

Alienation

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As humans, we crave a sense of belonging. We have been built to receive and give love. We have been made to engage in meaningful relationships. All of this can be recognized by God's characterization of Adam's existence: "It is not good for man to be alone..." (Gen. 2:18). In response to Adam's solitude, He made woman.

After Adam and Eve were made, God instructed them to procreate and exercise stewardship of the earth. They lived a fulfilling life. Sadly, this contentment was disrupted by sin. Belonging and fulfillment were replaced with overwhelming alienation.

Alienation is defined as, "the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved" (Google Dictionary). Sin causes alienation. Sin estranges us from our relationship with God and one another. The state of alienation is vast. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve experienced four types of alienation.

Four Types of Alienation

1. Spiritual alienation. This is perhaps the most noted form of alienation in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship with God drastically changed. God is holy; yet, they had become unholy through sin. They could no longer be in His presence; therefore, they were exiled from the Garden.

In the New Testament, Paul explains how sin alienates us from the presence of God. Sin brings death to our relationship with God. Sin prevents us from experiencing the blessings of a relationship with God (Eph. 2:1-3, 11-12). Sin obliterates hope for eternal life in the presence of God.

2. Psychological alienation. After Adam and Eve sinned, the Bible says their "eyes were opened and they knew they were naked..." (Gen. 3:7). Then, they hid from God. They did something wrong and were embarrassed.

Sin affects us personally. Sin changes our hearts. Sin reshapes our personality. Sin dehumanizes us. Sin alters us to our core. Sin affects us psychologically through shame and guilt.

There are few psychological conditions as overwhelming as shame and guilt. They can be paralyzing. It appears this was the condition in which God found Adam and Eve.

3. Social alienation. Sin disrupts our relationship with God; however, sin can also disrupt our relationships with other people. The psychological alienation of shame produces social alienation. Sin changed the quality of Adam and Eve's relationship. Sin affected how they co-existed. For example, before their sin, Adam and Eve lived "naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25). But then, after they sinned, they attempted to cover their bodies with fig leaves (Gen. 3:7).

God created us to be relational with Him and each other. Therefore, sin will tear apart relationships. Sin will cause divorce. Sin will cause siblings to hate each other. Sin will make someone a social pariah. The psycho-social alienation of sin will eat us alive.

4. Environmental alienation. All forms of alienation represent the consequences of sin. After the sin of Adam and Eve was exposed, God punished them. The punishment Adam and Eve were given continues to be felt today. For example, God cursed the ground (Gen. 3:17). This was done to make cultivating the earth difficult for Adam. However, the ground being cursed by God had a significant impact on man's relationship with the environment.

Sin brought disorder to the environment. This explains why we experience calamities in nature like tornadoes and hurricanes. Ironically, we refer to weather events as "acts of God." Living in the natural world was made harsh because of man's sin.

Ending Our Alienation

There is no more isolating a condition than alienation. It was not good for man to be alone in the Beginning and it is not good for man to be alone today. As long as we live in sin, we will remain alone.

There is no hope in the alienation of sin. Nothing good will come of it. We can do nothing to end it. Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. They tried to cover themselves to resolve their shame; yet, their attempts were futile. The restoration they craved could only be gained through God. Today, the only hope we have to end our alienation is for God to rescue us. Only God's grace can end to our alienation.

God can save us from our alienation through His Son, Jesus. The Gospel is our rescue. The Gospel can reconcile us to God and one another. In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul explains how Gentiles were once dead in their sin. They were alienated from God's family and without hope. Yet, by the grace of God, they were given new life and new status. Ephesians chapter two makes the following points:

1. Sin separates and kills (2:1-3).
2. God's grace mercifully gives new life (2:4-7).
3. God's grace is effective when we believe the Gospel (2:8).
4. Our obedience does not entitle us to salvation (2:9-10).
5. The blood of Christ makes peace for us with God (2:11-16).
6. God's grace ends our alienation and welcomes us into the family of God (2:17-22).

Conclusion

Alienation is a depressing topic. Yet, we can relate to it. We have all sinned and experienced the consequences. Therefore, we must make a decision about the Gospel. We can continue to be alienated from God and all the goodness He wants us to experience, or we can choose grace.

By faith in God's grace, our sins can be forgiven. We can become part of God's family. We can begin the process of renewal within ourselves. We can begin to rebuild our reputation and repair relationships. We can find stability in a calamitous world of uncertainty. The choice is ours.