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WHERE ARE YOU?

Genesis 3:7-15

By

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Genesis Lesson 9

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Our modern psychotherapeutic culture is desperately trying to rid itself of the notion of guilt and shame. Modern celebrities go on TV and brag openly about things that, just a few years ago, would have been kept quiet. Best-selling books, like *Healing the Shame That Binds You* [Health Communications, Inc.], by recovery guru John Bradshaw, promise to rid us of "toxic shame" by "Using affirmations, visualizations, 'inner voice' and 'feeling' work plus guided meditations and other useful healing techniques" (Back cover). Even many professing Christian psychologists, tell us that our problem is low self-esteem; we need to learn to accept ourselves.

Because we all sin, we all need to deal with the problem of guilt. It is not surprising that the enemy of our souls offers many counterfeit solutions. So we must be careful to answer from the Bible alone the question, "How does God deal with my guilt?" The fig leaves of human solutions to guilt will not suffice in the day when we stand before the living God. The story of God's coming to that first guilty, fig-leaf-clad, hiding couple, shows us God's solution to guilt.

Even many Christians have wrong ideas about how God deals with sin and guilt. They think that God came looking for Adam and Eve in the garden, chewed them out, cursed everything in sight, kicked them out of the garden, and locked the door behind them. They view God as one who lowers the boom on guilty sinners.

But that's not the picture of God in Genesis 3. Rather, we see God graciously seeking the guilty sinners and providing for their restoration. He promises them victory over the tempter. And even His expelling them from the garden was gracious, in that He protected them from living forever in their fallen condition. It is a chapter which gives us, as guilty sinners, great hope. We see that:

God graciously seeks, confronts, and offers
reconciliation to the guilty sinner.

We deal with our guilt, not by hiding from Him, but by coming to Him and acknowledging our sin. Jesus said, "The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

1. God graciously seeks the guilty sinner (3:7-10).

To begin, we must not overlook ...

A. The sinner's guilt.

There is no mistaking it. As H. C. Leupold observes, "Here is one of the saddest anticlimaxes of history: They eat, they expect marvelous results, they wait--and there grows on them the sense of shame" (*Exposition of Genesis* [Baker], p. 154). Sin always leads to guilt; guilt leads to alienation, both between the sinner and God and between the sinner and his fellow human beings.

(1) *The sinner's guilt is seen in the sinner himself.* "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed [intertwined] fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (3:7). Suddenly they were self-conscious. Have you ever dreamed that you were in a public place and you weren't properly clothed? It's a relief to wake up and find out that you're home in bed! Adam and Eve woke up and found out they weren't dreaming. They *were* naked! For the first time, they had a sense that it wasn't right. So they made an attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves.

When they sinned their conscience was activated. God's question zeroes in on this, "Who told you that you were naked?" (3:11). The fact that Adam now knew he was naked showed that he had a conscience, which he got from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Someone has defined the conscience as a *faults* alarm. It goes off to tell us our faults. Of course it's possible, through repeated sin, to sear your conscience to the point where it no longer functions. But this first couple's conscience was operating just as God intended--it told them that they had sinned. When that alarm goes off, the fallen human tendency is to deal with it just as Adam and Eve did: Cover it up as quickly as possible. But that inner voice keeps nagging, "Guilty! Guilty!"

(2) *The sinner's guilt is seen in his relationships with others.* Immediately Adam and Eve lost the open relationship they had enjoyed with one another ("naked and not ashamed," 2:25). Their fig leaves picture a barrier between them, which is seen even more when God confronts Adam and he blames Eve (3:12). Nice guy, huh? He's trying to save his own skin, even if God zaps his wife off the face of the earth. At least Eve was nice enough to blame the serpent! But Adam's blaming Eve did not foster their relationship.

Blame is the human way to deal with guilt. It doesn't work--our guilt is still there. But it's the way every sinner tends to deal with guilt. You don't have to teach it to your kids. They have a built-in circuit that says, "When you do something wrong, blame someone else. But don't ever admit, 'I was wrong.'"

The way this works is, people sin and they know they're guilty, but they rationalize by thinking, "Yes, I was wrong; I shouldn't have yelled at my wife. But she provoked me." It's like a scale, where I have a pile of guilt on one side, but rather than clearing it off the scale, I balance it by piling blame on the other side. It doesn't remove the guilt, but it makes me feel better, at least for a while.

Of course people don't just blame other people. They also blame their circumstances, which is really to blame God, who ordains our circumstances. Adam is implicitly blaming God when he says, "The woman whom *You gave* to be with me ..." (3:12). "If You hadn't given her to me, God, I wouldn't be in this mess. It's Your fault." The sinner's guilt is seen in himself and in his relationship with others.

(3) *The sinner's guilt is seen in his response to God.* Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool (lit., "the wind") of the day. It should have been a time of refreshment and delight, but it now was a time of fear. God's presence was a theophany, an appearance of Jesus Christ in human form before He was born of Mary thousands of years later. But Adam and Eve didn't want to see Him. They hid among the trees.

Have you ever come home from work and one of your kids seemed to be avoiding you? When you found him, he wouldn't look you in the eye? You know that he's done something wrong!

The human response to guilt is to hide from the one in authority over you. I experience it with people who are running from the Lord. Guess who represents God in their life? The pastor! If they happen to run into me in a store, they try to duck down one of the aisles before I get to where they're at! It's almost funny!

When the Lord finds Adam, Adam admits his fear. But notice what he says (3:10): "I was afraid because I was naked." Not, "because I sinned," but, "because I was naked." He had been naked every other time the Lord had walked with him in the garden. The problem wasn't his nakedness, but his sin. But the real problem was, and still is, it is a fearful thing to be exposed as a guilty sinner in the presence of God. And so instead of coming to God, who can deal with our sin, we run, foolishly thinking that we can hide from His omnipresent gaze.

But, thankfully, God goes after us. And so we see here not only the sinner's guilt, but also ...

B. God's gracious seeking.

Man may seek to hide from God, but the relentless "Hound of Heaven" goes after him. God calls to Adam and asks the first question attributed to God in the Bible: "Where are you?" (3:9). Whenever God asks a question, it is *not* to gain information. God knew exactly where Adam was. He asked the question to make Adam think. If you had a friend coming to your house for the first time and he called and said that he was lost, you would ask, "Where are you?" If he can tell you where he is, you can tell him how to get to your house. You've got to know where you are before you can receive directions to where you need to be.

God's question told Adam two things: "You're lost, Adam; and, I've come to find you." Every person needs to know the same two things: He is lost without Jesus Christ; and, Christ came to seek and to save those who are lost. The Bible teacher, John Hunter, makes the point that people who do not know Jesus Christ are never called "unsaved" in the Bible. That term, Hunter contends, softens the tragic reality of their condition. The opposite of saved is *not* unsaved; it is *lost*.

When Adam sinned, he became lost with reference to God. All Adam's descendents are born in that condition: lost. Before you

can be reconciled to God, you've got to answer for yourself the question God asked Adam: *Where are you?* The answer is, "God, I'm lost." Before God can save you, you've got to admit to Him that you are lost.

When I say that God's seeking Adam was *gracious*, I mean that Adam did not deserve to be found and forgiven. He had rebelled openly and deliberately against God and His great love. No sinner deserves God's favor. Two things underscore the fact that God's seeking was gracious:

(1) *That God's seeking was gracious is seen in the fact that He came looking.* God could have zapped them both on the spot and started over with a new couple. He could have waited a while. Let them stew in their own juice. Let them hide behind those silly fig leaves, cowering in fear every time they hear a noise in the bushes. Let them pay for what they've done. But the implication is that God came looking the same day Adam and Eve sinned. That was pure grace. God doesn't seek us because we deserve it. We deserve His judgment, but He seeks us to save us. That's grace!

(2) *That God's seeking was gracious is seen in the manner He came looking.* He could have come down in anger, yelling, "Adam, front and center for your court martial and execution!" He could have come with a lecture: "Adam, you've blown it badly. How could you do this to Me, after all I've done for you? How many times did I tell you not to eat that fruit? How could anyone could be so stupid!"

But God came graciously to Adam with a question designed to make him think about where he was: "Where are you, Adam? Look at yourself, hiding behind that tree. Look at those silly fig leaves. Why are you there?" No sinner seeks after God. He graciously seeks hiding sinners. Once God finds the hiding sinner, grace does not stop.

2. God graciously confronts the guilty sinner (3:11-13).

God never ignores sin or brushes it aside, as we do. If someone wrongs us, we may say, "No big deal. Don't worry about it." But God can't do that. That would minimize the seriousness of sin and compromise His holiness and justice. God confronts guilty sinners, but He does it graciously. By that I do not mean that God

is not pointed and direct. Rather, it is gracious because His goal is restoration of the relationship, not condemnation.

So God asks another question: “Who told you that you were naked?” This question was intended to show Adam that something new had taken place inside him, namely, the birth of his conscience. An inner voice was telling Adam that he was naked and guilty before God. Someone has said, “If the best of men had his innermost thoughts written on his forehead, he’d never take off his hat.” We are all corrupt in our hearts. God used this question to get Adam to see that he was corrupted in his heart because he had disobeyed.

God’s next question is very direct, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” Adam blames his wife and implicitly blames God for giving her to him. But then he weakly admits his disobedience, “and I ate” (3:12).

Then God turns to Eve and directly asks, “What is this you have done?” Like Adam, Eve tries to pass the buck. But she finally also admits, “and I ate” (3:13). When there’s sin in a person’s life, what they need most is to admit their disobedience to God. At the point we acknowledge our sin, God takes over and deals with our guilt His way.

3. God graciously offers reconciliation to the guilty sinner (3:14-15).

God questioned the man and the woman because He wanted to lead them to repentance; but He did not question the serpent because there was no mercy for him. God cursed the serpent. The curse is directed both to the actual snake and to Satan who used the snake for his evil deeds. Verse 14 applies mostly to the snake as an animal; verse 15 applies mostly to Satan. In a future study we’ll see how God provided animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve, a picture of atonement. But for now I must limit myself to verses 14 & 15, which show us two ways God graciously offers reconciliation to guilty sinners.

A. God graciously offers reconciliation by defeating our adversary, the devil.

The serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust. As Donald Barnhouse explains, “To eat dust is to know defeat, and

that is God's prophetic judgment upon the enemy.... There will be continuous aspiration, but never any attainment" (*Genesis: A Devotional Exposition* [Zondervan], p. 22). The serpent was literally condemned to crawl on its belly, which I understand to mean that before the curse, it did not do so. (Some commentators say that it did, but that now God attaches new significance to that fact.)

Behind the serpent, Satan is condemned to an existence of frustration and defeat. This is seen most pointedly in the cross, where Satan thought he had finally defeated God's program by killing the Savior. But the cross was God's greatest victory, because in it and in the resurrection of Christ, Satan's final doom was secured. Though during this age God allows Satan some leash, so that he wins some battles, he's going to lose the war!

If God had not graciously defeated our adversary, we never could have been reconciled to Him. We are no match in ourselves for a creature as sly and powerful as Satan. But since he was defeated at the cross, God can offer reconciliation to guilty sinners, and free them from Satan's domain of darkness (see Col. 1:13; 2:13-15). Genesis 3:15 tells us how God would defeat Satan:

- B. God graciously offers reconciliation through His seed who conquers the devil.

This verse is the earliest promise of a Redeemer, and it comes as a surprise in this context of judgment. But its unexpectedness makes God's grace shine all the brighter. God promises to put enmity between the serpent and the woman. Satan already hated Eve, but God graciously put it into Eve's heart to hate Satan. Then God says that this enmity will be between Satan's seed and the woman's seed. This refers to the battle of the ages between the ungodly, who are children of their father, the devil (John 8:44), and the children of God. In this sense, "seed" is collective.

But God goes on to say that He (singular, a particular seed of the woman) shall bruise Satan on the head, and Satan would bruise Him on the heel. This refers to Christ, born of a woman (Gal. 4:4), the last Adam, who would redeem the fallen race. It is a remarkable verse in that it refers to the seed of the *woman*, not the man. Elsewhere in the Bible descent is determined through the male. But here it is the seed of the woman, not the man, who will bruise Sa-

tan's head. It is a prophecy, veiled at the time, but evident now, of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

At the cross, Satan bruised Christ on the heel. At first, the cross seemed like a great victory for Satan and a terrible defeat for God. But when Christ arose from the dead, the serpent was crushed on the head. What seemed like Satan's moment of triumph was actually the eve of his greatest defeat. He thought that he was gaining what he had been after since he rebelled against God; but actually, he was carrying out the sovereign purposes of God's eternal plan. And so here, in this context when Adam and Eve could rightly have expected to be condemned to hell for their sin, God promises the defeat of Satan and the victory of the Redeemer who would come from Eve's descendents. Amazing grace!

Conclusion

An American woman, returning from Europe with some perfume she had bought, had gone to a great deal of trouble packing the bottles so that they wouldn't be spotted by customs officials. An official started going through her luggage. He had nearly finished searching the last suitcase when the woman's small daughter clapped her hands and said excitedly, "Oh, Mommy, he's getting warm, isn't he?" You can try to hide your sin from God, but be sure your sin will find you out!

Let me direct God's first question to you: *Where are you?* Are you hiding, afraid of God, because of sin in your life? Maybe you're trying to cover your sin with the fig leaves of your good works. Perhaps, like Jonah, you are one of God's children, and yet you are running from His purpose for your life. You have sin you have not confessed to Him. Your guilt may make you think that God is after you to punish you. The Bible says that God is after you to save you from the judgment your sin deserves. He is graciously calling, "Where are you?" If you will come to Him and confess your sin, He will deliver you from Satan's domain of darkness and transfer you to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom you will have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14). That's how to deal with your guilt.

Discussion Questions

1. Is all guilt unhealthy? How can we distinguish between the conviction of the Spirit and the accusations of Satan?
2. Why is it important to affirm that none seeks for God (Rom. 3:11; John 15:16)? Does this mean that we should not exhort sinners to seek the Savior? Why/why not?
3. Will proclaiming grace as God's undeserved favor result in people taking sin lightly? Why/why not (see Rom. 6)?
4. How can a couple break out of the guilt-blame cycle in a marriage? What specific counsel could you give such a couple?

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