

I want to start this morning by asking a question that's more relevant today than it was even two short weeks ago, "What's wrong with us?" After three mass shootings in the past two weeks, we're all asking that question. "What's wrong with us?"

For nearly three centuries, Western nations have accepted the Enlightenment dogma that human beings are basically good. The problem, we've been led to believe, is not with us but rather it's external to us. That would mean the solution is external to us as well — we need better schools, new laws, and different people in office.

But, today, many are questioning that assumption. More and more we're wondering if the problem really starts within us. I mean, even if the problem is with our institutions, who created those institutions in the first place? We did! Perhaps G.K. Chesterton was right when he said human depravity is the one Christian teaching that can really be proved. In our day of nuclear fears, racism, sexism, and terrorism who can honestly deny that something is dreadfully wrong with us?

We are in a series called "Worth It: Listening to the Voice that Matters Most." We've seen some of the ways we try to establish our worth and identity. We seek to build our self-worth and identity around how much we know, or what we do, or how much we have, or even in what we enjoy and experience. But none of these things ultimately work. So last week, we went back to our origins and saw that human beings are intrinsically created in the image of God. After God created the first man and woman, it says, "he blessed them." He told them "be fruitful and multiply," and to care for and rule over his creation. It was only after God created the man and woman in his image that he looked at all he'd made and saw that it was "very good." That's God speaking, and that's the voice that matters most.

But what happened? How did we go from that to this? To answer that question, we need to return to Genesis. This is the book of our origins. As we think about our worth, if we are going to listen to the voice that matters most, we'll also hear what he says about what's gone wrong with us.

Adam and Eve Disobey God

The second chapter of Genesis sets the context. We're told the Lord planted a wonderful garden in Eden. He filled it with every type of tree, all of them, "pleasing to the eye and good for food" (2:9). He gave Adam and Eve the task of working and caring for the garden (2:15). He urged them to enjoy its bounty, to satisfy their appetites on all God had made.

There was just one restriction. The Lord said to Adam,

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."
Genesis 2:16-17

God created Adam and Eve with desires, and he provided everything necessary to satisfy those desires. But he also set a limitation. They had everything they possibly could need or want, but they were to live within this boundary. They had the freedom to obey or not, and for a long time, they did obey. Chapter two closes with the man and woman living in harmony with one another, with God and with all creation. Life was good. But then everything goes wrong in chapter three!

You know the story. The serpent came to Eve and tempted her to eat from that one forbidden tree. She eventually succumbed and ate from it, and then Adam followed suit. But it's what happened next that I want to focus on. Someone has described it like an avalanche. What began as just one single act of disobedience snowballed into a massive avalanche of destruction for all humanity yet to come. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans put it this way, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned"* (Rom. 5:12). Sin became like an inherited disease, spreading death to everyone that followed. And we see it in how things play out in Genesis three.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. 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. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life. vv. 7-24

The Effects of the Fall Seen in a Series of Separations

Years ago, Francis Schaeffer wrote a book called "Genesis in Space and Time," where he described the results of Adam and Eve's fall as a series of separations. These separations continue to define us to this day. I want to look at four ways sin brought separation to humanity that was not God's original intention. These four separations answer the question, "What's wrong with us?"

The Separation of Man From Himself

First, there's a kind of separation that takes place within ourselves - a kind of psychological separation. After they ate, it says, "*the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves*" (v. 7). It seems for the first time they experienced self-consciousness and a sense of shame. They didn't like what they were, and so they covered up. There was an immediate sense of unease and discomfort with themselves. Cornelius Plantinga says, "It wasn't merely that they flinched when their partner's gaze dipped southward; it was also that they had trouble looking into each other's eyes."

And so this virus of sin introduced all the psychological problems of low self-esteem, poor self-image, and even narcissism. Our efforts at covering up manifest themselves in self-deception. The loss of true self-knowledge and acceptance leads to one of two things: Either we make too much of ourselves, or we make too little of ourselves. Either we idealize ourselves or condemn ourselves. The bottom line: we're not at peace with ourselves. We're restless. The prophet Isaiah described it like this: "*But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud*" (Isaiah 57:20).

The Separation of God and Man

Second, and this is the greatest separation, is the separation of God and man. After they make coverings for themselves, what's the first thing that happens? It says, they, "*heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...*" It's quite clear that previous to this, they were accustomed to open communication with the Lord God. In the cool of the day, there was fellowship and communion with him. But now we're told they, "hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden." They knew they'd disobeyed him and they felt guilt. They should feel guilty because they were indeed guilty! When we sin against God, we not only feel guilty, we ARE guilty. In fact, we're guilty whether we feel it or not.

So, there they are, hiding from God. But God graciously comes looking for them, and he calls out, "Where are you?" Whenever God asks a question of us like this, it's not because he doesn't know the answer. Don't you think God knew where Adam and Eve were hiding? But God asks the question to get Adam and Eve to look at themselves and ask themselves, "Why are you where you are — hiding from God? You never hid from him before." Before sin, Adam and Eve were comfortable in the presence of God. But now they hide from him in their guilt. They're afraid of God and don't want to be in his presence at all.

And the truth is they were unfit for God's presence. At the end of chapter three, we see how this separation took on geographical reality as they are literally banished from the Garden of Eden. God drove them out and guarded them from the tree of life with a fiery sword. Separated from the tree of life, they would experience death, just as God said they would, and that death wasn't just physical but spiritual; they were separated from God; alienated from their Creator, the author and source of life.

And because we've all sinned, that's true of all of us today. We're not born in innocence and perfect harmony with God and then somehow the world messes us up, and that's how we get into trouble. No! We're all infected with this disease, we all choose to defy God, and we all suffer the consequences of death and separation from him. In fact, all you have to do is flip over to Genesis 6:5 and it says, "*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.*" Nothing's changed. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "*No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one*" (Romans 3:10-12 NLT).

The separation of Man and Man

The third separation is between humans; between man and his fellow man — a social separation. We see this right away as God asks Adam, "*Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?*" How did Adam respond? You might say, Adam took it like a man — he blamed his wife! He essentially said: "I'm the victim here. She made me do it. In fact, God, you made the woman, so it's your fault!" And the woman doesn't take responsibility either. She basically says, "The devil made me

do it." So now the human race, created to live in love and companionship, is divided not just by shame but by blame.

And this plays out in a multitude of ways. It plays out in strife between the sexes. Male and female were designed to complement each other; together reflecting the very image of God in their relationship. But now, God says to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (v. 16b) That's not how God originally designed it to be. Men were not created to dominate, exploit, and rule over women, but that's what's happened throughout history. This also plays out in conflict and even murder. We see this immediately in chapter four as Cain murders his brother Abel. God then comes to Cain and asks another revealing question, "*Where is your brother Abel?*" *Cain replies, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (4:9).*

This is the beginning of the great divisions amongst humankind, not just male and female but racial divisions and prejudice which have been at the root of these recent shootings, and the division between the haves and have nots and the division between nations that have played out in millions of young men and women dying in wars and international conflicts. We were made for community. We WERE made to be our brother's keeper, and yet fear, misunderstanding, blame, hatred, violence, and verbal abuse dominate our relationships.

Before we look at the final separation, let me give you a personal example of this. Not too long ago, I went out to move my daughter's car from the street in front of my house to my driveway. It was raining really hard, and as I backed her car up, I heard a thud. It turns out I'd backed into my neighbor's truck, which was also parked on the street. Honestly, it's always bothered me that he parks there because his truck is right on the edge of my driveway. My first thought was, "I knew this would happen sooner or later." My second thought was, "Nobody saw me do this. I wonder if there's even a mark on his truck?" I mean it was nighttime, and it was pouring rain. So, I walked over and tried to see if I could see a dent or a mark. I couldn't, so I just thought, "Well, I can't see a problem here. No harm no foul."

But I felt a little guilty so the next day I checked it out again and noticed a black scuff mark and a little scratch on his bumper. Then the rationalizations really began. I mean that car shouldn't be there in the first place. Not only that, that mark might have already been there. And then I thought, "I'll bet with a little solvent I could wipe that scuff mark and scratch right out." So that night, when no one was looking, I snuck over to his car and tried to rub it out, and it was almost completely gone.

I know what you're thinking right now. You're thinking I'm a terrible person! You're thinking, how can he be our pastor? He's a criminal. But I want you to know I did finally tell him, and he was very nice and even said he couldn't see any mark on the truck. He does still park there, but I feel much better about it now!

Why tell you that story? Because it illustrates what I'm talking about here. It wasn't a sin to back into his truck, but it was a sin to try and cover it up. Sin put me at odds with myself. I didn't use a fig leaf to cover up but rather solvent! Sin also put me at odds with God. I knew as long

as I held onto that secret, I was out of fellowship with Him. And, finally, sin put me at odds with my neighbor. Until I told him what happened and took responsibility for my own mistake, I couldn't look him in the eye. You see, sin brings separation within ourselves, in our relationships, and with God.

The Separation of Man and The Rest of God's Creation

There one last separation we see in this story, and that's the separation between humanity and the rest of God's creation. We see this first in what God says to Adam,

"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 from the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food..." vv. 3:17b-19a

The blessing of work becomes toil, and man's relationship with creation is now marked with thorns and thistles. Weeds and erosion, floods and droughts, volcanoes and earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes, diseases and viruses, all came because of sin. The New Testament even says all creation groans, longing to be redeemed by the Creator (Rom. 8:22).

God made us stewards of his creation — to care for it and keep it. But that's turned into exploitation, the needless destruction of his creation without thought for its created beauty or intrinsic worth. We live with air pollution, climate change, deforestation, and water scarcity. These aren't just political issues; they're sin issues. They're part of an avalanche that began in the Garden.

But do you know what the amazing thing is about all this is? Despite all this, we're still made in the image of God. Yes, that image has been marred and blurred by sin, but it's still there. In fact, right over in Genesis 9:6, God lays down the law about murder and says, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.*" And, later, in the New Testament, James put it this way, "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's image*" (James 3:9). So, even in our sin and brokenness, we're still human, we still bear God's image, and we're still of great worth to him.

God's Plan to Reverse the Curse

In fact, we're of such great worth to God that he didn't leave us in this state of separation. We see that even before Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden and from the tree of life. You see, God put a plan in motion from the beginning to fix things. You might say God had a plan to get us back to Eden and to the tree of life. There are strong hints of this in Genesis three.

One of the hints is in verse 21. It says, "*The Lord made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them*" (3:21). Right there in the Garden, God met this ashamed and guilty couple in their need. Isn't it interesting that even then something had to die in order for Adam and Eve to be covered up? In that sacrifice of an animal, there's a hint of God's plan to cover our sin and guilt through a life laid down. This is the first act of atonement in the Bible. It took more than a fig leaf to adequately clothe

the sinful man and woman for the presence of God. It took the sacrifice of an animal. It took the shedding of blood, and only God could provide the sacrifice.

And that leads to another hint found up in verse 15. God said to the serpent, *“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.”* What does that mean? It means through a man born of a woman; Satan would be crushed. Who is that man? That man is Jesus. The Bible calls him “the second Adam.” You see, Adam failed, but the second Adam didn’t fail. Adam was tempted in Paradise and failed. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and resisted; he beat Satan. But Satan still had one poisonous bite. He took his bite at the cross, as a spike was driven into Jesus’ heel. It looked like defeat. The long-awaited offspring of the woman died. But three days later, Jesus rose from the grave. The ultimate sacrifice was made. The serpent loses. Jesus wins! We win! Hebrews says,

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews. 2:14-15

How much would you have to be worth for God to do that? Worth enough to send his Son, worth enough to watch him die, worth enough to clothe you with his righteousness.

Here’s the irony: our worth to God is seen to be even greater against the backdrop of our sin. I mean it’s one thing to love something or someone that’s lovable, but to love someone unlovable, someone broken, someone even shaking their fist at you, well that’s a greater love. You see, our greatest worth isn’t seen in light of our accomplishments, our morality, our intelligence. Instead, it’s seen in light of our sin and brokenness. Romans says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

This means we don’t gain any worth by denying our sin, but by exposing it. Fig leaves can’t fix us. What fig leaves do you hide behind? The world offers us fig leaves to fix our sin and shame. It offers fig leaves because it doesn’t understand how deep the problem really is. Jesus offers you something far different, far better. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a great German Pastor. He died in a Nazis prison camp because he stood for Christ. He wrote a wonderful quote. This quote is not meant to denigrate Psychology or the work of therapists, but I think the essence of what he said is very true. Bonhoeffer said,

The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and

experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men. And so, it also does not know that man is destroyed only by sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist, I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother, I can dare to be a sinner.

We need to do what Adam and Eve failed to do, take responsibility for our sin. We need to dare to be a sinner. The Christian life doesn’t really start until the excuses stop, until we quit acting like victims. Have you taken responsibility for your sin before God? Only then will you find your great worth is in his eyes; great enough to send his Son to die and clothe you.

And with that, beyond this life, he promises a new Eden for us. In the very last chapter of the Bible, we read of a holy city and a new Eden where the river of life flows from the throne of God. And the tree of life is there, loaded with fruit. But who gets to be there and eat from it? Listen to what it says, *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by its gates”* (Rev. 22:14). Who gets to be there? Not those wearing fig leaves, but sinners who’ve washed their robes in the blood of the lamb.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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