

## God's Restoration of a Dysfunctional Family

2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 06/05/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 3:8-24 Pastor Keith Besel

v.15, [The LORD says to Satan, the serpent,] **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”**

### Introduction

✘ I'd like each of you to think briefly about your family. What was your family like when you were growing up? What is your family like now today? Would you consider yours to be a healthy family or a dysfunctional family?

➔ A forbes.com article from 2019 reported that, “according to recent statistics, 70%-80% of Americans consider their families dysfunctional” (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/soulaimagourani/2019/11/24/what-does-having-a-real-family-mean/?sh=65979d2c1871>).

✘ So, how is a “dysfunctional family” even defined. Well, here's a definition that I have compiled from a number of different sources and authorities on the subject. *A family is dysfunctional when a family does not function in a healthy manner; as God designed and intends parents and children and other members to behave and take part and treat each other. Often there is abuse – whether it is physical, verbal, emotional or some other type of abusive behavior toward one or more members of the family, and frequently un-abused members still encourage or allow such behavior to continue out of fear or to exact control over the abused. It's common that roles get mixed up between adults and children, healthy and regular communication is hindered or non-existent, and any attempts at properly addressing the problem is avoided or refused. It's typical that blame is placed upon others; reactions are defensive and angry; there is undo pressure to do things that are inappropriate or unwanted; discipline is handed out unfairly or in a manner that is excessive for the sin committed; and overall, a healthy attitude of mutual love, forgiveness and respect for all members of the family does not, or rarely exists.*

✘ In our Old Testament Reading this morning, we actually see and hear the actions and attitudes of the very first-ever dysfunctional family. God created family in Genesis 2:24-25 after He created Eve saying, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed”.

➔ You see, before any parent even existed, the LORD set it up that there would be one husband and one wife joined together in the loving, one-flesh union of marriage and they would be loving and nurturing parents of children as the fruit of their love; living in a godly family.

### I. The Diagnosis (with 11 d-words)

✘ But now in the very next chapter, something has drastically changed, hasn't it? We find this healthy and happy family now dysfunctional; ashamed of their nakedness (3:7) and hiding from their loving Creator and God.

➔ But as the story continues in Scripture we learn much more from God's interaction with our first parents.

✘ In fact, we can use 11 d-words to help guide us through the diagnosis of this dysfunctional family; a diagnosis that I'm confident you will find to be quite familiar as you continue to think about your own families as well.

- For the first few words we have to go back to the verses just before our Scripture Reading today and see what happened to get Adam and Eve to the point that we find them hiding from God.
- ✘ The first word is (1) “doubt”. Satan in the form of a serpent tempts Eve to doubt the LORD; to doubt God’s Word; to doubt what He actually said regarding the command not to eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; to doubt His authority and superiority as God; to doubt that He truly does have her best interest at heart. This doubt leads her to commit the very first sin – wanting to be like God; wanting to be her own god.
    - And that leads to (2) “denial” and (3) “defiance” of God as her Father and Lord. When this happens we no longer want to look to God or listen and pay heed to His commands and guidance for how we are to live in His family.
    - This leads Eve and Adam to (4) “disregard” God; that is to ignore and disrespect Him and His Word, which sets them up to selfish (5) “defiance” and (6) “disobedience”; taking the forbidden fruit and eating it. At that moment, Genesis 3:7 says, “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked”.
  - ✘ Now we are at the beginning of our text for today, where the progression and diagnosis of this first dysfunctional family continues. The very fact that Adam and Eve have become ashamed of their actions and of the way that God made them to be in their bodies so that they are now hiding from their loving Father, brings us to the seventh d-word: (7) “distance”. We see people at this stage distancing themselves from God by staying away from worship, no longer opening their Bibles or even thinking about His presence and promises throughout their lives.
    - Yes, they actually (8) “dread” God’s presence as Adam said in verse 10, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself”. Many people, when they have progressed much further into dysfunction, no longer dread the LORD but instead they actually (9) “despise” Him because they see God as a roadblock to getting what they want; as a hindrance to controlling the family; as an unwelcome word of judgment about their true, sinful nature. But Adam and Eve here still experience the all-important fear of God, for deep inside their souls they know they are the reason for the dysfunction that has come into their family.

## II. Loving Confrontation

- ✘ All that has taken place thus far brings us in our text to the point where God begins to address the problem in this first family. Unlike so many of us in our own earthly families, God cannot and will not just ignore the dysfunction – either pretending that it doesn’t even exist or hoping that it will somehow magically go away and repair itself without a change taking place.
  - No, the LORD loves His family, then and now, too much to leave it alone. So what does He do? He lovingly confronts Adam and Eve. Of course, He knows all things. No one – neither Adam and Eve or you or I or anyone in our families can ever hide from God. But still He comes in love and asks, “Where are you?” (v.9).
  - Today He confronts us in His perfect Word of truth; often times using His servants in His Church like pastors and fellow believers and even other family members who know His Word and are seeking to bring it to bear upon dysfunction among us.
- ✘ When God confronts Adam and Eve in their dysfunction, they react with the 10<sup>th</sup> d-word – “defensiveness”. They place blame for their problem in every direction except for where it truly belongs – upon themselves. Adam blames God Himself and Eve in verse 12, “The woman

whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate". Eve blames the serpent and by extension, God as well in verse 13, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate".

→ In the end we come to the final d-word diagnosing this and all dysfunctional families – (11) "division". They/we are divided first from God and also from those closest to us. And try as they might to deny it, Adam and Eve have no one to blame but themselves. They are the ones who have "disavowed" and "disregarded" and "disobeyed" against the very God who lovingly created them and gave them all that they had in perfection.

- ✘ And folks, it is the same with all of us here today as well. It was the same, even for Jesus' earthly family as we saw in our Gospel Reading from Mark 3:21, where they doubted and disregarded His teaching, thinking that He was "out of His mind". It is the same in our families as well – some in more serious ways than others; some more progressed in their dysfunction than others, but all still dysfunctional; all of us steeped in sin.

### III. Loving Consequences

- ✘ And they will all remain that way until they are willing to accept God when He lovingly confronts their dysfunction and sin, and receive even His consequences as an important part of His loving discipline.

→ Yes, true love cannot ignore sin, but must confront it with compassion and boldness, as Hebrews 12:6,10 says, "For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives. ...He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness". Just as He wanted Adam and Eve restored back together with Him, so God wants each of you friends...and those who are in your families restored as well!

- ✘ So, we see in verse 16, that for Eve and all women, because of sin, pain is now a part of bearing children, and they will also desire to have the place of spiritual leadership in the family that should first be exercised by their husband.

→ And in verse 17, for Adam and all men, because of sin, work is now difficult and exhausting in order for us to eat. And thorns and thistles – that is troubles and difficulties constantly sprout up to try and hinder us each day.

→ But the greatest consequence is that now all mankind must die and return to the ground. Yes, life here on earth is no longer the paradise that it was in the Garden of Eden, for the LORD loving removed us all from the possibility of eating from The Tree of Life as long as we remain in our sin and dysfunction, lest sin and dysfunction be our permanent way in eternity.

### IV. Loving Mercy and Grace

- ✘ But just because He removed mankind from the Garden, God did not turn His back on us as so many sinfully accuse Him of doing. No, that was the point of Him keeping us from The Tree of Life while we continue here on earth in our sin and dysfunction.

→ When God confronted Satan in verses 14-15 we see a different approach than we see in His confrontation with Adam and Eve. With them, He hands down consequences that lead to repentance and learning to live again under God's order and according to His plan for our lives. But with Satan, the curse leads to the devil's eternal demise and our eternal salvation.

- ✘ The LORD says that it's all about a promised "offspring" from the woman; that is a particular descendant who would come and do battle with the devil. That battle would result in injury for both. For the Man, His heel would be "bruised". In other words, His injury would not be permanently fatal.

→ But for Satan, his head would be “bruised”. The head, in Hebrew thinking, represented the source of power and authority. This is God’s way of saying to Satan, “You and your evil ways will one day be totally destroyed”.

✘ This is the first promise of Jesus, God’s Son; the promise that even though He would be tortured and die at the hands of evil men, His death would not be permanent. No, His battle would end in complete and eternal victory over Satan, sin, and even death. His blood would mean that the gate would be reopened to The Tree of Life.

→ Revelation 7:14 and 22:14 together declare that through Jesus alone; through His sacrifice and resurrection and through His gift that enables us to believe and trust in His saving work alone, we are cleansed of all sin by His blood, and at our death or upon His return, we now have the gift of the “right to The Tree of Life” in heaven; in God’s restored paradise as a part of His loving, nurturing, compassionate and perfect family forever!

## Conclusion

✘ This is great news; wonderful news isn’t it? In Christ, you and I have been restored to live, no longer dysfunctional and divided from Him, but united with Him, and all other Christian believers, in His family forever!

→ But I know, many of you are probably wondering, “What about my earthly family and its dysfunction?”

✘ Well, just as with Adam and Eve at Creation, in love God doesn’t force obedience to His Word and His plan for how to live in a loving, healthy and caring family as He created it. Neither does He force people to love Him or believe in Him as their Savior and God.

→ But He does come to all people in love; He confronts us with our sin; He disciplines us out of love; He provides us with what we need for this life in the way of food and shelter and clothing and protection and more. He calls us to repentance and offers us the free gift of forgiveness and salvation and restoration through His Son Jesus; through His constant presence and comfort and help in the face of all that this earthly life might throw our way.

✘ He calls us, in faith, to share His Word and serve all others; to love others as He has loved us; to forgive as He has forgiven us – even when they/we don’t deserve it; to treat those around us according to His Word and Commandments and to model a healthy family love in first loving “the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind and with all [our] strength” (Mk. 12:30).

→ Though you can’t force others in your earthly family to live in a healthy and godly way, you can stay connected to the Lord your God in Word and Sacrament and Worship. You can stay connected to your Christian family, and in this way you can rest in the assurance of your place with the Lord.

→ And as with all things, you and I then must leave the rest to the Lord and His powerful work and will. We know that He has restored His dysfunctional family through His Son. He restored Jesus’ earthly family from dysfunction to being pillars in His early Church.

✘ We know He desires all people to come to Him in faith and He has done everything in His Son to make that possible. So today, we rejoice in His grace shown to us; in His restoration of us into His eternal family, and we pray for His help in living our lives here on earth according to His wisdom and will; in His grace. Amen.