

The Image Distorted

Gen. 2:8-9, 15-17; 3:1-24

Introduction: cf. Nature vs. Nurture debate. Who and what I am as well as how I live are very much impacted by genetic [nature – natural bent or predisposition] and environmental [nurture – circumstantial and behavioural] factors.

Likewise, as creatures made in God's image and descendants of Adam & Eve, we are all [humankind and the whole cosmos] impacted by the Fall. This morning we are going to look at the dark side of humanity; next week Pastor Steve will explore the bright and hope-filled outworking of God's redemptive plan.

When sin entered human history: cf. Gen. 3:8-24

Rupture of humanity's relationship with God – a break that alienates humankind from the Creator; Adam & Eve missed the mark, failed to live up to God's moral standards and to live out His original purpose, thus "fallen short of the glory of God", grieved and disappointed the Creator by defacing the image of God.

Personal guilt, shame, perversion of truth – being trapped self deceptions and tripped up by consistent failure in fulfilling God's moral instructions, perpetuating a cycle of self love and self hatred.

Conflict in interpersonal/social relationships – hiding and alienating from one another; blaming and refusing to take personal responsibility; creating enmity, rivalry, and loss of intimacy instead of living in harmony, cooperation, openness, trust, and love.

Struggle with nature/creation – pain in childbirth, backbreaking labour, painful toil, life draining efforts but often with frustrating results instead of delight and pleasant work.

Combating spiritual harassment, oppression, and attack – struggling "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

The air of Eden is polluted and humanity has lost its primal innocence.

In short, the wholesomeness of God's image was shattered; humanity has no peace with God, self, others, creation, and Satan.

Man's heart is deluded, soul diseased, mind darkened, body deteriorating, relationships disappointing, and work demoralizing. Instead of trust, partnership, and intimacy, we see domination, self-interest, and distance. Our first and representative parents had passed the sin nature on to humanity, i.e., sin understood to be a basic anti-god

orientation and as specific individual acts of wrongdoing. Humanity fails to reflect the glory of God and distorts the image of God.

Paul in Rom. 5:12-21 compares the legacy of the 1st and 2nd Adam in the following way:

Two Individuals: *Adam, Christ*

Two Acts: *Disobedience, Obedience*

Two Results: *Death, Life*

The disobedience of Adam and Eve distorted the image of God, brought unrighteousness, God's judgment, wrath and condemnation to humanity.

Since "all hell broke loose" when Adam & Eve disobeyed God, it's most instructive to understand the makeup of disobedience in the context of Eden, at the original crime scene when our first parents fell into Satan's temptation.

The first encounter between Satan and humankind is most revealing. The appearance and dialogue of the Serpent with Eve became the defining moment for all of humanity.

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God **really** say, 'You must not eat from **any** tree in the garden'?"

No doubt, Satan is the most skillful Liar and murderer, but the ultimate responsibility of disobedience falls on Adam and Eve. The Serpent's first turns God's original command into a question with a cynical twist, as we can see the subtle change of wording from Gen. 2:16ff.

Gen.2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are **free to eat from any tree** in the garden;¹⁷ but you must **not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

With such leading question, Eve starts to doubt God's motives, intention, goodness, and love for His children; she strays from childlike obedience. Eve's initial trust and faith in the Creator is now questioned, shaken, and triggering distrust of God the Father-Protector-Provider.

Doubt leading to distrust of God.

Trust is the most critical foundation of any relationship; distrust breeds ingratitude and fosters contempt. In Rom. 1:20ff. Paul provides the best commentary of what happened in Eden:

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen ...²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him ...²³ and [they] **exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made**

to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Disobedience shows its ugly bottom when God's power and His divine nature is suppressed; the distrust of God leads to "exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images" made to look like His creatures who begin to worship them – it turns the story of Genesis upside down. In creating God in the image of the creatures, self-idolatry is the under belly exposed.

Man's nature is a perpetual factory of idols.

John Calvin

The tragic and foolish irony, described by the prophet Isaiah in 44:9-20, is that idolaters feed on ashes and consider themselves eating the best that is available. This perversion of truth provides the most devastating critique against religion made by anti-god philosophers and thinkers such as Emile Durkheim, the "Father of Sociology", and Karl Marx, the "Father of Communism", who argue that God is nothing but man's own projection of his need, opium for his soul.

The first practical takeaway for us this morning is this:

Accept the Creator's invitation to come home.

Is. 55:1 **Come**, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and **your soul will delight in the richest of fare.**

³ Give ear and **come** to me;
hear me, that **your soul may live.**
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.

Insightful and challenging words from Ken Boa:

Seek satisfaction apart from [God], and you will never find it; seek to please Him first, and you discover that satisfaction is a by-product of the pursuit of God.

The path of disobedience begins with distrust that leads to self-idolatry, opium that never satisfies and creates a vicious cycle of seeking after and being disappointed by immediate gratifications, spiraling downward in acts of disobedience as we can see in the continuing dialogue between Satan and Eve. We shall see that ...

Discontentment leading to distortion of reality.

Gen. 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from **the tree that is in the middle of the garden**, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

But look at what God actually said earlier:

Gen. 2:9 The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. **In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

Eve recalls only half-truth, i.e., she affirms God’s command but misses mentioning of the tree of life which daily renews their life, preventing them from aging and death, and it is made available for her and Adam. Living by half-truth is breathing in heresy; disobedience is distorting God’s truth that ends in disaster:

Gen. 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was **good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom**, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

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Instead of enjoying and appreciating God’s bountiful provision, i.e., what one needs and what God has already supplied, Eve focuses on God’s prohibition, i.e., what she shouldn’t have but desires masked as personal necessity in order to legitimize a self-serving want into a self-satisfying need. From this angle, disobedience is the feeling that something in addition to God is required for living life to the full; it expresses itself in using the wrong measurements to gauge happiness, joy, and success, thus derailing God’s intended purpose for all image-bearing creatures. Humanity is designed to reign with God, but in our discontentment we pursue self-defeating strategies for living out God’s image. We turn to god-substitutes for comfort and security.

So the second practical takeaway is:

Appreciate what you have; be thankful to God even for what you don’t have.

It’s good to remember the words of Jeremiah:

Lam. 3:22 Because of the LORD’s **great love** we are not consumed, for his **compassions never fail**.²³ They are new **every morning**; great is your faithfulness.²⁴ I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore **I will wait for him**.”

²⁵ The LORD is **good** to those whose **hope is in him**, to the one who **seeks him**; ²⁶ it is **good to wait quietly** for the salvation of the LORD.

Allow me to use Ken Boa's words again:

"When we review our circumstances in light of God's character instead of God's character in light of our circumstances, we come to see that God is never indifferent to us."

What we began with distrust, sliding downward to discontentment, eventually we would end up with the ultimate act of rebellion and revolt, a total rejection of God. His command is to Adam & Eve pretty clear:

Gen.2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you **must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, for when you eat from it **you will certainly die.**"

But our first parents' disobedient act is foolishly bold:

Gen. 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she **took** some and **ate** it. She also **gave** some to her husband, who was with her, and he **ate** it.

Defiance leading to denial of God's authority.

After God created humankind – male and female made in His image – he said it's "very good"; he commissioned and granted them the authority to participate in ruling all of creation under Him. He gave our first parents a command but assumed their responsibility to choose, to make wise and correct moral decisions as image-bearers. The command to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was for their protection. But they failed royally, for they wanted to be autonomous and in control, usurping God's authority and role as Master of the cosmos, legitimizing their action by focusing on half-truths, seeing Him as their enemy rather than a loving God and protecting Father. Recalling God's commissioning of Adam and Eve:

Gen.2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** it and **take care** of it.

The 'working' and 'taking care' are terms of service, same verbs used to describe the responsibility of priests and Levites serving in the temple of God.

In disobedience, humanity seeks to "enslave" God for its own self-serving desires and shows pride and contempt aptly parallel to John Milton's poetic expression of Satan's defiance and declaration when he was thrown into the fiery pit of Hell:

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

Disobedience is just the shorthand for the maxim found in Prov. 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” It is our refusal to be human, to accept our creaturely status; to disobey is the desire “to be like God.” Hell is the place filled with god-want-to-be’s, anti-gods who would rather reign in chaos and misery than serve in humility.

The third practical takeaway for us:

Stop being a “wise guy”; let go and let God be God

Is. 55:8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

A great man knows he is not god, and the greater he is, the better he knows it. [C. K. Chesterton]

Conclusion: Various writers and public speakers have cited this quote: “The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.” Martin Luther said something similar when he likened the church being an asylum and believers are sinners and saints at the same time. We who belong to a faith community are no better than those outside; we all are in need of grace when dealing with disobedience. This should remind us to remain humble and not be overly judgmental; we are all messed up and in a process of healing, to regain the Paradise once lost!