

The First Sacrifice by Jeff Strite

Genesis 3:6-3:24

The true story is told of a banquet where a famous religious leader found himself seated next to an extremely beautiful woman who was wearing a gown with a perilously low neckline. He introduced himself to her... and then offered her an apple. She was a little surprised, but he explained with a smile, "Please do take it, Madame. It was only after Eve ate the apple that she became aware of how little she had on."

APPLY: Someone asked me recently:

Why was it, that after Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, the first thing they noticed was that they were naked?

Weren't they ALWAYS naked?

Well, yes.

But before they ate of the tree they didn't think about it.

They were innocent. Their hearts were pure.

Genesis 2:25 says "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame"

ILLUS: Have you ever noticed little children in the summer time? Sometimes they'll strip off all their clothes and run naked across the yard. Have you ever seen them do that?

They're not worried about being naked. They have no shame.

But why?

One commentator noted: "Two-year-olds don't see any difference between (their) face, (their) knees, and the parts of (their) body which we adults insist that (they) cover. Only adults feel that certain parts of the body must be covered. Because those parts are connected with physical lust and passions."

(Chaya Sarah Silberberg, Chabad.org)

You see, before Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, their hearts were pure.

That same scholar noted:

"Their nakedness was innocent and in no way sinful.

They saw no difference between a hand, whose purpose was to do good deeds, a mouth with which one praises God and says kind words to others and the parts of the body which are used to 'be fruitful and multiply.' With every organ they could fulfill the will of God or vice versa so no organ was shameful, nor did anything need to be

covered.”

But once they ate of the fruit... that all changed.

Their hearts were now tainted with sinful thoughts they'd never have considered before.

Jesus said: "... out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Matthew 15:19

You see, there were NO evil thoughts inside them UNTIL they ate of the fruit. But after they'd eaten, the knowledge they gained... shamed them.

And worse than that, their new-found knowledge separated them from God. The final punishment of God upon Adam and Eve was for them to leave His presence:

“(God) drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” Genesis 3:24 (ESV)

God kicked them out!!! He evicted them from their home.

But God didn't completely turn His back on them.

Before God sent them away, He gave them a special gift.

“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”

Genesis 3:21

Now this is interesting for several reasons.

1st – Adam and Eve ALREADY had clothes.

What kind of clothes had Adam and Eve made for themselves? (fig leaves)

Genesis 3:7 tells us that “...they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”

You know I've seen many different kinds of leaves, of various shapes and sizes, but I have yet to see any leaf that I'd feel very comfortable wearing out in public. And apparently, these leaves didn't do much more for Adam and Eve.

When God comes walking in the Garden and they hide themselves. And when God calls out and asks Adam where he's at, Adam replies:

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid BECAUSE I WAS NAKED; so I hid."

Genesis 3:10

Think about that! Up until that moment they thought their fig leaves were doing the job. But suddenly the leaves leave them feeling naked. WHEN did Adam realize his fig

leaves weren't doing the job? (when God came visiting)

It was when Adam found himself in God's presence that he began to realize his man-made coverings weren't enough.

Nakedness has been the symbol of our sinfulness ever since the garden.

Whenever a person's sins are discovered, we say they have been EXPOSED.

Jesus warns us not to be found "naked and exposed" when He comes again.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

Revelation 16:15

Now, people understand this reality. They know their own nakedness... they know their own sin/shame personally. They'll be blithely living their lives, working out in the garden, doing something in the house, or working down at the factory and suddenly it hits them out of the blue: a thought will overwhelm them reminding them of a something they'd said, done or thought in the past that brings a sudden wave of shame over their lives.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote "All of us have thoughts that would shame Hell."

People know their own nakedness.

They just don't want you knowing about it... and so they try to cover that nakedness.

I got to thinking about how people hide their nakedness this past week and there were at least 3 different ways people do this that occurred to me:

1. They try comparing their nakedness to someone else's... kinda like Adam did. "My fig leaves cover up more of my nakedness than yours do!!!
2. Or they'll try hanging out with all the right people – going to church/ belonging to church. I've seen pagans who have become Elders/ Deacons/ Sunday School teachers/ even Preachers. I've seen Pagans try to cover their nakedness by all kinds of religious activities.
3. Then there are others who will skip the religious clothing and just try to get by on their good deeds.

ILLUS: Sometime back I remember a famous billionaire who'd just made a very generous donation to a charity joking that he'd heard that you couldn't buy your way into heaven, but his present donation was a good down payment on a place there.

Now what's interesting about all these folks is that they do everything they can to avoid

getting too close to God. Because once they get too close to God their nakedness becomes obvious.

But this past week I asked myself: how would I KNOW if I'm one of THOSE people? How would I know if I'M the one who's trying to get by covering my sin? How do I know if I'm the one trying to avoid God so my sins won't be exposed?

You see, I'm as prone as the next guy to deceive myself into thinking I've got my sins covered. So, how would I know if I've fooled myself?

The most obvious folks are the ones who say "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian." They may show up periodically for a worship service because ...it's not that important to them to be where God wants them. These folks don't love Jesus. They think they're good enough as they are. Their fig leaves are just fine, thank you.

But the harder ones to spot are the ones who "go to church" regularly. They're highly religious, the regulars at worship. They may even hold positions of prominence in the congregation. In fact, they had a counterpart in the religious community of Jesus' day. Do you remember who these highly religious folks were? (Pharisees)

Jesus told us a parable to help us understand how naked these guys were:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself:

'God, I thank you that I am not like other men— robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

(Going to one side of the stage, I said:)

The Pharisee stood before God and essentially told Him how lucky He was to have this Pharisee in His church. He reminded God of how he was far better than the robbers, evildoers, adulterers... and even this tax-collector.

Then just, in case God missed his point, the Pharisee reminded God of his righteous deeds. Why he fasted twice a week and gave a tithe of everything he made.

Yes sir. God was mighty lucky to have him. His fig leaves were all properly in place.

(Going to other side of the stage, I said:)

Meanwhile, the tax-collector was standing before God... and he didn't feel worthy to even raise his eyes to heaven. He didn't have anything to brag about. He didn't come to praise himself but to seek God's mercy. He realized that – in God's presence – he was as naked as a jaybird and he it was he (not God) who was lucky to be there.

That's the man we want to be like.

We know we've acknowledged our nakedness when we begin to view church as a privilege. When we think of how lucky we are that God not only lets us come to church... but that He lets us LIVE. When we realize how honored we are to have received His love and mercy. And we think about it every day.

THAT'S how we know that we're not one of those people who try to hide behind their fig leaves... because in being like the tax collector we realize we don't have any fig leaves worth anything.

So the 1st intriguing thing about the story of Adam and Eve was that they already had clothes, they just weren't very good clothes because they were man-made.

The 2nd thing that's intriguing here is that God supplied their clothing.

He gave them clothing that He had made for them.

God did it all – they did nothing.

All they did was put the clothes on.

What's intriguing was the KIND of clothing God supplied.

What kind of garments were these that God gave them? (Animal skins)

Genesis 3:21 says "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."

Garments of skin?

Now where would God get garments of skin from? (From an animal)

And how do you get skin off an animal? (It's got to die)

When God killed these animals to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness this was the beginning of animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices were made throughout the Old Testament to pay for sin.

The Law of Moses repeatedly taught the Israelites that every sin that they committed was punishable by death. But since everyone sinned, God allowed them to pay for their sins by offering up a sacrifice of a pure and spotless animal in their place.

Hebrews 9:22 tells us "... the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Leviticus 17:11 taught "...the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

In order for God to give mankind forgiveness... something had to die.

But why would God have an animal die for Adam and Eve?

Well, God had created the animals FOR them.

ILLUS: How many of you have pets? How many of you LIKE those pets?

Imagine being Adam and Eve in the garden. Imagine being down by the stream and having fish nibbling unafraid at your toes because they want to play with you? Or sitting beside a tree with a lion or leopard resting its massive head in your lap wanting you to stroke it and comfort them.

These animals were Adam and Eve's constant companions. They were like pets to the first couple. All the animals in the garden were gentle and loving... and loved by Adam and Eve.

And one of these gentle companions had to die to cover their nakedness.

Throughout the Old Testament God drove home HOW TERRIBLE sin was. Every time a child of God sinned, they were required to offer up a blood sacrifice. In the days of the tabernacle you'd see people lined up at the gate with their sacrifices being offered for things they had done.

Day, after day, after day sacrifices were offered up to God. And these sacrifices cost the life, and the blood, of an innocent animal to pay for THEIR sins.

A price had to be paid.

And blood was the dearest price that could be paid.

Lastly, the animals that God used to make Adam and Eve's garments were the 1st deaths on earth. Nothing else had ever died before this.

And these creatures died at God's hand.

They were literally the first sacrifices ever made in man's history.

One person has rightly noted that God made the first and the last sacrifices for man's sins.

Here in the Garden of Eden, God sacrificed the first innocent animal to cover sin.
And it was on Mount Calvary that God made the last sacrifice of His sinless son to cover our sin.

In the Garden, God supplied Adam and Eve with garments
And on Mt. Calvary He supplied us with our garments.
His gift to them involved the death of an innocent animal.
His gift to us involved the gift of His son... a pure and spotless offering to cover our nakedness

Genesis tells us that God sacrificed those first animals to cover man's nakedness.
But how does God cover our nakedness in the sacrifice of Christ?

That answer is found in Galatians 3:27 "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have CLOTHED yourselves with Christ."

When we were buried in the waters of baptism we were literally wrapped in Jesus. His righteousness covers us like a garment. And that – of course – was the genius of God's design, for when we go down into the waters of baptism we are literally wrapped in the waters, enveloped as in a garment.

But the garment we receive through Jesus Christ was far better than the ones that Adam and Eve were given.

- Their garments would eventually wear out.
- Their garments would eventually be torn and stained
- And their garments would ultimately become shabby and not worth wearing.

But worse than that... the garments God made for Adam and Eve would never allow them back into God's presence. No matter how long they wore them, they'd never be allowed to re-enter the beautiful Garden had prepared for their home.

But when you and I put on Jesus that all changed.

Hebrews 10:14-23 "... by one sacrifice (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more...

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere

heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

Unlike Adam and Eve, the garment Jesus supplied us with gives us the privilege of boldly coming into God’s presence and enjoying His love and compassion on a personal level.

CLOSE:

One last thought: Did Adam and Eve deserve the garments God made for them?

Of course not!

And in the same way, we don’t deserve the garment that covers our sins either.

This is best illustrated the story related by the late Paul Leonard.

He wrote: “My father had died during my Senior year in high school, and my mother had become blind. With her encouragement “I enrolled in the University on the eve of the Great Depression.

By night I was a taxi driver, and during the lunch & dinner hours I waited tables in a campus dining hall. I made enough money to pay my expenses, but I had to always pinch pennies.

At lunch one day I was serving a table where faculty members were seated. As I returned to the table with my tray held high, the unthinkable happened! I slipped on a spot of gravy on the floor and watched helplessly as the plates slid off the tray, spilling onto an especially well-dressed man... one of my professors.

My heart sank. What could I do to atone?

I grabbed a towel to clean up the food, but I only spread the mess over more of my professor’s suit.

He locked his eyes on me and asked, "Mr. Leonard, what are you going to do about this?"

"I’m so sorry sir. I’ll pay to have your suit cleaned," I responded.

"I don’t believe this suit can be dry cleaned, do you?" my professor countered.

It was badly stained. I could tell that. And who was I to question his judgment?

He had every right to be irritated. "Whatever it takes, sir." I answered.

Later that afternoon I sat before the same professor in his engineering class as he did his best to present his normal lecture in something less than what he was used to wearing for his lectures. When the bell rang I heard the dreaded words:

"Paul Leonard, I’d like to speak to you for a moment."

After everyone had left, he said, "Mr. Leonard, I believe it is only fair that you buy me a new suit."

"Yes, sir," I managed to say.

With a knot in my stomach, I agreed to meet him at a Columbus men's store the following day. I recognized the name of the store, an exclusive men's clothier specializing in custom-tailored suits. I also knew that I could cover the expenses only if I were able to make payments over several months of work and scrimping. As I walked in the front door of the finely furnished store, I grew even more apprehensive.

"Oh there you are," my professor remarked.

He had arrived early. He already chosen the fabric and the tailor had already taken measurements. My professor, a regular customer, had apparently vouched for my trustworthiness because the clerk nonchalantly accepted the professor's remark, "Mr. Leonard will be responsible for the bill, as I have indicated."

More than a little disorientated, I turned to follow my professor out of the door. Then he stopped.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked.

"Yes sir," I responded. "It will take time, of course, but I..."

He interrupted me with words directed to the clerk.

"Let's see that Mr. Leonard is fitted for a suit just like mine. And put them both on my bill."

Not only was my debt canceled, but I received what I did not deserve. And my benefactor provided me with more than a suit and an indelible memory. He gave me an encounter with grace.

(The late Paul Leonard told this story about his life that appeared in the Lookout in 1990)