

Exit from Eden

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series on *Understanding Man* we have been attempting to discover the principles of true psychology and true anthropology, i.e., the study of man. It is by these biblical principles that all secular studies ultimately must be measured, for here is the revelation of things as they really are with respect to mankind. Also, counseling on problems which may arise in marriage or in the home must ultimately be governed by the principles found in this passage.

Beginning next Sunday we shall start a new series with Chapter 4, entitled *Understanding Society*. In these next chapters we shall be looking at the fundamental principles of sociology, the science of society, trying to grasp the biblical basis for understanding civilization and history. These should prove to be fascinating chapters. But now we shall take the last few verses of Chapter 3, the exit from Eden. We must see these verses and the incidents related in connection with the whole story of the Fall. Otherwise we shall miss the true significance of these incidents.

We have already seen that this whole story of the Fall is a prototype, an original pattern, of the process of temptation, of yielding to temptation, repentance and restoration, of any individual who has ever lived since that time. In other words, we all live in this third chapter of Genesis. We who know Christ are continually reproducing this process in our lives. All men, without exception, are reproducing it in its initial steps of temptation and fall, and the subsequent death that enters in. This universal experience is proof of the biblical claim that we are all children of Adam, descendants of the pair who opened the story of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

We need to see this whole process very clearly in order to understand this last scene. We can gather up what we have learned so far in a few words, if you will bear with me in a moment of review:

1. So far we have looked at the process of temptation, which consisted of the arousing of desire, the rationalizing of that desire by the mind, and thus the moving of the will to an act of disobedience. This is always, and forever, the process that temptation follows.
2. Then we saw how the account immediately records the fact that death entered the scene. What the Bible means by death is far more than simply the ending of life, becoming a corpse. Death, in the sense this account reveals, is first a very vivid feeling of self-consciousness. We are made immediately aware of ourselves, and this brings with it an accompaniment of shame, guilt, and fear. Along with that there is a sense of defensiveness, a desire to blame somebody else, and then a great sense of loss or limitation, an enslavement, follows. These were inevitable after Adam's sin, and they still are, just as this story outlines.
3. The next step is that of repentance. Recall that we traced through how God, in grace, skill, and tenderness, leads this guilty pair back along the path they have come, and helps them to see what they have done. Repentance consists of two things.
 - First, the awareness of the course of temptation. It comes from within. God helps Adam to see that – that it arose not from anything outside him but from something within.
 - Second, the pair acknowledge the fact of their disobedience. They both come to the place where they say, "Yes, we ate."
4. The next step is that of the manifestation of God's grace, a promise given of grace. There

is the announcement of defeat for the Tempter and judgment upon him; then the provision of certain helps to the man and woman to keep them clinging in dependence upon God – which is the only place of safety, the only place of security and strength in life. These helps are pain, subjection, toil, and death.

That brings us now to the last three steps of the process traced in this chapter, and these three are extremely significant. What happens after God acts in grace to give a great promise and to set (as we saw last time) “sheep dogs” nipping at the heels of mankind to bring individuals into the place of blessing?

The first thing, we will note, in Verse 20, is **an act of faith on Adam’s part:**

**The man called his wife’s name Eve,
because she was the mother of all living.
{Gen 3:20 RSV}**

In order to understand that we must link it immediately with Verse 15, where we have God’s statement to the serpent about the woman: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” That is dealing with the woman’s issue, the seed of the woman. Verse 20 deals with the same. The woman is to become “the mother of all living.” In response to this promise of a seed to come through the woman, Adam changes his wife’s name. In the beginning, her name was not Eve (is it not strange that we never refer to her as anything but Eve?) but Adam called her *Ishsha* which is the Hebrew for “woman.” In Verse 23 of Chapter 2 you will note this was the case.

**Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called *Ishsha* [Woman],
because she was taken out of *Ish*
[Man].” {Gen 2:23 RSV}**

He called her, “Out of Man,” and that was her original name. Now he changes her name to *Chavah*, which means “life.” He first called her “Out of Man,” but now because of God’s promise, he calls her “Life,” which is the meaning of the word

Eve. Our English word, *Eve*, is simply an anglicization of this Hebrew word, *Chavah*.

Ordinarily Verse 20 is taken to indicate Adam’s understanding that a race of men and women are to come from Eve, thus, she is to be the mother of all living. But that was rather obvious from the beginning. Adam and Eve knew that they were to be mother and father of a race, because God had told them to multiply and fill the earth. But here, you will notice, this verse immediately follows the announcement that the ultimate doom of man is death. God has said to Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return,” and Adam understands, from that, that he is now to become the father of a doomed race, that, because of his sin, that which he begets is doomed to death from the moment of birth. How certainly we know the truth of this. We begin to die the moment we are born, and the process goes on until it results in the inevitable conclusion of the grave.

I am always faintly amused by the optimistic reports of the medical profession about the present increase of life span, though I am sure this is progress and is something good. But there is always the implication that ultimately we are going to win this battle. Yet the interesting thing is that though we have won great victories in the medical field, the death rate has remained exactly what it has been for centuries – a flat 100%.

Adam realizes that this is true. But if you read carefully here you will notice something important: Adam changes the name of his wife because Eve has heard God’s promise and believed it. This is the only possible explanation for Verse 20. When a human being, guilty in sin, believes the promise of God, truly believes it, he or she passes immediately from death unto life. In recognition of that change, Adam calls his wife’s name, “Life,” because she has passed from death unto life. “Therefore,” he says, “she is the mother of all living,” i.e., the first of a long line of those who would pass from death unto life. This ties in exactly with the promise of the seed of the woman which would ultimately come and which would bruise the serpent’s head. All those associated with Christ become part of this redeemed humanity, which is the seed of the woman, and Eve was the first of that line. If we could see the roster of the redeemed it would be interesting to note that it is not in alphabetical order: Adam is not first; Eve is.

All this is exactly in line with the significance of a change of name throughout the rest of the Bible. Have you noticed how many times biblical characters change their name, and always with this same significance? It means that a person has also changed his nature, changed his character. He has become a different person:

- A bit later in Genesis we learn that God changed the name of Abram to Abraham, and the name of Abram's wife, Sarai, to Sarah. These names are significant.
- Later, also, he changed the name of Jacob (which means a supplanter, a usurper) to Israel (which means a prince with God). It is always God who changes these names.
- In the New Testament, our Lord changed the name of Simon, the brother of Andrew, to Peter, because he said he would become like a rock, which Peter means.
- He also changed other names. Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul, which means "little." He lost his conceit and became little in his own eyes and so his name was changed to Paul.

Thus you have all through the Scriptures this significant change of name. It always refers to something which had occurred within, which has changed the whole nature of the person. So this is therefore not a promise that Eve was to become the mother of a race of literal human beings; this is the promise, rather, that she is to be the mother of those who would find life through Jesus Christ.

Thus the immediate response to the promise of God is an act of faith on Adam's part. After all, this is the only proper response to a promise: to believe it and to act on it. And that is what Adam did.

Throughout this whole account in this chapter there are only two things that man can, and does, do, with regard to the problem of sin – he repents, and he believes. That is all. He exercises repentance and faith. Throughout the rest of the Bible, repentance and faith are the means by which the problem of human evil is handled – repentance, an acknowledgment of the facts – and faith, a laying

hold of the promise of God by an act of the will. It is thus that man lays hold of God's grace.

Now the divine activity begins again. **The next step** is found in Verse 21:

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. {Gen 3:21 RSV}

We have already noted the significance of this in part. We saw that this was a sign of God's redemptive activity. With the sacrifice of another's life, he clothed Adam and Eve. In Paul's beautifully expressive phrase in Ephesians, it is a picture of how we are "accepted in the Beloved One," {cf, Eph 1:6}. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We are given his standing before the Father. All this is beautifully pictured by this account.

But notice why the clothing is required. Clothing is not required for God's benefit. It does not make any difference to God that Adam and Eve are naked. In fact, as Hebrews tells us, we are all always naked before God – everything is naked and open in his sight {cf, Heb 4:13}. It is not God who requires this clothing, nor is it Adam and Eve, though it may have bothered them to be naked before God in their fallen condition, but it is because of the others who would see them that they are clothed. Clothing is for public appearance. God desires that the mark of his acceptance and acknowledgment of them be manifest to the whole universe. That is why Adam and Eve are clothed, and this is the primary purpose of clothing.

We are concerned about clothing today, because it makes us acceptable in the eyes of others. We feel that we look better, and others think so too. Remember that in the story of the prodigal son, in the New Testament, the first thing the father did when the son returned home was to clothe him with a new robe. It is a public mark of acceptance, a public demonstration that he was back in full favor with his father. Also, in the story of the healing of the demoniac of Gadara, we are told that the Lord cast many demons out of this man, a legion of devils. When the disciples returned to the Lord they found the former demoniac sitting at the feet of Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind," {Mark 5:15, Luke 8:35}. That clothing is a significant expression of his return to normalcy.

The importance of clothing in its symbolic significance was underscored to me only the other day. I was driving down the street near here just as the youngsters were getting out of high school. I passed by three boys who were walking down the street (at least I thought they were boys). They had long hair down to their shoulders and rather grubby clothes on. Two of them were not so bad, but one of them was in a terrible state. His clothes were filthy, his hair was matted and dirty, and it was, I confess, revolting to me to look at him. But it set me to thinking. What makes these youngsters dress this way? Why are they so fiercely determined about it? Why is it so important to them that they must defy authorities and customs and traditions in order to dress in this fashion? As I thought on it (I had just been working on this passage) I recalled this story of when man was clothed by God. I saw immediately that what lies behind the fierce desire of young people to dress in these weird fashions is that clothing reflects the inner condition of the heart. We want our clothing to be expressive of what we are. Hippy dress is therefore an attempt, in some sense, to be honest.

When I thought of it that way I could see that perhaps we are a bit superficial in our attempts to correct these conditions by outward legislation – although I think there is a place for legislation of these matters. But if clothing does reflect an inner condition then it does not help much to force an outward change. Clothing is very significant. The proof of that is that, whenever any of these young people (as I have seen happen several times now) become converted, and their inner rebellion ceases, the first sign of it is that their clothing changes. Often they get a haircut as the first thing. Their whole outward look changes because the inward attitude has changed.

Now notice that God clothed Adam and Eve. He killed the animals, he made the skins, and he clothed them. They did not even clothe themselves, but he dressed them. It is important that we let God do this to us.

Not long ago a young man came to me, burdened by a moral failure in his life. He was heavy with guilt and he talked it all out with me. Together we went through the Scriptures. He said to me, “Yes, I know these things. I know that God has forgiven me, but I can’t forgive myself. I feel unclean, and I can’t look at myself as being anything but unclean.” Then I retold him the story of

Peter on the housetop in Joppa {cf, Acts 10:9-30}, when he was waiting for a delegation, unknown to him, to come from Cornelius. God prepared him for that encounter by letting down a sheet from heaven, filled with unclean and clean animals, and said to him, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” Remember that Peter protested and said, “No, Lord, I have never touched anything unclean in my life.” But God immediately rebuked him, “Peter, don’t you call unclean what I have called clean.” I said to this young man, “Isn’t this what God is saying to you? The Scripture says, ‘If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Now don’t you dare to call unclean what God has cleansed. That’s an insult to God’s grace.” He was tremendously helped by that and immediately saw the point.

Thus, following the act of faith on Adam’s part, there is the cleansing and public mark of acceptance by God, so that it is clearly demonstrated to every being in the universe that Adam and Eve are now received of God and owned again of him.

Well, then, if that is the case, **how shall we explain this last section** which seems to be totally inconsistent?

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever –” therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. {Gen 3:22-24 RSV}

God seems to have drastically changed his attitude, hasn’t he? He had just accepted Adam and Eve, dressed in the new clothing which he himself had provided, and suddenly now he banishes them from his presence, drives them out, slams and locks the door behind them, and sets a guard in the path to keep them from coming back in. Is there not something wrong here?

If we read this passage that way, we have surely misread it. It is important that we note carefully exactly what it does say. Notice that

Verse 22 is one of the few unfinished sentences in the Bible. God acknowledges that man has fallen into a condition of self-centeredness. He says, “the man has now become like one of us.” Man knows good and evil by relating it to himself. This is the basic problem with mankind. We have no right to know good and evil by relating it to ourselves, but that is what we do all the time. It is recorded in the book of Judges: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” {Judg 17:6, 21:25 KJV}. That is the formula for anarchy. It means we are relating and judging everything by the way it appears to us. This is the way God does it, for he is the measure of all things, but it is wrong for man. God acknowledges this condition and, having done so, he now faces the problem of the other tree in the garden:

This is not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, now, but the tree of life. God says, “What if man, doomed now to guilt, shame, limitation and loss, should now reach forth his hand and take and eat of the tree of life, and live forever.” It would mean that man would never physically die but would go on in his evil condition forever. Notice that God leaves the sentence hanging in the air as though the result is too terrible to describe. What if man should do this? Then God’s loving solution follows. He says, “Drive him out, cast him out of the garden, and put at the gate of Eden the cherubim [throughout the rest of Scripture cherubim appear; these are what we might call angelic animals, related to the holiness of God] and a flaming sword which turns every way [but now notice] to guard the way to the tree of life.” It does not say. “to keep men from coming to the tree of life.” That is not what the barrier is for. It is to guard the way to the tree of life, so that men come the right way and not the wrong.

We usually read this passage as though God has barred man from the tree of life – and there is no way to get back in. But that is not true. There was a way in, but it is no longer a physical way. That is what this text is telling us. Man must be kept from trying to come through some physical way, but must be forced to find the right way back. That is what the cherubim and the flaming sword are for. They absolutely cut off any other way to God than the right way. There is no other way, only one.

This is why what you do with your body, religiously, is of no importance whatever unless it be a

genuine reflection of what you do with your spirit, religiously. This explains why you can come to church every Sunday morning, sit in the pews, nod your head, pray, stand, sit down again, genuflect – anything you want – but if the heart is not doing the same thing it is an ugly, distasteful thing in God’s sight, and he has no regard for it at all. There is no way to come to God by doing something – none at all. The physical approach to God is completely cut off.

But here, read the words of the Lord Jesus in the 14th chapter of John, Verse 6. What does he say?

**“I am the way, and the truth, and the life;
no one comes to the Father, but by me.”
{John 14:6 RSV}**

That is the only way there is. That is not only the way to begin the Christian life but it is also the way to continue the Christian life.

Do you know the way to the tree of life? In the passage read for us from the book of the Revelation we heard that the tree of life is for healing. Do you know how to find healing, do you know the way to the place of healing? When your spirit has been torn and broken, or you are pressed by despair, or wounded by sorrow or grief, heartache or guilt, whatever it may be, do you know the way to the place of healing, to the place where the living waters flow? Have you learned not to go but once, but many, many times; to drink again and again of the water of life? Do you know what that means?

Do you know what Jesus meant when he said to the woman at the well, “I will put in you a well of living water, so that you do not need to come to this well for satisfaction. You will find it within you, and you can drink any time you want to,” {cf, John 4:7-15}. Have you learned to drink of this well within when the pressure is on you; to retreat from outward circumstances for the moment and come again to that living fountain of water, springing up within you? To take by quiet faith his promised supply, to partake of his patience and his power, and so to meet the circumstances with a mind at ease, relaxed, trusting, no longer fearful. Do you know what that means? That is the function of the tree of life.

This physical exclusion from Eden is why the body of man must die. The Apostle Paul tells us that is so, even for Christians. He says, “we were

crucified with Christ in order that the sinful body might be put to death,” but that we might live with him in the realm of the spirit and soul, {cf, Rom 6:5-8}. This is why our bodies are dying and we cannot come to God physically. We cannot find our way visibly into his presence. We cannot until the problem of the body is resolved in resurrection. But the glorious truth is, as Hebrews declares to us, that the blood of Jesus Christ has opened for us a new and living way into the holy place {cf, Heb 10:19-20}, and there again we live in the presence of the tree of life in the garden of Eden. Spiritually and psychologically (in the realm of emotions and mind) we are to live in the presence of God because a way has been opened back to the tree of life.

There you have the teaching of this passage. Let me recap it for you in closing. Look at the whole process.

- a) First, *temptation*: How familiar we are with that!
- b) That is followed immediately by *death*, which grips us and casts a gloom over our lives, bores us and frustrates us, and makes us feel despairing, discouraged, and defeated.
- c) Then the place of *repentance* where we admit the facts as God sees them.
- d) Then the flowing of *grace*, the promise of victory and of restoration, accompanied by those helpful measures by which we are made to see our dependence upon him.
- e) Next the response of the spirit in *faith*, when we believe what God has said and are changed and strengthened, we are remade again, in what the New Testament calls “the renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit,” {cf, Rom 12:2, Tit 3:5}.

- f) Then the *public acknowledgment* on God’s part, clothing us with Christ’s peace, Christ’s righteousness, Christ’s power and poise. so that we become panic-proof, no longer disturbed by the circumstances around.
- g) It ends by *finding our way back* to the place of the healing of our mind, heart and spirit – spiritual health!

Is that not also what the New Testament develops for us? Can you see this pattern developing and have any questions left as to whether this book is from the hand and mind of God? It is all there, is it not, given to us in order that we might live in this world, amidst all the problems of today.

God grant that we might know it in daily experience.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Holy Father, for the way back that is open to all of us, the way to the One who himself is the tree of life, the way, the truth, and the life. We must live by him. We have no other place to live in these days. We pray that each of us, young and old alike, may grasp anew how vastly important it is that we learn to live by the Lord Jesus, by a constant communication with his life, his grace, his strength, his power. Lord, open our eyes to understand these things that we may be men and women who so conduct ourselves as to be mysteries, puzzles, to those around who cannot understand from whence we get this amazing strength, this unflappable poise, this amazing ability to handle life at its worst, without failing. We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.