

Chapter 10.

Woman in Eden (Part 2)

Since the direction our lives take and the influence we have upon others is determined by the choices we make, it is crucial for us to be able to define good and evil. The human view is that everything conforming to my ideas and wishes is good, and of course everything not conforming is bad. The name for this system of thought is humanism. And from this viewpoint, God is either non-existent, threatening, or controllable. The Apostle Paul labels this the "natural mind," and apart from Jesus Christ, that is the mindset of the human race (Romans 7:15 ff.). It is the human "good" which results in evil. We are five billion ego-centrics, competing for first place. The result is war, chaos, divorce, ulcers, loneliness, bitterness, bigotry, etc.

The solution even a child can comprehend. One day our daughter, Laurie, then five years old, brought a tearful report of conflict between a playmate and herself. We talked it over, applying the old biblical principle of the mote and the beam, allowing the Spirit of God to correct our thinking and time for the emotions to adjust to that reality. Then Laurie said, "Mother, isn't it a good thing we have God, or how would we know good from bad?" I have never been able to state it so well!

God is good, and goodness is godlikeness. That is the only no-contest criterion for goodness. In God's Person there is an inflexible, impeccable Good which transcends law, but which every just law tries to preserve. This is the Life of God, the Life which may be described as love and joy and peace. It is the life he created us to live, but which cannot be lived apart from him, and therefore depends upon an unbroken relationship with him, a relationship of love and trust.

For every positive there is a negative. One wonders whether a positive can exist as such without its negative. Thus, God who is Love can hate evil, be jealous for the good of his people and be provoked to wrath by defiant, rebellious sinners. (A wrath which he turned on himself in Jesus Christ who became sin for us and paid the price of our rebellion!) It appears then that the very existence of good poses the potential for the existence of evil--not, however, a negative which harmonizes and accentuates a positive, but a defiant opposition to that which is good, a negative gone hostile and asserting itself as Good.

The Lord God commanded the man (thereby making him governmentally responsible) to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning him "in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Physical death was, of course, imminent in choosing to disobey, but of far greater import was the effect of death upon the whole person--death to the spirit and death to the soul. In knowing good, Adam would think himself Good, and, setting himself up as God, become evil. Thinking himself Love, rather than Love's agent, he would lose the faculty for loving; thinking himself Joy, rather than the agent of God's Joy, he would no longer experience joy. Claiming to be wise, he would become a fool, futile and senseless in his view of God and of himself (Romans 1:18-32).

God, who is Good, is a Person. The first man and woman had communion with him. He had shared his creative plan with them and infused and surrounded them with his life, including the tree of life "in the midst of the garden." He made life the centerpiece of their communion with him.

Evil is also a person, and Satan is his name. (Incidentally, if we object to the masculine pronoun for God, should we not also protest the masculine pronoun for Satan?) Although there is evil in our nature, humanity of itself is neither Good nor Evil; we may opt for the control of either, and in either case we are dealing with a person, God or Satan.

Satan's stock in trade is subtlety. In Revelation 12:9 he is referred to as "the deceiver of the whole world." The Hebrew word from which the translation "the serpent" derives, actually means "the shining one." II Corinthians 11:14, 15 says, "...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." He is an artist in craftiness and deception, in the distortion of truth, and he is behind all deceitful strategy, the model for all pretense. "I will make myself like the Most High," was the exalted boast which articulated his absolute commitment to evil (Isaiah 14:12-14). His outward beauty was a veil for inward corruption, a trap for the easily deceived.

Satan, the subtle strategist, made his initial appeal to the woman. He did not go to the governmental head of the race, but took his appeal to "the people." I believe Satan's choice of the woman strongly suggests that he understood the distinctiveness of the male-female function and characteristics. Would the subtle deceiver choose to "lay it on" the less subjective, more judicially culpable of the two? Would he not find it strategically expeditious to aim at the man through the woman, particularly if she were the way to the man's heart? Certainly the tactic of a subtle enemy bent on subversion and exploitation would be to attack at the point of greatest vulnerability.

And yet, characteristics which accompany vulnerability are those which we highly esteem, such as a keen sensitivity and a faculty for adapting to life and people. We admire one who can motivate with gentleness and compassion. These are the characteristics of the emotionally strong and mature. But the temperament from which these strengths may spring can also produce an inversion to these strengths, by virtue of its vulnerability. It may be well to remind ourselves at this point that in the discussion of temperamental and biological differences, we are not at all addressing the question of identity or worth, but only a variety in function.

Nor are we attempting to put an either-or characterization to the male and female, but rather a more-less distinction. Obviously, we may not say woman is sensitive, man is insensitive; woman is illogical, man is logical. We are a long way from the original creation, and each of us is a complicated structure of genes and culture. But just as the male-female biological pattern has remained consistent, so I believe has the basic structure of the male-female psyche instituted by our Creator. This is why I believe we must listen so carefully to these Genesis passages, comparing them with the whole body of Scripture.

There is in all of us the racial memory of Eden, when we were like God, made in his image, where two human wills were harmonized in the full expression of humanity through choosing to relate to God on his terms. God had given Adam and Eve a loaded option: "every tree that is pleasant to sight and good for food, and the tree of life also in the midst of the garden," with only one prohibition. The key issue was obedience, their will subject to God's will.

We live each day between Eden and heaven, under attack from an enemy who introduces doubt and distrust of God and one another through deceit and subtlety. God is not enough, the enemy suggests, or God is dispensable. You have what it takes to go it alone, or at least to make a good show. Then we take off on our self-centered excursions, and my way versus God's way becomes my way versus yours. When we transfer our faith and our expectations from God to ourselves or others, we breed fantasy, illusion, frustration and despair. No human being can fulfill himself or another except in a secondary manner as an agent of God's life filled with the character of the indwelling Jesus Christ, taught and empowered by His Spirit.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

God has given us all of life to enjoy, but that enjoyment is contingent upon his control of our motivation; that is, the control of agape Love, a love which is always satisfied because it demands no gratification from the loved object. God who is agape Love is its only Source. Without him, human "loves" are at best a shabby imitation, at worst a devastating tyranny, and in any case a diversion from the Giver. Controlled by agape Love, we are free to enjoy every relationship without emotional sabotage, and in it we are always drawn back to the Giver. God's image is restored in us when he is in control of our human faculties.

An independent identity is an illusion. We simply choose the form of government under which we shall live, God's or Satan's. Our emerging function will be good or evil, accordingly. God tells us truth about ourselves and life; Satan offers a counterfeit, and his initial thrust is an attack upon God's credibility. To question God's character is to question his very existence. When we face our doubts to the dregs we are brought to the unbearable conclusion of godlessness, and then, because we were made to be possessed by God, we will choose to return to him, or we will opt for a counterfeit.

The woman met the enemy alone, and she was no match for his subtlety. The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *exapatao*, to indicate intensive deception (1 Timothy 2:14). She violated her unity with God and with the man, and, unsupported, she bought the twisted perversion in which Satan offered her godlikeness. Deluded into thinking God had cramped her style, deprived her of her rights, she defied his authority, "took of the fruit and ate." Then, deeply engaged in the satanic enchantment she offered the fruit to the man.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul tells us Adam was not deceived (and here the milder word, *apatao*, is used). The man, without recourse to God, and in full possession of his objective capacities, capitulated to the woman, "and he ate."

"Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3: 7).

The psycho-sexual-spiritual implications of this account are profound. In it we are taught the basic format for human existence, the struggle between God and Satan, the function of choosing. The deepest issues of our sexuality are implicit in these "simple" phrases if we will be teachable and transparently honest with ourselves and the Spirit of God.

I believe it consistent with the entire body of Scripture to define sin as placing something or someone finite before God. Satan, appearing in beautiful guise, first engaged the woman's emotions; then with seeming logic he persuaded her that she could add dimension to her humanity beyond the limits proscribed by God, and on her own initiative. She could be godlike without God, and she would share her new, independent adequacy with the man. She would offer him more than God, and, by-passing God, she would be man's Help, rather than his helpmate, his First Cause rather than his supporter (or to put it in the language of some contemporary literature), "the idol of her husband's heart." "God-playing," we sometimes call it; "idolatry," is God's name for it.

Adam met the woman alone, and he was no match for her. First Timothy 2:14 tells us he was not deceived. Later he would respond to God's questioning by blaming "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me." We are not told her method. Did she nag, wheedle, weep, threaten, bribe, tease, or all of these? Or perhaps she feigned submission--the subtlest weapon of all. At any rate, Adam, out on a limb, ignoring God, surrendered his headship, and "sin came into the world through one man" (Romans 5:12).

The Genesis reference to nakedness is solid confirmation of the synthesis of body, soul, and spirit in humanity. Our first ancestors were at peace with their bodies so long as they were in unbroken unity with God. Sin had not yet defiled their humanity and so their nakedness was not an issue. And since their relationship with God was unbroken, and their identity therefore unthreatened, they had no need to mask their humanity nor to support it with contrived trappings.

There was no shame because there was no guilt. The moment they committed themselves to their own defiant method for understanding good and evil, guilt enveloped their entire persons. The sexual polarities which had once been harmonized and complemented in spiritual unity with God and each other, now became an embarrassment. Now alienated from God, they become defensive, self-centered, and seek ways to hide from him and from one another.

With simple elegance, the story of our lives:

"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and

the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 2:8).

With poignant beauty, the story of humanity's Lover, the Hound of Heaven:

"But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 2:9).

Again, God initiates the encounter with Adam, the head of the race, holding him responsible to the divine commandment; a commandment which, if observed, would have interpreted their freedom and kept them free from the bondage of self-centeredness. And now the question which will incriminate the woman as his motivator as Adam evades his responsibility:

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 2:11)

Eden's Watergate unfolds, with cross accusations, buck-passing and the fading fig leaves of unrepentant self-righteousness. Adam blames the woman, and God for giving her to him. The woman cites the beguiling serpent.

And God? Once they knew him as their Creator-Lover. Now they will know him as their Lover: Redeemer!

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