

“FREEDOM FROM GUILT & SHAME” **(Genesis 3:7-13)**

One summer when I was a kid, my family went to Yellowstone National Park. Like all tourists, we watched the Old Faithful Geyser erupt – which was quite a sight – and then we went to have lunch right next door at the Old Faithful Inn. As we were sitting down at our table, a man walked up behind my dad and tapped him on the shoulder. My dad turned around and said, “Ron Dilday, what are you doing here?” Ron went to our church back in Oregon where my dad was the pastor. What are the chances that two people from the same little place in Oregon – 1000 miles away – could end up in Yellowstone at the same time?

Ron seemed very nervous and asked if he could speak with my dad alone. I learned later that Ron was there at the Inn with a woman who was not his wife. When he saw my dad walk in, he said it was like God was walking in. Like the verse in Numbers 32:23 says, “Be sure you sin will find you out,” He was found out, and overcome with guilt. I don’t remember what became of Ron, but I know he will never forget the day God found him out.

Guilt is a powerful emotion that we’ve all experienced. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, found out how strong feelings of guilt can be, when – as a practical joke – he sent a telegram to twelve of his friends which read, “Flee at once... all is discovered.” Within 24 hours, each of the twelve men had left the country. Apparently, they each had a guilty conscience about something!

Feeling guilty is not always a bad thing – we should feel guilt when we’ve done wrong – but if guilt is not dealt with in the right way, it can destroy us. If guilt is not resolved, it leads to shame – where you not only feel guilty about what you’ve done, but shame about who you are. The good news is – as we will see in today’s story – is that our gracious God always provides a way out of guilt and shame, a way that leads to freedom.

This morning we continue in the pivotal chapter of Genesis 3, the chapter that explains what’s wrong with the world. In the first six verses we see Satan – disguised as a serpent – tempting Eve to doubt God’s goodness in forbidding her to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “God is withholding something good from you. Why let Him decide what is good or bad for you? Decide for yourself – be your own god.”

After talking to the serpent, she takes another look at the tree and thinks, “What could go wrong? It looks good, and as the serpent said, think how wise I will be after eating it.” She takes hold of the fruit, picks it from the tree, and eats it. Then she gives some to Adam and he eats it. This is the moment that changed everything – not because they took a bite of fruit, but because they disobeyed God and acted independently of Him. Sin is not just a matter of rule-breaking, but the deep-seated desire to be my own god – to live life on my terms and not by God’s order and design.

God has built into the fabric of creation the law of sowing and reaping – that there are consequences, positive and negative – to everything we do. And beginning in verse 7, through the end of the chapter, we see the catastrophic effects of sin that are felt to this day. Today we want to zone in on verses 7-14 and the immediate effects that sin had on Adam and Eve, their relationship with God, and their relationship with each other.

The first consequence of their sin is a feeling of guilt and shame. Verse 7a, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” In a millisecond, Adam and Eve went from a state of blissful innocence to guilt. Their eyes are opened, meaning that they now have a moral knowledge of good and evil. They already knew what good was – they were surrounded by good – and they had some sense of what was what was evil, but it was based entirely on what God had revealed to them. They did not know for themselves – experientially – what was good for them and what was bad. Now they have a conscience – an awareness of what is right and wrong.

The conscience is to our soul what nerves are to our body. When you do something painful – like touch something that’s hot – your nervous system sends a message to your brain to stop touching. I read about a guy recently who has a very rare condition in that he feels no pain. Imagine that. People tell him all the time how lucky he is to not feel pain, but he said it’s a curse in that he’s constantly injuring himself without knowing it. In the same way, our conscience tells us when we’re doing something morally wrong, and we feel a sense of guilt – just like Ron did when he saw my dad.

Guilt is a good thing if it moves us to do something about it. King David was racked with guilt for nearly a year after he sinned with Bathsheba and conspired to have her husband killed. That would certainly make you feel guilty. For several months David lived with his guilt, keeping it hidden from God and others, and it nearly destroyed him. In Psalm 32:3-4 he wrote, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” David’s guilt affected him physically – down to his bones; it affected him emotionally – he groaned all day long; and it affected him spiritually – he felt the weight on God’s judgment.

But when David came clean with the Lord, his guilt was lifted. In verses 5-6 he goes on to say, “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” What a relief! Once David got his sin out in the open and confessed it, he could walk freely and authentically. He got a new lease on life.

Along with guilt, Adam and Eve felt shame – and their shame is symbolized by their nakedness. Before the fall, in 2:25 we read that Adam and Eve were both naked and not ashamed. It’s hard to imagine a world in which being naked was no big deal. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were like one- and two-year-olds running around the house naked and unashamed. Toddlers are unaware of their need for clothing – they’re innocent. But there’s a point where that awareness kicks in and they don’t want to be people to see them and they want to cover up.

This reminds us that God created the human body holy and pure – and nothing to be embarrassed about. But after the fall, there’s a shame associated with nakedness – we make jokes about it – we don’t want people to see our bodies, and we don’t want them to see our souls. Being exposed to other eyes makes us feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. It’s like when you sense someone is staring at you and you don’t like it. You don’t want to be exposed.

As soon as they realize their nakedness, Adam and Eve cover themselves – they creatively sew big fig leaves together in order to cover themselves. This is what guilty people do. Sometimes when a person is being brought into jail after committing a crime, and the cameras are pointed at them, they will pull a jacket over their face because they don’t want to be seen. They’re ashamed.

While guilt and shame are closely associated, there is a subtle but important difference. Guilt is when you feel bad about something you've *done* – you stole something, you talked about someone behind their back, you looked at something online you shouldn't have looked at – and you feel guilty about what you've done. Like David, guilt can be used to make a positive change and rectify your wrongdoing.

Shame is when you feel bad – not just about what you've done – but about who you *are*. Instead of just saying, “I did something bad,” shame says, “I am bad... I'm flawed and defective and unworthy of love and belonging.” Our daughter, Abby, is very involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, and she was telling me recently that nearly every person addicted to drugs or alcohol has a deep, underlying sense of shame... and they turn to addictions to cover shame over something they've done or that has been done to them. Abby read to me a portion of the AA book in which a medical doctor said the only hope for an alcoholic is God, because only God can free us from guilt and shame.

The beginning point of the gospel message is the recognition that I've messed up – that I'm a sinner – that I'm guilty of rebelling against God and doing my own thing. We've all fallen short of God's glory. Pop psychology says the opposite, “You're good – there's nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about.” The big problem with this thinking is that it doesn't deal with the root issue of sin. It just puts a nice-looking band-aid over the problem, and denies our need for a Savior.

The good news of the gospel is that when we come clean with God – when we come to Him in humility and admit that we're sinners – He forgives us and removes our guilt and shame. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (ESV). We don't need a band-aid, we need forgiveness and cleansing.

The beauty of the gospel is that Christ – who knew no sin – who lived a perfect life and had no guilt – took all our guilt upon Himself – He bore our sins in His body on the cross. Crucifixion was a particularly shameful way to die. Victims of the cross were stripped naked and were hung alongside major highways for all to see. Jesus took our shame upon Himself. He was mocked and jeered, He was spat upon, and taunted. But Hebrews 12:2 says that for the joy of seeing you and me be forgiven, Jesus scorned the shame of the cross, and willingly endured it.

If you've confessed your sins and trusted Christ for salvation, you've been set free from guilt and shame. God declares you good, righteous, and blameless in His sight. All of your sin – past, present, and future – is no longer held against you. You're part of His family and His love for you is unconditional. Even if you sin after becoming a Christian – and you will – God will not disown you. Sin disrupts your relationship with God, but it does not sever your family bond with Him. The closer you grow in your relationship with God, the more sin will bother you, and when you do sin, you'll quickly confess it. When you sin, quickly confess it so your fellowship with God is not broken.

Once you're forgiven, you no longer need feel guilt and shame. God wipes your slate clean. God lets it go, so you can too. Satan – your enemy – is the one who doesn't want you to let it go. In Revelation 12 he's called “the accuser of the brethren.” He's says, “You're no good, you're no good, baby you're no good. You're not worthy of God's love. God can't forgive you. Look at all you did in the past, and how much you're struggling now.” He uses guilt and shame to keep you neutralized in your faith, and God says, “Who are you going to believe? The lies of Satan or the truth of the gospel? I have come to set you free – now walk in freedom.”

Well, so far we've made it through one verse, let's see if we can tackle another one. The fallout of Adam and Eve's sin not only causes guilt and shame within themselves, but it causes **alienation with God**. Verses 8-9, "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. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"

Before the fall Adam and Eve would have run to meet God, and be delighted to be in His presence, but now they hide. They hear the sound of the Lord God as He's walking in the garden. If God is spirit, what does it mean that He was "walking in the garden?" We don't know for sure. Some think that God appeared to them in what's called a theophany – in a way that was tangible to their human senses – perhaps in human form, as He sometimes did in the Old Testament.

He comes in the "cool of the day," the early part of the evening when it starts to get cool. If they ate of the fruit early in the day, they have had a number of hours to feel guilty about what they'd done. They're used to taking evening strolls with the Lord, but instead of running to meet God, they hide from Him. That's what guilty people do. Sometimes police will set up a road block to catch a criminal, and what they're really looking for are the cars that take the first exit after the warning sign. "Why are you turning off? Do you have something to hide?" Guilty people hide.

Adam and Eve want to avoid God, so they find a big tree and hide, and it's almost humorous that they think they can hide from the creator of the universe. Psalm 139:7 says, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" You can run from God, but you cannot hide from Him – sooner or later we must all face Him and be accountable.

I love the fact that God does not come charging into the garden and zap them with a bolt of lightning. He could have – He created them – but instead He seeks them out. Even though Eve is the first to eat of the fruit, God holds Adam responsible. Eve ate because she was deceived, but Adam knew exactly what he was doing. He calls out to Adam, and says, "Where are you?" God, of course, knows exactly what tree he's hiding behind, but He wants to make him think about his condition. He wants to draw him out of hiding and be accountable for the choice he made.

"Where are you?" is another way of saying, "Where are you in your relationship with me?" Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship and harmony with God – there was no tension, there was no awkwardness in their relationship. But when they acted independently of God and disobeyed Him, they became estranged from Him. Have you been estranged from someone? You once were so close to someone, and now you don't even speak to each other. Sometimes in a broken relationship, both parties are at fault, but in this case, only Adam and Eve are to blame – it was their act that broke the relationship.

God created Adam and Eve to live in close fellowship with Him, but He gave them a free will to choose whether they would trust and obey Him or go their own way. When they chose to be their own god, they became alienated from God – they became strangers to God – and the Bible says that all those born after Adam are separated from God. All we like sheep have gone astray – each of us have turned to our own way. It's part of our fallen condition.

God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die. But he didn't. At least not right away. Later in chapter 5 we see a long list of people who die, and among them is Adam. Adam didn't die physically right away, but he did die spiritually.

To be spiritually dead means that you are cut off from the life of God – you’re alive physically, but dead spiritually. Because of Adam’s sin, we are all born in a state of spiritual death, and outside of God’s intervention, we are eternally separated from Him.

God calls out to Adam, and in verse 10... He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” Adam is like a child who is confronted, and you can see the wheels of his mind spinning as he tries to come up with an explanation. Instead of being straight up about his sin against God, he focuses on himself and his discomfort in facing God... “I heard you, but I was afraid – not because I disobeyed you and sinned – but because I was naked.”

In verse 11 God asks Adam another question... And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Who told you that you were naked? How did you know this? There was no one else in the garden to tell them, and God did not tell them. In asking this, God is getting Adam to see that something new had taken place in him – he now had a conscience. He now had an alert system within him to warn him when something was wrong. Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from? At this point, Adam has a choice – to fess up and be honest – to admit his sin to God – or to justify his actions.

One of my early experiences with my conscience took place in grade school. I was sitting in English class, right before class started, and my friend, Mark, asked me if I could give him my homework to copy. He hadn’t done his, and it was due in a couple of minutes. I tried to say no, but he was very persuasive and, against my better judgment, I gave him my homework. I said, “Just be careful what you write down.”

I’ve always been one of those who get caught when they do something wrong, and sure enough, we got caught. Mark did not camouflage his answers very well and it was clear to our teacher, Mrs. Van Atta, that someone was cheating. We were informed that Mrs. Van Natta, our English teacher, wanted to see us both of us after school. Mark and I had time to rendezvous before we went in to see her and Mark calmly suggested that we lie about it.

He went in first and when he came out, he looked relaxed and I knew he had lied. Then it was my turn. I was reluctantly prepared to lie and tell the same story Mark did. That was, until I came face to face with Mrs. Van Natta. She was an older teacher who had a reputation for being strict and all business. She said, “I know that one of you copied the other one’s homework, and I want to know who did what?” Mrs. Van Natta had these glasses that she wore low on her nose and her eyes looked over the top and peered right through me. My conscience was sounding alarms all over the place, and I spilled the beans. We both paid the price for our actions, but I was able to walk away with a clear conscience.

Adam is given the same opportunity to come clean, but he doesn’t. Verse 12... The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Instead of owning up to his sin, Adam justifies his sin by blaming not just Eve, but God. “The woman you put here with me.” In chapter two Adam was singing a love song about the woman, and now he says in effect, “If you hadn’t given me this woman, none of this would have happened.” He blames God.

Blaming God is a common response when life doesn't go our way. We say, "Since God in control of everything, He could have stopped what happened. He could have changed the situation to benefit me; He could have averted the calamity. Since He did not, He is to blame." What Adam forgot, and we forget, is that God created a perfect world for us to live in – He gave us only blessings for our own good – it was Adam who messed up and brought this upon himself.

In the same breath, he also blames Eve – "She gave me the fruit, and I ate it." When we're confronted, our first instinct is to explain and justify our actions... "The reason I did this is because..." Pride keeps us from simply admitting we did wrong. We then often try to shift the blame onto someone else so that we're not accountable. "It's my parent's fault, it's my teacher's fault, it's the policeman's fault, it's societies' fault. I'm not to blame." It's like the guy, some years ago, who spilled hot coffee on himself, and sued McDonald's for making it too hot. It's not my fault, Adam says, it's her fault. But blaming others does nothing to alleviate the guilt and shame we feel inside.

Then things become almost comical. Verse 13... Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." It's not my fault – it's the snake's fault – the devil made me do it. It's true that Eve was deceived, but it was no excuse for her actions in eating the fruit. When we caught our kids doing something they shouldn't be doing, they would often come up with an excuse. Sharla and I would say, "That may be a good reason to explain why you did what you did, but it doesn't excuse what you did – you still did it and you have to take responsibility."

The truth is that there are some valid reasons people do what they do – the environment they grew up in, the role-models and examples they had, or something that was done against them. Eve was deceived by a crafty serpent – but to simply blame the snake will not alleviate her guilt and shame. Adam could say that the influence of his wife contributed to his fatal decision, but blaming her is not going to restore his relationship with God.

After the fall, God takes the first step in restoring our relationship with Him. Early in the story of the Bible we see God's grace and mercy in coming to Adam and Eve where they were and gently calling them to repentance – to recognize their sin and be forgiven of their guilt and shame. He calls to each one of us today, "Where are you? What's your spiritual condition?" If you want to be saved, if you want eternal life restored, if you want relief from guilt and shame – come clean with God.

Say, "I'm a sinner in need of a Savior." Repent of your sin. Say, "Lord God, I want to turn from my sin and turn to you. I want to leave my guilt and shame in the past and start a new life." Then put your trust in God's provision for salvation – Christ Jesus, who took your guilt and shame upon Himself and died on the cross in your place.

You may have come here this morning weighed down by guilt and shame, but you don't have to leave with that burden. Through Christ you can walk free, and enjoy walking with God in the cool of the day.