

The Separation Syndrome: The Theological Separation

Genesis 3:8

Lent Midweek I

March 1, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Moses records the first consequence of Sin this way in Genesis 3: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, I concluded the Ash Wednesday sermon with a hint of the meditation to come during these Lenten weeks:

“This Lenten season now upon us *is* a time to consider the terrible truth that our sin separates us from God and, thus, heaps upon us all catastrophic consequences that play out in daily life and constantly preach impending eternal death.”

We sometimes don't appreciate *salvation* because we don't appreciate *sin*; and we don't appreciate the danger of *sin* because we don't appreciate how *thoroughly* the Fall into Sin affects every aspect of daily life... and we especially don't appreciate/respect that it is playing out just as God's Word said it would.

Thus, it's right for us to understand how the Fall has heaped upon us (just as God knew it would) all the catastrophic

consequences of daily life. Or, to say it another way, it's right for us to understand how we can see in every aspect of daily life just how true, how relevant is Sin and its impact on creation. And, if we see and admit that, then we will better appreciate the work of Christ upon the cross and the word of Christ in His sacramental gifts: "I forgive you your sin."

Any of you who've been through my confirmation classes or through adult instruction likely recall some explanation in those first hours of instruction which centered on the Separation Syndrome. But, that leaves many of you that perhaps have never studied it at all.

I want to make clear that the terminology is a teaching tool; it's not found in the Catechism or the Confessions and not widely known in our church body. But, as pastors all have teaching tools, illustrations or acronyms to help students remember theological truths (some of you may recall the "Golden Gate Bridge" illustration, or even the term or image of "the Trinity", itself a descriptive teaching tool of history), so we can carry this tool with us and, by it, remember the depth of our need and the breadth and depth of Christ's saving work.

As the image on the front of the bulletin may seem familiar from the bookmark we handed out two summers ago,

you may recognize how it represents the truth that the Scripture says all the various fallout of sin can be grouped into one of five categories, one of five *separations* – as highlighted in Adam’s fall as recorded in Genesis 3. These separations, in order of appearance, are theological, psychological, sociological, ecological, physiological (you’ll notice on the bulletin cover). That’s not to say that some of life’s problems aren’t a combination of two or more; that most certainly can be true (for example, something can be a matter of the psychological *and the* physiological, of the mind *and* body). But, if you recall these five *basic* categories, you will see that every problem of daily life fit into these... you’ll see these separations and their consequences playing out in daily life. And that knowledge of sin will, perhaps ironically, bring you a pretty level-headed understanding of and expectation for life in this broken world, and a much better appreciation for the words “I forgive you your sin”... and the Separation Syndrome’s pattern of reversal will give you a much more confident and content patience to await Christ’s timing to make all things new.

So, let’s consider the first of these separations – the **theological** separation... likely the most well-known and oft-considered (though, likely also least believed) of all the

separations. In the events of the Fall, the theological separation is recorded this way:

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

First, it should be noted that the theological separation is **not the first sin itself**; it is the *consequence* and *fallout* of the first sin. And the first fallout of Sin is an objective separation, a true divide between God and man. It’s not just a *feeling* of being divided; it’s a true division, a true separation.

This is an important fact to uphold, for Man today claims that unity with God can be achieved by simply *feeling* better about one’s standing before God, *feeling* united with God. But feelings don’t change objective truth. When a called servant of Christ must come to you and say, “You need to repent, because your sin has separated you from God,” the common response, “Well, I don’t feel that it has” shows the person’s misunderstanding regarding the objective nature of sin and of the pastor’s work as he highlights for you the perilous objective reality of man’s theological separation from God.

Indeed, this is an objective separation – a ‘great divide’ and chasm of sorts. It’s a divide that *sin* has caused, *man* has caused... not a separation *God* has caused. That’s an important point, isn’t it? So often people assume that God separated himself from man as a response to sin, that God was ashamed of man or afraid to be stained and soiled by man’s unrighteousness. But that’s not at all true, is it? As soon as man sinned, God came to man, entered the garden and called out to man... that God might help man, might save man from himself.

But that calling out needed to be made because there was an objective problem. Even if man hadn’t *felt* there was a problem, the call still would have come from God... perhaps no longer needing to begin with “Adam, where are you?” (there’s the allusion to Adam’s hiding), but the LORD still would have begun (more to the point), “What have you done?” Either way, an objective answer would be needed, because an objective problem had occurred. Disunity had occurred. Separation had occurred.

This first point is so fundamentally necessary that we could never over-emphasize it: **The sinner’s standing before God has nothing to do with how the sinner *feels*.** It has to do

with an objective separation – an objective consequence and fallout from that particular sin, even that very first.

The Scriptures speak *very* clearly on this objective consequence that plagues every child of Adam – we often call it “Original Sin.” St. Paul quotes the psalm, “No one is righteous, no, not one;... All have turned aside.” Just a short while later, Paul’s epistle to the Romans includes those more well-known words of this damning separation: “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” To the Ephesians, Paul explains it as being “dead in the trespasses and sins in which you walked, *following the course of this world.*” And he goes on to call mankind “sons of disobedience” and “children of wrath”; and St. James refers to man in this separation as “enemies of God.”

No matter how you describe it, it’s not a problem of feeling or emotion. It’s a true separation, an objective problem. Yes, *what* an objective problem – that can only be rectified by an objective answer.

Man instinctively knows that this objective separation is there, no matter how much he wants to ignore it. And, sadly, how many there are who ignore it...ignore it by advancing a

different doctrine as the supposed 'objective truth'... a different doctrine than Christ's... a doctrine calling man "inherently good" or "innocent at birth" or "well-intended" or even saying mankind "are all God's children." And, if such is the case, the Fall amounts to nothing but a blip in Adam's own life.

Indeed, how hopelessly lost is man when he convinces himself that the Fall was only applicable to Adam himself and that each new generation starts over in righteousness and purity, or at least 'partly so.' How off-course is man's theological understanding at that point, helped only by the fact that it's so devastatingly wrong, that it's hard to ignore and suppress the truth of the sinful condition – found even in the youngest of children.

And, once Man finally admits that the problem is there, he wants to provide the solution, and he reasons, "If I messed it up, I should be able to fix it." Then, he comes up with all sorts of 'answers' (doctrines/religions) of his own making and attempts to bridge this objective separation and achieve the reconciliation and re-unification... namely, to bring himself back to God.

That last phrase is an important one – "bring himself back to God" – it is the proper meaning of the word "religion."

How does one bring himself back to God? The world answers with all sorts of “religions.” Meditation, walking in nature, paying dues, giving to the poor, making decisions, doing works, praying at set times, following moral codes, even writing holy books of man-made religions to re-write who is this God that we might approach Him (or, now, “Her”) in our own way. Yes, so many ways to try and reunite himself with God that it is near impossible to count every religion of the world and all their false gods, near impossible to count every way in which spiritually dead men futilely attempt to reunite themselves with the Creator.

But it is quite simple to locate the objective answer that actually is not a religion at all: *God* provided the answer, which means it is not at all “*religio*” (man re-uniting himself with God), but – because God knew that spiritually dead men could never provide the answer – God provided the answer by sending the Christ and, by so doing, objectively and truly overcame the theological separation and reunited himself to and reconciled himself to Man.

Christianity is, properly speaking, no religion... but is the truth of God’s objective answer *in Christ* to the division and separation Man caused in the Fall. The objective **sacrifice** in

history, the God-man offered up on behalf of men who had nothing to offer... and the objective **atonement**, God giving His own Lamb for the sacrificial slaughter that the payment for sins may be righteous and whole, it all brought an objective **answer** to the problem of Sin. And, with that objective answer to be proclaimed as a gospel to all nations, the world's religions are not only shown to be unsatisfactory and misleading, but they are also unnecessary; for the doctrine of the Gospel declares: an objective re-unity is completed, finished, and sealed in the blood and death of Jesus.

How do the apostles explain it – both in the objective work of the cross and in the objective truth of its proclamation?:

St. Peter says, “Christ died once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might *bring us back* to God.” Again, Paul tells the Corinthians that “in Christ, God was reconciling the world unto himself,” And the same apostle tells the Colossians,

“In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross... And you, once alienated and hostile, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his

death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.”

And, **the proclamation of** this objective good news, the apostles call “the message of reconciliation,” “the ministry of reconciliation,” and “the preaching of Christ crucified.”

Indeed, Christ crucified, the objective, historic answer, to an objective, historic separation... a theological separation that would have forever condemned all mankind, but in the proclamation of the objective, saving truth of Christ Jesus... a theological separation no more... reconciliation, unity, oneness.

Thus, as I hinted at last week, Lent is not only a season to mourn the great truth of Sin; it is also a season to learn anew the divine work of Christ in reuniting God and man and healing the consequences of such separation, reversing the consequences right into his everlasting promise to make all things new.

In the weeks to come, as we continue to meditate upon the great truth of these consequences of Sin, and the equally great truth of these consequences being reversed in Christ Jesus, keep in mind that it all begins with this: the objective

reality of a theological separation man caused, and an objective reunification Christ achieved.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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