

The Genesis of Divine Revelation
Read Genesis 3

Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has been concerned about etiology (ēteōlogy). Etiology is defined as "the study of causes, origins, and reasons." Normally we think of ancient pagan societies being obsessed with questions about their origins and fabricating myths to explain where they came from and the character of their gods. Yet, even in our scientific and information age we still ask etiological questions. We don't know all the answers needed to explain our existence. Humanity continues to struggle with the age-old quandaries such as "what is the meaning of life?" "why are we here?" "where did we come from?" "will we ever be able to explain the mysteries of love and life?"

The epitome of such inquiry is expressed in childhood. Recall the infamous series of "why" questions. "Mommy, why does daddy rub your neck each evening?" @=it feels good. "Why." @=it was injured. "Why." @ a car hit our car. "Why." @=the road was slippery. "Why." @=it was snowing. "Why." @=that's enough. Then, there are the questions which call for complex answers: "why is the sky blue?" "why is daddy's hair turning white?" "how do birds fly?" "where do babies come from?" Our oldest daughter had a unique way of communicating such queries. She always expressed them in terms of what something will do to you. She would ask, "what do lions do to you?" "what does an earthquake do to you?" "what does spinach do to you?" "what do snow flakes do to you?"

As Christians, we often take our etiological questions to God and His word. The Bible does not answer all of our questions; however, God has revealed His response to some important questions concerning our existence. We call the Bible, His revelation to us. This revelation from God begins with an account which addresses such questions as: "how does God respond to our disobedience?" or as my daughter would say it: "what does sin do to you?" or most to the point, "where does sin come from?" As if anticipating such a question, the apostle Paul wrote in Romans, "...through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all, because all sinned--." In the midst of a larger discussion concerning sin and righteousness, Paul points to the entrance of sin through one man, and claims that the consequence of death spread to all because all participated in sin. So who started it and what are the consequences? The beginning of God's revelation in the Bible addresses these concerns. That is, the "Genesis of Divine Revelation" communicates to us the character and consequences of sin, and God's response to human disobedience.

I. Basic Character of Sin

The account in Genesis 3 begins with a conversation between the first woman and one of the wild animals which God created. The crafty serpent phrased a question to the woman in such a way as to imply that God restricted the first human pair from eating of any tree in the Garden, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from **any** tree of the garden?'" The woman rightly responded and corrected the serpent by stating, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we **may** eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from **it** or touch it, or you will die.'" At this point the serpent appears to have directed the discussion to the subject of his original intent, that is, the forbidden tree. The serpent refutes the woman's statement with three claims: first, "you surely will not die;" second, "when you eat from it your eyes will be opened;" and third, "you will be like God knowing good and evil." What appears a little frightening on a surface reading of the text is that all three of the serpent's claims are exactly what happens. After the couple eats the forbidden fruit, they do not immediately fall over dead, and verse 7 proclaims that "the eyes of both of them were opened," and later in verse 22 God Himself announces that "the man has become like one of Us knowing good and evil!" This is a reminder that the greatest deception is always mixed with truth. That is what makes it so deceptive!

So what does it mean to be like God knowing good and evil? What is so bad about knowing the difference between good and evil? Aren't we supposed to distinguish between good and evil? I believe the key to the concern here is the combination of equality with God and knowing good and evil. That is, the issue here is not just the simple knowledge of good and evil, but it is determining for oneself what is good and what is evil, as if one were God. The temptation is that of becoming one's own God and deciding for oneself what is good and what is bad. It means being my own boss, becoming my own god, and deciding what is right and wrong for me, regardless of how it impacts others. It is a condition of independence, self-centeredness, and hubris. Unfortunately, such a condition is readily advanced in a pluralistic and relative society like our own, in which everyone should be seen as right and no view should be insulted as being wrong. Everyone is his or her own god, free to determine what is good and what is evil.

It is striking to me that the image of this temptation is that of grasping fruit from a tree. If the first couple grasps the fruit, they are to become equal with God. It is striking because the one man who was indeed equal with God did not consider it something to be grasped. Recall the words in Philippians 2: 5-8:

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, **did not regard equality with God a thing to be**

grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The call of our Savior, Jesus Christ, is not to consider equality with God something to be grasped, but rather to empty oneself as a servant in full surrender and obedience to God.

So what are the **consequences** of this first sin? What does sin do to you? God's revelation in Genesis 3 continues to communicate some answers.

II. Consequences of Sin

After the act of disobedience, and the eyes of the first couple are opened, the text states that "they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." The first few times I read this, I wondered what in the world being naked had to do with anything else in the story! Why is that all of a sudden an issue, when it wasn't before? The concern over being naked, of course, recalls the concluding statement from chapter 2 of Genesis, which states that "that man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed." Again, I wonder what does that have to do with anything? Why is that statement placed at the end of chapter 2!?

The context of Genesis chapter 2 suggests that the statement regarding nakedness serves as a summary image of the trust and harmony depicted in the original state of creation. The creation account of Genesis 2 describes God fashioning a world of interdependence and unity. As God provides, we are given a picture of creation in which the ground is watered by a mist, a man is made from the dust of the ground, the ground is cultivated by the man, trees provide food for humans and animals, and a companion is created so the man would not be alone. Everything is in harmony and functions with interdependence: the ground, garden and trees need the water; the humans and animals need the fruit from the trees, the ground and garden need the man to cultivate them; the man and the women need each other for companionship; and all need God for life and sustenance. This picture is summed up and concluded with the statement that the "man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed."

Their nakedness without shame reflects the trust and harmony and innocence evident between the first couple and evident throughout the creation. This beautiful picture is broken in chapter 3 when the couple sins, their eyes are opened, and they become aware of their nakedness. They sew fig leaves and make coverings for themselves. Their desire to hide and cover their nakedness becomes an image of mistrust and disharmony. It is an effective image. After all, in a world of mistrust, consider what is the most vulnerable position in which we humans can

find ourselves? I can be insulted, slandered, abused, attacked, and beaten; but at the very least I find some measure of dignity and comfort in being covered and clothed. The most humiliating, undignified, and vulnerable state I can imagine is being naked with absolutely no stitch of material between me and the rest of the world. When there is alienation and mistrust in our world, consider the tendency of the human creature. We put up barriers of every kind: fig leaves, clothing, doors, walls, fences, borders, land mines, tanks, nuclear weapons, and all kinds of other blockades. An old professor of mine, upon mourning the plight of our fallenness, protested, "If only we could learn to trust each other, and drop our fig leaves once again." I am afraid we are beyond that.

Besides hiding and covering up, the atmosphere of mistrust and alienation is evident in the couples' response to God's questions after they sinned. To the man, God inquires, "Where are you;" "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man eventually confesses with these words, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." The Lord then turns to the woman and asks, "What is this you have done?" She confesses in a similar manner with the words, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." The picture of brokenness and alienation is complete. The man and woman have pushed away everyone of significance in the story, with blame and accusation. "God, it is your fault for giving me the woman; it is the woman's fault for giving me the fruit." And "it is the serpent's fault for deceiving me." The man and the woman cast blame and push away responsibility.

The only character in this account who takes responsibility and begins to act to deal with the situation is God! God, who has provided paradise and equipped it with harmony and unity; God, who is innocent and just; God, who is gracious and good; God is the one who picks up the broken pieces which his creatures have cast down.

I can't help but recall the famous trial of captain Kirk in Star Trek 6. He is captured by the fearsome Klingons and put on trial for killing the Klingon Ambassador. Of course, we the audience, having seen the truth in the film, know that Kirk is innocent and that he is the victim of an elaborate set up and conspiracy. The false accusations and circumstantial evidence are so obvious that we are confident that this mockery of a trial will not be able to condemn the great captain Kirk, who just two films earlier literally saved the planet earth. The klingon prosecutor, brilliantly played by Christopher Plummer - Captain Van Trapp himself in Klingon skin, presents all kinds of manipulative arguments aimed at indicting Kirk. We easily see through the conspiracy, **until** the prosecutor levels the fatal question: "Kirk, as captain of the Enterprise, are you not responsible for the actions of the crew who serve under your command." Suddenly, our confidence in the captain's vindication is shaken to the core! Knowing the

character of our captain, we tremble as we hear his slow and committed response: "As captain of the Enterprise, I am responsible for the actions of the crew who serve under my command."

In a similar manner, in Genesis 3, God takes responsibility for the actions of his creatures. In verse 15, God takes responsibility for putting enmity between the serpent and the woman. In verse 16, God takes responsibility for greatly multiplying the woman's pain in childbirth. Not only in Genesis, but in other biblical texts, God takes responsibility for the actions of his creatures. In Exodus, God takes responsibility for hardening Pharaoh's heart. In 1 Samuel, God takes responsibility for sending an evil spirit upon King Saul. In all of these cases, the larger context makes it very clear that the people involved brought their evil circumstances upon themselves. Yet, God is the one who takes responsibility when his creatures deny it. The greatest manifestation of this wondrous grace is seen in Jesus Christ, **as on the cross** once again, God takes responsibility for the actions of his creatures! This does not mean that people are let off the hook and are spared the circumstances of their evil actions. However, neither are they abandoned to suffer alone without hope of restoration. As early as our text in Genesis 3, God begins to work to reconcile the brokenness introduced by the first couple.

III. God's Response to Human Disobedience

It needs to be clarified that God's speech in verses 14-19 does not constitute a curse upon humanity. A close look at the terminology reveals that only the serpent and the ground are cursed in the divine speech. The rest of the speech serves to clarify the state of the relationships which has resulted from the actions of the man and the woman. At first glance, I once again wonder what these particular issues have to do with what is happening in the text.

That is, what does hostility between the woman and the serpent, increasing pain in childbirth, and thorns and thistles have to do with eating forbidden fruit? Given the context of the relationships, the answer becomes apparent. These circumstances are representative of the larger condition of brokenness in the relationships of creation.

Recall the context which has been created by the actions of the man and the woman. Brokenness and alienation brought on by blame, accusation, and mistrust constitute the atmosphere which defines the current state of relationships. Given such circumstances, the great harmony and interdependence pictured at the end of Genesis 2 is clearly undone. Accordingly, the enmity between the woman and the serpent reflects the disruption of good-natured relationships between humanity and the animal kingdom. Likewise, the struggle and toil to cultivate the ground in order to extract food reflects a disruption of the mutually supportive relationship between ground and humanity. This picture of alienation between humanity and animals

and even the ground, highlights the truth that the fallenness of our world impacts all of creation. Thus, in Romans, Paul proclaims that "the whole creation groans and suffers" in the context of our fallen world.

Most critical is the disruption of the relationship between the man and the woman. Notice that the Lord proclaims that pain in childbirth will **increase**. Thus, God does not invent pain in childbearing for the first time, as if it was originally a comfortable and pleasant experience. Ideally, a couple will provide for each other with great love and comfort and support during the wondrous event of childbirth; thereby **decreasing** the pain which is natural to the process. However, given the circumstances brought about in Genesis 3, the normal level of pain in childbirth would naturally **increase**. That is, in the context of mistrust, brokenness, and alienation, in which men and women have pushed each other away, loving support will obviously be lacking. Without the loving and trusting relationship between a husband and wife, the wife must experience the work of birthing a child by herself, alone and isolated, without the comfort of a caring spouse. That is why, God states that the woman's desire will be for her husband. Unfortunately, in the state of alienation, his response will be to rule over her, rather than to comfort her. Under such circumstances, clearly the **pain of childbirth increases**. Childbirth, which should be a foundational bonding experience in the life of any couple, serves as a central image of what broken relationships look like.

It is critical that we recognize the function of this speech from God. As one of my undergraduate professors put it, "It is not a **prescription** of what must be, but rather it is a **description** of what has come about." Through this speech, God identifies the consequences of the couples' sin. This certainly does not mean that God intends for life to carry on this way. On the contrary, God begins the work of reconciliation to correct this state of brokenness.

Thus, it is a huge mistake in the church when we glean from this speech such misguided doctrines as, for example, the one which claims that men are divinely called to rule over women. Instead, we need to recognize that we are called to join God in the work of correcting the brokenness reflected in the images of this speech.

After clarifying the situation, God continues the work of reconciliation by making garments for the couple. This affirms that we are beyond the state of simply dropping our fig leaves. Next, the Lord drives the couple out of the garden of Eden. The rationale for this is out of concern that they might eat from the tree of life and live forever. Clearly, God does not want the couple to live forever **in their current state of alienation and mistrust**. It becomes evident that expulsion from the garden is actually an act of salvation! Accordingly, it is significant that the tree of life becomes accessible to humanity once again in the vision of the book of

Revelation. In the last chapter of the Bible, after the work of reconciling the world is complete, humanity is again given access to the tree of life.

Conclusion

So what are the lessons which we should derive from the account of the fall of humanity. Allow me to suggest a few to get us started. When sin emerges in our own lives, we should resist the tendency to blame and deny. Instead we need to follow the exhortations from the larger context of God's word, which call us to confession and repentance. Furthermore, we should recognize that mistrust, self-concern, and the consequences of broken relationships are not intended to be the norm of our existence. Instead, we are called to join God's work of reconciliation and seek to correct the state of brokenness in our world. That means it is good for a husband to comfort his wife and even seek to **decrease** the pain of childbirth. Of course, this is just the start of the larger concern to pursue relationships characterized by humility, love, grace, and kindness for all people. Finally, our life outside of Eden and paradise should not be considered a curse from God. Rather, it reflects a period of grace during which we have the opportunity to join God's great work of reconciling the world, until the time comes when the tree of life is available once again, and the promise of eternity is fulfilled.