

IT'S OUR OWN FAULT

Text: Romans 5:12-19
Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 3 Q7
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I want to spend the next weeks answering the question 'Why do we need Jesus?' Our Mission Statement says *'Hope in the Hills Christian Community is called to bring hope to the hills community by sharing the good news of Jesus through word and action and growing as disciples who make disciples of others.'* That's why we exist as a church. We are here to help our communities find Jesus and become his disciples. But for people to look for Jesus they have to see why they need him. It has to do with the human condition.

You all know that I have a food intolerance condition. This not just something I have to live with. I feel guilty because it's a condition passed on genetically. I have passed on a bit of a curse. My father had food intolerance. I have the condition as well as one brother. I can see the symptoms in a couple of my children. And I see it in a grand child. I can also see some thing else I have passed on, another curse far worse: a sinful nature.

Everyone has a theory as to why there is so much trouble in the world. What is it about human beings that we are always arguing and fighting. We do so much harm to each other and the world in which we live. What is wrong with us? How did we get that way? The Catechism summarises the Bible's view on this. Question 3 talks about *'...coming to know your misery'*. The Bible says there is a God who has created everything. And he has given his law by which we are to live so that that we get the best out of life. It is by failing this law that we have alienated ourselves from God and others. We are supposed to love God with our entire being and love every one else, even ourselves. But instead we have this natural tendency now to do the opposite.

Now Question 6 picks up on this issue of our 'natural tendency' to *'hate God and [our] neighbour'*. If it is a 'natural tendency' then *'...did God create people so wicked and perverse?* If it is a natural tendency is it a design fault by the manufacturer? It's like a previous car I owned. It had to be recalled because all the models like mine had the same defect in the steering. If all of us have this 'natural tendency', is it God's fault as the creator. Actually it is a good question because it is also our 'natural tendency' to blame God for things. You know how it is often said: 'If there is a God and if he is Almighty, then all the wrong and suffering in the world is his fault.' That approach is as old as the hills. Did you notice in the Genesis 3 reading how Adam said *'...the women you put here with me, she gave me some fruit and I ate it.'* The Bible is very emphatic that there was no design fault when God created. Seven times it says in Genesis 1 that *'...God saw all that he had made and it was ...good...it was very good.'* God made us human beings in his own 'image', in his own 'likeness'. He gave us a world to live in and explore, to understand and enjoy and care for on his behalf. God made us to live with him and enjoy his company. Think of the discussions with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day.

Question 7 makes clear that our 'corrupt nature', as it puts it, stems from Adam and Eve. The Bible takes the first chapters of Genesis as history and traces our human problem of sin back to our first parents. Now I am well aware that today many regard us human beings as the product of an evolutionary process. So at best the Adam and Eve story is just a myth to explain our human situation. But Romans 5 makes us realise that we have more than a myth in Genesis 3. The Bible sees Adam as a real person, the first human being who was the representative of the human race. Romans 5 sees Adam as real and as representative as Jesus is. Jesus is called the second Adam. The parallel discussion of Adam and Jesus in Romans 5 implies that if you deny the reality of Adam you would also end up denying the reality of Jesus. If you deny that Adam brought us into sin; verse 12 *"just as sin entered the world through one man"*, so you would end up denying that Jesus brought salvation into the world: verse 17 *"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who received God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."* Paul sees both Adam and Jesus as very real people with very real consequences coming from their lives and actions.

What this parallel between Adam and Jesus points out is that both were our representatives. Jesus represented all who believe in him on the cross. His death and resurrection paid for our sin. So Adam and Eve were our 'first parents' and represented the human race. The decisions that they made affected all of us. The principle of representation is a well established one. It's how we have a functioning government. Our members of parliament form government and they are called upon to represent us and make laws and decisions that are binding on all of us. So with Adam. If Adam had been obedient in the garden they as our representatives would have ensured we would have lived forever, perfectly with God. The point of the test was to have Adam, as our representative, display his love for God. He was to demonstrate of his own free will his desire to obey and worship God. Why is that important? Let me put it this way. I could pay you to be nice to me and be my friend. That might be nice for me. But if you, of your own accord, went out of your way to care for me, and treat me well, that would be very touching for me. Real worship of God is when it comes from our own love for him.

Now, I have heard on numerous occasions some one say, why did God give them that choice, to obey or not to obey? Why didn't God force Adam and Eve to obey and save us all the misery and heartache we have ended up with? The thing is, if God had forced obedience we would not be human beings. We would not be made in his image, able to think and be creative and love God from our own selves. We would be puppets on a string, robots pre-programmed with no individuality. God didn't want robots. He wanted free beings who were responding to his love, people who were responsible, who freely responded to God.

Well, as we know, Adam and Eve failed the test. This is described as '*the fall and disobedience of our first parents*'. Notice the two issues there: fall and disobedience. It was a fall, because instead of going up in the world and 'being like God', Adam and Eve crashed terribly from their grand position with God. We are still of that same calibre. We always want to go up in the world. We want to be God-like on our wealth and power and independence. None of us want to be told. We even have a saying warning of 'pride before the fall'. And how often don't we see highfliers crash and burn. The failure of Adam and Eve is also described as 'disobedience.' Their failure was not due to circumstance. Nor can the blame be shoved onto the devil. Eve tried that one: '*...the serpent deceived me and I ate.*' We still do the same. Far too often we say

'the devil made me do it'. The Bible puts the blame squarely on Adam and Eve, squarely on the human race. All the sin and suffering in our world is the consequence of human rebellion against God.

Now if you were listening you will have noticed how I rolled what Adam and Eve did into what all of us have done. Some one though might want to ask, why should Adam and Eve's disobedience affect me? That was their problem back then. Why hang it on us? Well remember Adam was our representative and our first parent. In that dual capacity his disobedience affected us in two ways. First, Adam as our representative stood in our place in a legal capacity. When he disobeyed God and broke his law, he was declared guilty and the death sentence placed on him. Now, seeing that Adam represented the human race his legal standing is also binding on all of us. We have also been declared guilty. Adam's status is, as the theologians call it, 'imputed' to us. His position before God is also attributed to us.

Now normally when I explain this there is someone who is unhappy with that and feels it is unfair. But think of this: if we insist we are ruggedly individual and that Adam's actions have nothing to do with us, then we can end up denying the system of representation and thus deny our own salvation. Come back with me to Romans 5 where Paul describes Jesus as the second Adam, the representative of the new humanity. If we have faith in Jesus God imputes to us, God attributes to us, Jesus' legal status before God. Which is what? Not guilty! Perfect. Now that really is unfair. At least with Adam as our representative, we might not like his guilt imputed to us, but we sure are sinners ourselves! But if we trust in Jesus, then we are declared not guilty of sin. Our legal status is: 'perfect in the eyes of God'. That is what justification is about, 'just as if I had never sinned'! We are legally perfect. But we sin all the time!

Now I said that Adam and Eve affected us in two ways. One was as our representative in a legal capacity. But Adam and Eve were also our first parents. And like my dad passed on the curse of food intolerance to me and I to my offspring, so we all have a corrupt human nature that has been passed down the generations from Adam and Eve. The Catechism says "*This fall has so poisoned our nature that we are born sinners- corrupt from conception on.*" Remember that God had said to Adam that he would die the day he ate of the tree. Now the central idea of death in the Bible is 'separation'. And that 'death', that 'separation', includes our spiritual separation from

God. It also includes our psychological separation; we are no longer whole as individuals. It involves the antagonism between people. It involves the curse on the creation which is the destruction of the harmony of the earth itself and all the creatures. When Adam disobeyed God this curse, this punishment of death, was imposed on him. His nature, our nature is torn, distorted, corrupted. So if the corrupt nature is passed on then we too are 'corrupt from conception on'. Whenever we have a baptism we ask the question "*Do you believe that your child though sinful by nature right from the beginning of their life and consequently deserving of God's judgement and even eternal death is by God's mercy holy in Christ...?*"

Now admitting these things about our little ones is not always so acceptable. There are those inclined to argue that babies are innocent. That was the teaching of Pelagius who in the first century disputed the teaching we have just stated. He argued that everyone is born with a clean slate. He argued that we do not sin because we are sinners. We are sinless at birth but we learn to sin by imitating those around us. Now it is very true that children and adults learn many things, good and bad, by the modelling of others. But the human problem is far worse than just bad behaviour patterns. We are corrupt in our nature from the moment of conception. That's the point David was making in Psalm 51 when he admitted that he "*...was a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" David in this Psalm is lamenting his sin. What he says builds to a climax. His sin is not just an occasional thing. It is part and parcel of his very nature. The sin in his life was an outward expression of a sinful poisoned nature. In a sense he says 'what else can you expect Lord, I am being true to my corrupt self.'

This Biblical teaching is not pleasant. In fact in our times it is quite unacceptable. The current view in many theories on human nature is that we human beings are the result of evolution, we are basically good, and given good teaching or counselling we can resolve our issues. But can we? We have been at it for thousands of years and still the papers are full of our failings and corruption. Actually, talking of our poisoned natures is the more caring because it makes us realise our need for Jesus. [POWER PONT] Someone once wrote a book entitled: 'Jesus Is The Answer', to which some wit replied by writing: 'If Jesus Is The Answer, What Is The Question?' Why in the world would your friends and mine respond to our call to come to know Jesus if they don't see that there is a God, a God we have failed? The amazing grace of God is seen in Jesus being

the second Adam. He represented us and carried our sin on the cross. Through faith God declares us forgiven. Jesus' righteousness is granted to us and through the power of the Spirit our corrupt nature is being changed to be more like Jesus. We need to see how bad we are to see how good God is! I don't know how to stop my family genetically passing on food intolerance. But I do know God has provided that answer to the passing on of a corrupt sinful nature. His name is Jesus.