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Missing the Mark!

Men do not differ much about what things they call evils; they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable.

~G.K. Chesterton

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Galatians 5:7

THREE

Missing the Mark!

“You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”

(Galatians 5:7)

There is probably no better verse in all of Scripture to get this chapter off the ground. Paul was writing this *to* the foolish Galatians, but it sure looks like he could have been writing it *about* Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were off to such a good start in their race! Paul defines “running well” as obeying the truth, and that is exactly what the first family was doing, moment by moment. God was the beginning and the end of all that they thought, said, did, desired, and listened to . . . until they followed the leading of that sinister sound track spun by Satan.

Wow! With only one prohibition in all of paradise, Adam and Eve failed the “trust test.” Would they trust in the revelation of God or the imagination of man? In an act of willful rebellion against God, Adam and Eve chose to trust in themselves. Tullian explained this test:

Given that the tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God was testing them specifically to see if they would rely on his standards for good and evil, truth and beauty, or develop their own. He was testing them to see if they would embrace and forever submit to the fact that all of creation depends on its Creator, not only for physical things but also for knowledge and moral understanding. They failed the test.¹

Not satisfied with being made in the image of God, Adam and Eve wanted to *be* God. They bought into Satan’s promise of the bigger, better deal: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5), and chose to disobey God. But their act of rebellion brought exactly what had been warned against—death.

Satan’s seduction of our first parents has been evaluated from every conceivable perspective by many great Bible scholars. All agree that this one temptation included a variety of different temptations, including self-sufficiency and autonomy. At the end of the day, the best I have been able to come up with to classify what Satan dangled in front of Adam and Eve is found in a single word:

PRIDE.” Upon careful inspection you will notice that the same “I” in the center of PRIDE is also found in the center of SIN. Let’s take a brief look at sin.

SHALOM SHATTERED

Sin, literally, means “to miss the mark,” like an archer whose arrow veers wide of the target and skitters wildly through the trees behind. The “mark” we miss is God’s perfect standard of holiness, as expressed in His law. “You therefore must be perfect,” Jesus said, “as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Anything less than God’s perfection is sin. The Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism defines sin as “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they chose to transgress the law of God by refusing to conform to the law of God. They missed the mark. Jerry Bridges puts it this way:

Sin, in the final analysis, is rebellion against the sovereign Creator, Ruler, and Judge of the universe. It resists the rightful prerogative of a sovereign Ruler to command obedience from His subjects. It says to an absolutely holy and righteous God that His moral laws, which are a reflection of His own nature are not worthy of our wholehearted obedience. Sin is not only a series of actions, it is also an attitude that ignores the law of God. But it is even more than a rebellious attitude. Sin is a state of heart, a condition of our inmost being. It is a state of corruption, of vileness, yes, even of filthiness in God’s sight.²

Sin made Adam and Eve not only guilty of violating God’s law; it made them filthy in the process. They defiled themselves when they decided to do what they wanted to do rather than what God designed and instructed them to do. The Bible provides powerful pictures that help us understand the biblical definition of sin.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;

(Isaiah 53:6)

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

(Judges 17:6)

Adam wanted to be the king and Eve wanted to be the queen of their own little kingdom. They chose to *go their own way* and *do what was right in their own eyes*. They looked for satisfaction outside of the only One who could ever satisfy them. They looked for their new identity outside of the only One who could give to them their true identity. Their lives were to be continually shaped by God and His revelation, but now they would be marred by sin. God had given to them all they needed to live lives that mattered, and they threw it all away because they wanted more than what God had provided. Like wild animals, they chose to “bite the hand that fed them.”

The revelation of God directed Adam and Eve to serve the Kingdom of God. The imagination of man told Adam and Eve to serve the kingdom of self. And it is the same today. When we seek to do what we want to do, rather than what God directs us to do, we seek to serve the kingdom of self. Sin shrinks our service to the level of self-service and nothing more.

Perhaps the best description of sin I have come across is found in the book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., president of Calvin Theological Seminary.

In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be . . .

God hates sin not just because it violates his law but, more substantively, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be. God is for shalom and therefore against sin. In fact, we may safely describe evil as any spoiling of shalom, whether physically (e.g., by disease), morally, spiritually, or otherwise. In short, sin is culpable shalom breaking . . . In sum, shalom is God's design for creation and redemption; sin is blamable human vandalism of these great realities and therefore an affront to their architect and builder.³

What an incredible, insightful way of describing the result of sin! Sin splintered shalom. The perfection of all things was destroyed in an instant when Adam and Eve succumbed to the seduction of sin. Sin marred and scarred the image bearers of God and resulted in them being evicted from the Garden of Eden. Everything was turned upside down. Peace was replaced by war. Joy was replaced by fear. Love was replaced by hate. Self-sacrifice was replaced by self-protection. Laughter was replaced by tears. Singing was replaced by shouting. Dancing was replaced by a death march. Sin shattered shalom and scattered it to the four winds.

I remember hearing Dr. R. C. Sproul say during a seminary class some years ago, “The word ‘fall’ is not strong enough to accurately describe what happened when Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and His singular prohibition. Considering all that God had graciously given to them, the word ‘plunge’ seems to be a better description of what happened. Adam and Eve’s sin not only affected Adam and Eve, it affected all of creation. Their willful act of disobedience sent all of creation into a cataclysmic plunge, resulting in what we now know as a fallen, broken, and sin-filled world.” When you consider what things were like in the Garden—perfect, to what things are like today—sinful, “plunge” really does seem to describe what happened far better than “fall.” Adam and Eve went from living out God’s Holy Story to writing their own horror story that would never fit in the context of His original script.

THE DEVIL DIDN’T MAKE THEM DO IT!

If you are old enough you will remember Flip Wilson, a comedian whose signature line was, “The devil made me do it!” This statement is as inaccurate as it is disempowering, because it removes the responsibility of the sinner from the act of sinning. When we place the responsibility on something outside of us, we remove any possibility of changing our behavior. We echo Flip Wilson: “It’s not *my* fault; the devil made me do it!”

Many in the church today would say the devil made Adam and Eve do what they did. Adam and Eve were simply defeated by Satan, they would say; the arch enemy of God was too crafty, too strong, and too powerful for Adam and Eve to resist. On the surface, that reasoning may seem sound and accurate, but upon closer inspection we see that this clearly misses the mark of what actually happened

on that dreadful day. In adopting the language of being defeated, we place the responsibility outside, above, and beyond Adam and Eve—and ourselves.

Only when we understand the profound difference between being defeated and being disobedient will we ever be able to begin to win the battle against sin. We must see that the responsibility for our behavior rests squarely on us and not something outside of us. It is far too easy to say, “You made me angry,” or “My boss makes me miserable.” We cannot control what is going on outside of us, but we can control, by God’s grace, what is going on inside of us. We choose our thoughts, words, actions, and desires. When we are angry, we choose anger. The sooner we can get away from the false understanding that we are at the mercy of the strongest wind that is blowing, the sooner we will get on with pursuing the life God is calling us to live.

THE SIN OF EVE

We discussed in the last chapter that sin was rooted in the desires of the heart. So what was the desire of Eve’s heart? It was the desire to live outside of the boundaries God had set before her. In a word, it was the sin of self-sufficiency. It was her hearts deepest desire to live outside of God’s perfect plan for her because she believed her plan was better. She did not want to surrender, submit, and serve the will of God. She bought into the lie of Satan that life is infinitely better when lived for the glory of the self rather than the glory of the Savior. You will remember that this is the same lie delivered to our Lord in His wilderness experience in preparation of His earthly ministry.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Matthew 4:8-9

The sin of self-sufficiency ruled her heart and shaped her life. Instead of expanding the borders of her life, Eve shrank her life down to the size of her life. No longer living for the transcendent glory of God, Eve chose to live for her own glory. Her response to the father of lies should have been the same response Jesus gave to him.

Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Matthew 4:10-11

THE SIN OF ADAM

If Eve’s sin was self-sufficiency, what was Adam’s sin? In a word, it was the sin of self-protection. As men, we need to take a close look at what really went on in the Garden on that fateful day if we are ever going to learn from it.

Have you ever wondered where Adam was when Eve was listening to the serpent’s suggestions? Was he laboring on the other side of the Garden, unaware of what was going on? Was he looking after the animals he so carefully named? Genesis 3:6 provides the awful answer. “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.” The Scriptures indicate that Adam was right there with Eve when the serpent was seducing her affections away from God. And if that is true, we men are confronted by another set of questions: “Why didn’t Adam *do* something? Why didn’t he step in, speak up, and send the serpent on his wicked way?”

In Adam’s first opportunity to speak a Word of life into the face of death, he remained silent, plunging all of creation and the created order into chaos and despair. Adam was in the position of authority in the Kingdom of God, having been given dominion to rule the creation as the image bearer of the Almighty. He knew what God had said about the forbidden tree—“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.” He was right there *with her!* He had to have known what was happening to his beloved wife—the flesh of his flesh. We don’t know exactly how much Adam heard going on between Eve and the serpent, but he knew enough not to be deceived. 1 Timothy 2:14 states, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” If Adam was not beguiled by temptation, then where did he fail? I believe he was hamstrung by the same problem facing every man that has ever lived: PERSONAL SAFETY! Adam’s desire to be safe was more important to him than the desire to be godly.

If Adam had confronted the serpent, he would have been forced to move outside his comfort zone. That, as all men know, is simply not safe. Adam fell into the trap every man and every re-made man falls into today—**HE KNEW MORE THAN HE DID!** By refusing to do what he knew he needed to do, he lost the first spiritual battle he fought. At the end of the day, the scoreboard read, Kingdom of Darkness 1 / Kingdom of Light 0. Adam knew exactly what he was called by God to do. He was, without hesitation, to step in and speak up. He simply refused to do it. He chose comfort over character. In *The Silence of Adam*, Dr. Larry Crabb writes:

But Adam said nothing. He stood there, heard and watched the whole thing, and didn't say a word. He failed his woman. He failed, in his first spiritual struggle, to represent God. He failed as a man!

The silence of Adam is the beginning of every man's failure, from the rebellion of Cain to the impatience of Moses, from the weakness of Peter down to my failure yesterday to love my wife well. And it is a picture—a disturbing but revealing one—of the nature of our failure. Since Adam, every man has had a natural inclination to remain silent when he should speak. A man is most comfortable in situations in which he knows exactly what to do. When things get confusing and scary, his insides tighten and he backs away. When life frustrates him with its maddening unpredictability, he feels the anger rise within him. And then, filled with the terror and rage, he forgets God's truth and looks out for himself. From then on, everything goes wrong. Committed only to himself, he scrambles to make his own life work. The result is what we see every day: sexual passions out of control, uninvolved husbands and fathers, angry men who love to be in the driver's seat. And it all began when Adam refused to speak.¹

It's almost hard to believe what resulted by Adam keeping his mouth shut. There are many times I do well when I keep my mouth shut! I am frequently too quick to speak and too slow to listen. But there are times when all men of God are called to speak words of life into the lives of others. This was clearly one of those times for Adam . . . and he failed miserably. Was he afraid of conflict? Was he afraid of confrontation? Was he more concerned with personal comfort and self-protection? The Scriptures do not say; but in remaining silent, Adam spoke volumes about the kingdom he was willing to

serve. He chose to serve his own little kingdom instead of God's big Kingdom. When was the last time you chose to serve your little kingdom instead of God's big Kingdom? What was the result?

KINGDOM'S IN CONFLICT

As I have said, at the deepest level, the battle between these kingdoms takes place in the heart. Jesus confirms that this truth, which provides great insight into how the battle will ultimately be won. It will not be won with a sword or gun, utilized in political revolution in overthrowing governments, as many of the early religious zealots believed. No, the battle is more lonely and much more personal; it will be fought in the hearts of man.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Paul Tripp writes,

Ever since that fateful day, human life and history has been shaped by kingdoms in conflict. The little kingdom wars with the big kingdom, the kingdom of this world wars with the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of man wars with the kingdom of God. This war goes on behind every human intention, decision, thought, word, desire, and deed. Everything everyone ever does is done in pursuit of the success of one of these kingdoms. The war is unceasing and inescapable because it is fought on the turf of each of our hearts. Created for "big kingdom" living, sin twists our allegiance and causes us to be all too dedicated to the little kingdoms of our own making. We get blinded to the transcendent glories of the big kingdom and actually believe that the little shadow glories of our own little kingdom are as good as it gets.⁴

Both the big and little kingdoms are locked in perpetual conflict and will stay that way until Jesus returns and the Kingdom of God finally and fully replaces every kingdom of this fallen world. In Daniel's prophecy we see four characteristics of the Kingdom of God summed up in one word—EVERLASTING.

“It shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). The war will be over. All other kingdoms will be conquered, and the Kingdom of God “shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). But until that day, the kingdoms will remain in conflict.

1. Tullian Tchividjian, *Unfashionable*, 46
2. Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 32
3. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 10, 14, 16.
4. Paul Tripp, *A Quest For More*, 50



BROTHER TO BROTHER

1. Tullian wrote in *Unfashionable* that Adam and Eve failed their first test in the Garden of Eden. What was that test and why did they fail it?

2. How would you define the word sin? Do you think the term “shalom shattered” is a good description of sin? Please explain.

3. Adam and Eve were created by God to serve the Kingdom of God. They chose to serve their own little kingdom instead. Why?

4. Have you been serving your own little kingdom instead of God’s big kingdom in any area of life? If yes, can you share any of the consequences?

5. What was Eve’s sin?

6. What was Adam’s sin?

7. Why was Adam’s silence so sinful? Where have you been silent when you should have spoken up?
