



Part 17 – The Fallen Confronted

Genesis 3:8-13

In his book Temptation Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh...It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money...Joy in God is...extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses

all reality, and only desire for the creature is real...Satan does not here fill us with hatred for God, but with forgetfulness of God...The lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: ‘Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?’ ‘Is it really not permitted to me, yes – expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?’ It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.”

This is exactly what happened to Eve as she succumbed to the serpent’s temptation. She minimized the Lord’s generosity and magnified his restriction. She doubted God’s word to the extent that choosing to rebel became far more attractive and reasonable than faithfulness to her Lord. Her ego and appetites thus stirred, Eve rejected everything she knew from her own experience about the goodness of God.

The first sin – what is often referred to as “The Fall” – changed everything. We may well imagine scenarios whereby we can ignore and even tolerate sin. After all, we do just that on a daily basis. But we are sinners born in sin. God, on the other hand, cannot and must not tolerate sin. He is holy and just. For God to ignore, or in any way make a place for sin, would require that he no longer be God. He would cease to be perfect. His holiness would be a joke. His perfect justice would be hopelessly compromised. Therefore, God’s confrontation with his fallen image-bearers and the judgment to follow is not only consistent with God’s character, it is the only appropriate way for a perfect God to act.

The sin of Adam and Eve offers deep insight into our own struggles with sin and temptation. It also serves as a lasting reminder of the devastating impact of sin.

1. How sin impacts our relationship with God

Vs. 8 – “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

- **Alienation**

- The image of God’s presence in the garden in the cool of the day is a powerful one. God is described as “walking” which is a vivid way of describing his presence. The same word translated “walking” is used later of God’s presence with his people. And, of course, the Christian life is often referred to as “walking” with God. The image of God “walking” suggests the happy fellowship the man and woman had with God in the garden prior to the fall. But because of their sin, the man and woman sacrificed that fellowship.
- Their sad attempt to hide from God was an admission of guilt. They hid precisely because for the first time they felt shame and fear. They were guilty and knew it. The trusting innocence and happiness of their former communion with God had now been replaced by the fear of God’s displeasure, an instinct that now lives in every single human heart. This then was the first consequence of sin: Alienation from God.

2. How sin impacts our conscience

Vs. 11 – “He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”

- **Shame**

- In verse 9 God asked Adam where he was. Of course God was not ignorant about Adam's location. In addition to highlighting Adam's alienation, the question draws attention to Adam's shame. God asked about Adam's whereabouts to shed light on the fact that for the first time in his life Adam was hiding. Prior to sin there had never been the need to hide. And though the impulse to seek covering was appropriate in light of their sin, the man and woman had never needed such covering prior to their sin.
- Ed Welch defines shame as "the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. You feel exposed and humiliated."¹
- There is a shame which is appropriate because there are deeds which are shameful. Sin is certainly shameful. Shame tells us that we have done something wrong. In that sense shame can be a truth teller. In the hands of God, shame is often a catalyst moving the sinner toward repentance. Shame can also become sinful and damaging when it drives us deeper into isolation and self-absorption. In those cases shame morphs from a signpost directing us toward repentance to a voice of accusation and condemnation crippling our joy and moving us further away from God and others.
- The response of Adam and Eve was one of shame. Their attempts to hide from God reveals the extent to which they grasped the magnitude of their action. Keep in mind that the covenant that God had made with Adam had no provision for forgiveness. In his Covenant of Works (or Covenant of Life) with Adam, God promised eternal life if the terms of obedience were met (not eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil). However, if man broke the terms of the covenant through disobedience then the sentence was death (Romans 6:23). There was no escape clause. There was no way to receive a second chance. In light of this, Adam and Eve's evident shame and fear is quite understandable.

3. How sin impacts our relationships with others

Vv. 12-13 – "The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"

- **Conflict**
- God's inquiry to the man and woman reflected his order of creation. He asked the man first and then the woman because this order of responsibility is established in the order of creation. When God asked the man and then the woman what had happened (vs. 9) they each state facts but in such a way as to shift blame. Each in turn blamed someone else and ultimately God for the disaster that had befallen them (vs. 13).
- From this point forward the unspoiled complementarity of the man and woman would be undone by conflict. Indeed, all human relationships are harmed by conflict. This ruinous condition is witnessed from tension filled living rooms to war torn nations (and everything in between). Sin so attacks the harmony of God's creation that conflict is present even in the closest of relationships. Envy, resentment, fear of man, competition, anger, gossip, lust, and self-protection are now ordinary daily experiences.
- Though the Covenant with Adam had no provision for forgiveness, it soon became clear that God would not abandon his people and where sin abounded, God's grace would abound all the more. God did not storm into the garden in wrath though it was his right to do so. He responded to the rebellion decisively but with a great measure of gentleness. He asked questions to draw them out of their hiding rather than driving them into his terrifying presence. Though decay and death certainly entered the created order on that day, God mixed mercy with judgment. He preserved the lives of the man and woman. Even as he pronounced judgment, God made new promises; promises of grace to meet and overcome the sin of the man and woman. What is more, as we will see, God provided them with the cover that they needed; the cover which their fig leaf righteousness could not afford. And to this day God covers sinners by grace. He turned his own Son over to executioners that he might provide the covering of righteousness for guilty sinners.
- The distance between God and his sinful people has been replaced with communion. The shameful inheritance of sin has been overcome by the cleanness of redemption. And the ruin that sin wrought upon our relationships has been answered by the blessed communion of saints.

¹ Edward Welch, *Shame Interrupted* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2012) p. 2