

First Sunday of Lent

HUNGER PAINS

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

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Analysis by Bill White

2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

DIAGNOSIS: Deceived into Death

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Disobeying God*

Adam and Eve have a problem. They have disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). So they now have an awareness of which they had no previous experience, namely, the knowledge of their nakedness and the experience of the shame that came as a result of their disobedience.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Disobeying God Is Grounded in Misplaced Faith*

There is a deeper problem that underlies their disobedience. Adam and Eve are hungering for knowledge. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge", and as Luther reminds us, "We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things." But in their hungering Adam and Eve were deceived into doubting God's word. When given the choice of believing and trusting God's word (2:16), or believing the word of the crafty serpent (3:1-4), they choose to believe the deceptive lie that if they eat they will "be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5b). Instead of clinging to faith in God they choose to fear, love, and trust the false god of self. "After all" they say, "why should we cling to faith in God when we can be like God? We'll choose to be gods ourselves!"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Misplaced Faith Is Sin, Sin Leads to Death*

Worse still in the case of Adam and Eve (and all of humanity since), when the Lord God said in Geneses 3:3, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die," this was God's Truth; this was and is reality. Human beings had only one rule, one law, to keep; and we broke it! Adam and Eve's disobedience is sin, and the wages of sin is death. As Luther

writes:

See how sin is gradually spread to all the senses. After Eve has believed Satan, contrary to God's Word, that she will not die, but rather that her eyes will be opened, and she will know evil and good, what does she neglect to do that is needed to make her sin greater? Her eyes cannot be satisfied by the appearance. It is not enough for her that she has the knowledge of God and a sound reason; she wants the knowledge of evil to be added. But this is Satan's very own poison, that she wants to have insight beyond what was commanded. This wisdom is death, and it is hostile to the wisdom of God which was given her in the command; it has the effect that she regards as righteousness what is sin; and what is the utmost folly she imagines to be the highest wisdom. (Luther, M. (1999). Luther's works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5 [J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed; cf. Genesis 3:6]. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.)

Thus it is that sin and death became the reality of the human condition, and we cannot undo God's judgment upon our sin.

PROGNOSIS: Justified into Life

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Christ Overcomes Sin and Death*

Only God can undo the effects of humanity's disobedience. THE Good News is: God chose so to do! This is the Good News that Saint Paul proclaims in the fifth chapter of Romans including the second lesson appointed for this day, Romans 5:12-19. God sent Jesus to fulfill the Law, die on the cross for the sin of the world, and trump the power of death by his own glorious resurrection from the dead. "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (Rom.

5:18).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Well-Placed Faith Overcomes Sin and Death in Us*

This “act of righteousness” that “leads to justification and life for all” Jesus now offers specifically to all of the Adam’s and Eve’s in the world today, to you and to me. Jesus comes to us offering to exchange his gracious gift of true faith in him for our misplaced faith in ourselves and in the deceptive words of others. He says in effect, “I will empower you by the Holy Spirit to fear, love, and trust my promises, and in so doing I will swap your impending death for eternal life in me.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Well-Placed Faith Leads to Obeying God*

“Moreover,” Christ says, “Daily I will forgive you of all your sins, including the sins of disobedience that lead to shame and fear. By the power of the Holy Spirit I will re-create you as a loved and forgiven child of God, and I will fill you with a desire to be obedient to where I am calling you to follow. No longer do you ‘got to’ obey me; now you ‘get to’ obey me.”