



Part 16 – An Intruder in the Garden

Genesis 3:1-7

Genesis chapter 3 tells the most tragic story of cosmic history. Typically referred to as “the fall,” it is the account of the entry of evil into human history. The man and woman did the one thing they were prohibited from doing. And the fact that they committed this sinful act before they were infected by

sin’s inner temptations or outer frailties makes it all the more outrageous.

The sin of Adam and Eve presents something of a crash course in the nature of sin and temptation. The words of a creature took precedence over those of the Creator. What their eyes perceived were granted greater weight than the words of God. “So the tempter pits his bare assertion against the word and works of God, presenting divine love as envy, service as servility, and a suicidal plunge as a leap into life...” (Kidner, 68). Throughout, the one charged with the responsibility of leadership – Adam – remained passive. He neither drives the intruder from the garden nor provides instruction for his wife. What this tells us about the role of husbands and those charged with spiritual leadership is significant.

Genesis 3 is the explanation for all that is wrong in the world. All acts of wickedness, all instances of human frailty, and all of the decay and disasters throughout the creation find their origin in the sin of our first parents. Paradise was lost in that one wicked moment in the garden. And ever since, all of creation, including every human, has “been groaning together” in pain (Romans 8:22). But even in the groaning there is the promise of redemption “as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

1. Sin is unnatural.

Vs. 1 – “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.”

- As much as many of us would like, there is nothing in the text which suggests that there is anything inherently wrong with snakes. The term translated “crafty” can be understood positively or negatively depending on the context. The question is whether “crafty” in this passage applies to snakes in general or to this particular serpent. Whatever the case, it is true that the snake of Genesis 3, possessed as it was by Satan, was crafty in the most negative way. His goal was to tempt the woman into sin. He was there to introduce what is unnatural into the perfect order of the garden. Sin is contrary to the original creation. It entered the garden from outside. The sinful nature we are born with is not the way it was supposed to be.
- It is often asked where evil came from. There are mysteries to this which we will not be able to solve entirely. We must affirm what the Scriptures tell us without speculating on matters that remain beyond our knowledge. We do know that God is sovereign over all things including the actions of his creatures. We know that God rules in such a way that his human creatures remain fully responsible for their deeds. We know that Satan, being a created being, cannot act apart from the will of God (see Job 1). And yet God cannot be charged with evil (James 1:13).

2. Sin is breaking God’s law.

Vs. 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.”

- To sin is to break God’s law. It is important that we understand this. Modern attempts to soften this central reality have served only to soften the moral catastrophe of sin. It is common today to see sin defined as brokenness thus making it a therapeutic rather than moral matter. And while sin certainly causes brokenness it does so because at its heart, sin is rebellion against God; it is willing transgression of his law. The cycle of temptation and sin is often birthed with two acts of denial: 1) Denial of God’s word and 2) Denial of God’s goodness.

- The sin in the garden began with an inappropriate conversation. The woman listens to one who was quite obviously an intruder. And what does he say? “Did God really say...?” More often than not sin begins with a challenge to God’s Word. The challenge may be subtle or grand. The denial of God’s goodness likewise appears in the cycle of temptation and sin. Notice how the serpent accuses God of being harsh and restrictive: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Of course this was a radical misrepresentation of God’s law. But the hook was set as Eve corrects the serpent but does so with an exaggeration of God’s law. As the conversation continues the serpent accuses God of placing the restriction upon the man and woman for selfish reasons. The woman begins to see God as her rival rather than her loving Father. The result was that the woman and then her husband broke God’s law. In one unimaginably wicked moment they broke the covenant their Creator had made with them.

3. Sin is dehumanizing.

Vs. 7a – “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...”

- The lie of the serpent was that if the man and woman disobeyed God, they would become as God. But not only did their disobedience not make them as God, it actually vandalized their humanity. Sin brought decay and death to what was meant to be incorruptible and immortal. Contrary to the serpent’s lie, sin did not make Adam and Eve like God. It did not even make them more human. It reduced them. It made them less than what they were originally.

4. Sin is weakness masquerading as strength.

Vv. 4-5 – “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

- “The sinners of Genesis 3, like so many after them, imagined themselves greater in the arrogance of their gesture. Were they not making a superhuman challenge against heaven? Rebellion seeks to masquerade as heroism. But it is a laughable disguise, for at the very moment that the sinner is intoxicated with the sense of his own power, he is being manipulated by another mind. In actual fact, sin is defeat.”¹

5. Sin is an inversion of God’s order.

- Sin always seeks to twist and undermine God’s order of creation. It attacks God’s hierarchies and harmonies. There are several examples of this inversion throughout the event. As we have already seen, there is the disorder of a talking animal – the serpent itself represents an inversion of God’s order.
- Another example of this inversion is the disordered way in which Adam relates to Eve. We notice that throughout the event it is Eve who is speaking to the serpent. She acts first. Were it not for the latter half of verse 6 we would not even know that Adam had been present the entire time. However, instead of protecting the garden and his wife; instead of exercising his God-given dominion over the garden and driving out the intruder, Adam allows the enemy time to speak and exercise influence. Rather than leading his wife, Adam is led, thus inverting the creation order. In this way the man and woman are equally complicit in this act of rebellion. The woman allows herself to be deceived and the man fails in his obligation to lead and protect.
- Of course the act of taking from the tree of which they were not to eat is the ultimate inversion of God’s order. It was an act of bold sin; a breaking of the covenant between God and man. It must be kept in mind that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not evil. It was part of God’s “very good” creation. It was placed in paradise and was therefore designed to bless. But it was meant to bless in a particular way. Eve, followed by her husband, sought to have the thing meant to bless in a way that was disordered.

6. Sin is captivity.

Vs. 7 – “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

- The serpent promised the woman liberty. No longer will she be constrained by the laws of her Maker. Rather she will become as God and be a law unto herself. What she realized too late, however, is that the liberty promised by the serpent is a liberation from the good, the true, and from life itself. She was “liberated” from the blessing and security of God’s covenant love and loyalty. But as we will see, neither the serpent nor the sin will have the final say. The Creator God will become humanity’s Redeemer God.

¹ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984) p. 142