

## Session Four: Fallen Through Sin

*By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)*



# Session Four: Fallen Through Sin

## WHY IS EVERYTHING, INCLUDING MYSELF, SO BROKEN?

### Session Introduction

We have been studying the Scriptural account of the creation of our first parents:

- how they were created in God's own image and were called by God "very good,"
- how they were placed in a garden of paradise with all their needs met,
- how they were living in peace and joy in the presence of their God and Father.

Those origins are necessary for us to understand who we are as men and what God intends for us. It is the crucial opening chapter of the human story. But if we stopped there, much of our current experience of the world and ourselves would be left unexplained. So much of the world around us is not good, but bad, and so often we are the cause of the evil we experience, far from being the "very good" pinnacle of creation. To understand that reality, we need the next part of the human story: the Fall.

When we look at the world around us, instead of seeing a peaceful paradise, we see a world at war. We are faced with suffering and injustice. We see men who will do anything to get to the top or men who will not take one step to help someone if it means inconveniencing themselves. And yet, the goodness that we read about in the Creation stories shines through the lives of men who are outstanding in virtue, who are self-sacrificial, courageous, generous and who are models to look up to.

When we look at ourselves, we have a front-row seat to this reality. We are moved by courage, kindness, self-sacrifice, and our conscience that tells us that we should be acting for goodness and not for evil, but so often we find ourselves enslaved by our passions, greed, bad habits, and convenience. We desire to love our wives, but we struggle with sexual sin, pornography, and other temptations. We want to be good fathers, but so often we are impatient, angry, or simply not present to our kids. We desire to know truth, but we spend more time gossiping or deceiving in order to get ahead. We want to be men of action, leading and protecting our families, but we passively allow decisions and difficulties to pile up on those closest to us. We desire to live in goodness, but our actions fall short - we are at war within ourselves. As St. Paul put it in his letter to the Romans: *"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Wretched man that I am!"* (Romans 7:15, 19, 21, 24).

This struggle within us is explained by the story of the Fall in the third chapter of Genesis. It is a story of deception and sin, it is a story of a man and woman who do not trust in God and his plan, and it is a story that we can recognize in our daily lives. It is the story of man choosing, in his freedom, himself over God, and now, instead of being free, he is enslaved by the very thing he chose, sin. This is the situation that Jesus comes to save us from. His “good news” is that he can do what we cannot do for ourselves, despite our best attempts: set us free from the slavery to sin.

**Catechism of the Catholic Church. 397**

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command...All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

**I. Opening Prayer**

Pray together as a group:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your Word,  
and understand and do your will. Do not hide your commandments from me,  
but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.  
Speak to me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.  
On you I set my hope, O my God, that you shall enlighten  
my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge;  
not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them;  
For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness,  
and from you comes every good deed and every gift.*

*Amen.*

## II. Reading Scripture

Read aloud as a group the following passages.

After reading the passage, answer the questions as a group in order to draw out some of the key ideas.

*Some key ideas for this passage are listed in the back of this book to help with your discussion if needed.*

### 1. Genesis 3:1-24 (The Fall)



- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What is the serpent's mode of attack? What are the subtle lies that he leads Eve through?
- Where is Adam during all of this? What is he doing and not doing?
- What does the serpent promise Eve if she eats of the fruit? Why is this so appealing?
- What might it mean that the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened? Opened to what?
- Why do Adam and Eve hide themselves when they hear the Lord approaching?
- What are the consequences of this first sin? What does it mean for Adam? for Eve? For the serpent?
- What are some of the practical consequences of Adam and Eve's banishment from the garden?

### Catechism of the Catholic Church, 391

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy.

### III. Applying Scripture

Based on your reading, discuss the following questions as they apply to your life. Depending on how much time you have available, you may not be able to discuss all of these questions. If necessary, choose one question to discuss in a significant way.

- 1 Many modern people treat the devil as a kind of fairy tale. This is a serious mistake. Just as each of us has been given an angel "to guard you in all your ways," (Psalm 91:11), each of us is involved in a personal struggle with evil spirits. Are you aware of this spiritual battle, or are you blind to it? Every man is called to be a warrior, and part of this warfare is his struggle against demonic power. Have you taken to heart St. Paul's admonition to "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*"? (Ephesians 6:11) **How does the story of the Fall teach you about the methods of the Evil One? What spiritual practices can you use in order to fight this spiritual battle?**

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3 One result of being cast out of Eden is that we were thrown into an identity crisis. Instead of being secure in our place as sons of our heavenly Father, we began to hide from him, and to look elsewhere to create our own sense of who we are. Today the idea of a masculine identity is in chaos because our society has decided that we can only be free if we create our own identity. For many men, our relationship with work has been twisted to the point that our dignity and worth comes from our jobs and how much money we make. **What do you think it means to be a man? What false masculine ideals does our world hold up for men to emulate? How have these affected the way you act and the way you think about yourself and others? Do you judge others and yourself on false criteria of masculinity?**

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4 We are meant to love people and use things. Since the Fall, human relationships and our understanding of love have been distorted. We now tend to use people and love things. We also struggle with deep and intimate connections because we hide away our vulnerabilities out of fear of being hurt by those around us. The fig leaves that Adam and Eve sew for themselves were an act of self-protection from the possibility that the other might use them rather than love them. Our distortion of love causes us to hide from those who love us the most. **What are the consequences of using people as if they are objects? Are there ways in your life that you use people instead of loving them? Are there relationships in your life in which you feel used instead of loved?**

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- 5 For men, sexual sin, and in particular, viewing pornography feeds the confusion between loving and using. Pornography reduces women to their physical bodies and their ability to sexually satisfy our fantasies. **How has our society twisted the way that you view and relate to women? In what ways does pornography destroy love? If pornography is something that you struggle with, make a plan to go to confession - as often as necessary - and root out this deadly sin from your life.**

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#### IV. Call to Action

Write down for yourself one concrete way that you are going to apply today's Scripture Study to your life.

*Example:*

Set aside 30 minutes to do an extended examination of conscience. Pay particular attention to the areas of your life that you keep hidden or the parts of your life that you blame other people for. Then make a plan to go to Confession before the next Bible Study session.



## V. Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind  
and meditate on them day and night,  
persevering in prayer, always on watch.  
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,  
and to show us not only how to understand it,  
but how to put it into practice,  
and to obtain spiritual gifts  
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.  
Amen.*

## ORIGINAL SIN, THE FLESH, AND FREEDOM

*A supplemental note for further study*

The sin of our first parents has left its mark on us, what the Catholic tradition has called "original sin." There is a mystery here, one that touches on the communal aspect of humanity. It is true that we are unrepeatable individuals, and that the hair of each of our heads is counted by God. At the same time we are also part of something that goes beyond us. We are like different members of a human body, or like stones built into a temple, or like branches growing out of a vine, to note three images given us by the New Testament. We are both individual and communal. Because Adam and Eve are our first parents, we are somehow implicated in their fall. In the same way, because Jesus is the new Adam, we are mysteriously connected to his death and resurrection. What Adam did affects us, but what Christ did through his death and resurrection is immensely greater and not only restores what was lost, but draws us into the divine life through the waters of Baptism.

When the New Testament speaks of the effect of original sin on us, it often uses the term "the flesh." The Catholic tradition has sometimes used the word "concupiscence" to refer to the same thing. When we hear of "the flesh," or "sins of the flesh," we tend to think only of sexual sins, but Scripture means something much more broad. It means all those evil desires of whatever kind that stem from the wound we received as a result of original sin. Here is St. Paul speaking of the flesh: *"Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21). A look at that list makes clear that "the flesh" includes not only sexual sins, but also sins of the mind such as idolatry and sorcery, and sins in relationships, like envy, anger, and selfishness. The desires of the flesh do not represent who we most truly are as creatures of God; they are a corruption of our God-given nature. But because we have lost our proper relation to the Father, these evil desires tend to overwhelm us and enslave us. Again St. Paul tells us: *The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would"* (Gal 5:17). This is the disharmony and the slavery we have been born into, and this is what Christ frees us from: *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Gal 5:24).

We love the word "freedom," and we should, but we need to remember what has been enslaving us and what we need to be freed from. Jesus once said: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:34-6). The freedom we long for, the only freedom that really makes us free, is the freedom brought by Christ: freedom from slavery to sin, and freedom from slavery to the devil whose power over us comes through sin. This is the freedom bought for us by Christ, first given to us in baptism, and strengthened in us as we allow the life of the Holy Spirit to grow in us by following the way of Christ and receiving his grace in the sacraments.

## Additional Readings from Scripture

*These optional readings build on the themes discussed in this session. You are encouraged to read and pray with them on your own in between this meeting and the next.*

**Genesis 4:1-12** *“When they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.”* This story of the first murder shows how rupture in relationship to God always leads to rupture in relations between humans.

**Jeremiah 17:7-10** *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?”* When Scripture speaks of the “heart” it refers to the deepest part of us. As a result of the Fall, the human heart has a tendency to move toward evil.

**Psalms 51** *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* This famous Psalm recounts King David’s heartfelt repentance after his sins of adultery and murder. David recalls the fallen state of all humanity and begging the Lord to be merciful.

**Psalms 53** *“They have all fallen away; they are all alike depraved; there is none that does good, no, not one.”* This Psalm gives an overview of the human race from God’s point of view, and prays that a savior might be given to bring deliverance.

**Romans 5:12-21** *“As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”* Paul makes an extended contrast between Adam and Christ, and shows how Christ undoes Adam’s sin by his willing sacrifice and leads his disciples out of the death caused by sin and into life.