

“It Wasn’t My Fault”

Genesis 3:8-13

October 11, 1998

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READ Genesis 3:1-13

My parents, from Wisconsin, are with us this weekend and (will be/are) in the worship services today.

Therefore, unfortunately, I have to tell this story on myself rather than on my brother.

When I was quite young, I’m certain too young to know better, I had the habit, so my mother tells me, of directing blame to my brother.

When I would get caught doing something wrong, even as obviously as standing there with food all over my face, eating something forbidden, I would say that my brother Michael did it.

Even if my brother Michael wasn’t within 10 miles at the moment - I would still crudely and foolishly look at my mother and say, “Michael did it!”

That kind of nonsense is not restricted to me.

I won’t embarrass them, but I’m certain my own daughters, when young, gave ample illustration of that same human tendency - point the finger somewhere else, anywhere else, to avoid responsibility.

But it is not only children who use this technique - We all seem to have a natural aversion to owning responsibility for anything that others might find objectionable.

I can’t tell you how many husbands I have heard blame their wives for how the husbands were acting.

I can’t remember how many wives I have heard blame their husbands for the decisions the wives were making.

How many times have you heard these words, “Oh, I know I haven’t been perfect BUT...!”

I have heard men and women attempt to justify pornography, adultery, divorce, abandonment of children, abortion, unforgiveness, unwillingness to tithe, failure to serve, and many other things by saying they had done all they could do and therefore it couldn’t be helped - it may have been wrong but they certainly couldn’t be held responsible.

According to this text in Genesis 3, it seems we come by this tendency naturally.

If the first sin of the human race was disbelieving the word and goodness of God, then the second sin is “passing the buck” - avoiding responsibility.

I’m indebted today to Helmut Thielicke - a German pastor/theologian who was a prolific writer following WWII.

It was Thielicke who got me to pause in my study of Genesis 3 and look more carefully at the center section of this chapter.

In the first part of this chapter, verses 1-6, which we looked at quite closely last week, Eve and Adam are confronted by temptation and they sin against God by disbelieving his word and his goodness.

In the latter part of the chapter, verses 14-24, which we will look another time, we have God’s response to their sin - a response that affected not only them but all humanity.

But tucked in between the account of the first sin in human history and the consequences of that sin is a short section, verses 7-13, which I thought was interesting but not particularly significant.

At first I thought the section was there mainly to help move the story along - to get smoothly from the sin of Eve and Adam to the consequences God pronounces.

Listen, though, to that short section once again: READ 3:7-13
This isn't just Eve's and Adam's experience - it is mine and yours!

Just as Eve's and Adam's losing battle with temptation in the first part of the chapter is "Everyman's" battle (as we saw last week) -

So Adam's and Eve's denial of guilt is "Everyman's" experience.

The point of the passage then seems to be something like this:

Denying full responsibility for my sin makes me unavailable to experience the mercy and grace of God.

Or stated positively: Only when I accept full responsibility for my sin am I ready to experience the mercy and grace of God.

Look how this denial of responsibility unfolded in the Garden of Eden:

The snake (or more accurately Satan through the snake) tempted Eve and Adam to eat the forbidden fruit by telling them if they ate it their "eyes would be opened..."

Because Adam and Eve bought the lie that God was holding out on them - and they therefore must take charge of their own lives if they were going to live life to the fullest - they disobeyed God and ate.

And sure enough, the serpent was partially correct - their eyes were opened.

And when they were opened what does it say they saw?

"They realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

Back in chapter 2:25 before their sin it says, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

Now clearly their sin caused the difference but what is the difference?

Their physical nakedness is symbolic of the relationship they had with God and with each other.

Before their sin there was nothing to hide, there was an openness, a willing vulnerability - the relationships were without secretiveness or defensiveness.

There was an intimacy and security they enjoyed.

Now **after their sin** they immediately experience shame because of their guilt.

Before, their nakedness was representative of their innocence - like a little child - now, their nakedness represented their guilt.

They wanted knowledge, they wanted opened eyes - well they got it - but not what they expected.

They thought they would experience enlightenment beyond what God wanted for them - but they got an eyeful of their own sinfulness.

Between each other, their intimacy turned to isolation - they sewed fig leaves together to hide from each other.

Physically and psychologically they became independent instead of interdependent. We'll see more of that later in this chapter.

But they not only felt isolated from each other but when we look at verse 8 we see that something also drastically changed between them and God.

Before their sin, **they were open** with God.

He had created them uniquely to have a relationship with himself.

But **now**, in v8, when they hear God, the God who made them, loves them, and provided everything for them, **they hide**.

"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."

One author said it this way, “Their frank and open candor with God is shattered... They go into hiding like culprits caught by surprise and with palpitating hearts they watch to see what will happen.” (How the World Began p123)

And when God called out to him (v9 “Where are you?”), Adam admitted, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid...”

Like Adam and Eve, every human being since then has been hiding from God because they are afraid of God.

What is very interesting to me in this passage is that Adam and Eve didn't go out to find God when they sinned - **God had to find them.**

And God's seeking them was not to destroy them (as becomes evident in the rest of the chapter and the rest of the Bible) but God's seeking them was to save them.

In mercy God came to them.

And this is the decision point of the story - how would Adam and Eve respond to God?

They had two options:

They could ask for mercy OR

They could claim they weren't guilty.

They had already sinned, they knew it, they experienced guilt because of it, they tried to compensate for it by making coverings for themselves, and they hid from God when he showed up.

Now God calls out to them, and they have the opportunity to put a stop to their self-help program **or** they can add to their sin by further sin.

What do they do?

God said to Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

Adam's response is classic!:

“I’m not admitting anything God until you understand the mitigating circumstances. For when you hear what led to my actions then you will surely think differently about what I did.”

Now as I see it God, here’s what actually happened, “The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.”

And so God turns his attention to Eve saying, “What is this you have done?”

Eve was a quick-study - she learned well from her husband -

“God, you must understand the circumstances.”

“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

I hear myself in that kind of response, do you hear yourself?

God, if pornography wasn’t so available,
 if women didn’t dress so seductively,
 if my husband was more responsive to my needs,
 if my boss was less demanding,
 if I had a different job,
 if I had more money,
 if I had more time,

But Adam and Eve don’t just blame someone else, or their circumstances - listen to what they say:

Adam says very explicitly - “the woman **you** put here with me - she gave me some fruit...”

Eve says it more subtly by implication - “The serpent deceived me.” - Implication: The serpent whom, we all know, you made, according to 3:1.

Both Adam and Eve make God ultimately responsible for what they have done.

“God could have given me a different home when I was growing up.”

“God could have changed my spouse.”

“I didn’t make myself, choose my genes, my environment - God made me the way I am - I’m just jealous or ambitious, or sexy by nature.”

And furthermore if God made everything and nothing existed apart from God making it - then God must have somehow made evil.

Though most would dare not say it aloud - do you hear what they and we are saying?

“You, God, not man, are the one who should hide yourself in the woods of Eden. You are the one who should be accused by the mothers who have lost their children to disease, the widows whose husbands have left them alone, the orphans who are growing up unprotected, you and you alone should be accused. You would do better to call yourself a bungler or to call yourself “blind fate”. Then at least we could play out our lives as a tragedy which we can do nothing about. Then at least we could drop this convulsive lying gesture of having to beat our breasts and keep crying out: ‘Wretched man that I am!’ You are the one who made death and evil, you alone!” (Thielicke 164-5)

God you are responsible!

There! I’m no longer guilty - because my sin was caused by something or someone other than me.

But that leaves me with two huge problems:

1. I still have this profound sense of guilt and
2. I am left with a God who is evil.

And if those two things are true then there is no hope for me in either this life or after death.

Some would say there is no God, that evil in the world is due just to fate. I’m not exaggerating.

Increasingly evolutionary psychologists are telling us that we are what we are because of humanity’s built-in need to survive.

We are the product of blind natural selection. Everything we do is determined by our need to survive and to make certain the human species survives.

Lust, for example, is simply the human’s way of preserving the species.

Richard Dawkins said, "We are survival machines - robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes." (In CT Oct 5, 1998)

Robert Wright wrote, "The difficult question of whether the human animal can be a moral animal may seem increasingly quaint. The question may be whether, after the new Darwinism takes root, the word moral can be anything but a joke." (CT Oct 5 1998) "Evil" no longer exists. All actions, including the most heinous, are simply the product of natural selection.

Do people really believe this?

Increasingly in our magazines and newspapers we are reading that alcoholism,
sexual addition,
homosexual practice,
even violence in our schools,
murder on the streets,
and every other conceivable social aberration is caused by fate -
those who practice such things were made that way -
natural selection produced those behaviors - the perpetrators are not
responsible - certainly they not, in any moral sense, "guilty".

When we pursue the source of evil we find either evil doesn't exist at all, if we live in a world controlled by fate - naturally selected genes. OR we have an evil God.

Someone well said, we don't really want to know the source of evil - we are just trying to divert the attention away from ourselves.
(Thielicke)

You can fumble around in this philosophical exercise, of finding the source of evil, all you want but in so doing you will never find the solution to the initial problem:

What do I do with the evil I have done?

Yes, I can pretend someone else or God is responsible or I can pretend evil doesn't exist - OR I can admit the source of the evil I committed was ME!!

In I Samuel 15 there is a tragic illustration of another person who refused to accept responsibility for his sin.

God had told King Saul of Israel to conquer an enemy and slay everything including all the animals - keeping nothing.

But Saul spared the best of the cattle.

When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul with this failure to completely obey Saul does a perfect "Adamism" -

just like Adam, Saul says, "Not me, Lord, 'The soldiers spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord.'"

The soldiers did it.

And furthermore they did it because of you - you are ultimately responsible because you asked for worship.

When Samuel further rebuked him, Saul only slightly changed his tune:

"I have sinned - I was afraid of the people and so I gave into them."

He continues to find excuses so that he won't bear the responsibility.

Denying full responsibility for my sin makes me unavailable to experience the mercy and grace of God.

Martin Luther wrote, "It is God's nature to make something out of nothing. This is why God cannot make anything out of him who is not yet nothing." (On the flyleaf of How the World Began

Contrast King Saul with King David only a few years later when Nathan comes to him after his sinful adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah.

This was David's response, one simple phrase: "I have sinned."

In a further reflection on this same incident David said it this way in Psalm 51:1,3 "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;.. My sin is always before me...Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."

Only when I accept responsibility for my sin am I ready to experience the mercy and grace of God.

When David offered no excuses,
no mitigating circumstances,
no finger-pointing and
cast himself on the mercy of God he was able to experience the
grace of God

Psalm 32:1,2, 5 “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven...When I kept silent (unwilling to confess)...your hand was heavy upon me... Then I acknowledged my sin to you...I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Though I grant you it is not explicitly stated, I think v21 gives us a clue to what happened to Adam and Eve following their attempt to divert guilt.

When Moses' first readers read that “God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them”, they would have had every reason to assume that Adam and Eve finally got the message and exchanged their fig leaves - their attempt at covering their own sin - for the covering that God alone could provide - The skin of an animal offered in sacrifice for their sins.

And the story stands as a clear signal to the Israelites and to us:
Denying full responsibility for my sin makes me unavailable to experience the mercy and grace of God.

God came to Adam and called out, “Adam where are you?”
Just so Jesus Christ comes to us today calling “Where are you?”

He said, “I came to seek and to save the lost.”

And anyone who is willing to put aside this pretense of not being responsible for sin,
anyone willing to admit that they and they alone are responsible for the sins they have committed -

that there is no excuse, there were no mitigating circumstances that matter, there is no one else to blame - to that person Jesus will grant full forgiveness based on his mercy and grace.

Have you sinned against God and others?
Does your conscience declare your guilt?
Are you done with trying to blame anyone else - even God?
Are you ready to say only, "I have sinned."

Then respond to Jesus, knowing that he will forgive you.
In fact he will defend you from this moment forward.

When we give up defending ourselves then Jesus can begin to do so.

He will declare us forgiven - our past has been nailed to the cross with Jesus.

He will protect us from our own consciences.

One writer said it this way:

Our past simply does not interest him anymore.

He is only interested in what he will make of us in the future.

If you live with guilt there is only one way to truly deal with it.
Excuses won't cut it - only confession matters with God.

Only when I accept responsibility for my sin am I ready to experience the mercy and grace of God.