

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 5 (3:13-41): Some Summary Thoughts

Revelations from the “Fall” of man... Genesis chapters 2 & 3 call us once again to “see” as God intended us to “see” and be careful about the “desires” of our hearts. Like Adam and Eve, God questions us. The questioning has little to do with gathering information; rather, as we noted in lesson 3, it involves self-revelation. As we answer God’s questions, “*Where are you?*” [3:9], “*What have you done?*” [3:13], (and in next week’s lesson, “*Why are you angry?*” [4:6]), we can begin again to see ourselves as God sees us. And, by engaging God directly again through His Word and in prayer, we return God to His rightful position as a conversational partner, not some obscure topic of conversation or debate.

Is man evil? God’s design would argue otherwise. In Genesis 1:26-27 we read that mankind – male and female – is made “*in the image of God*” and appointed lord of creation. He is commissioned to “rule,” i.e., to have a caring, stewarding dominion [1:28] over God’s creation. To argue that man is evil, would infer that God also is evil since mankind is made “in the image of God.” God is not evil; thus, man is not evil, *per se*.

Is man capable of doing evil? This is an entirely different question and the answer is unequivocally “yes.” Again, we can look to God’s design for answers. In Genesis 2:7, the first man is depicted as being made from the dust of the earth with all the weakness of clay and, as the story unfolds, fragile and vulnerable – subject to temptation, sin, sickness, and death. Initially, three relationships suffer tension and severe fracture (God/man; man/woman; mankind and creation). Soon, simple blame-shifting, lying, and denial will morph into violence as brother kills brother (chapter 4). Then whole communities disintegrate with violence becoming the norm (chapter 6). For now, God punishes each actor in the garden with a 2-part punishment:

- Serpent: No trial, just the pronouncement of “guilty.” God “curses” the serpent. The craftiest of animals becomes the most cursed of animals. The serpent will crawl upon its belly and eat dust. It will experience a hostile relationship with the human realm.
- Woman: Unlike the serpent, woman is not “cursed.” She is punished for listening to and acting upon words from the creature rather than the Creator. In her quest to become her own god and determine for herself what is beneficial or harmful to her, the woman must suffer pain as she gives birth. In essence, she becomes destined to experience a painful struggle to create life apart from the Creator of life. Secondly, God reorients her “*desire*.” Earlier in chapter 3, the woman “*desired*” to eat of the “tree” that she thought would make her “wise” [3:6]. Now God declares that her *desire* will be “*for your husband, and he shall rule over you.*” Her previous “desire” led her to deny God’s Lordship by seeking to be “like God” [3:5], and strain and fracture the original relationships (primarily with her husband and God) that God had declared “good” in chapter 2. In punishment, God decrees suffering and alters the husband/wife relationship originally established in chapter 2.
- Man: Having listened to his wife rather than God, the man gets the lengthiest address. He is not “cursed,” but the earth is cursed because of him [3:17]. Now, the “cursed” earth will continue to provide for man that which God intended in 1:29-30; however, only after much toil, struggle and “pain” [3:17-19]. Secondly, man will now experience a constant awareness of mortality [3:19].

In the final scene in chapter 3, God mixes His justice with His mercy. He expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, i.e., God expels and bars them from His Presence. But, before that occurs, God clothes them by garments from animals. Life has changed dramatically. Adam and Eve, once lovingly, trustingly dependent upon God for advice and life, have broken that trust. Originally made “in the image of God,” they have adopted character traits of the “deceiver.” Their own marital relationship, established in equality, now is tense and fractured as man “blames” woman and God for man’s own choices. Mankind’s relations with the animal kingdom also deteriorate. The animals originally entrusted to man’s care now must become the source of clothing for humankind.

As a consequence of mankind’s actions, where once harmony, productivity, and meaning were the norm, now pain, struggle, and potential meaningless life dominate. In their attempt to fill the new “desire” of their hearts and circumvent their need for a Sovereign Lord, they fail to achieve fulfillment. Instead, they become keenly aware of their own creaturely weaknesses and vulnerabilities. In their relationship to each other, equality and mutual concern and care is replaced by struggle, conflict, and an imposed hierarchical order. The joy and freedom they experienced in their relationship with God within the sustaining Power and Word of the Creator has given way to a constant awareness of suffering, toil, and the ever-lasting sense of mortality. But punishment is mixed with mercy. Where the facts warrant death, God still allows life!