam trusted his reason and his senses when he was naming the animals, and everything worked out fine. What was the difference between that and this?

The difference was that Adam was obeying God. He founded his reason and sense experience on a proper regard for God's word. Here, the Woman does not have a proper regard for God's word; in fact, she seems to have left it out of her calculations entirely.

Let's indulge in a little theological science fiction. What might have happened if she had added God's word to her reason and her perceptions? God says that eating from this particular tree will kill her, but it looks good to eat and resembles all the other trees that she has eaten from; in fact, she would never know that eating the fruit was harmful except that God said so. Conclusion: her senses and reasoning are not by themselves sufficient to enable her to navigate her world; she needs to ground her understanding of the world on God's word first of all. Then, when the serpent comes along contradicting God, she remembers that she is supposed to have dominion over all the animals, including this talking snake, and she doesn't listen to him.

Unfortunately, it didn't happen that way. She left God's word behind, tried to evaluate the world independently, and wound up believing the serpent's lie. Her husband, standing there with her, ate as well. We don't know what he was thinking,

but if John Niemelä (a mentor of mine) is right that the Woman was already pregnant with Cain at this point,¹ we can offer a pretty good guess.

The Consequences: Corruption and Curse

Corrupted Thought and Perception: Genesis 3:7-8

Immediately after they ate, their perception changed. Before they had been naked, and not ashamed. Now, they felt a need to hide their bodies from each other. We don't know exactly what changed, but we do know that they saw themselves, and each other, in a way that they were never meant to. Their perception became corrupted in some way that is not described in detail in Genesis.

It gets worse. Not only has their perception changed, but their theological thinking begins to degrade as well. When they hear God in the garden—this is God the creator, who knows everything and sees everywhere—they hide from Him. It's not clear what they hope to accomplish with this.

Corrupted Speech: Genesis 3:12-13

When God calls them to account for what they have done, do they confess their sin and repent in truthful, straightforward fashion? They do not. Adam blames his wife and God for his failure; his wife follows his spiritual leadership and does a little blameshifting herself.

A Promised Rematch: Genesis 3:14-15

As God condemns the serpent, He also gives hope to Woman that one day, one of her offspring would win the victory that she and Adam had failed to win.

Death and Exile: Genesis 3:16-24

Man's responsibilities after the fall remain the same, but everything gets harder. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Because man gave attention only to the things of this world, and not to God's word, death comes to the whole world. This fact is gruesomely illustrated as God kills animals and peels off their skins, then dresses Adam and Eve in the freshly-killed hides.

Finally, God drives them out of the garden and places an angel with a flaming sword as a guard to enforce their exile.

3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

If there's one thing to take away from this passage, it is that we *must* begin with God's word, and do all our reasoning from there. As you encounter struggles and trials in your life this week, whether it's someone cutting you off in traffic or the death of a close friend, start by asking "What does God have to say about this?" As you encounter perplexing situations where it's hard to know what to do, ask, "What does God have to say about this?"

¹ He argues this based on the grammar of Genesis 4:1, which could better be translated, "Now Adam had known his wife, and she conceived...."

Then do all your thinking on that basis.

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

We are going to use Psalm 139 as our practice passage, and for the next 10 weeks, we will spend a little time with it each week. This week, just observe the psalm. Don't try to decide what it means yet; just list as many things about it as you possibly can.

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

Read the first 7 chapters of Howard Hendricks' *Living by the Book*. If you read Hendricks first, it will help your work in Psalm 139.

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

Go to <http://www.crivoice.org/enumaelish.html> and read through the text of *Enuma Elish*. *Enuma Elish* is a pagan creation story, and it is part of the cultural backdrop against which Moses would have been writing Genesis. Observe Genesis 1-3 and *Enuma Elish* side by side. What is the same? What is different? In the way that he tells the Genesis story, Moses highlights certain differences. What are they? Why would Moses highlight those particular differences? What points is he trying to make?

For Further Study

Remember how at the beginning of the lesson I said that we need to begin with the beginning in mind? Most people have one or more fields of specialty. Whether it's astrophysics, digging ditches, or talking people into things they wouldn't otherwise do, we all have things that we're good at. Take an area that you're good at and read back through Genesis 1-3. What do you see in these three chapters that might apply to your area?