

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 4 (3:1-13): Some Summary Thoughts:

Some Lessons from the “Fall” of man... **First**, Scripture presents two very different sources of “voices” or “words” competing for the attention of humanity’s ears and ultimately mankind’s “heart.” The LORD God is depicted as selflessly loving – the Creator – the gifter and sustainer of all life, the One who offers particular blessings and boundaries to benefit His creation. In contrast, the serpent is depicted as the “deceiver,” one whose character promotes spurning God’s Word, lying, denial, deception.

Second, man’s response reveals that “temptation” can lead to what Scripture later will characterize as a “divided heart” (see discussion on Rom 7:17-18 below) – a heart that no longer centers upon *glorifying God*, but one that seeks primarily to *gratify “self.”* Once this occurs and man’s focus shifts away from God, (as is beautifully depicted in the Bible image of Peter walking on the water so long as he kept his eyes on Christ and did not look at the wind, Matthew 14:29-30), our senses become confused by contrary data. At that point, no longer does our view of God exclusively shape our attitude and actions. Instead, other views reform our thinking. The proverb (23:7) about man that states: “*As he thinks within himself, so he is*” (NASB), becomes true. We succumb to two cancers of our imagination:

- (1) The first trend is that our minds conform to the modern spirit, the spirit that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God. This manifests itself partially in attempts to set God at a distance or hide from Him, if not deny Him altogether.
- (2) The second trend is to allow our minds to be confused by modern skepticism. As we read the Word of God, we can approach our attempts to understand under the guise of attempting to know God, but actually elevate ourselves as now having knowledge equal to or greater than God. When this happens, we no longer see God through “*spectacles of faith*” (a wonderful term used by Martin Luther). Instead, we see only through lenses clouded by confusion. As a result, the completely sovereign God depicted in Scripture is reduced in our minds, delimiting Him, diluting His power, or ultimately denying Him altogether.

Third, “*Truth*” (the very essence of who God is, i.e., His character – remember Jesus describing Himself as “*the way, the truth, and the life,*” John 14:6) no longer is the primary shaper or molder of man’s character. By choosing godlikeness over creatureliness, we adopt new character traits -- those of the “deceiver” – and so we now lie, cast blame, deny, deceive. Guilty and hostile ourselves (having experienced “shame,” 3:7), we project that guilt and hostility onto others (Adam’s blame upon Eve, and ultimately back upon God, 3:12). In exchanging the truth about God for a lie, we begin to “see” God differently – as full of caprice, contradictions, hostility, lust, and retribution (all projections of our fallen selves). One result is that man’s character conforms itself to its new deceit-filled understanding. Created to image, and thus represent, God in all that we are and do, we morph our new image into whom we have chosen to be so that we now bear the image of the Evil One, God’s implacable enemy.

Fourth, Scripture is clear that rules, even Holy rules, will still be rejected by creatures seeking to serve themselves. Paul makes this clear in his discussion in Romans 7: Law (rules), even deemed “*holy, righteous and good,*” can’t produce a righteous human: Example: Command: “*Do not covet*” (Rom 7:7) calls for renunciation of anything not gifted from God. It asks us to put our trust in, accept and depend on, God’s gifts (life, things, grace).

- Our reaction to the rule is not to agree, but to resist according to our fallen values: “*Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire*” (Rom 7:8). We resist precisely because we refuse to live by God’s grace and Will.
- Even if we acknowledge the command to be right, we still hesitate to obey with a whole heart: “*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing*” (Rom 7:17-18).
- Our resistance to God’s good/grace is so deep within is that even when we attempt to do good works, they become tainted. “*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there beside me*” (Rom 7:21).

Interestingly, our very awareness that we are doing good becomes a sign that we are not doing good. As we become conscious that we are doing “good,” we attribute the good to ourselves (not God) and become proud of our goodness. In realizing that we are being humble (a desired characteristic of “new kingdom” people), we cease to be humble. The vicious logic of law and sin leads us to despair of relief/salvation: “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” (Rom 7:24). Fascinatingly, our “wretchedness,” according to Paul, consists not so much in our breaking of God’s commands as in our futile (powerless) efforts to obey them. So, what can be done? God’s answer is that we need rescue – deliverance. And so He sent His Son! (Rom 7:25).