

The Sin Dilemma
Genesis 3: 1-13
September 23, 2018

Jesus seems perfectly at home with those branded sinners in his day: publicans, tax collectors, prostitutes, among others. We are told that he ate with them and seemed to enjoy their company. These were people the religious looked down their noses at. When challenged by the religious elite for the company he kept he replied:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.

Sin is a big word in the bible and even in our culture. From its opening poem of the first human family's fall from grace to the end of the book of Revelation, sin occupies an important place in the biblical interpretation of our human nature. And yes, even in our post Christian society we continue to use this word to describe our misdeeds and failures. It is never far from our front-page news. Sin is like a disease that none of us seem able to avoid. This fault line runs through the centre of us all. No exceptions!

Yes, some say we are made of stardust. As Christians we believe God the Creator made all of matter so it is not unrealistic to say we are in fact made from the same stuff as the stars. Our two origins stories in Genesis one and two, both Jewish poems trying to explain our beginnings, tell us that we came from God's creative action. We were made from the dust of the ground, like all living creatures, and to it we all return. We are earth creatures into whom God has breathed spiritual life. Unlike all other creatures, however, we were made in God's image: given the capacity for free will, love for God, and others. We were the crowning act of God's creation. In the creation story Adam and Eve hold a special relationship with the Creator.

In the garden they lived in harmony with God and all creatures, as is beautifully painted in the garden scene in Genesis two. We are, in our centre, spiritual beings, forever intended to be in close relationship with God.

But even in paradise it wasn't enough. Adam and his wife Eve wanted more. They desired the wisdom from the forbidden tree. They were told the fruit would make them like God. But in their rebellion and greed they learned instead fear, blame, envy, anger, judgment and shame. For their disobedience they were banished from the garden, away from the tree of life. From now on they and their children would die. This is the ultimate consequence of their rebellion against God—spiritual and physical death! Dust to dust and ashes to ashes! The sons and daughters of this couple would taste ash in their mouths for all generations to come.

Inside each one of us born of this family lives this rebellion against God. This instinct to turn away from God is as natural to each of us as water is to fish. Our creeds call this **original sin**, or perhaps better expressed as simply our desire for independence from God. We wanted to be like God. This takes us to the heart of what sin is. It is not all the little sins we usually describe in our literature, plays, movies, news accounts: envy, stealing, lust, greed, anger, and malice, envy. We usually list the seven deadly sins as the top of the list. But these and others are merely expressions of a deeper malady.

In our post-modern world, where truth is what I make it, as we are seeing first hand in American politics, what does the word “sin” mean? How do we live in such a world of relativism? There is no narrative by which to live.

As Marva Dawn says in her book, **A Royal Waste of Time**, young folk are: *Constantly shifting their image of themselves to fit in with the fads and fashions of the times, young folks especially lack a nucleus of identity... Their subconscious cry often becomes, “Keep entertaining me, so that I don't have to face the absence of my self”*

They might identify with Macbeth's words
*Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

There is no meaning; there is no self; there is no god; there is only now, me.

What does Scripture say to these conditions, first to the madness of our age, and to the meaningless of our age?

Here let us listen afresh to the Biblical story of the Fall.

Evidently God had a much better plan for humankind than what we ended up with. Something happened in that garden that has altered God's intent and our nature. Prior to the serpent's appearance all is harmony and light. God and Adam with his wife Eve enjoy a perfect relationship.

This is a mythic story of our origins. That doesn't mean it is not true. In short, let me suggest that we have an account of our origins that is replete with symbols, metaphors, and images. Through these means the writer seeks to relate the truth about us and what happened to us. In short, behind the symbols and the images lies truth telling on the order of absolute truth. God speaks to us through these stories, these metaphors, and these images. The serpent lied by feeding their anxiety about life. Eat the fruit and you will cease to be anxious and will be like god, perfectly free and possess knowledge, and knowledge is power. This is to be the pattern of the human family's chasing after security and meaning. Eve couldn't resist the allure of the fruit; it looked so pleasing to the eye, succulent to the taste, and full of promise to make them complete. Temptation to sin has never changed. It looks good, it feels good, and it promises to satisfy my deepest longings. Whatever that "it" might be in our lives, just let us remember it is a big lie.

Like Jesus said to the tempter, "man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God." What the world offers us is a false system predicated on the lie that we can be autonomous. Who needs God when we have this, or that, or whatever? We will now live life, Adam and his descendents say, on our terms with God as our enemy. We might not admit this consciously, but when push comes to shove we are living this out. By seeking to pursue autonomous freedom we suffer from profound anxiety.

Walter Bruggemann comments on this:

The attempts to resolve anxiety in our culture are largely psychological, economic, cosmetic. They are bound to fail because they do not approach the causes.

Our shopping malls, our consumerism as a panacea for our anxiety, our addictions to workaholism, drugs, food, entertainment, are all signs of our fundamental dis-ease with our world and ourselves. All of this began with the big lie that the serpent sold Eve and Adam, namely that freedom and happiness are only possible outside the prohibiting, narrow, and restrictive realm that God fences us within.

What follows is not freedom but shame. They know they are naked and they are forced to hide. But God will not let them go. He calls, as he continues to do today, "where are you?" Adam blames the woman, and, interestingly, God himself for giving him this troublesome creature. Eve blames the serpent.

Jesus interprets our fundamental problem to be our broken relationship with God. He tells the Jews proud of their heritage in Abraham: *If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here.* He goes on: *You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.*

Paul interprets sin as our natural tendency to exchange the truth about God for a lie. He says that we: *they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. (Romans 1:25)* In other words, at its heart, sin is inverting the relationship established in creation. We like our original parents want to be God, but we are not!

Sin is at its root a broken relationship with God. Christ came to put that right. He came not for those who think they are together, but for those who accept this diagnosis. So the question we must always ask: have we accepted God's remedy for our fallen natures, or are we still trying to work it out ourselves? **Amen**