RESTORING HARMONY

Anyone who ever took the initiative to tidy up his/her wardrobe knows that the process may generate even more disorder. Simply defined, chaos is the absence of order. But then, what is order? In Genesis 1 we understand that order assumes an arrangement according to preestablished criterion, so that the outcome is harmonious and even advantageous—a clean wardrobe. Related to order is differentiation where you can classify things according to kind, color, size, or shape. By doing this efficiently, some are even able to find their black socks in the dark without waking up their spouse with the lights.

However, organized things do not stay arranged. The principle of entropy (the second law of thermodynamics) states all things naturally move from the original order to disorganization. Sicknesses, environmental deterioration, and eroded family relations are some examples of the results of sin. Unless external energy is introduced, everything suffers chaos and eventual destruction.

Hebrews says not only that the Son was the Heir of all things and Creator of worlds (and systems), but also that He upheld “all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:2, 3, NKJV). This week we will explore Genesis to analyze how God brought order out of chaos, and what principles He used to uphold these systems. The role of God’s Word will be explored not only in Creation, but also in upholding what He created—from our bodies to our marriages, and even our finances. Those who pay attention to His Word and reverently apply it to their lives will see the reversal of entropy’s consequences! There is hope!
Write out Hebrews 1:1–4 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
The First Gift

Genesis 1 describes God’s first gift to humanity—an environment prepared for sustainable life. Initially it is described as dark, “without form, and void” (v. 1), indicating an absence of order, organization, or beauty.

God’s first action was to call light into existence: “For He spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). But His Word is used for more than creation. As we saw in Hebrews, He also upholds “all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). Hence, any hope of restoration from a formless state can only be obtained by following “the word of His power.”

What He does next is so instructive! God divides light from darkness (Gen. 1:4), waters below from waters above (v. 6), dry land from water (v. 9), day from night (v. 14), and light from darkness (v. 18). The ability to use His word to differentiate, to select, to establish borders and limits, and to place each thing in the right place indicates the preexistence of criteria established by His own purpose and intentionality. Those who do not like or respect rules, limits, or borders, established by His Word, are increasingly exposed to chaotic, or formless, conditions.

The fact that God created humanity in His own image (v. 26) implies that the human race was provided with similar organizational abilities. Further into the account (Gen. 2:8), He plants a garden where He puts the man and woman, giving them a specific task: to tend and keep it (v. 15). This assumes that before sin, humankind was given the ability to create and to maintain order and a harmonious beauty. As grass cannot decide where it should spread, there must be a mind apart from the grass to guide and to limit its growth. As beautiful flowers do not have intelligence or mobility to group together by kind or colors, someone must decide where to plant them. God left these tasks to our first parents.

This managerial responsibility was attributed to them by the Owner of the garden, providing meaning and purpose for their life. In return, He freely offered everything necessary for their subsistence (Gen. 1:29), provided they would keep His established limits that protected their wellbeing. Any disregard of these limits would alter their relationship status with the Owner.

Although that which is edible is abundant and diverse, the food appropriate for humanity is specifically identified by the Owner (v. 29). A death penalty would be enforced if they ate the item that, although apparently available, was excluded from their diet (Gen. 2:17). Disobedience would cause the reversal of the organizational/creative process, because life cannot be upheld by its Giver when limits for the well-being of His free willed creatures are disregarded.

The forbidden tree would represent God’s established exclusives. For example, no business manager can take home anything s/he wants, unless the owner allows. By crossing this border and using what was restricted by God as a test of allegiance, they broke the sacred relationship of trust. The first couple lost possession of the garden, started to sweat, and worried about nature’s maintenance. Entropy was now doing its job!
THE GIFT OF GOD'S EXCLUSIVES

God created the universe in terms of systems. These systems are units composed of related elements that interact with each other. There are macro systems, such as the solar system, and there are micro systems, such as a cell, which is a subsystem of the body (a system itself). There are also visible systems, such as the body, and less-visible ones, such as the family.

Even though the borders of some systems may be permeable, their integrity is crucial for the protection of their contents. Alterations to the integrity of these borders may produce chaos and catastrophic consequences. Think tsunami, an infection, a theft, or adultery, for example.

In Genesis 1 and 2 God creates and organizes the elements, specifying their limits, borders, divisions, or restrictions. These indicate that the original organization is crucial for the well-functioning of the whole. Light and darkness, waters below and above, water and dry land, day and night, specific creatures for different environments, male and female, what could be used as food and what couldn’t, seasons, weeks, months, and years—these were all established to provide and maintain harmony, beauty, and functionality.

God’s stewards of creation, man and woman, were also limited by a border. They knew that any violation to what was originally organized (or limited) would produce consequences in health, sexuality, relationships, and even finances, reversing the creative process.

In Genesis 3 man and woman for the first time crossed this border, a line established by God at Creation, and terrible consequences resulted. The prohibited fruit was seemingly portrayed as available, accessible, attractive, and as the fruits in other trees. But the limitation was a reminder of God’s ownership. Only owners establish what managers are allowed to touch for personal use or take home.

By touching God’s restricted property, they acted as the owners, placing themselves in God’s exalted position. By becoming untrustworthy managers (stewards), Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to remain in the Garden of Eden. They lost possession of God’s property, engaged in painful labor, and worried about their sustenance. By losing access to the tree of life, their lives could no longer be upheld by the Giver. Decay and death were the result (Rom. 6:23).

God’s exclusives may still seem to be accessible and available for us to use at our discretion; His limits and borders may still appear as permeable. But the aforementioned principle is still in effect after the Fall and obedience to it is crucial in the process of restoration and redemption. Extramarital relationships may seem available for intimacy; borders may seem available (and encouraged) to be crossed; inappropriate drink or food are widely available to be consumed; resting time and Sabbaths are apparently (cont. on p. 13)
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Genesis 1:26–29
Genesis 2:8–17
Exodus 20:3–17
Malachi 2:16
Malachi 3:8–12
Isaiah 58:13, 14
Romans 6:23
John 3:16

(Cont. from inTerpret p. 12): available for regular work or self-focused entertainment; and whole salaries may seemingly be available to be spent at someone’s own discretion. Nevertheless the reversal of the creational/organizational process is triggered every time God’s exclusives are violated and His borders crossed.

God-established limits are His gifts for the good of His subjects. By respecting them, His creatures recognize His sovereignty and ownership, revealing allegiance to Him. On the other hand, by disrespecting them, humanity is introduced to social, physical, spiritual, and environmental disruption, ending up in death. But there is still hope!

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 1:1–4.
THE FIRST OFFERING

Adam and Eve had nothing to worry about inside the Garden of Eden. Their Creator would come and spend time with them, while teaching them His secrets. The weather was stable and comfortable. The couple would enjoy deep intimacy with each other. After all, there was no electricity, and after sunset they would have no other option than to spend a fabulous time together before they got too sleepy.

Everything they would need for maintenance was abundant, widely available, and ready to be consumed, without worry or toil. As God’s representatives, they were given freedom to organize and manage the garden according to their discretion, developing their refined aesthetic criteria to glorify God. This would foster a high sense of self-worth and pleasure.

However, after crossing the forbidden border, Adam and Eve opened a wide gate for the reversal of the creational process and for chaos to be installed. Unworthy to be trusted (disruption of self-esteem) and expelled from God’s visible presence and the garden (disruption of spirituality and environment), surrounded by mutual accusation (disruption of relationship), subjected to death and decay (disruption of life), they were ordered to work and toil for their maintenance (potential disruption of economy). Fear, worry, and shame (disruption of emotions) were the new reality!

It was only after doubting the goodness of God that they despised His sole restriction. They believed they were losing their freedom and sought to secure what they believed to be their rights. So the essence of sin is a desire to put self first.

As distrust always harms relationships, it produced a critical disruption on the first couple’s connection with the Source of life. Distrust brought alienation, decay, and death. No one would blame God for being unfair if He would have left them to the bitter consequences of their choice. After all, how many times were they warned?

As sin would endanger the stability of the systems (of the universe), God couldn’t just pretend that nothing was happening. He would need to deal with it! God realized that if He simply removed Adam and Eve from the scenario, the other beings would henceforth obey Him out of fear. They would not trust that the limits He set were intended for their good, and would generate more distrust and rebellion. Wherever there is fear, there never is love.

So instead of removing Adam and Eve forever, He decided to “remove” Himself from His exalted position. God would become the divine recipient of disruption, pain, suffering, chaos, and death. To all who would trust that His death was sufficient to forgive sins and cleanse from all unrighteousness, He offered Himself as substitute, diverting the natural results of disobedience. This plan was immediately offered to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) and was exemplified by the first (and shocking) animal offering, something implicit in the account of the tunics of skin provided by God to them (v. 21). The first Giver provided the first Offering!
Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study, what are personal applications you are convicted of in your life?

How can these personal applications be made practical on a social level?

**HOLY HEDGES**

The tree of knowledge had been made a test of their obedience and their love to God. The Lord had seen fit to lay upon them but one prohibition as to the use of all that was in the garden; but if they should disregard His will in this particular, they would incur the guilt of transgression. Satan was not to follow them with continual temptations; he could have access to them only at the forbidden tree. Should they attempt to investigate its nature, they would be exposed to his wiles. They were admonished to give careful heed to the warning which God had sent them and to be content with the instruction which He had seen fit to impart. (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908], 53.)

He rules over His kingdom with diligence and care, and He has built a hedge—the Ten Commandments—about His subjects to preserve them from the results of transgression. In requiring obedience to the laws of His kingdom, God gives His people health and happiness, peace and joy. He teaches them that the perfection of character He requires can be attained only by becoming familiar with His word. (E. G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913], 454.)

This scripture [Prov. 3:9, 10] teaches that God, as the Giver of all our benefits, has a claim upon them all; that His claim should be our first consideration; and that a special blessing will attend all who honor this claim.

Herein is set forth a principle that is seen in all God’s dealings with men. The Lord placed our first parents in the Garden of Eden. He surrounded them with everything that could minister to their happiness, and He bade them acknowledge Him as the possessor of all things. In the garden He caused to grow every tree that was pleasant to the eye or good for food; but among them He made one reserve. Of all else, Adam and Eve might freely eat; but of this one tree God said, “Thou shalt not eat of it.” Here was the test of their gratitude and loyalty to God.

So the Lord has imparted to us heaven’s richest treasure in giving us Jesus. With Him He has given us all things richly to enjoy. . . . He asks us to acknowledge Him as the Giver of all things; and for this reason He says, Of all your possessions I reserve a tenth for Myself, besides gifts and offerings, which are to be brought into My storehouse. This is the provision God has made for carrying forward the work of the gospel. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 65.)

The tithing system reaches back beyond the days of Moses. Men were required to offer to God gifts for religious purposes before the definite system was given to Moses, even as far back as the days of Adam. In complying with God’s requirements, they were to manifest in offerings their appreciation of His mercies and blessings to them. This was continued through successive generations, and was carried out by Abraham, who gave tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 69.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why are rules and restrictions fundamental for aesthetic and relational harmony?

How is genre distinction (for example, in God’s proposed diet) different from a restriction and rather protection against chaotic conditions?

If you could give just one suggestion to someone facing a chaotic situation in life, what would that suggestion be? (Hint: Heb. 1:2–4).

What restricted things determined by God’s Word are still a test of faith and allegiance to Him, even after the Fall?

What specific action proposed by Jesus will lead us to trust, not worrying about food, clothing, or anything else? (See Matt. 6:25–34.)

Why do you believe that God did not destroy Satan immediately after his rebellion, trying to usurp God’s position?