

NEWTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Mystery of Our Humanity Part IV “Sudden Exposure”

Genesis 3:6-13

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When I was in seventh grade I played in my junior high orchestra. Mr. Rupp was the conductor of our 70-80 piece orchestra. We played beautiful music, and we rehearsed every day in orchestra class. Often, during rehearsal, while one section of the orchestra was practicing their parts, the other musicians with their instruments were required to remain quiet. This was hard to do for a bunch of Jr. Highers—to sit still. When students would talk while others were rehearsing, Mr. Rupp would sometimes become very angry. In fact, he was a very stern man. He would not stand for any of us to be disruptive in any way during rehearsal. Often times he would yell “Shut up,” to make us be quiet.

In the seventh grade, I played the cello. It was second instrument for me. I had taken piano lessons, but there was no need for a pianist in the orchestra so I took up the cello. I was certainly not one of the best cellists. Out of seven or eight, I sat near the back of the section, between sixth and eighth cellist. I too, as a seventh grader, found it difficult to sit quietly sometimes. There were times when I experienced the wrath of Mr. Rupp telling me to be quiet.

One day our orchestra was practicing. Mr. Rupp was busy rehearsing the flutes, and I was trying to sit quietly. I was managing to keep my mouth quiet, but I was fidgeting with my cello. If you are familiar with a cello, it has a long, retractable spindle at the bottom. The spindle rests in a small brace that comes out from the bottom of your chair. The cellist sits with the instrument between the legs, and leaning upon the shoulder. No this design of the spindle actually makes it possible to spin the cello along its axis. That was how I was fidgeting that morning. I was spinning away!

Of course, you’re not supposed to do this with cellos, but I was bored, waiting for our turn to rehearse, and so I was spinning my cello. Spinning a cello makes no noise, so Mr. Rupp didn’t seem to notice or mind. Nobody paid any attention, until the cello slipped out of my hands. You can imagine my horror as I watched the school-owned instrument fall to the ground as if in slow motion. With a deafening crash, the cavernous wooden back hit the hard classroom floor, drawing everyone’s attention to the rear of the string section. Almost instantaneously, there was a second, loud report from the instrument. This second sound was accompanied by a four-fold-harmonic twang, that signaled the snapping in two of the hand-carved wooden neck of the instrument.

As if on cue of the baton, there was a 70-piece gasp. Dead silence fell on the whole orchestra. No one breathed. Most were still looking around to see what had caused this horrible noise. The blood, by this time, in my face, had been fully drained away leaving a sheet-white complexion. The pieces of

my broken cello lay on the floor beside me. All eyes then moved to Mr. Rupp. His imposing frame, grew stiff as he inhaled through his teeth and nose. His ruddy bearded face became redder. He glared. I wanted to crawl into the nearest hole, but his eyes held me pinned to my chair. He snorted once or twice, but said not a word. He may have been remembering that rule for junior high teachers: When you feel you are about to commit a felony against a student, count to 10 slowly. Except, I think he must have counted to 3000 that day. Finally, with his anger under control, he dismissed the class, and asked me to meet him at his desk in the back.

As long as I live, I will never forget the horrible shame I felt that day. Perhaps you can remember a time like that in your own life—a time of horrible embarrassment and shame. Maybe you did something terrible. Maybe you were caught with your hand in the cookie jar. The feeling of guilt and shame can be tangible. What is the root of that horrible feeling? Where did shame begin? That’s what we’re going to look at today as we continue to explore the origins of sin and its consequences.

If you’ll remember from our study of Genesis so far, God told Adam that he could eat from any of the trees in the garden, but from the one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was not to eat the fruit. And God said, “When you eat of it you will surely die.” But then the serpent came along and said something different to Eve. He said, “You surely shall not die.” He called into question God’s word. He said, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” As Eve took that first bite and then gave it to her husband there was a question hanging in the air. Who was right? God or the serpent? Who was telling the truth and who was lying. The immediate results seemed to prove the serpent right. Because Adam and Eve didn’t die right away. And their eyes *were* opened. And they *did* begin to know good and evil. Well, let’s look at that story together. Gen. 3:6-13:

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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 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?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman

you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Notice the focal point of the fall. What is the one thing that changes immediately when Adam and Eve disobey God? It’s very interesting. It has to do with their nakedness. At the end of Chapter 2 we see a beautiful statement on the intimacy of married life. “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Then along comes the serpent. In just a matter of hours the wonder and the beauty of the garden has completely changed. Look at the first thing that happens. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.” Their first action is to deal with their nakedness—they sew fig leaves together to cover themselves.

And then, when they meet God in the garden, notice the topic of conversation. He says, “Where are you?” And Adam says, “I realized I was *naked* and I was afraid and so I hid.” And God says, “Well, who told you that you were *naked*?” What is it about nakedness that is so central, that is such a focal point to the fall? Why is nakedness so important? I think one reason is that nakedness and the realization that we are naked mirrors our vulnerability and symbolizes who we are in our core being. Nakedness is also related to our relationships as well. Nakedness has to do with intimacy. Shame related to nakedness can become a hindrance to our intimacy in marriage. The awareness of our nakedness is the primary sign of the loss of innocence.

What happened to Adam and Eve when they sinned, and what happens to us when we sin? Think for a minute. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve were not aware that they were naked. And why was that? It was because they were outwardly focused. They focused outwardly on God. They focused outwardly on each other. They focused outwardly on the beautiful creation that God had given to them. But once they sinned—and when we sin—self-consciousness resulted. We become aware of ourselves. And Adam and Eve for the first time began looking from the outside inwards at themselves. They became self-aware, self-conscious. And we do the same. We look at ourselves from the outside, and how others see us.

Think for a moment of little children. When they’re small they don’t realize or even think about the fact of whether they’re naked or not. They can run around without any clothes on and completely self-consciously not be aware in the least. But as they grow older they begin to learn modesty. They begin to be self-conscious, self-aware and begin to cover themselves. They learn what it means to be naked.

The awareness of nakedness is universal. Every human society is aware of nakedness. Even the so-called “naked savages” know the difference between being clothed and being naked. Take the Aymara people in Bolivia, for example. If you saw them you would certainly think they were naked. The men

wear only a thin fiber string around their waist. It really doesn’t cover anything of importance, but this string is very important to them.

One of the early pioneer missionaries to the Aymara people tells the story of when she visited a sick man in his shelters to bring him medication. As she entered his home, he made signs of extreme embarrassment. He fidgeted nervously, moving about the shelter and calling for assistance from his wife. She ran in, bringing his string, and tied it around his waist. As soon as the string was in place, the man relaxed. After that, he was able to speak with ease and confidence with the this Western woman—even though *to her* he was not really covered up at all. But from his perspective, he was no longer naked.

When we discover our nakedness, when we become self-conscious, how do we respond? There are three ways that we as humans respond when we become self-conscious—aware of our sin and nakedness. We see the first response in what Adam and Eve do when they realize they are naked—they cover up. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together because they were self-conscious and they felt shame. They realized that the other could see their nakedness, so they covered themselves. Before sin entered the picture, they had shared a beautifully intimate relationship, with no barriers between them. Now, suddenly, shame had come up between them, and so they had to construct the further barrier of fig leaves as coverings. This was the physical manifestation of the emotional and spiritual alienation that had occurred between the man and the woman because of sin. We too, have learned to cover ourselves. We all wear clothes to cover our physical bodies on the outside. But we also learn how to cover up what is on the inside, and so prevent others from seeing our true selves. We learn very well how to hide behind images of ourselves—images of who we want to be, or who we want people to think we are. We wear masks, and in so doing, lie to one another about who we really are on the inside. The result for many is that they are truly known by no one. So, covering ourselves—physically and psychologically—is the first way we respond to the shame and realization of our nakedness that results from sin.

The second response is seen in the next verse. Listen again to what happens.

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.

They hid from God. The next consequence of sin and shame and self-consciousness is that we try to hide from God. This verse paints a beautiful picture of the relationship between Adam and Eve and God before the fall. They used “to walk together in the cool of the evening.” Imagine the beautiful fellowship they shared. They walked together. They talked together. Adam and Eve could ask God anything on their minds, and he would answer. Think how incredible that would

be today. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God the wonderful fellowship was destroyed. They tried to hide from God. Imagine the absurdity of that! Did Adam and Eve really think they could hide from God in the garden? That they would somehow escape God's notice? But we all do that. We try, out of fear, to hide from God.

One of my sons, when he was a baby and had done something he knew was wrong, would cover his eyes with his hands. He thought that because he couldn't see anyone else that no one could see him. He was hiding. Instinctively, we all try to hide when we have sinned. It's a natural tendency whenever we've done something wrong. Our guilt makes us hide. We feel exposed and we don't like that feeling. That's the way I felt when I dropped the cello. I wanted to crawl into a hole and disappear.

Notice that is not God who hides from us when we sin, but we, in our guilt and shame, who hide from God. We pull away from him. It was Adam and Eve who tried to hide from God. Never vice versa. And thankfully, God doesn't leave us in hiding. Then the Lord God called to the man—and he spoke the three saddest words in the Bible: "Where are you?"

The third response to our shame and nakedness is very interesting. God asked the man, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Listen to Adam's answer? He played the oldest game in the history of the world, the blame game. He passed the buck. He said, "The woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit and I ate." He blamed his wife. Sound familiar? Interestingly, God does not call Adam on this. Instead, he turns to the woman and asks her, "What have you done?" And she went right along with the game. She passed the buck too. She said, "The serpent deceived me and so I ate." The third natural response to shame is to blame others.

But there is something subtle going on here that is even more insidious than using other people as a scapegoat when we are to blame. Adam is actually blaming God. "The woman *you* put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Adam is saying in essence: "If *you* hadn't put her here with me in the first place, God, I wouldn't have had any problem." The woman also is implying the same thing in a subtle way. "God, if it hadn't been for you allowing this serpent in the garden, I wouldn't have been deceived." We don't only blame one another, we also blame God.

That is so like human nature. When we are wrong we want to find someone else to blame. Isn't it so? We can see this readily in the world around us. I want to read to you some of the responses claimants involved in auto accidents wrote on their insurance forms describing what happened in the accident. Listen to this. These are from actual insurance claims:

- "No one was to blame for the accident, but it never would have happened if the other driver had been alert."

- "The other car collided with mine without giving warning of its intention."
- "Coming home I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I don't have."
- "The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so I ran over him."
- "I had been driving for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had an accident."
- "I had been shopping for plants all day and was on my way home. As I entered an intersection a hedge sprung up obscuring my vision."
- "In my attempts to kill a fly I drove into a telephone poll."
- "As I approached the intersection, a stop sign suddenly appeared in a place where no stop sign had ever appeared before. I was able to stop in time to prevent an accident."
- "The telephone poll was approaching fast. I was attempting to swerve out its path when it struck my front end."
- "An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my vehicle, and vanished."
- "The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him."
- "I pulled away from the side of the road glancing at my mother-in-law and heading over the embankment."

We laugh, but don't we all do this. We make excuses for our behavior and we try to blame others for what is really our responsibility. The blame game taints all of our relationships. We are all acquainted with the results of sin: shame, exposure, embarrassment, guilt, alienation, and our tendency to hide and our tendency to blame.

Well, how does God react to all this? What is God's place as we feel all of these things as a result of our sin. Some people think God is like my Junior High School conductor, Mr. Rupp. They think God is a stern old man with a beard just waiting, watching us, ready to yell at us as soon as we step out of line. If that were the kind of God we have I'm sure he would have reacted very differently to Adam. Think about it. He has just created this beautiful world. He's set the stars and planets in their orbits, created the Earth and filled it with good things and breathed life into his creatures. Everything is beautiful. Everything is good. Very good. Now, in just a matter of hours, Adam and Eve have messed it all up. They've managed to destroy his good creation. How would you respond to them if you were God?

Look at how God responds. He asks three questions. He says, "Where are you?" "Who told you that you were naked?" and "What have you done?" I think these questions reveal what kind of a God we're dealing with. God is far more concerned where the sinner is and what has happened to the sinner than he is with what the sinner has done.

Here in this chapter of Genesis, we see God take the initiative in the first act of redemption. He calls out to Adam and Eve, asking them these questions, and inviting repentance.

Remember, repentance is agreeing with God that we've done something wrong. Though Adam and Eve's repentance is feeble at best, at least they admit that they have eaten. True, they make excuses for their behavior, they blame each other and God, but in the end, they say, "I did eat." But God initiated in their act of repentance. The man and the woman, they run, they hide, but God pursues. God finds them. And God finds us. Paul writes in Romans 2:4

Or do you show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

God's mercy and kindness lead us to repentance. He's the one who initiates. He takes the first step to pursue us. That's a wonderful thing.

This week a young man asked me if there were certain sins beyond God's forgiveness. We had been talking about God's grace and forgiveness, and he asked me, "Are there some things that a person can do that are so bad that God cannot forgive them?" And I told him, according to the Bible, there is no deed so evil, no sin so black, that God in his love cannot forgive the sinner who truly repents. And God initiates. When we think we are so bad that God could never love us again, could never forgive what we have done, and so we hide from his presence—it is then that his love seeks us out.

What about our shame? How does God deal with our shame? Well, in a very amazing way, God dealt directly with our shame. And he did it in a particular way that connected to nakedness. In Roman crucifixion, the criminal hangs on the cross naked, exposed. It is a brutally painful punishment, but it is also a horribly shameful punishment. The criminal is exposed naked for all to see. When Jesus hung on the cross for you and for me was exposed. Naked. He suffered shame for us.

Paul writes in Galatians that we who are sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus have "clothed ourselves with Christ." These articles of clothing that we're wearing today are a poor substitute for what we're really longing for. In the garden, God actually provided garments of skin for Adam and Eve, but that was a foreshadowing of what he would do later through Christ. When Christ hung naked on the cross and took our shame and bore our shame, he then provided a way that we could be clothed with Christ. That we could be clothed with what we're longing for. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:2

Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed we will not be found naked.

God's final and greatest act of grace is to clothe us with his righteousness.

And finally, how does God deal with our tendency to blame, to point the finger, and pass the buck? Even as we are trying to find someone else on whom to put the blame for our sin, God in Christ was taking that blame and freely placing it upon his own Son. Christ took our blame freely, willingly, and suffered the penalty for it on the cross. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Christ took the blame for us.

I don't know where each of you are today. Perhaps you're feeling shame. Perhaps you're carrying a heavy burden of guilt. You may feel weighed down in a very real way each day when you wake up. The weight of guilt and shame is heavy indeed. Well, God wants you to know that Christ is ready to lift that weight off of your shoulders. Christ is ready to remove your burden of guilt and shame. He will carry it himself. In fact, he's already borne the full weight of that guilt when he hung on the cross. He's already fully paid for that burden on the cross. So everything necessary has been already done by Christ, so that he is ready to lift that burden off of you right here this morning. Whatever you're carrying, whatever you feel has separated you from God. Whatever you feel has caused you to want to run away and hide from those you love and even from God. God is seeking you out this morning. He's calling, "Where are you?" But he already knows. He is waiting with tender compassion for you to come out from hiding and receive his love. All he asks is that we admit our sin and realize our need of forgiveness. Then he will take that burden, lift it off your shoulders, and set you free. Having borne your shame, he will clothe you with his righteousness. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for Jesus Christ who came to bear our shame—to take our guilt upon himself and pay the penalty for it on the cross. And to cover our nakedness with his righteousness. Lord, if there is anyone here this morning carrying a weight of guilt and shame, speak to their heart the truth that you want to take that burden away, cover their shame, and clothe them with your righteousness. Help them to come out from their hiding place, into the light of your love and receive the forgiveness Jesus offers. May each of us, daily, clothed with Christ's righteousness, live lives free from guilt and shame, in joyful service to you. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.