

The Separation Syndrome: The Sociological Separation

Genesis 3:12

Lent Midweek III

March 15, 2023

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

Our text, Moses records the third consequence of Sin this way in Genesis 3: “The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Two Wednesdays ago, we began our consideration of the Separation Syndrome with the theological separation, and last week we considered the psychological separation. So, let’s put those two together: Where man has objectively separated himself from God and is without any ability to work himself back to God or earn God’s favor, he then fears God, mistrusts God, and hides from God.

And, where man (unable to work himself back to God) fears and mistrusts God (man being “foolish, warped” Paul calls him in our second reading), man must shield himself by blaming others, throwing them under the bus, sacrificing them to save himself. That brings us to the third of the separations – the sociological separation.

The sociological separation includes every manner in which man (in his foolish, warped mind) harms, cheats, blames, and hates his neighbor for his own benefit. And – as mental images of simple examples fill your head – we instinctively notice that, here, the consequences of the Separation Syndrome begin to be much more tangible in daily life. Though we said last week that the psychological separation is more tangible than the theological separation, it's also true to say that both of those first two separations are matters of the First Table of the commandments and sometimes may seem *only* matters of the head and heart. (They certainly are not, but our mental examples think of it that way.)

But now, beginning with the sociological separation, the consequences of sin are seen very easily as constantly and abundantly manifesting themselves in and dominating the landscape of daily life. In fact, did they not dominate the scene in fallen Eden and beyond? In this evening's reading, Adam blames his own wife – he hurls her before the judgment of God to save himself. And God's response (as He – in later verses – lays out how this separation will affect daily life), His response recognizes the seriousness of this sociological separation and its threat not singularly to Man, nor singularly to Woman, but

its threat to the *marriage estate*... as He says to the woman, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”... and, to the man, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife,” (in other words, ‘because you upended My design and good order of the marriage estate’). And, throughout the history of Scripture and certainly beyond, how often is proved God’s wisdom and foreknowledge in the shadows of fallen-Eden, His foreknowledge that marriage would forever be under attack?... Husband blaming wife, wife blaming husband, marriage undermined by adultery and premarital and extramarital infidelity, and marriages ending in divorce as sinners blame and even hate their spouses in order to love and justify *themselves*.

Of course, the Scriptural record indicates that the sociological separation goes far beyond husband and wife... trickles from the Marriage Estate into every other relationship (for, *every* societal relationship ultimately derives from the central unit of the family, the pinnacle of which is *the marriage estate*): What is the very first sin recorded in post-Eden life but the jealousy and hatred and murder of one brother by another. And, what of the sins of son Jacob against father Isaac? Or of the ‘brothers Eleven’ against Joseph? Or of son Absalom

against father David? How deep does the sociological separation run, when the sinner will hate even his own flesh and blood for the sake of his supposed gain?

And, if one's own flesh and blood, then what about those far enough removed in Adam's line that we don't recognize them as part of our own flesh and blood (part of the family tree), but now merely refer to them as 'neighbor.'? Every nightly news program is riddled with stories of one neighbor harming or killing another neighbor. The entire second table of the commandments must defend your neighbor from you because you as a sinner see them as expendable, someone who might get in your way, be an inconvenience to your quest for life's riches, someone you ought use or abuse for your own advantage. The love of self runs deep; and so, equally deep runs the hatred of neighbor... hatred, not necessarily always in our modern sense of loathing and anger, but in the *Scriptural* sense of ranking them lower in importance than myself.

And, in that sense, how widespread is my hatred of my neighbor... never thinking them an equal to myself. That can show itself in various stereotypes of hatred toward those I don't even know (how often do we hear – sometimes rightly –

about the evils of sexism, racism, ageism, and – in this context – even the concern of hatred of the LGBTQ community is a *valid* concern – a reason for repentance – if your thoughts toward them are filled with hate and condemnation rather than a desire to see fellow sinners be brought to repentance and forgiven freely by Christ).

Of course, our world exacerbates the problem by championing these very ‘groups’ and classifies people by ‘races’, as if we are not each flesh-and-blood children of Adam and therefore brothers and sisters of one another. Yes, such hatred is fostered, even championed, in our society... especially when we understand that hatred need not mean anger and loathing, but simply preference for myself over my neighbor.

And that brings this issue much closer to home for each of us personally. Because we might very truly be able to say, “But, I’m not racist, nor sexist, nor agist, nor transphobic, nor all these other charges society throws against me.” And, honestly, who can properly judge your heart regarding such things? Oh, we’re told that “hate speech” is the judge of the heart. What a trite and shallow term *that* is when considering the depth of true brotherly love: sure, you might speak nicely

enough; you may say all the outward things that fend off social pressure, but that doesn't mean you love your neighbor.

No, much closer to home, the sociological separation and its hatred of my neighbor (and preference of "Me") constantly shows itself – not just when we are impatient with our children or disrespectful to our parents, or when we give the silent treatment to our spouse, or when we yell at our siblings... but also when we, for example, volunteer to help our neighbor, but put *less* effort into *their* project than if it were my own. Or, when we smile at them to their face, but gossip about them behind their back. Or, certainly when we tear them down in front of mutual friends to build myself up.

And, sadly, we forget that the sociological separation – which man tries to fix with noble, but horribly imperfect efforts like governments and police and military and marriage counselors and a jury of peers – all of that dwelling on the sociological separation "in society" make us quick to forget that it also occurs among fellow Christians in the pews and around the altar of God... when we are disinterested in the well-being of our fellow Christian... when we don't notice or care if the one who normally sits three throws in front of or behind me hasn't been in church for the last month... when I'm more

concerned about the church making decisions I like than wondering how it will benefit my fellow Christian.

But, of course, the closest fellow Christian to me is likely in my own home. And the sociological separation runs deep, so that – as long as I know that I have faith – I don't always put the effort into teaching or confessing or encouraging my loved ones in the faith...living it out before them so as to truly love them.

All of these examples (and we could go on for hours) are examples of the sociological separation... in which we love ourselves and hate our fellow child of Adam.

Now, there *is* a proper way to rightly use that Scriptural term, “hate” – a matter of lesser comparison to the greater “love” ... for example, when Jesus says “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters – even his own life – he is not worthy to be my disciple.” Yes, we should love Christ first and foremost – “above all things,” as the First Commandment says – but precisely because he has freed us from sin and judgment, freed us to truly love our neighbor.

Christ comparatively hated his own life for the sake of his neighbor, even his enemy, and laid down his life for us all.

Yes, in this way God *loved* the world – that world the sin of which had separated it from God – nevertheless, God *loved* those who hated Him and gave His son to lay down his life for us.

And as we've said the last few weeks, as that objective reunification between God and man is proclaimed, it reverses the separations so that: the mind no longer fears God but trusts Him, and the person who now trusts God and knows he stands justified before God – now that person no longer needs to hate his neighbor, but may learn to love him.

In other words, the good news of Christ's sacrifice for us all works faith in God and, therefore, fervent love toward one another. There's a *reason* that this is always the emphasis of Christian teaching, that in Christian teaching we always seem to hear about "faith in God and love of neighbor": it's because that's what the objective reconciliation of the theological separation does for the psychological separation and, in turn, the sociological separation. If I no longer fear the un-tame God, then I no longer have reason to hurl my neighbor before him as fodder; if I no longer fear God's wrath, then I no longer have reason to throw my neighbor in front of me as my shield. If I am freely forgiven before God, then I no longer have reason to

try and justify myself by throwing my neighbor under the bus. And, if I no longer need to love my neighbor outwardly to try and prove my worth to God, then I can love my neighbor sincerely for his own benefit.

Thus, just as the Scriptures – from Genesis 4 on – abundantly describe the sociological separation among fellow children of Adam, so those same Scriptures also abundantly describe the healing of that sociological separation among the baptized children of God. You heard Paul instruct Titus about it in our second reading. And St. John says it this way:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.... Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. **By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.**

Notice that last line, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.” Notice that true love is only known by that good news, thus known only by the renewal of the *mind*

(psychological separation repaired), the mind that has been blessed by the proclamation of the good news of Christ crucified. By this Gospel Truth we know what it means to love: he loved us and laid down his life for us. And that good news brings trust and confidence to the heart and mind, which then makes alive our desire to love our brother, to love those of the household of faith.

But it must be in the proper order! How much of the world nobly wants to advance the love of each other, but thinks it can do so without faith in Christ! And the end result is “social gospels” replete with virtue signaling, self-righteous comparisons, lawsuits, fraud, false prophets, neighbors who do not *trust* one another, *know* one another, or *care about* one another... but seek to justify themselves before man and therefore use another as stepping-stones to righteousness, hide behind their surface love of one another as a way of justifying themselves.

But the love of Christ is for all men. And as the love of Christ is for all, so that the holy will of God includes a second table of commandments teaching love of *every* neighbor, therefore the Christian learns to live with **faith in God** (as lived out in our daily prayers) and – flowing from that – learns to live

with **Christ's love for our neighbor** (as lived out in the Table of Duties.) Husband loves wife, and wife loves husband. Child loves parent, and parent loves child. Pastor and parishioner, young and old. And even – if they would only listen to and learn to love based on *the will of God* – employer and employee, government and citizen.

This is love, not that we first loved God, but that he first loved us and laid down his life for us... and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. The sociological separation reversed... true love for our neighbor, true desire to see them benefit from all that the good and holy God has promised *them* and *us*, **we all who**, though once condemned as the children of Adam, are blessed by the historic work of Christ ... blessed to hear His proclamation of His atonement, the good news of which turns hearts of fear into hearts of faith, creating confidence and joy that we are indeed children of God and – in Christ's *true* love – brothers of one another.

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

Calvary Lutheran Church
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