

CITY CHURCH—EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

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Expulsion

Genesis: The Story of God, The Story of Us Paradise Lost

The second law of thermodynamics asserts that the entropy, or randomness, of a closed system cannot decrease. One of the effects of sin is that of spiritual entropy, a tendency toward chaos in all things spiritual. The entrance of sin into the world was truly a fall from a place of spiritual shalom to a place of spiritual chaos.

This spiritual entropy works itself out in several ways. Because of sin we now have a sense of guilt, feeling wrong because of what we've done; and shame, feeling wrong because of who we are. These feelings of personal wrongness lead to feelings of fear, mistrust, and a deep need to hide in response to perceived potential pain. We often hold back the deep inner things of our lives, things that we think would bring rejection if they were brought to light,

and so we respond with secretiveness and blame-shifting in an effort to protect our dignity. We see that in the responses from Adam and Eve as they were confronted by God in the face of their sin.

Adam and Eve hid in the first place because they feared the judgment of God. It is true that in response to sin God is a judge. He pronounced the ongoing consequences of sin: the futility of fertility, as it were. Humankind's relationship with the created world and with one another would now suffer under the effects of chaos and death.

But God is not only a judge; he is also merciful. Even after pronouncing the consequences of sin, God showed mercy to Adam and Eve. Most immediately, he replaced their clothing of fig leaves, their effort to cover their shame and guilt, with clothing made of animal skins, signifying

that sin could only be covered through pain and blood. But he also gave them a glimpse of the future and promised that one day a descendent of Adam and Eve would defeat the serpent once and for all.

What, then, is our response to this God of judgment and mercy? We must be brought to the point of realizing that we cannot redeem ourselves. Our best efforts are fig leaves. It seems paradoxical, but it is not in the hiding of sin or blame-shifting that our dignity is protected; it is confession that our dignity is secure. God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness, because of the pain and blood of Jesus Christ. God replaces our fig leaves of self-effort with the blood and righteousness of Christ. Clothed in this glorious dress, we can lift our heads with joy to worship our great God.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the Gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Genesis 3:8-24

1. What are some of the ways that culture and churches have handled (or mishandled) guilt and shame? What is the Gospel approach to handling guilt and shame?
2. When confronted with guilt and shame, are you quick to confess, or do you attempt to hide? When sin is eventually exposed, do you accept responsibility, or do you try to shift the blame? How has the power of the Gospel helped you in these areas?
3. Where (e.g. in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your relationships, etc.) do you see the effects of your own sin most clearly? How could the light of the Gospel be brought to bear in those places or situations or relationships?
4. Discuss some strategies for combating the tendency toward self-redemption (sewing fig leaves) in our lives. Have you sought freedom from self-redemption? If so, how?
5. Look again at Genesis 3:15 and 3:21. How do God's words and deeds give you hope in light of sin's consequences in Genesis 3:14-19?
6. Martin Luther wrote, "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly." Discuss how living that out might affect the our community's perception of Christianity.

Intersect: Thoughts on Faith and Life

As Adam was hiding in his sin, God called out, "Where are you?" It's probably something we all wrestle with. When brought to a knowledge of our sin, our reaction is to hide. But as with Adam, the Lord God calls out to each of us: "Where are you?" Yet even when we're found, we do everything we can to dodge the reality of our sin. We rationalize, we minimize, we cast blame on someone or something else. Nevertheless, there comes the time when our hiding place is discovered, our reasons and excuses are rejected, and we stand naked in our sin before a holy God.

Put in that position, our response will probably be like that of Paul in the letter to the church in Rome, when he recognized the reality of harrowing sin: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" But he does not remain in his wretchedness, and neither should we. He turns around and thanks God for the one who *does* set him free from his body of death, the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, it is Jesus who died to save sinners from the power and penalty of real, actual sin.

Redemption is good news because real repentance requires real sin. It will be impossible to live a life of true repentance and renewal if our real sins are hidden in darkness. It's often painful, and always uncomfortable, to bring our sin into the light. But we can own our sin with confidence because it's not really ours any more. It died with Jesus on the cross. Our sin is real, yes, but it is *dead* in Christ. It does not and cannot rule over us any more.

This good news goes back to the Garden. Adam and Eve were hiding, but God was looking for them. And when they are found, Adam and Eve attempted to hide the shame of their nakedness with fig leaves. But since they could not cover their own sin, God made them clothing that would cover their sin for them. God still pursues his children in the same way, calling out, "Where are you?" He takes our feeble attempts to cover our sins and he clothes us with the righteousness of Christ.

"Where are you?" It is an invitation to step out of the shadows and into the light of God's mercy, confessing with confidence and repenting with boldness, because we stand clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'"

C. S. Lewis,
The Great Divorce

