

Genesis 3:8 – 19

⁸ 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. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰ He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' ¹¹ And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹² The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

'Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you will go,
And dust you will eat
All the days of your life;

¹⁵ And I will put enmity

Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.'

¹⁶ To the woman He said,

'I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you will bring forth children;
Yet your desire will be for your husband,
And he will rule over you.'

¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';

Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.

¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;

And you will eat the plants of the field;

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face

You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,

Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return.’

Historical and Cultural Background

- The serpent
 - An ancient symbol for an opponent of human beings, in ancient Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Greece.¹ In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a snake steals Gilgamesh’s power of immortality.
 - The serpent motif is found in the first confrontation of Moses with Pharaoh, since it was known that the crown of the Egyptian Pharaoh contained a serpent (Ex.4:3; 7:9 – 12) as the symbol of power trying to obstruct God’s blessing on Israel and through Israel, the world, and again in the wilderness when the second generation of Israelites were rising out from the sins of the first generation (Num.21:4 – 7). The book of Revelation identifies ‘the serpent of old’ as Satan in Revelation 12, who wanted to corrupt Adam and Eve to prove to God that angels should not serve them (Ps.91:11 – 12; 1 Cor.6:3).
 - ‘It is no accident, after all, that our Ancient Foe first appears in Holy Scripture as a snake—imagery that follows the devil all through the canon to the closing vision of the Revelation to St. John. As philosopher Leon Kass puts it, “For the serpent is a mobile digestive tract that swallows its prey whole; in this sense the serpent stands for pure appetite.”’² However, I think it is more likely that the serpent is used as a symbol for its venom, a slower-acting poison that kills a person slowly. Jesus referred to demons as ‘serpents and scorpions’ (Lk.10:19), likely because the influence of demons acts within the person like venom.

¹ Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p.135–8

² Russell D. Moore, ‘Love, Sex, and Mammon: Hard Times, Hard Truths, & the Economics of the Christian Family’, *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=22-02-003-e>, accessed December 17, 2012

Questions

1. Now that Adam and Eve have sinned, how do you think God ought to respond?
2. Why do you think Adam and Eve hide from God?
 - a. They are suddenly concerned that they are naked. They weren't concerned about that before. Unfortunately, rather than heading into a brave new world, Adam and Eve introduce insecurity and preoccupation with self into human life. Whereas before, Adam and Eve focused gratefully on God and then on each other in appreciation for God giving them to each other, their focus now turns downward, to themselves, to their nakedness, to their shame (3:7). They become not merely self-aware, but self-concerned and self-centered.
 - b. What does this show? They have internalized into themselves what should have been left external: the desire to define good and evil for one's self. God left it on the tree to teach them that the definition of good and evil is older than them, more fixed and immovable than them, and most importantly, outside of them! Now they have taken into themselves the defining of good and evil, and since then we as human beings struggle with wanting there to be a good and evil, but also wanting to define it for ourselves. This is the birth of relativism. We will see it develop in the story.
3. Why do you think God asks questions? Doesn't He already know the answers?
 - a. Knowledge isn't the issue. Relationship is. Asking questions makes Adam and Eve step back into the relationship. Hence, we see that God cares about the relationship, and His way of dealing with human sin already shows that.
 - b. Asking questions makes Adam and Eve fess up to what they've done. God's questions do not allow Adam and Eve to be evasive.
 - c. Does Adam own up to what He's done? Adam tries to be evasive by shifting the blame from himself to Eve ('this woman') and God Himself ('you gave me'). This reveals something very important about what sin has done and continues to do in us. Adam's perspective is already skewed by the fact that he ate from the Tree, and freely, without any compulsion. He thinks he can define good and evil properly. In reality, he is just shifting the blame. He has no one else to blame but himself.
 - i. Illus: In sociology, this is called the 'fundamental attribution error.' The error we make often is that we attribute blame and responsibility to others or to circumstances or to God in order to feel less guilty. When I observe a child misbehaving at the store, my first reaction is, 'His parents must not be consistent.' But when my child misbehaves at the store, my first reaction is, 'My child is behaving badly.' I don't attribute the blame to myself.
 - ii. 'Why do people refuse to admit mistakes – so deeply that they transform their own brains? They're not kidding themselves: they really believe what they have to believe to justify their original thought. There are some pretty scary examples in this book. Psychologists who refuse to admit they'd bought into the false memory theories, causing enormous pain. Politicians. Authors. Doctors. Therapists. Alien abduction victims. Most terrifying: The justice system operates this way. Once someone is accused of a crime - even under the most bizarre circumstances - the police believe he's guilty of something. Even when the DNA shows someone is innocent, or new evidence reveals the true perpetrator, they hesitate to let the accused person go free. This book provides an enjoyable, accurate guide through contemporary social psychology. So many 'obvious' myths are debunked as we learn the way memory really works and why revenge doesn't end long-term conflict. Readers should pay special attention to the authors' discussion of the role of science in psychology, as compared to psychiatry, which is a branch of medicine. I must admit I was shocked to realize how few psychiatrists understand the concept of control groups and disconfirmation. Psychoanalysis in particular is not scientific. The authors stop short of comparing it to astrology or new age. This book should be required reading for everyone, especially anyone who's in a position to make policy or influence the lives of others. But after reading *Mistakes were Made*, I suspect it won't do any good. Once we hold a position, say the authors, it's almost impossible to make a change.' (Review of Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson's book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts*)

- iii. 'Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action, according to Fine, a research associate at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. Fine documents a wealth of surprising information about the brain in this readable account that adopts a good-humored tone about the brain's failings without underestimating the damage they do. The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!). The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality... According to the story, in a survey taken several years ago, all incoming freshman at MIT were asked if they expected to graduate in the top half of their class. Ninety-seven percent responded that they did.' (Reviews of Cordelia Fine's book *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*)
- d. But God designs His questions to sizzle through our feeble defenses, and bring us to repentance. Here's an illustration of that from someone who writes

In the last chapter I mentioned that Karla and I spent a week at Daybreak Retreat Center. We were soul weary. We had come to the point where our busy lives were 'putting our souls in danger.' Desperate for our souls to be mended, we gathered in the bitter December cold for our first meeting. We had come with a group of our friends and were anxious to meet Henri Nouwen and Sue Mosteller, the leaders of our retreat.

The first meeting brought together our group of eight, three workers at L'Arche, and three mentally and/or physically challenged residents of the community. I had read many of Henri Nouwen's books and fully expected his remarks at our first meeting to be life changing. During the obligatory introductions, I had admitted to the group that my busyness was draining my soul of life-leaving it lifeless and weak.

Although Henri's opening remarks were interesting, I was disappointed. I expected profound insights. What I received was the logistical instructions for the week.

After the meeting, somewhat dismayed, I was confronted by a handsome resident of L'Arche. I'll call him Robert. Robert was in his forties, and although his appearance was normal, his vocabulary wasn't; it was limited to maybe a few hundred words. He stood uncomfortably close, his face within inches of mine. With his eyes focused directly on mine he said, 'Busy?'

Startled with his concise summary of what I had admitted earlier, I said patronizingly, 'Yes, Robert, I'm very busy.'

'Too busy?' he continued.

'Yes, Robert,' I admitted rather sheepishly, 'I am too busy.'

I will never forget what happened next. He moved even closer (his eyes revealing his sadness for me) and asked with a sincerity I have seldom experienced, 'Why?'

My eyes filled with tears. Robert, a man with a very limited vocabulary; had asked the one question I had been afraid to ask. Somehow he knew that the solution to my weariness was hidden somewhere in the answer to his question: a question I was afraid to ask and no one else had. Why was I so busy? Because I still was hanging on to the belief that God's affection for me was measured by my activity for Him. The more things I did for God, the more He would love me, or so my insecurities kept telling me. Robert, in his childlike way, could see my insecurity, could feel my need to prove to God I was worth loving. By asking me a simple question, Robert started me on a journey toward intimacy with my Father. Amazingly, Robert's risky curiosity peered deep into my soul, enabling me to begin hearing what God had been spending my lifetime trying to say to me: 'I love you, Michael, questions and all, with an unconditional, no-strings-attached love.'

- 4. God seems to treat the serpent differently from Adam and Eve. How so? Why?
 - a. He pronounces doom on the serpent, straightaway, but he does not render that kind of judgment on people.

- i. Ultimately, this is about Jesus being born of a woman, taking human nature to heal it and defeat the serpent.
 - ii. Jesus will share his victory with us. See Romans 16:20, 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.'
- b. In all cases, the consequences are immediate, and it relates to each person's nature.
 - i. The serpent – a symbol of the appetite – must crawl along its belly and eat dust
 - ii. The woman – who bears human life – will have difficulty in child birth; also, she – who comes from the man – will be alienated from the man
 - 1. Desire is interpreted variously. Many Jewish rabbis interpret it to mean sexual desire, but many other scholars view this term as involving more than that. It is a relational desire, to find her identity in her husband, or a man in general.
 - iii. The man – who comes from the ground – will be alienated from the ground; although he was supposed to spread the garden, he will spread unwanted thorns and thistles as well
 - 1. Thus the natural world is not what it was meant to be. We lost the power to shape it and bring forth the life that God intended. Nevertheless, we are still dependent on it but affected by it in ways that God did not intend (e.g. disease and sickness, inability to calm nature, etc.)
 - 2. And work is not what it was meant to be. It is 'toil' (3:17). Not the enjoyment of the spreading of garden life.
 - iv. What is God doing to the man and the woman?
 - 1. Is He punishing them? I don't think so.
 - 2. Or is God simply declaring what they had done? They had turned away from the source of life, God, so everything they do that involves bringing forth life is now laced with pain and sorrow. God had given Adam and Eve the ability to partially exile Him from the world.
 - 3. Notice that God curses the *serpent* and the *ground*, but He does not curse Adam and Eve themselves!
- c. For the serpent, there is a 'seed of the woman' who will come to defeat the serpent, and evil in general. This is unusual because most ancient literature refers to the seed of the *man*. For God to promise a seed of the woman gives more importance and weight to the wife. But at the very least, God is still encouraging Adam and Eve, and all humanity since them, to still be fruitful and multiply. Having children is now tied to God's promise and human hope for God's redemption.
- d. Illus: When I was a child, my dad read me books at bedtime. He read me *The Hobbit* and the first two books of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I thought they were amazing stories back then. As an adult, I've found J.R.R. Tolkien to have some of the most amazing insights into spiritual truth I've ever read. One of them is his story of God's creation of Earth, and God's struggle with evil, recounted in *The Silmarillion*. In this story, God's name is Iluvatar, and he creates all things through his song. He creates the Ainur, the angels, and they sing with him. Together their music fills the void. Tolkien writes, 'For a great while it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws' (p.16). But then, one of the most powerful of the angels, named Melkor, becomes impatient, wants to create things on his own, and so he starts to sing a discordant melody. The two songs clash. Here is how Tolkien describes that clash:

'Straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. Then the discord of Melkor spread ever wider, and the melodies which had been heard before foundered in a sea of turbulent sound. But Iluvatar sat and hearkened until it seemed that about his throne there was a raging storm, as of dark waters that made war one upon another in an endless wrath that would not be assuaged.

Then Iluvatar arose, and the Ainur perceived that he smiled; and he lifted up his left hand, and a new theme began amid the storm, like and yet unlike to the former theme, and it gathered power and had new beauty. But the discord of Melkor rose in uproar and contended with it, and again there was a war of sound more violent than before, until many of the Ainur were dismayed and sang no longer, and Melkor had the mastery. Then again Iluvatar arose, and the Ainur perceived that his countenance was stern; and he lifted up his right hand and behold! A third theme grew amid the confusion, and it was unlike the others. For it seemed at first soft and sweet,

a mere rippling of gentle sounds in delicate melodies; but it could not be quenched, and it took to itself power and profundity. And it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Iluvatar, and they were utterly at variance. The one was deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came. The other had now achieved a unity of its own; but it was loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes. And it essayed to drown the other music by the violence of its voice, but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern.

In the midst of this strife, whereat the halls of Iluvatar shook and a tremor ran out into the silences yet unmoved, Iluvatar arose a third time, and his face was terrible to behold. Then he raised up both his hands, and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Iluvatar, the Music ceased.

Then Iluvatar spoke, and he said: 'Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Iluvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.'³

³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p.16 – 17