

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MESS YOU'RE IN?

Genesis 3:8–24

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More times than not, temptation appears as something very luscious. Also, when something is hidden or forbidden, it may excite us to figure out what it is and participate in it. If a member of our church walked in today with a hood over his head, it does not matter how beautiful everyone else is in the room. The attention would not be upon one another so much as it would be upon the one who is mysterious and covered.

Sin often comes to us in that kind of fashion. We suppose that when we pull away the covering, we'll find something beautiful. Instead, we only find we've unleashed forces that are monstrous and evil. As so often happens, we are not shocked by sin when it strikes us for the first time. We are not shocked by temptation. If Adam and Eve had been shocked by the suggestion of Satan, they certainly would have made the right kind of choice. But it was a lie.

We learn from the Scriptures that so often what the world passes off as sin is mainly something very aggravated and hideous. But in the Bible sin is, in fact, something else. It starts out very subtly as simple disobedience to God. It doesn't appear very horrendous. But the effects of it are. We need to be alert as to how Satan comes at us and the kinds of suggestions he presents. Even though Isaiah was certainly the most righteous person that ever lived, when he was in the presence of God he realized his own need and cried out, "Woe is me! I am undone" (Isaiah 6). He had the ability to be shocked by the holiness of God and the deceitfulness of sin.

In Genesis 3:8–24 we find the effects of sin. These effects are noted in three ways. First of all, there's the guilt and blame that occur in verses 8 and 9. Then the second effect, condemnation or judgment, is noted in verses 14–21. The third effect of sin, noted in verses 22–24, is separation.

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I. Let's look at the first effect of sin—guilt and blame.

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8, NIV). Already they've begun to feel a sense of shame in reference to their sin. When we sin, we feel shame.

The tendency for Adam and Eve was to find something to wear. We must see their nakedness as something more than physical nakedness, although that is involved. But it goes deeper into nakedness of the soul before the presence of God. They will soon find, however, that what they made to cover their sins was not sufficient.

The animal world does not need to wear clothes. They are not conscious of the need of clothes simply because they are not conscious of the need for moral choice. But as human beings we are conscious of the need for moral choice. When we sin, shame sets in.

We find in the text that shame also produces hiding or the fear of God. Now for the first time, Adam and Eve are not looking forward to the presence of God as He communes with them in the Garden. We would have to look further at the phrase “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking” not to have the idea that God is somehow like a man in a physical body. But the term “walking” may be an anthropomorphic term—something that describes a humanlike quality in reference to God. It helps us understand Him.

The point that's being made in verse 8 is that a very close personal communication exists between man, woman, and God, and now it has been severed because of sin. So there's hiding going on. As if one could hide from the presence of God behind a tree. As if we could hide from God when we sin. But we, like Adam and Eve, think we can.

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They're already showing the effect of sin. Sin produces fear of God. We can trace this theme all the way through the Scriptures right up to the very end hour of earth's history. In Revelation 6, when God takes action to destroy the world as it now is, those who are without God would rather face death than meet God. They cry out, "Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne" (Revelation 6:16, NIV). But for those who are righteous, Revelation 22:4 says, "They will see His face" (NIV). What a difference.

Wanting to see the face of the Lord, the close presence of the Lord, is a part of being covered by the righteousness of Christ. The opposite aspect is to flee. Guilt and shame and fear result. We sense this inasmuch as we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Genesis 3:9 says something very strategic here. Man and woman are caught in guilt and shame and fear. "But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (NIV).

Where are you? That is the first question God asks of man in the Scriptures. It is not so much that God didn't know where Adam and Eve were, but it is the recognition that they need to know where they are and who it is that is talking to them.

With this question, God is ruling out two options He could have taken. One option is He could have simply annihilated the first man and woman when they sinned. But the fact that He is talking to them shows He has chosen not to do that.

Another option God could have taken is to withdraw himself totally from the affairs of men and from the world and instead become totally transcendent. That is, beyond the realm of human experience and earthly cognizance. He would have been beyond, and never again would there be relationship.

But He chooses neither of those two alternatives. Instead, He begins to flush men out through questions. God has a very delicate way of moving. He does not start out with a thunderous voice.

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He does not start out with an outright announcement of judgment. He does not start out with belligerence. That would only drive men further and further into hiding. But He wants to talk with us when we have sinned. So He brings us out as a teacher would bring out a student, knowing that the best way is through questions.

One word in the Hebrew describes the question that God asked here. It's a very simple question, and man is being forced to focus in upon it.

It should be noted that the first question God asked in the Old Testament is “Where are you?”

The first question that men asked in the New Testament is “Where is He?” The Old Testament describes in totality the lostness of man: We need a Savior. The New Testament describes where to find the salvation: Where is He? It's a beautiful interplay.

Adam responds to the question by saying, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:10, NIV). There's both truth and error in that statement.

Certainly he was afraid, but the real reason he hid himself is not because he was naked. He is naked only because of something else—namely because he has sinned. Adam's first response to God after his sin is less than honest. He tells, in effect, a half-truth. He's unwilling to “fess up.”

The Scriptures teach us that if we are ever to lick the problem of sin, we must be honest and admit where we are and what we've done. It is good to say, “I have sinned. That's why I'm naked.” God cannot help us until there is an admission of that fact on our part. We see this in human experience like Alcoholics Anonymous. The person who is to be helped must first say, “I am an alcoholic.” The Scriptures start out the same way—with a basic confession of “I have failed.”

To say, “I have sinned” is offensive to some, maybe because the word “sinned” is associated with beating your wife and kicking the dog and getting drunk and squandering your money and

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all these kinds of things. But in Scripture, sin is to fall short of what God intended for your life. It is to disobey Him in one way or another. An honest admission is needed. Adam does not make it. So God responds in verse 11: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (NIV). How does the Holy Spirit convict us of sin? He starts raising questions. Finally, He gets down to the root of what is wrong. “Have you eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?”

Notice the man's response. The responses of the man and the woman here are very alike. The man says, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (verse 12, NIV). He's telling God, “I sinned because of two things. First, I sinned because of this woman.” That has been going on ever since. But his second comment is even more subtle. He says, “It's the woman that You gave me.” In effect he is saying, “God, it's Your fault. If You hadn't come along and made this woman, I would never have given in to sin.” Instead of taking the responsibility for himself, he passes it off on the woman and on God.

Notice God does not get into an argument with him. He simply passes on. God can win every argument He gets in, but there are some arguments He chooses not to answer. God is not a defendant. We are the defendants in this situation.

So the Lord said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” (Genesis 3:13, NIV). The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So she's blaming too. She blames the serpent for the temptation and she does not take responsibility for herself.

One of the marks of maturity, whether in life or spiritually, is to grow up enough to say, “I take responsibility.” It's always easy to pass off the blame. “If you had the person that I have to live with” or “If you had the kids that I have. That's why I lose my temper. It's because of my kids” or “The reason I didn't get the job is because the boss has a favorite.” This may be true, but

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often—whether it's personal happiness that we're deprived of or sin that occurs—it's easy to move in at a level of blame and say, "I don't take responsibility for that" or "The reason why I don't get good grades is the lousy teacher I have."

One of the great things in life is to say, "This has happened and I take responsibility without blaming." The terribleness of the situation is greater when we pass off the blame.

God doesn't want us to simply live with the responsibility for our sins. He is going to provide a remedy, as we'll see throughout the text.

So in reference to sin, the first effect is guilt and blame. It's kind of an enduring thing, isn't it? Even though Genesis is the beginning, it describes life as it is. How tremendously the Scriptures delineate what human behavior is all about.

B. The next effect—condemnation or judgment—is pronounced in turn upon the serpent, upon the woman, and upon the man.

Upon the serpent, God says in verses 14 and 15: "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle and above all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (NIV).

We are told nothing in the Genesis account as to the origin of Satan or his fall. From other parts of Scripture we may understand that Satan was a created being. He is not the opposite of God; God has no opposite.

Satan is an angel. He is limited in time and space. From his position of privilege, he wanted to exalt himself as God and wound up being banished to planet Earth. That appears to be the limit of his punishment. But now, because he is instrumental in the sins of man and woman, there is a further punishment meted out upon him. It would be best for Satan if he had left man alone. But

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by trifling with man, an added sentence is pronounced upon Satan—one that Christ will do on the Cross, in the Resurrection and at the end of the age. There is a triad of events there.

From man's point of view, he needs to understand that a curse has been pronounced upon Satan.

God uses the figure of a snake to picture that curse. Genesis is not teaching that Satan is a snake anymore than other Scriptures teach that the Messiah is a lamb or the lion of the tribe of Judah.

The words "lion" and "lamb" are pictorial representations of Christ and His qualities as the Messiah. Pictorial representations also are used for the character of Satan. He is in the gutter and the slime of life. He's exceedingly dangerous. He's stealthy.

Nothing is said about serpents being upright before the curse. Snakes may have already been crawling on the ground before the curse, but now they are to represent Satan himself in their character. They remind us of him. God does not use a noble term to picture Satan like a lamb.

Genesis 3:15 includes a very unusual statement. You immediately recognize it as going beyond the realm of man versus snake. There is to be enmity—the woman and her seed against the serpent and his seed or influence. The serpent will be effective in striking man's heel. Man will be effective in smashing the serpent's head. The difference between the two should be noted. To smash the head of Satan is a mortal wound. To bruise the heel of man is something very trying and dangerous, and if the snake is poisonous it can also be venomous and deadly. But the ultimate thing is the last word: "His head shall be bruised." That means put to death.

This is the first word of hope—the first prophecy related to the Messiah in Scripture, the first good news. Judgment is pronounced. Satan will pay the consequences for what he has done. As we understand from the New Testament, from the seed of Adam and Eve the Lord Jesus Christ will come and triumph over Satan. What a beautiful promise.

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Next there is condemnation or judgment passed upon the woman. Her judgment is twofold. God said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16, NIV). The first thing was pain in childbearing. This leads us to the understanding that up to this time there may have been the birth of children in Eden prior to the Fall. The curse is not that women will bear children; children are not the curse of the Fall. They're the one thing left over we can still rejoice in. Rather, the curse is pain in childbearing.

What is the Lord doing here? He's saying that at the most beautiful event in life—the entrance of life—there is the threat of death. Even at birth, one is on the threshold of death—the threshold accompanied by such great pain.

The second point is that in the marriage relationship, man is now put in a dominant position of rulership over the woman. Looking back in Genesis 2 before the Fall, we see a kind of equality. Man was the head, but not in the “you're underneath my feet” sort of way. Together man and woman named the animals, participated in the gardening work, celebrated the presence of God together, and prayed together. There is in Christ neither male nor female. Now the marriage relationship becomes affected—so much so that the woman becomes subdominant to the man in an unhealthy kind of way. We have seen an extension of this when men step over the bounds and rule in a slavish or lordly kind of a way over their wives.

Genesis is telling us that the consequence of sin is fouled-up personal communication—fouled-up relationship. There is now tension. Instead of the word “love,” we find the word “rule.” One of the beauties of Christian marriage, I believe, is that it can help us rediscover Eden—what it is like to have the man as Adam, head of the home, but without the wife being under his feet. Eve's punishment brought tension in her and Adam's marriage.

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Directly to Adam, God says two things: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:17–19, NIV).

God is saying, “Because of you, nature is going to work against you.” Thorns and thistles are going to creep up. Man is in a battle with his environment. As he keeps tinkering with it, it keeps turning against him—so much so that now even aerosol cans are being talked about as possibly ruining the environment. And they very well may.

In Isaiah 11:6–8, we get a picture of what God will make the heaven and the earth like one day: “The lion shall lay down with the lamb. And the child shall play at the den of the serpent.” What is happening? The tension in nature is gone.

Because of our involvement in the ecosystem of life, what man does affects nature. There is frustration with nature. Interestingly enough, the New Testament picks up on this theme in Romans 8:20–23 when it says that the whole creation is subject to bondage and that it groans, waiting for its liberation. Just as the children of God wait for their liberation, nature is waiting for a redeemed mankind to know how to handle it.

Not only that, God says that when you work, it's going to be toil and sweat. No longer will work be the pleasure it was in Eden. Indeed, the curse on Adam is not that he will work. He worked before the Fall—this is clearly seen in Genesis 2. But now it's work without fulfillment. It's labor without rest—labor with sweat and tension and lack of ease.

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If you look at the world's population today and the number of people who still live by the literal sweat of their face, you'd have to say that 85 to 90 percent of the world barely eke out a living doing something that is very unfulfilling intellectually, socially, and every other way. We in America are privileged, and many have fulfilling jobs. But a terrible thing is happening around the world. Work is not satisfying.

Next is God's statement that Adam will go back to the dust. In Genesis 2:17, the Lord gave the tree to Adam and Eve and told them not to eat. He said, "In the day you will eat you will die."

Yet they did not die physically the day they ate. Rather, the death spoken of refers to a spiritual death that is talked about throughout the Bible. In the day you eat you'll become separated from God. That is a death unto itself and is different from physical death.

We know that death does not mean cessation of existence. Even though man returns to the dust, the Bible does not teach that he ceases to exist. Even Ecclesiastes, the most pessimistic book in all of Scripture, says man returns to the dust but the spirit returns to the God who gave it. Man is eternal; he is meant to live eternally.

Physical death begins working out its implications as deterioration of the body starts to take place. To dust you shall return. If the Lord doesn't return, we all know exactly what we're going to become physically. That's our future, spelled out in clear terms.

A word of optimism breaks through in verses 20 and 21. The man called his wife Eve—which in the Hebrew means "living one"—because she was the mother of all living. The Lord God also made for Adam and his wife garments of skin to clothe them.

I like the name Adam gave to his wife. He called her "mother of the living" or "mother of all living." He could have called her mother of all dying, because that is what had just happened.

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But he chose to see things from a dimension of faith. God would make her the mother of all living.

Genesis 35:16–18 is a beautiful passage that describes the birth of Benjamin, Jacob's youngest son by his wife Rachel. As Benjamin was being born, Rachel was dying in childbirth. She reached out with her last breath to name the child as he was coming into the world. She declared that his name would be *Ben-Oni*, meaning "son of my sorrow." Jacob immediately said, "His name shall be Benjamin, son of my right hand."

So Adam reaches out in faith to call his wife the mother of all things living. And the Lord God reaches out to make provision. Leaves are not enough; there must be garments to protect them physically from the cold world into which they will literally be cast. How different is God's provision for covering than man's!

You find in Genesis 3:21 the allusion to the first death that occurs in God's world. For in order to have skins, there had to be the death of an animal. While we don't have the sacrificial system of the Old Testament in operation here, we do have the implication. If there is to be covering for man, it's all wrapped up in the theme of life. It's wrapped up in the theme of substitution. It's wrapped up in the death of something innocent in order that we might be covered. That theme in Scripture runs all the way through until it reaches its height in the person of Jesus Christ who makes covering for us by His blood on the Cross.

C. The effects of sin are guilt and blame, condemnation, and, finally, separation.

"And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of

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Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22–24, NIV).

It would now be impossible for fallen man to really enjoy eternal life. What would the use of endless time be if one was not fit to live in it? Because of sin and the ravages that had occurred in their personal lives and their marriage, Adam and Eve are unfit candidates for eternal life.

Eternal life for them would have been hell, so God denies it. They must learn the truth of what it is like to be in hell in human experience so they could learn in faith to reach out for God's Eden. God's home. God's heaven.

Then the cherubim are assigned to guard the way with a flaming sword. There's a fascinating insight here. Cherubim in Scriptures are angelic types of beings described as having wings and feet. Other than that, we do not have a description of them. But in Israel's worship these cherubim assumed an important place, for they were embroidered into the tapestry of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. It is as if the cherubim were guarding the entrance into the Holy of Holies. In other words, a separation has occurred. Not only is man separated from Eden, but he is also separated from God—outside of God's presence, outside the Holy of Holies.

A decree of God forbids that man can enter on his own. How great it is then to turn to the New Testament to find what Christ has done. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, have confidence to enter the sanctuary, the holy place, by the blood of Jesus, by the new and the living way which He opened for us through the curtain” (Hebrews 10:19).

God has said there is amnesty. You can come back to Eden. You can be with Me. You can live with Me. Christ has opened up the way. He has pushed the cherubim aside, in effect, and He says, “Follow Me.” He has opened up a new and living way.

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So when we take the bread and the cup, we are doing something that has been bound up with the history of man since time began: knowing that we're excluded from God but that through Christ we have the ability to come back and to have a relationship.

Romans 8:33–35 puts it so well as an overlay in contrast to Genesis 3. We have seen that the first effect of sin is guilt and blame. But for the person who is in Christ, Paul says, “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?” When you’re in Christ, who can blame you? Who can establish a charge against you? Who can make you feel guilty from the condemnation that is pronounced in Genesis’ judgment?

Romans 8:34 says, “Who is he that condemns?” (NIV). Who is to condemn you now because of Christ’s works and His death on the Cross? Where is there any who can condemn you? Only Christ can condemn you and He will not.

In answer to the effect of sin, which is separation, Paul says in verse 35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (NIV). No more is separation possible.

In three questions in verses 33–35, the apostle shows how Jesus Christ has reversed the effects of Eden. Who will bring any charge? Who is to condemn? Who will separate? In your heart, because of Christ, you know the answer.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we thank You for these words of Scripture and for the life that is in us through Christ our Lord. We gather around this table and ask Your blessing upon our hearts that they may be prepared to meet with You. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.