

18-19 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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.

"One righteous act... justification... for all people" – the condemnation is "for all people" represented by Adam – the whole human race. The second "all people" is all who are represented by Christ: all who would believe in Him. The Bible is clear and consistent that salvation comes to those who make their choice to exercise faith in Jesus Christ – not everyone.

• **For further study**, see Matthew 7:13-14, 23; 25:46; Romans 1:16-17, 3:22, 28, 4:5, 13.

REFLECTION The story of the talking serpent appearing in the Garden of Eden, and the continuing curse resulting from Adam's mistake, does not fit with our human ideas of what is believable and logical – spiritual revelation is needed. Yet other Bible writers, including Paul who makes it a mainstay of his doctrinal teaching, treat this encounter with all seriousness. A bit easier for us to believe, Jesus had His own testing encounter with the devil. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus proved Himself sinless by responding with what God had said and refusing to entertain any alternative.

Taken together, these passages teach us that:

- Life is full of tests and choices. The battleground is in our thoughts, rather than played out face to face in a garden or desert, but the enemy of our souls is constantly trying to deceive us and trip us up, to lure us off the path God has marked out.
- We can choose the obedience of believing God and honouring Him in our actions.
- Obedience is more about 'being' than 'doing'. Paul, teaching the early church, only requires us to 'do' one thing, which is to believe in Jesus – to receive the gift of grace that is in the one man, the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Jesus in the desert was held by His relationship with His Father. Paul urges us to be living in the gift of righteousness, which comes to us unearned and undeserved, but bestowed on those who are in Christ Jesus – those who have asked Jesus to be Lord of their lives.

If we have asked Jesus to be our Lord and invited His Holy Spirit to help us, we are equipped to see the tests coming, and have the confidence to make good choices. This is an obedience not created by doing good deeds or performing 'holy actions', but the simple consequence of loving the Lord who first loved us, and wanting what He wants. *The person who always chooses for Jesus makes a hard target.*

QUESTION 1 *What common and dangerous strategy of the devil are we learning?*

QUESTION 2 *Paul contrasts two states, being under condemnation or being counted righteous as one who is in Jesus Christ. How does it help to counter the devil's suggestions, if we know we are accepted by heaven rather than guilty?*

PRAYER Father, this harsh and selfish world can make us feel like helpless aliens – but we are reminded again of Jesus' victory and how by grace we are allowed to participate in it. In ourselves we have few answers to the wiles of the enemy and His tests, but in Christ Jesus he has little with which to answer us back. We praise You again, Lord God, and thank You for Jesus and His victory. And we join with Him in saying: "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' ". Amen.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, March 1, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **March 1**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: God presents us with choices, whether or not to trust Him

Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7 – Deception: Adam and Eve are tempted to disobey God

Matthew 4:1-11 – Test: Satan fails to tempt Jesus into sin

Romans 5:12-19 – Choice: Receive the gift of God in Jesus

Also read: Psalm 32

Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7 – Deception: Man is tempted to disobey God

Breaking trust with God in the Garden of Eden introduces sin into the world

15-17 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

"To work it and take care of it" – responsibilities that are later applied to the tabernacle.

• **For further study**, Lev. 8:35; Num. 3:5-8, 8:26.

"The LORD God commanded the man" – the Bible's first covenant decree. God bound Himself to provide freely; there was one condition, the man trusting God by not eating the fruit of one particular tree.

"You are free... but..." – covenant words with Adam given a choice leading to a benefit, and a condition which is a test of obedience.

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?'"

"The serpent" – part of God's creation, the talking snake appears with motives that are unclear but "crafty", offering an alternative 'wisdom' from God's, Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10. It then becomes clear that this is Satan manifesting as a snake.

• **For further study**, 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9, 20:2.

2-3 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 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.' "

"Not... the tree... in the middle" – by not naming the tree, the woman skirts round the reason for the ban.

4-5 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

"You will not... die" – with this lie the snake denies God's clear pronouncement and deceives Eve and Adam into acting independently from God, and hence spiritual death. See John 8:44.

6-7 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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

"The fruit was... desirable" – the snake appeals to the woman's human independence, deceiving her into disobedience. Innocence lost, they now "know" or have experience of evil, and sin is born.

REFLECTION Here in the Garden of Eden – a place and an event which Scripture treats very seriously – mankind’s ancestor, Adam, faces a test. God has given him the freedom of the garden except for one particular tree and its fruit. Will he stay true to what God has told him, or will the suggestion that nothing is stopping him from doing his own thing prove too attractive? Adam gives in to Satan, loses the life he had, and opens the way for every subsequent generation to experience temptation to sin. We face exactly the same choice – whether to entertain the enemy’s latest lie, or to hold on to the truth from God.

QUESTION How does Satan’s lying, deceiving nature affect us day by day?

Matthew 4:1-11 – Test: Satan fails to tempt Jesus into sin

Jesus, unlike Israel in the desert, overcomes by declaring God’s word

1-3 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

“Led by the Spirit... to be tempted by the devil” – “Tempted (tested and tried)” (Amp). “Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it” (Msg). God’s servants frequently face tests of character as they enter ministry, allowed by God but carried out by the devil.

“Into the wilderness to be tempted” – Adam and Eve gave in to temptation; their failing the test allowed sin to enter the world. Moses recalls how the Lord led the Israelites in the desert for 40 years “to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” Jesus, in the desert, is provoked to sin but instead shows Himself the true, or real, Israelite who holds to what God has said to do (below).

4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

“It is written” – Jesus’ testing experience teaches us how to declare Scripture truth to deflect the enemy’s evil attentions. He quotes Deut. 8:3 to assert the spiritual dynamic of what God has said.

5-6 Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If You are the Son of God,” he said, “throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning You, and they will lift

You up in their hands, so that You will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

“If You are...” – following the temptation of material things, the devil tries the temptation of fame, conveniently omitting the promise “to keep you in all your ways” from Psalm 91:11-12, twisting its meaning to suggest that Jesus could test God in a spectacular way.

7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

“Jesus answered” – with a principle even higher than trusting God, that of honouring Him, Deut. 6:16. Satan implies God can be called upon to rescue, but Jesus knew that God is trustworthy even when we are suffering. Mocking bystanders observing Jesus on the Cross used Ps. 22:8 to suggest that if God really loved Him, He would be rescuing Him. Jesus knew better.

8-9 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give You,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

“All this I will give you” – Satan, called the prince or ruler of this world, John 12:31, offers Jesus a shortcut to future kingdom reign without the Cross. But this, the most extreme demand, exchanges the love of God for the worship of Satan.

“I will give” – Satan can exercise a measure of authority over the present sin-damaged world, but the kingdoms of the world belong to God and are promised to His Son.

• **For further study**, read Psalm 2:8; Luke 4:6; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4.

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the

Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

“Away from Me” – Jesus affirms wholehearted worship of the one true God, showing that true worship, expressing love and total submission to God, is a knockout blow in spiritual warfare. As the devil craves our attention, to respond by extolling the goodness of God reverses this strategy.

REFLECTION The second account of testing also involves the devil appearing and speaking suggestively. Just as deception led Adam and Eve to act independently of God, so the devil uses the same tactic on Jesus to try to get Him to compromise His demanding mission. If Jesus can be persuaded to go outside what God had decreed, He would no longer be the sinless Son of God uniquely equipped to break the hold of sin in the rest of us. *The good news is that when we are tested we can exercise the power of declaring the word of God, as Jesus did.*

QUESTION How do we declare the word of God in common ways we worship?

Romans 5:12-19 – Choice: Receive the gift of God in Jesus

Paul teaches original sin and its remedy, grace that comes from accepting Jesus

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –

“Sin entered the world” – Paul teaches the need for the gospel, because of man’s fall through Adam.

13 To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law.

“Before the law” – the period from Adam to Moses, when human independence from God was widespread but not in the sense of individual violations. The rules for righteous and unrighteous behaviour would follow.

14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the One to come.

“Death reigned” – Paul continues from his incomplete sentence of v.12, that the original man’s quest for independence was the root of sin, resulting in human mortality.

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

“Angels... attended Him” – showing Christ’s status as all heaven recognises the significance of His initial victory. The verse Satan had twisted, Ps. 91:11-12 is now fulfilled in God’s way.

man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

“How much more” – a phrase Paul repeats. The reach and extent of God’s grace is immensely greater than even the disaster of Adam’s sin.

16 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

“One man’s sin” – through the “one man”, Adam, sin entered the world and with it the condemnation, or punishment due, for that sin. That is the human state we all inherit, regardless of the kind of life we lead. The Good News is that God has offered a way out, “the gift” of God, which we “receive”, v.17, by choosing to belong to Jesus.

17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ!

“Trespass” – Adam’s offence was an act of trespass, a deliberate going astray. What Jesus Christ did for us was an act of undeserved grace, v.15, allowing us to be counted righteous if we have given our lives to Him.