

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

July 05, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Two weeks ago, we talked about the power of wealth (*money and possessions*) to turn us away from God. Last Sunday we talked about the power of culture to turn us away from God. Both of those influences reside outside us. Today we will look at two powerful influences that reside within us, and when we follow them, they turn us against and away from God. These two influences are **selfishness** and **pride**. And to look at these two influences, we will use the story of Adam and Eve's sin, the serpent's well-crafted lies, and the way Adam and Eve dealt with having sinned – as found in **Genesis 2:16-3:24**.

B. Prayer

II. The power of selfishness and pride to turn us against and/or away from God

A. In **Genesis 1:26-27** we are told that God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." [And so,] [27] God created Adam and Eve in His own image; male and female He created them.

1. In **Genesis 2:7-9**, we are told that God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; **and** man became a living being.

2. I believe God made us in His likeness so we would be able to have an intelligent, meaningful, and freely chosen relationship of love and trust with Him. And He does this all over again in a similar way when He saves us from sin and death.

3. Continuing on with **Genesis 2:9**, we read that God planted a garden in Eden; and He placed the man in the garden to cultivate it and keep it. Finally, God caused trees to grow in the garden, including the **tree of life** which was in the middle of the garden, and the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**.

B. **Genesis 2:16-17** . . . The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; [17] but from the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

1. Along with giving Adam extensive freedom, authority, and responsibility, God gave him one “you shall not” command and warned him what would happen if he broke the command – “In the same day you eat of that tree, you will die.”
 2. Compared to all the commandments and laws we have to keep, you would it would have been easy for Adam and Eve to obey just one commandment, after all the rest of the garden was theirs to enjoy.
 3. However, this one command stood between them and having several things most of us want – like being important, having what others have, and being right all the time because we know like God knows.
- C. [18] Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."
1. Now you may think that the next part of this story doesn't show God in a good light, for if He is all-knowing, then He surely knew no animal could be a suitable helper or mate for Adam.
 2. However, I propose that **vs 19-20** are here to show us that not even man's best friend – which is a dog – can give us such things as the kind of love, sense of belonging, intelligent interaction, help, enjoyment, encouragement, and sympathy that comes from another human being with whom we share our life.
- D. [19] Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. [20] The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, **but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.** [21] So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. [22] The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. (*Just as God created us with enough likeness to Himself for us to enter into an intelligent and meaningful relationship with Him, so God created Eve with enough likeness to Adam for the same reason.*) [23] The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."
- E. **Genesis 3:1a** . . . Now the serpent was more crafty (*or shrewd*) than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.
1. Down in **vs 14** we learn that this serpent most likely was a snake, which until he was punished for deceiving Eve, apparently moved about on legs or in some other way rather than crawling on its belly.

2. It also appears from **Genesis 3:15** and references in the NT that the serpent was not working on its own, but was under the influence of the devil. We learn this from a scripture like **Revelation 20:1-2** . . . Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. [2] And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.
- F. [1b] And [the serpent] said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"
1. Or in other words, "Is it really true that God won't let you eat any of the fruit growing on the trees in the garden?"
 2. And herein are two examples of the devil's wiles.
 - a. **First**, the devil presents himself as a subordinate or as a servant who is only trying to seek our good. Therefore, he doesn't try to control us, he suggests and entices so that we come to the conclusion – as if on our own – that disobeying God is simply choosing and doing what is best for us.
 - b. **Second**, one of his methods for enticing us to do what he is tempting us to do is to exaggerate one of God's commands or the cost of living according to God's will. And his exaggerations commonly go in one of two directions.
 - (1) Either they imply that God's commandments and will prevent us from enjoying the best of life's pleasures,
 - (2) Or they imply God is demanding so much of us that we can't possibly fulfill His demands, so why even try.
 - c. Either way, the inference of this kind of exaggeration is that God is unfair, and we are suffering because of it.
- G. [2] The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; [3] 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.'"
1. It wasn't God who said they couldn't touch the tree, Eve added those all on her own, and in doing so, she exaggerated God's strictness. This exaggeration fed a lower view of God, which in turn made it easier for her to disobey God. Why? Because our view of God significantly affects our way of life.
 2. Therefore, when we exaggerate God's strictness, we feed the belief that God's demands are excessive and He is impossible to please. And once we conclude that God's demands are excessive and He is impossible to please, we tend to give up and go our own way.

- H. [4] The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! [5] For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
1. We see here a progression in the devil's craftiness. He began by asking a question he knew wasn't true, but he used it to infer there was a flaw in God's character – a flaw that was making Eve miss out on enjoying a fuller and better life.
 2. Eve responded by correcting the devil's assertion, but she added an exaggeration of her own – thus further feeding a view of God in her own mind that was more like the devil's than the truth.
 3. And as Eve progressed in thinking more like a selfish and proud human than God, she began to agree with the devil about God's flaws and about the untrue nature of the threatened consequences for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - a. In fact, according to the devil's logic, if she ate from the tree she would be like God – who can't die. Therefore, Eve could disobey God's command without fear of any negative consequences, including death.
 - b. Now if the devil's logic is valid and there are no consequences to fear, then the next logical conclusion must be that God is not only unfair and too strict, He is **selfish** and **proud**. And the devil supported this conclusion by inferring that God selfishly made a law and lied about the consequences of breaking that law to prevent Adam and Eve from having what was rightfully theirs. And he showed God to be proud by inferring God used an unfair command to remain superior to Adam and Eve rather than allowing them the equality they deserved.
 4. However, it was the devil who was acting from the motives of selfishness and pride, not God, for he wasn't tempting Eve for her sake or for Adam's sake or for God's sake. He was doing this for his own sake, and his sake alone. And his pride is seen in his arrogant denigration of God, as if he had the position or the authority or the right to judge and discredit God.
- I. [6a] When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate;
1. It is likely **1 John 2:16**, is taken from this part of the this story: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."

2. Therefore, the words “**good for food**” refer to the selfish desires, cravings, and felt-needs of the flesh which when stimulated push us to pursue forbidden pleasures.
 3. The words, “**delight to the eyes**” refer to those selfish and prideful desires that are stimulated through the eyes and push us to pursue whatever the world has that gratifies our selfishness and pride.
 4. The words “**desirable to make one wise**” refer to our pride being stimulated by the hope of gaining a superior stature or position.
 5. And finally, the words “**she took from its fruit and ate**” remind us of two important truths that we are wise to remember in our battle against sin.
 - a. The first truth comes from **James 1:14-15**, “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”
 - b. And the second truth is this: In essence, sin, or doing what we know is wrong is a selfish act that often includes pride. For example, Eve did not eat the fruit for God’s sake, or for Adam’s sake, or for her children’s sake, but for her own sake and her own sake alone. This made it a completely selfish act!
 - c. And Eve ate the fruit because she wanted to rise to the stature of God – at least in the area of knowledge. This made it pride!
- J. **[6b]** and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked;
1. Eating brought knowledge, but that knowledge brought with it an awareness that they now had a big problem that needed to be solved. The reality is, sin never improves our lives – no matter what the devil promises. It always makes our life worse, just as God says.
 2. Yet this story provides an example of the power of selfishness and pride to alter our view of life **enough** to turn us away from God and to look at sin as a better choice than obeying God.
- K. **[7b]** and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings (*In other words, they tried to cover up the evidence of their sin, as if covering it up could hid it from God and make it as if it never happened.*)
- L. **[8]** 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.
1. Obviously, the fig leaves were not enough to make them feel as if all was well between God and them. You see, once God entered the

garden, they realized they either had to hid from God or admit to Him – **and to themselves** – that what they did was not only wrong, it was willful, selfish, and prideful.

2. So they hid. They did not want to take full responsibility for their actions. Yet without genuine confession – a confession that names our sin, admits our guilt, and acknowledges we deserve the consequences – there can be no repentance. And without repentance nothing can be made right between God and us, which means there can be no forgiveness and no restoration of the relationship.
- M. [9] Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"
1. Notice, God did not say to Adam, "I know you are hiding and I know why, so come out!" Instead, God asked a question that gave Adam the opportunity to, of his own free will, take full responsibility for his sinful actions.
 2. In other words, God gave Adam the freedom to respond however he would choose to respond – for that would reveal what was in Adam's heart concerning his sin and his relationship with God.
- N. [10] [Adam] said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." (*Or, I was afraid that once You saw the fig leaves You'd know what I had done and You would not only think less of me than I want You to think, You would punish me for disobeying You, and I don't want to be punished. **Sound familiar?***)
- O. [11] And [God] said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (*Once again God uses questions to open the door for Adam to freely admit his guilt and take responsibility for what he had done, or to deny his guilt and justify his actions.*) [12] [And Adam] said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."
1. Though Adam admitted he ate the fruit, he was unwilling to acknowledge guilt and take responsibility for his actions. In other words, he was willing to admit he did something wrong, but he did not want to be labeled a sinner, or bear the blame, or endure the consequences.
 2. So he did what most of us do. He admitted he ate the fruit, but gave an explanation to show why it wasn't his fault. And in his explanation, he placed the fault on his wife and on God. He blamed his wife because she talked him into eating the fruit. And he blamed God because it was God who gave him a defective wife.

3. Do you see the power of selfishness and pride to drive us to do what we know is wrong, and then to drive us to become irrational and dishonest as we seek to justify what we have done? We reveal our own foolishness when the truth of what we have done is obvious to those around us, yet we deny it as if they are blind or deaf or stupid.
- P. [13] 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."
1. It is true, the serpent lied to Eve in an effort to deceive her. But his effort at deception was just that – an effort. It was not a controlling force that made Eve do his bidding. His deception left Eve free to do as she willed. Sadly, Eve disobeyed.
 2. And next we see the power of example, for like Adam, Eve admitted she ate the fruit, but she went on to explain that it was the serpent's fault, not her's. And of course, if having sinned is not your fault, then neither God nor man should hold you accountable for your actions, and all should be well between you.
- Q. [14] 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; [15] 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."
1. Notice, God asked no questions of the serpent. He gave the serpent no opportunity to admit his guilt, repent, make right the wrong he had done, and change his ways. Instead, God told the serpent he was guilty and that there was going to be significant consequences because of it.
- R. [16] Then to the woman [God] said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth (*or raise up*) children (*I suspect Eve felt a great deal of pain when Cain murdered Able, and than when Cain was driven out from the presence of the Lord.*); yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (*Sadly, many men have ruled over women in abusive, controlling, unloving, and unkind ways. And some men have selfishly used women for their own purposes. Even sadder, there are Christian men who do not treat their wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, and women in general as Christ teaches us to love one another. Though there is no excuse for this, this is an example of the power of selfishness and pride to move us away from God and godliness.*)
- S. [17] Then to Adam [God] said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife (*or because you chose Eve over me – I suspect Adam was not*

willing to lose Eve even though it meant disobeying God and possibly losing his intimate relationship with God. Can you think of one or two or three things you have chosen over God in spite of its cost to your relationship with God?), 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. [18] Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; [19] 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."

- T. [20] Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. [21] The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. [22] 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"— [23] therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. [24] So He drove Adam and Eve 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.

III. Conclusion

- A. We will close with these few reminders.
1. Sin never makes life better. It always makes life worse.
 2. Selfishness and pride are primary reasons we do what we know is wrong.
 3. In spite of our sin, God comes looking for us because He values the relationship.
 4. On the eternal, spiritual, and relationship with God side, God provided a remedy for our sin in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.
 5. On the temporal, human, relationship with God and with others side, we provide a remedy for our sin through honest confession, repentance, making things right with those we have wronged, and by pursuing a life of obedience and godliness.