

6. THE COVENANT BROKEN THROUGH THE FALL INTO SIN

We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in a state of integrity and innocence. The Bible tells us in Genesis 2:25, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” We may add: no shame for one another. There was complete openness between Adam and Eve, full trust with nothing to hide. Their relationship was pure, and they lived in harmony and peace.

The text implies also that they felt no shame before *God*. In the next chapter we read how God came down to walk in the garden “in the cool of the day” (3:8). This may very well have been a daily visit in which Adam and Eve rushed to meet their Creator to share with him their excitement and joy, also about the work done in the Lord’s service.

The relationship with God was one of love and trust. There was no fear, for as the apostle John writes later, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” (1 John 4:18). Perfect love existed in paradise.

There was also harmony between man and the animals, who obeyed man’s commands. Adam and Eve freely associated with all the animals and were not threatened by them. In Genesis 1:25 there is a distinction between wild animals and livestock, and we read in Genesis 3:1 that the serpent was one of the wild animals. The word wild here does not mean ferocious and dangerous. It indicates that some animals were by nature more domestic, tending to stay in the vicinity of man, while others roamed far and wide in the fields and the forests. But the animals were not afraid of man, nor did they pose a threat to him.

There was harmony and peace with all and among all.

Questioning the terms of the covenant

We will not discuss the rebellion of the unfaithful angels in heaven and the casting out of Satan from heaven, events which must obviously have taken place before the fall of man into sin. Our focus now is on the tactic Satan uses in seeking

to discredit the covenant of God and thus God himself. His method is to suggest that God is not really honest and fair but uses the arrangement of the covenant to keep man in servitude.

Satan makes use of the serpent, presented as “more crafty than any of the wild animals” (Gen 3:1) and therefore suited for the diabolical purpose. Satan is a master of disguises; he always likes to come camouflaged.

His first line of attack is not outrightly to accuse God, but to sow doubt by questioning God’s fairness and motives. We read in Genesis 3:1: “He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” He gives the impression that man is restricted by God’s covenant law; that it is not a relationship of *love*, but one of exploitation. Rather than giving freedom, God unfairly restricts his children.

This approach is still used today by the devil and his demons. Covenant breakers almost always feel that within God’s covenant they do not have the proper room to operate, to be *themselves*. They turn their freedom in Christ into a licence for the flesh, “to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal 5:13).

Satan’s question sounds innocent and has in it the suggestion of true concern: are you not being short-changed by God? You may not eat of any tree? Yet the question is venomous. And it is remarkable how the woman answers. She says: We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. God has given them abundance. They are free to take and eat. Yes, there is a restriction: God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die” (Gen 3:2, 3).

Here God is vindicated. The woman shows that she fully understands the terms of God’s covenant. She draws the proper consequences: if you may not eat of the tree, do not touch it either. It is simply out of bounds. She has heard the sanction also: disobedience leads to death. The woman shows by her answer that she is aware of what is at stake in the relationship with God.

Denying the depth of the covenant

Satan then takes the matter a step farther and outrightly accuses God of falsehood and deceit. He says boldly: you will not surely die. The sanction [of death] is an idle threat which God cannot even follow up. Mankind can rise above the sanction. Indeed, man can become divine. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4).

The covenant line is: I alone am God, sovereign and almighty; you are my servants whom I love and bless, as my very own children. But Satan’s line is: be your own master. Do not take orders from God, but decide for yourself what is good or evil. Do not let anyone tell you what to do: be truly free. Be yourself!

Satan denies that the covenant of God is one of life and love. He makes a caricature of it, as if it were a means of God to keep mankind under control; as if

it were used to give man the feeling of freedom while he is in fact enslaved. Here the very depth of the covenant as a relationship of love is brutally denied: God does not love you but is (ab)using you. Now love yourself and be your own master!

Christ later referred to this event. He said to the Jewish leaders, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here." Notice Christ's emphasis on love. But the Jews have fallen into the snare of Satan. "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The sin of Judaism is that man wants to serve God in his own manner, securing his own salvation. There is no love for God and his Anointed. Lack of love means hate, and hatred leads to violence and death.

When Adam and Eve took of the fruit of the tree, they indicated that they did not want to live within God's covenant but be their own masters. The fall into sin is nothing less than a wilful breaking of the covenant of love.

Eve first, then Adam

The woman ignores all the danger signs that are obviously present. The fact that a snake can speak should have warned her. Even more, she should have been alerted by the style of reasoning, the knowledge of what God had said, for animals had no such insight. Here is a clear attempt to have her break the covenant of love which God had made, and she could have immediately realized this.

But as the tree became more desirable, she took from it and ate. And we read that she also gave some to her husband, "who was with her," and he ate (Gen 3:6). From the way the events are described, we get the impression that initially Adam was not with the woman when she fell into sin. One might translate: "she gave to her husband with her," and the inference could be that after eating she went to look for her husband and persuaded him to eat of the fruit.

In any case, the woman fell first. We would perhaps not attach much significance to this, were it not for what the apostle Paul wrote later, "And Adam was not the one deceived [i.e. by the snake]; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Tim 2:14).

The apostle makes clear that the woman here ignored the position and task given her in the covenant as a helper for the man. So she became to him a liability instead of being an asset. Paul follows this up with the command that in the church women understand their task and be satisfied with the place assigned to them, for in this way they may fulfill God's covenant demands. Paul's teaching concerning the place of women in the church is not sexist but truly covenantal.

It is also remarkable that the eyes of both of them are opened only after *Adam* has eaten of the forbidden fruit. This is also a covenantal aspect, for Adam was created first, to be the head of his wife, and as leading figure he bears the greater

responsibility. When he has taken and eaten, the fall is an irrevocable reality. The covenant of love is broken.

The consequences of the fall

The Bible does not explain why the fall took place. From a human angle it is inexplicable that man could so resolutely break the covenant of love. We can say that God allowed it to happen, because love is something that cannot be forced but must be freely given. The fall is entirely man's doing and responsibility.

God had taken great care in the creation of Adam and Eve. He had endowed them with many special gifts, given them a wonderful place, and attended to all their needs. He had clearly revealed to them the terms of his covenant. Therefore in no way can the fall into sin be ascribed to God. God deeply hates all sin, forbids it, and takes immediate action to overcome it.

The Bible shows us that the consequence of breaking the covenant is that the relationship of love is disrupted. When God comes to visit his children on the evening of that day, Adam and his wife hide from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. The garden of love has become a hiding-place of fear. When God calls Adam, he answers: I was afraid. There is an immediate distance now between God and man.

When called to account, Adam blames his wife. "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some of the fruit from the tree, and I ate it." By speaking of the woman "you gave me," Adam even implicates God himself. Here it begins: man blames God and his neighbour. The commandment of love is no longer kept.

Eve follows the same procedure: she blames the serpent. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Meanwhile, since the devil has already left, the snake cannot speak and blame Satan. But as the curse over the serpent takes effect, there is also an immediate distance between Adam and the animals.

The harmony of love is broken. God can no longer associate with man as before. Man and woman now live in a ruined relationship. Love will lead to pain in child-bearing. Nature has become hostile to man, and the forces of nature will make it difficult for him to live on the earth. Hard work is the result. The animals will shy away from man, and many will be a constant danger to him. Animals will also devour each other. And death enters into the world of man as the inevitable end after a difficult life.

The consequences of the fall are severe. The way to the tree of life is barred. Sin leads to exile from paradise: "So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:23, 24). Breaking of the covenant leads to exile from God. We see this later in the history of Israel, and we see it also in the judgment of hell, the exile to the outer darkness and the lake of fire. The line of Scripture is clear and consistent.

A glimpse of paradise restored

When we read in Genesis 3 of man going out into a hostile environment, the way back blocked by angels, we are reminded of Christ's victory over satanic temptation in the wilderness. The circumstances of the second Adam are different, and his victory is total and glorious.

We read in Mark 1:12 how the Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert. We know that Christ fasted there for forty days and nights, being afterwards extremely weakened. But he withstood every temptation of the evil one to go against the Word of God. Finally he commanded that Satan depart from him.

We then read in Mark 1:13 these remarkable words, "He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him." For a moment the desert becomes a garden reminiscent of paradise. Christ can associate with the wild animals, who flock to him and pose no threat to him at all. There are no angels who bar the way and flash their swords; they come to *minister* to him.

This passage is a glimpse of the paradise to come, when people, animals, and angels will dwell in peace with one another before the face of God. It will be realized through the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is rightly called the second Adam, and who will restore all things as the Mediator of the covenant of love.

This passage in Mark 1 shows us the unity of the Old and New Testaments: we go from the first Adam to the second, from the old paradise to the new, and all this because of God's covenant of love with us.