

## Leadership And Covenants (Part Seven)

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It is time to become reacquainted with an old friend. “Friend” may not be the correct term, but we normally feel very comfortable with it. In fact, we feel close to this friend because we have known it intimately since birth. We strongly desire to protect this friend’s reputation, and if accusations come its way, we do our best to shield it. We will try hard not to lose this friendship and will even resist those who urge us to rid ourselves of it.

This friend makes every effort to maintain its closeness to us. Sometimes the closeness is so constricting that it is tantamount to enslavement, persuading us that anything of true spirituality is not in our best interests. It tries to convince us that what is important is our enjoyment of life right now. It endears itself to us by suggesting that we are more important than we actually are. This friend will stick with us all the way to our final breath.

Most of us are aware that this friend has a weakness: It is shortsighted. It does not care to think much about the thoughts, words, and deeds it urges us to involve ourselves in. It reasons that the immediate reward is well worth any risk that may arise in the long run. It will argue that someone we know did what it wants us to do all his life, and it never affected him adversely. The friend seems ignorant of the reality that life would be better without that potentially dangerous practice, instead trusting the positive things other people say about it. It puts great stock in what other people say.

Romans 8:7 describes our friend in this way: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” The Greek word underlying “carnal” is *sarx*, which *Strong’s Concordance* says refers literally to the meaty part of an animal or man. However, it has several figurative usages that commonly appear in the Bible.

### Flesh and Spirit

*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* adds that *sarx* “is either the equivalent of the English word ‘material’ or describes human nature when under the domination of its lower, unregenerate impulses.” “Carnal” describes the way we humans think and act without the influence of God’s Holy Spirit that we receive when we are called, repent, and are converted. The carnal mind focuses on using circumstances in life to please the self.

In many modern translations, *sarx* is often rendered as “flesh,” its literal meaning. In the context of Romans 8, it is translated as such in the New King James Version to clarify that spiritually, there are two classes of people. Those who live according to the flesh allow their lives to be determined by their sinful nature. They set their minds on—are most deeply interested in, constantly talk about, engage in, and glory in—things that pertain to the self.

Those in the other category live according to the Spirit. They submit to the Holy Spirit’s influences, concentrating their attention on, specializing in, and choosing what is important to God’s Holy Spirit. In the conflicts between the pulls of the flesh and the influences of God, the first group sides with the self, and the second group sides with God, despite knowing that choosing that way may entail considerable sacrifice.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds church members that it is impossible to be on both sides at once. This choice is basic to our attitudes and sets the direction of our lives: We are either on God's side or sinful human nature's side. If a person persists in siding with the flesh, which is worldliness, then he must expect the world's doom. Conversely, if the things of God and His Kingdom are a person's chief concern, he can expect God's love to be shed abroad in his heart (Romans 5:5) and his future to be full of unspeakable joy, as Paul later declares.

In the apostle Paul's writings, "flesh" clearly indicates spiritual weakness. He teaches us that a person living by the flesh cannot be justified before God or please Him because the flesh does not appreciate God's priorities. Living with a fleshly outlook leaves an individual vulnerable to the power of sin to excite him to temptations, self-gratification, pride, pursuit of praise, envy, selfishness, impatience, and a definite unwillingness to sacrifice for spiritual well-being. As Paul teaches, the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak because it is not inclined to believe God.

It is the flesh, stirred to action by Satan, that drives this world. Even so, we must be clear on an important truth: Satan cannot make us sin. Scripture says unequivocally that the sins committed belong to those who committed them. Adam's and Eve's sins were not forced by Satan. He reasoned with Eve, and she chose to believe what he suggested and then transgressed. Neither was Adam forced by Satan to sin, nor was he deceived as she was. He chose to follow his wife into sin without Satan's arm-twisting.

Romans 8:5-8 from *The Living Bible* will help summarize this subject:

Those who let themselves be controlled by their lower natures live only to please themselves, but those who follow after the Holy Spirit find themselves doing those things that please God. Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace, but following after the old nature leads to death, because the old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God's laws and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their old sinful selves, bent on following their old evil desires, can never please God.

### **Seeking God and Charity**

This series of articles on leadership and the biblical covenants is not aimed at those who are of this world, the unconverted, but at those already convicted that the Kingdom of God is their life's goal, yet who also desire more clarity in understanding God's guidance toward it. Scripture, the only accurate resource that a faithful person can always trust, commands us to seek God and His way.

My hope is that these articles will firmly establish in us a worldview that will support us through the time leading to the return of Christ, a period crowded with events that may confuse us in terms of the direction our lives should take. The coming confusion may affect our decision-making to the point that choosing correctly may be stressful and difficult because we fear making a wrong decision. We must not allow our faith in God to crumble under the pressure.

In Part Six, we observed the institution of marriage by God, the original innocent and pure state of Adam and Eve's relationship with Him, and their initial sins that exposed both their lack of faith in God's Word and the strength of their self-centered disloyalty toward Him. This teaches that actively trusting Him rather than ourselves and other humans is the converted person's central issue of life.

In addition, we observed the initial effects of the judgments God imposed on them, which is important to us because they remain in effect to this day. Because God did not destroy everything He created when Adam and Eve broke faith with Him, we are correct in concluding that He anticipated their sins, and His creative purpose moved forward. This is encouraging because what God reveals of His purpose is glorious. Because He finishes what He starts and actively rules His creation, this can be a source of hope to those who believe Him.

### **Regarding Nakedness**

Vital and helpful knowledge, centering on Adam's and Eve's physical nakedness when they were created, can be gleaned by comparing their relationship with God before and after their sins. Understanding this helps in understanding our spiritual nakedness before God.

Genesis 2:25 reads, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." This statement acts as a bridge, connecting directly to mankind's first sins, exposed in Genesis 3. Their nakedness played a revealing role, instructing us about what happens when we sin. Undoubtedly, their nakedness in verse 25 was literal, not merely figurative.

Combined, the terms "naked" and "nakedness" are used 104 times in Scripture, a high number for fairly uncommon words, indicating their importance. Depending on the context, the terms can figuratively indicate innocence, defenselessness, vulnerability, helplessness, humiliation, shame, guilt, or judgment.

At times, nakedness may indicate several qualities within the same context or even within the same sentence, the different figures adding clarity to our understanding. A person may have to read the context carefully to grasp how God is specifically using it. In Genesis 2:25, He is using this distinctive illustration to portray Adam and Eve's innocence and purity of conduct. In Isaiah 47:1-3, Jeremiah 13:26, and Ezekiel 16:37, nakedness emphasizes Israel's and Babylon's significant declines, falls from being seen as respectable national powers to being judged as despicable prostitutes by all who beheld them among the nations. They became objects of wondering scorn rather than of emulation.

### **Seeing Nakedness for the First Time**

The context involving nakedness continues in Genesis 3:7-11:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound 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 among the trees of the garden.

Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

A reason God asked the questions of Adam was to make those of us reading this think about the subject of nakedness as it applies to its scriptural use and thus to our spiritual life. The answer is obvious: Nobody told them. Before their sins, they were naked, but they were not aware of their

nakedness. They simply accepted it as normal; they saw nothing unusual about it because they were naked from their first awareness of being alive.

This contains a vital lesson, one that is either never learned or quickly forgotten after being made aware of it. When Adam and Eve sinned, the first apparent result to them, the sinners, was that they were immediately aware of their nakedness. In this novel way, their proclivity to sin was exposed to them. Their innocence was forever destroyed.

A change happened in their minds or hearts, with no effort on their part. God created this reaction in them to bring an awareness of sin to their consciences, and guilt and fear became part of their “normal” makeup. Knowing immediately that God was aware of what they had done, fear entered their perception of themselves and their relationships. They no longer looked at others and events with their former innocence. Their reaction to all this was pathetic, making clothing of fig leaves, as if to cover their sin, and hiding from God after hearing His voice.

God is teaching this object lesson to those who are part of His new spiritual creation so they can be aware of their spiritual deficiencies. Consider the typical reaction people have when exceeding the speed limit on the highway and suddenly discovering a patrol officer with a radar gun clocking the speed of those passing his position. Similarly, most people resent the cameras that governing authorities have installed throughout cities to enable them to watch what is going on. Psychologists tell us most people become irritated when stared at.

Why do people react this way? Those under observation, believing their lives are being inspected, fear what the observers will learn. They feel exposed; they may even feel naked, though they are fully clothed. Yet, rioters have no qualms about breaking into a store and looting whatever is not nailed down because they know they can easily get away with their thievery since the authorities’ attention is elsewhere. It is as if they and their sins are invisible. Many people steal because they believe no one is watching. How wrong they are! Not only is God watching, but their own conscience is too.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they had done nothing wrong. Even before God, they had nothing to be embarrassed about. This points to a safe conclusion that God had instructed them thoroughly about the Two Trees. If they had not been taught, they would have had no understanding that their actions were wrong (Romans 3:20). The moral perfection of both was erased in an instant.

We can deduce another effect of their sin: It changed their attitudes toward each other. Besides God and the Serpent, Adam and Eve were the only ones around, and when they sinned, God was nowhere in sight. Despite there being only the two of them, the awareness of their nakedness motivated them to cover up in the presence of each other. Before their sins, they were not aware of either their own or the other’s nakedness. If there was no sense of shame or embarrassment between them, why cover up? Yet, with sin, their attitudes toward each other had changed. It is as if each felt their nakedness needed to be hidden from the other. Humiliation, too, now appears to be a part of their relationship. Their untainted feelings for each other that had existed since their creation began to turn immediately.

Hebrews 4:12-14 provides a foundation for a major spiritual lesson for us. It offers both comfort and motivation for a vibrant spiritual life, which will bring glory to God:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Is our faith in God's existence of such clarity and strength that we know that we stand spiritually naked before Him in every circumstance in life? Our fear of Him should not be terror but a profound respect that motivates us to bring honor to Him always. He is not our enemy but our Savior. He is striving, not to "catch us in the act," but to spare us from the destructions of sin, which, as we saw in the example of Adam and Eve, changes the heart in an evil direction. Consider how mercifully He dealt with them when He could have obliterated them. That same, unchanging God deals with us in the lives we live before Him.

Genesis 2:25 provides a clear picture of how things began in Eden. Revelation 19:7-8 reveals how God desires things to end:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Sin exposed Adam and Eve. Righteousness will clothe us, and that is a fitting end.

### **Sin Does Not Matter?**

One of the most prominent aspects of mankind's first sin is that in one sense, nothing spectacular happened at all. Lightning did not flash, and thunder did not crash and reverberate through the sky. There was no great earthquake; no huge crevasse opened at their feet and threaten to swallow them. We can take a lesson from this too: Most sins occur beyond the sight and hearing of others, and most people take pains to hide them.

Taking pains to hide one's sins suggests that if no one sees them, a person can get away with them, and nobody is the wiser. Even with this first sin, time seemed to move on as though nothing happened—despite being one of the most momentous events in mankind's history, affecting everybody born since! Our first parents' sins are the first indication that no sin is done in a vacuum, that a sin can be committed that affects nobody else. In Scripture, sin is typified by leavening. No one must induce leaven to do what God created it to do. Like yeast, sin spreads and infects others.

This process also sets a pattern for God's reaction to sins that we commit. There is almost never any outward indication that one sins. Notice that God called out to them in the cool of the day, suggesting the passage of some time since the sin occurred. It was certainly after they had time to dress themselves in fig leaves. Perhaps God called out to them in late afternoon or early evening.

God certainly did not arrive on the scene in a terrifying manner—with fire, hailstorm, and thunder. Apparently, He was calmly walking. But notice that the Bible indicates that Adam and Eve reacted in terror of meeting with Him. The knowledge of their sin against their wonderful Creator filled them with great anxiety, to say the least. The sins were working internally, creating stresses in anticipation of His reaction. They knew enough about His character to know they had done wrong, and despite knowing they could not hide from Him, they nonetheless still attempted to do it.

### **The Adamic Covenant**

Researchers disagree as to whether a second covenant with mankind resulted when God imposed His judgments as penalties for Adam's and Eve's sins. Life went on, but there is no doubt that the environment within which Adam and Eve and all their progeny lived changed dramatically. The judgments indeed changed life almost completely.

Those who believe the sins did instigate a second covenant name it the "Adamic Covenant." Perhaps this covenant could be identified as the "Edenic Covenant, Part Two." This would indicate the judgmental additions are attached, but that the requirements of the Edenic Covenant continue.

Some aspects of the curses God imposed will not be lifted until His purposes for mankind are completed, despite Jesus Christ being on earth governing all nations for some of the time. However, His presence governing humanity will greatly mute many of the curses' effects.

The judgments God imposed altered the living environment Adam and Eve were to live within. That environment is the state into which we are born. Their sins have made life considerably more difficult than it was beforehand. In this is a broad lesson for everyone: Sin never makes life better. It has only one overall effect: It destroys the beauty and rhythm of life as God intended for humanity.

In Romans 8:18-25, the apostle Paul personifies our natural environment to help us understand what was imposed on it by God's judgments:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

It is apparent to all who believe the Bible that, like Adam and Eve, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). To some degree, then, we share guilt with them. But because of our merciful calling from God, we are granted the hope of seeing the curses lifted and are urged to persevere, for they will indeed begin to be lifted when our Savior returns. Meanwhile, the curses continue affecting life to this very day.

Further understanding can be gained from Adam and Eve's anticipation of God's reaction following their sins, as well as God's revealed attitude in imposing the judgments. First, though, we must take into consideration the indisputable fact that Adam and Eve knew God in a way few others have. They already had a walking-and-talking relationship with Him. They were also greatly gifted, bringing Jesus' principle in Luke 12:47-48 into play:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.

This places them somewhat in the position of converted persons: forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, within a relationship with Him, justified, and having Christ's imputed righteousness. This is not a perfect match, but there are similarities because of their gifting, their relationship with God, and their innocence. Even with all they had working for them, they still sinned. How strong is the influence of human nature! We must resist it lest we, too, fall into sin.

A vivid example of mankind's persistence to continue in sin is that of Jonah's repeated attempts to flee from doing a job God assigned him. Nevertheless, God eventually got through to him. Have we sufficiently learned the lesson Paul lays before us in II Corinthians 5:10, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ? We would do well to keep in mind that our names will be called for judgment, as were Adam's and Eve's. We, like them, will be impelled to respond.

Consider how aware God is of our conduct:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me, If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.  
(Psalm 139:7-12)

David writes this psalm in a positive sense, showing God's ever-present kindness and mercy, but the same awareness could be used negatively. God's judgment can be rendered either of two ways: He could show mercy, or should He choose to do so, He has overwhelming evidence to convict us of the death penalty and justifiably carry out the curse of the law.

### **The Rise of Self-Justification**

By the time God calls us to account for our conduct, we will fully realize that we cannot hide from His awareness. Do we even now grasp this fact at anywhere near the level Adam and Eve did when they sinned? At that point, devastating effects began to unfold, even though nothing appeared to happen. The effects silently involved every person born from then on. Death is tragic, yes, but we must learn that the tragedy of death is *earned* (Romans 6:23).

If we were to watch a stage play of what happened from Genesis 1:1-3:9, it would unfold something like this:

- » The creation scene would come first, in which God would be alone but intensely active at what He is producing.
- » The second scene would be a domestic one, portraying God preparing Adam and Eve in the Garden to live for the benefit of each other and to fill the earth with their children. There would be no indication of shame in their nakedness.
- » The third scene would feature Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. It would include the temptation and their life-changing dirty deed.

» The fourth scene would have a somber, judicial tone, and it would involve God, Adam, Eve, and Satan. By itself, it would have four parts: an arraignment of Adam, Eve, and Satan; God's examination of them; His sentencing of them; and finally, God pronouncing His judgments.

In Genesis 3:11-13, the arraignment has already taken place, and some questioning follows. God's questions are not asked to gain more information; He already knows the answers.

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

God asks the questions to impress them on their minds, allowing them to convict themselves with their thoughtful and honest answers. Honest, yes, and very revealing. Both cast a measure of blame away from themselves. They plainly believe that they are not to blame and should not bear full responsibility for their transgressions.

Thus began mankind's practice of self-justification in defense of sin. But neither Satan nor anyone else made them sin. Nobody twisted their arms. Notice how the sin of self-justification intensifies the original sin. By attempting to dodge responsibility, claiming that circumstances made them sin, they compounded their sin by lying.

Adam's sin is particularly egregious, blaming God's gift to him, Eve, whom he had held in such high regard just moments before. In a somewhat roundabout manner, he is blaming God, essentially saying, "God, if you hadn't given me this woman, I wouldn't have sinned!"

Similarly, Eve says, "If you hadn't allowed that Serpent into the Garden, I wouldn't have sinned." Today, we might say that it is in our genes to sin; that we grew up in a bad neighborhood; that our parents failed to teach us; or that our father or mother was a drug addict or alcoholic. Some of those circumstances may be true, but they do not *make* us sin.

God is teaching us that, regarding sin, circumstances offer us little assistance in God's judgment. Should a situation that invites sin arise, it is our responsibility to exercise faith and control ourselves, remaining in alignment with God's righteousness. When he told his audience that he had done something wrong, comedian Flip Wilson claimed, "The Devil made me do it!" and everybody laughed. But that, too, is simply a backhanded way of blaming God, as He created the angelic being who became the Devil.

We have learned a great deal so far from the context of humanity's first sin, and there is still more. However, we can reach a couple of brief conclusions from our evaluation of Adam and Eve's experience:

First, if we do not honestly and fully accept responsibility for our sins before God, we will surely reap their grim effects. Sin's fruit, regardless of the circumstances in which it is committed, is always the same. When sin occurs in the course of history makes no difference. Adam and Eve's sins



occurred at the outset of mankind's history, and they are still affecting us. Not every sin has this level of power, but the potential exists. Besides the death of the sinner, like leaven, sin's effect is to spread from its initial point of origin.

Second, as shown by Adam's and Eve's excuses, self-justification tends to blind us to God's goodness, His gifts, because it intensifies what originally occurred. In our haste to absolve ourselves, we forget things that God has provided us: life itself, a mind that can gather information, the ability to reason, the ability to remember, and a spirit that, not only makes us human, but confers the potential to be like God. Adam's blaming of God for His gift of Eve reveals his horrendous ingratitude for what he had been given.