

“THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN”

Last week, we looked at the temptation that led to the downfall of the human race. And in that first temptation we saw the basic principles that lay behind all temptations for sin, principles such as: asking whether God’s law is reasonable; wondering whether God really has our best interests in mind; doubting the threat of divine judgment; and allowing our desires to cause us to disregard what God has revealed in his Word. The first temptation can be likened to a seed out of which all future temptations grow. And we see something similar to this in the passage we are studying today, where the Lord shows us the consequences that were brought about by Adam and Eve’s sin. The judgments that God renders in these verses give shape to the course of all future history, giving us insight into the fundamental characteristics of life in a fallen world. Still, as we will see, this passage is not just about judgment. For it also contains the seeds of the promised salvation that unfolds across the pages of redemptive history.

Our passage begins with the Lord God coming to the garden to look for man. Notice the resumption of the use of the dual name for God: “the LORD God” or, in the Hebrew, “Yahweh Elohim.” Though Satan avoided using God’s covenant name, the name Yahweh, in his conversation with Eve, the Lord now comes to confront man as both covenant Lord and Creator God.

This scene also provides us with another example of an analogical description of God. That is, in this text, God is revealing himself by way of analogy. God is a Spirit. He is present everywhere and he knows all things. He does not need to walk through the

garden and call out to Adam and Eve to find where they are hiding. But he revealed himself to them, and to us, in a way that we can understand. In a sense, all of God's self-revelation is analogical in nature.

Because of their sin, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. From our point of view, their attempt to do this looks both foolish and ridiculous. It reminds us of the prophet Jonah trying to run away from God. We know that there is no hiding from God. He is the Creator, the Lord, and the Judge of all the earth. We may know that this is true, but the fact remains that we all try to hide from God. It is part of the universal experience of fallen humanity. We dread the piercing light of God's presence, knowing that it will expose the darkness of our hearts. As Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." [Jn. 3:20] This is described in vivid detail in the book of Revelation, where the wicked cry out to the rocks and mountains on the day of judgment, saying: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" [Rev. 6:16-17] Our sin causes us to flee from God's presence. So often, we would rather avoid his searching gaze than come before him honestly acknowledging our sin and pleading the righteousness of Christ for our forgiveness.

But the Lord is gracious to us. He comes to us like he came to Adam and Eve, searching our hearts and gently exposing our sin. Remember, God knew what Adam and Eve had done. He did not need to ask them to explain it to him. He could have rendered

his judgment immediately, without asking any questions at all. But he chose to seek them out and question them, not so that he might learn the facts, but so that they might be brought under conviction for their rebellion against him.

As God investigates the first transgression, he begins by confronting Adam, even though it was Eve who was first deceived into eating the fruit. Here is another example of the biblical doctrine of male headship. Adam bears the primary responsibility for the fall because of his role as spiritual leader in marriage.

We see the rupture in Adam's relationship with Eve in the fact that he responds to God by placing the blame on her shoulders. And even worse than that, we see the rupture in his relationship with God, as he also assigns blame to God by calling attention to the fact that it was God who gave the woman to be with him. Here again is something that we see in every human heart: the tendency to always cast the blame for our sins and failures upon someone else. How often do we say, or at least think, the words: "It's not my fault!"

As God turns to confront Eve, the blame game continues, with Eve refusing to take responsibility for her sin and assigning blame to the serpent. Neither Adam nor Eve said anything that was untrue. Eve did give the fruit to Adam, and the serpent did deceive her into eating it in the first place. However, neither of them took personal responsibility for their sin by confessing it and repenting of it. Eve's sin did not absolve Adam of his sin. And the serpent's deception did not absolve Eve of her sin. It is true that Satan seeks our spiritual ruin, but this does not mean that we are not responsible for our sinful choices.

As Augustine once wrote, “The devil is not to be blamed for everything: there are times when a man is his own devil.” [Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 241]

While God confronted and questioned Adam and Eve for their sin, he did not question the serpent. God wanted to bring the man and the woman under conviction for their sin, but there is no attempt to do so in Satan’s case. This is a sign that for Satan there will be no possibility of pardon. And this is made explicit in the curses that God speaks against him. Notice that it is only the serpent who receives God’s curse. The man and the woman experience consequences for their sin, but they are not cursed by God. God does say that the ground is cursed because of man, but he does not say that man is under his curse. Only the serpent receives that final and absolute declaration of judgment.

What is the meaning of the first part of God’s curse upon the serpent? Is this simply telling us the reason why snakes crawl around on their bellies, or is God saying something else here? To answer this, we need to remember that the serpent was not acting for itself, but was the mouthpiece for Satan. God didn’t curse snakes; he cursed Satan. The declaration that Satan will travel on his belly and eat dust is not intended to be taken literally, but to be understood as a picture of humiliation. Other OT passages use this kind of language to describe an estate of humiliation. Satan styles himself as the ruler of this world, but in this verse God promises that Satan will be brought to the lowest place of abasement.

And verse 15 tells us how this will be accomplished. Here, in the midst of the curse pronounced upon the devil, we find the very first proclamation of the gospel. Though

Adam and Eve sided with Satan when they chose to disobey, God in his grace sets them at odds against the serpent. God refuses to give all humanity over to the side of the evil one. Instead, he sets enmity, or hatred, between the serpent and the woman, and between his offspring and hers. The offspring of Satan are those people whom he seduces into following him. This is why Jesus referred to the Pharisees as children of the devil. In replacing the truth of God with their own set of rules they had become Satan's offspring. The offspring of the woman is not merely humanity in general, but a particular human being, along with all who belong to him. This is made evident by the fact that he is referred to by the singular pronouns "he" and "his" in verse 15. This is a promise that one day the Lord will raise up a champion for the human race. This champion will be a true descendent of Eve, but he will also have the power to destroy the works of the devil. This is the very first prophecy of Jesus Christ. In the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" [Heb. 2:14]

After pronouncing his curse upon the serpent, the Lord turns to the woman and issues his sentence against her. While God created mankind with the intention that they multiply and fill the earth, now it will be the woman's pain that will be multiplied as she participates in fulfilling God's purpose for mankind. Adam and Eve will have children, and their children will eventually fill the earth, but Eve will experience great pain in bearing children, a reality known firsthand to every woman who has ever given birth.

That part of the woman's sentence is clear, but what about the second part? What did the Lord mean when he said to Eve, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"? We find a clue to understanding this by looking ahead to the next chapter, where the same phrase is used in reference to Cain. In Genesis 4:6-7, the Lord spoke these words to Cain: "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Sin wants to rule over Cain, but God's solution is for Cain to rule over sin, putting it to death by placing his trust in God. This helps us to see that the desire that Eve will have for her husband will be the desire to have control over him, the desire to rule in the marriage relationship. For women, one of the chief consequences of the fall is that they will want to take control over their husbands, subverting the pattern that God established when he created man first and then made the woman to be his helper. This gives us insight into one of the main temptations that women face: the temptation to be discontented, especially with regard to their relationship with their husbands.

Now it is important to say that we husbands can certainly give our wives innumerable reasons to be discontented. And it is sadly true that there are far too many husbands who fail miserably in their duties towards their wives and make their marriages extremely difficult and unhappy. I imagine that most of us either know or have known such men and we have felt a great deal of pity for their wives. This is certainly not what God wants for a marriage. But the solution to this problem is not for a woman to try to manipulate

and control her husband, though that is often what ends up happening in such cases. Instead, the Lord wants wives in such marriages to continue showing respect to their husbands and to look to the Lord himself to provide what their husbands are failing to give them. Church history is filled with countless stories, some told and many more untold, of women in unhappy marriages who nonetheless enjoyed a level of communion with God that other women can never know.

After pronouncing his sentence upon the woman, the Lord turns to the man and renders his sentence. As was the case with the woman, there is a sad irony here. God created man to subdue and cultivate the earth, but now this work will prove to be a source of frustration for him. In one way or another, every man knows this firsthand. Life is hard. Providing for a family is hard. Faithfully fulfilling all of our responsibilities is hard. And it is harder for some than it is for others. And because of the hardness of life, one of the chief temptations that plagues us men is the temptation to be irresponsible. It is hard to earn an honest living. It is hard to love our wives as Christ loves the church. It is hard to be a kind and patient authority in the lives of our children. It is hard to do the work of prayer. It is hard to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So we are tempted to give up, at least in those areas where we find it most difficult. But the Lord calls us to persevere in all of the work that he has given us to do. For even in this sentence upon fallen man there is a promise. Our labor will be toilsome, but it will still produce fruit. God said that the ground will produce thorns and thistle, but he also said: “you shall eat the plants of the field.”

The last part of God's sentence upon man confirms that he will carry out what he threatened when he forbade Adam from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man will return to the dust from which he was taken. Man will die. But notice what the very next verse says. Right after this pronouncement of the certainty of death, Adam gives his wife the name Eve, a name that in Hebrew is derived from the verb "to live." Right after God told him that all men will die, Adam called his wife the "life-giver." Now why did he do that? Why not call her "death-giver," since everyone descended from her will eventually die? Adam called his wife "life-giver" because he believed what God said in verse 15. He believed God when he said that one of Eve's offspring would crush the serpent's head.

The final consequence of our first parents' sin was their expulsion from God's presence in the garden. Here is the fundamental consequence of sin: sin results in man's alienation from God. And the way back to the tree of life, the sacramental symbol of God's life-giving presence, is now guarded by a terrifying angelic being who wields a flaming sword. The only way back to God will involve passing through that flaming sword of judgment. And that is precisely what Jesus Christ has done for us. He has crushed the serpent's head, but he has done it in the most surprising way. He did it by bearing God's judgment on our behalf. And, in doing so, he opened up the way for us to enjoy communion with God. That is why the temple veil, the veil that curtained off the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, the veil that was embroidered with cherubim,

Sermon on Genesis 3:8-24
An Exposition of Genesis, # 10

Grace PC, Laconia (11/16/08)
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was torn in two at the very moment when Jesus died on the cross. Only in Christ is sin atoned for; only in Christ is paradise regained. Thanks be to God. Amen.