

Genesis 3:8–14 — They Heard the Voice of the LORD God

Where Art Thou, Nakedness as Soul-Exposure, God-Blaming, the Chiastic Structure, and the Serpent Cursed to Eat Dust

Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:8–19

“And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

“And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

The Cool of the Day: Only One Still Enjoying the Garden

They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Adam and Eve were hiding. They had no more liberty to enjoy the garden. The sweet communion they had known before the fall was over. The only one in the garden still walking in unhindered pleasure was Jehovah Elohim himself — whose communion with the other persons of the Trinity was entirely unaffected by what had taken place. The heart of God was unchanged. The whole creation groans and travails, as Paul writes, because of fallen man, but God changes not. The cool of the day was cool and pleasant to him even now.

In verse 8, the Lord God was walking in the garden and speaking — but Adam and Eve were not yet addressed. With whom was he speaking? The text does not say. It may be a hint, early in these chapters, at the Trinity: God said in chapter 1

verse 26, let us make man in our image. In that case, the voice in the garden is one person of the Godhead in communion with another, unhindered, in the midst of the ruin man had made. It was not until verse 9 that Adam was called.

God's Questions Are Not for Information

When the Lord God called unto Adam and said, Where art thou? — this was not a request for geographical information. God knew exactly where Adam was. God does not ask questions to get an education. The questions God asks — here and in the Gospels where the Lord asked, Who touched me? or Who is my neighbour? — are always designed to reach a state of soul, to bring a condition to light, to pierce the conscience so that the soul might be bared before God. Where art thou? is a moral question, not a physical one.

Two questions follow: Where are you? and What did you do? Together they address the whole situation. Where are you speaks to the new moral state — the man has moved from innocence into a condition of guilt, nakedness, and fear before God. What did you do? addresses the act that produced that state. The first draws out where the soul now stands before God; the second draws out what happened to bring it there. These are the questions with which God begins his dealings with fallen man.

When God asks, you have to answer. The Lord Jesus in the Gospels said to his opponents, Answer thou me, and they did answer, even when they tried to evade. Even I cannot tell — the response the Pharisees gave when he asked about John's baptism — was still an answer. Adam answered immediately. There was no delaying it.

Nakedness as Soul-Exposure: The Deeper Meaning

I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself. The nakedness had not changed physically since before the fall. They had always been naked. What

changed was the moral consciousness of it. The knowledge of good and evil brought with it a conscience, and that conscience conveyed the sense of being exposed — fully open to the scrutiny of a holy God whose eye missed nothing. Nakedness now carried with it the sense of standing before God with nothing to hide behind.

Hebrews 4:13 captures the spiritual depth of this: all things are naked and opened before him with whom we have to do. That is not about physical clothing; it is about the soul standing uncovered before the omniscient eye of God. This is what Adam experienced for the first time at the fall. Before the fall, he stood before Jehovah Elohim in innocence and had no shame; there was nothing to be afraid of. Now everything was different. The consciousness of exposure, of having something to hide, is a mark of a fallen conscience.

Men hide themselves in many ways. They hide behind nature, as Adam hid among the trees. They hide behind education and knowledge. They hide behind religion and the leaves of profession. But everything is naked and opened before him with whom we have to do. The lesson of the coats of skins in verse 21 is that God himself provides the only covering that actually covers. Man's self-crafted coverings leave him still afraid, still hiding.

The church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:17 had a nakedness problem of a different kind. At least Adam knew he was naked. Laodicea said, I am rich and have need of nothing, and did not know that it was naked. A nakedness combined with insensitivity to the fact — the counsel to that assembly was to buy of Christ white raiment that the shame of its nakedness might not appear. The clothing that covers spiritual nakedness is always Christ's provision, never man's.

Sin Makes a Man a Coward and a God-Blamer

Adam's reply moves from cowardice to accusation. I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself. That is the

cowardice: the bad conscience producing fear and concealment. But when pressed further in verse 12, the accusation emerges: the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate. He blames God. You gave me this woman. And he blames the woman. She gave me of the tree.

This is not an isolated move by one man in extremity. It is the characteristic behaviour of fallen man toward God. Why does God not stop wars? Why does God allow suffering? Why does God not prevent this or that? These are all versions of Adam's response: it is your fault, not mine. But the right question is not why does God not stop these things; the right question is why does man do these things. James answers: because of lusts in the members. Everything that man rails against God about traces back to man's own fallen heart. Adam stood before God with the evidence against him and still found a way to fault God. It was your fault. You gave me that woman.

The Chiastic Structure: God's Order of Address

God addressed Adam first (verse 9), then the woman (verse 13), then the serpent (verse 14). Having drawn out the confessions, he then reversed direction in his pronouncements of consequence: first the serpent (verse 14), then the woman (verse 16), then the man (verse 17). The order is Adam – woman – serpent in the questioning, and serpent – woman – Adam in the judgment. This chiastic structure — a deliberate reversal — is one of many such literary structures in the word of God that reflect the care of its divine author. There is also a narrowing of speech as God moves: fewer and fewer words as he proceeds, and no question at all for the serpent. God has no desire to hear from him. He simply pronounces.

Adam, meanwhile, would have heard everything said to the serpent and to the woman before God came back to him. And we will see in verse 15 that faith began to work in Adam's soul as he heard what was said to the serpent. God's announcement to the serpent was not addressed to Adam, but Adam was

listening. The entrance of his word gives light. Adam heard the promise of the coming seed, and he laid hold of it.

The Serpent Cursed: Dust and Degradation

Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field. Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. The serpent evidently had not previously gone on its belly; the curse put it down into that posture. Dust does not mean it literally ate earth for food — the phrase speaks of degradation, a place of the lowest humiliation. In Scripture, dust is consistently associated with the lowest and most abject condition. Lamentations 3:29, he putteth his mouth in the dust — if so be there may be hope, he giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him. In that setting it is a picture of self-humiliation, the deep lowliness of Philippians 2.

The serpent's curse will not be lifted in the millennium. Isaiah 65:25 specifies that while many things are transformed, the serpent's condition remains: dust shall be the serpent's food. Most of the creation's curse is ameliorated in the millennial kingdom; certain things are left as tokens of what happened at the beginning of man's history. The serpent's perpetual eating of dust is one of them. It is interesting also that the worship of the serpent was widespread across ancient cultures — the snake idols of Egypt typically depict the serpent with its head raised, not in the dust. This is itself a contradiction of the word of God. Romans 1 tells us men served the creature rather than the Creator. That the creature they most universally chose to exalt was the one God had most definitively cursed and brought low is entirely fitting.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?