

Return to Eden

Genesis 3:22-24 (KJV)

22 And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: **23** Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. **24** So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

This story is the one that sets the tone for the rest of the Bible. In it, Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden after they eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We call this the 'fall of man.' We tell people that because Adam and Eve sinned, all of mankind is guilty and must seek redemption.

I am not going to disagree with that statement, but I think the reason is different than we have usually understood it to be. When people look at Adam and Eve, they see two people walking around in the Garden naked, eating fruit, hanging out, having free love, and generally having no responsibilities. To the modern Baby Boomer, we see Adam and Eve as the original hippies. In fact, the song 'Woodstock' by the Joni Mitchell has the chorus:

We are stardust, we are golden,
We are billion year old carbon,
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.

Even modern preachers will speak of the Garden of Eden as a place to which we must return. An ideal from which we have strayed and something to which we must return.

But what does it mean to "return" to the garden? How would we even do it? According to the Bible, God put Cherubims to guard the path to keep us out. So even if we knew where the garden was, how would we get back into it? And if we did, are we sure we would even want to?

To understand why and how we might get back to the garden; we first need to understand what it was like to be there in the first place and how we got kicked out. Only then can we understand what it means to return to the garden.

Living in the Garden

Genesis 2:15 (KJV) And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Adam and Eve lived in the garden to keep it. We don't know what the responsibilities of keeping the garden were, but we know that it didn't include plowing dirt, planting seed, or removing weed, because when God drove them out of the garden, He told them that they'd have to start doing those things.

Something else it tells us about living in the garden is that they were naked.

Genesis 2:25 (KJV) And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

The part of this verse I find fascinating is at the end: "and they were not ashamed." Are they supposed to be ashamed? The way that the verse is phrased, it seems that they should be ashamed. They should be ashamed, but they are not.

Why should they be ashamed? They're naked. Why were they naked? That's the way God made them. They didn't know that they should've been ashamed, because nobody ever told them they should've been.

So, Adam and Eve are in the garden doing something shameful, but didn't know it was, because God didn't tell them that it was. However, in the garden, there was something that would tell them; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

God was careful to ensure that Adam and Eve would never find out.

Genesis 2:16-17 (KJV)

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: **17** But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam and Eve were doing something shameful, but God didn't care. He let them exist in this state and even tried to protect them from knowing about it. To God, it wasn't a sin. The one instruction God gave them was to not to eat of the tree that would let them know. Eating from a tree is not shameful, but if God says not to eat from it, it is a sin.

If God says it's a sin, it's a sin. If God says it's not a sin, it's not a sin. Since God allowed Adam and Eve to be naked in the garden, it wasn't sin to them.

What does it mean to be naked?

Genesis 2:25 (KJV) And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3:1 (KJV) Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

The words 'naked' and 'subtle,' in Hebrew, are the same words. The original scriptures were written on long scrolls that didn't have chapters and verses, so these two scriptures were originally read one after another. In fact, it literally says, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more naked than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made..."

The serpent was more naked than any other? What does that mean? I think God is showing us a greater truth here. A snake is not particularly smart. It doesn't plan, instead it wanders around looking for its next meal; it's driven by instinct.

God gave all of creation an instinct, a way of operating on our own. I think when the Bible uses the word, "naked," it doesn't simply mean something unclothed: it means without intellect.

Every person has two natural parts: a mind and a body. Our body acts per its instinct. Our brain stem regulates our heart rate and breathing. It makes sure that our body temperature is within a pretty tight range. However, our mind doesn't concern itself with all these things. Our mind makes choices and weighs

alternatives to select a course of action, while our body reacts without consideration.

This conflict between our mind and our flesh starts in the Garden of Eden. God was God, and existed in a realm that we still don't understand even today. But Adam and Eve existed in a state of perpetual "nakedness." That is, they existed in a realm where they lived by the instinct that God gave them, which the Bible calls "naked." That is why the serpent was more naked than any other: because the serpent lived in a state where its actions were driven by carnal instincts and lusts even more than those of Adam and Eve.

In this state of perpetual instinct or "nakedness," Adam and Eve lived without God holding them accountable for their lusts. The lust of the flesh was not a sin as far as God was concerned.

Living in The Baby Seat

But then Adam and Eve made a choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of knowledge. The tree of intellect. God told them not to eat of the tree of knowledge. To them, eating of that tree was a sin. Remember that they were living in a shameful state of "nakedness." When they commit the sin, God must drive them out of the garden. Why?

Genesis 3:22 (KJV) And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

So, Adam and Eve took the first step towards becoming more like God. They went from being just like every other creature that God had created and instead took the first step towards being like God. God's responded, "I used to look the other way, because you didn't know the difference between good and evil. But if you are going to eat of the tree and start knowing the difference, then I am going to have to start holding you accountable for it. That nakedness you used to have and I let slide? Now you are going to do something about it."

Many people tend to view God's reaction to Adam and Eve as a punishment. I think we should view it as consequences, but not in a vindictive way. God isn't

making Adam and Eve feel pain because he wants them to feel pain, he is allowing them to experience the consequences that he used to hide from them.

When I was young, I used to ride in the back seat of my parent's car. Whenever I wanted to go somewhere, I would have to either walk or ask one of my parents to drive me. The car was provided for me and I simply took advantage of it. When I grew up, I wanted to get my own license. But I found out that having a license to drive is more than just a vague thing called responsibility; there are tangible effects on my life. A car requires gasoline, oil, tires, more gasoline, insurance, batteries that die in the cold, and more gasoline.

All those things require money. In order to get money, I needed to get a job. Having a job meant that I lost some of my free time. It also meant that I lost some control over my life. Now I had someone else telling me when to work and what to do. The act of gaining "independence" meant that I lost some of my independence. When I was a child I never had to worry about any of those things because my parents took all the responsibility for me. When I took on the responsibility of driving a car, I took on the consequences and accountability that went along with it. If I broke the speed limit, it would be me, not my parents, who would be fined. If I wrecked the car, it would be me who paid for the repair, not my parents.

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree, they were in effect telling God, "We want to take on more responsibility. We want to know the difference between good and evil." To which God replies, "Fine, but then you are going to have to take on some of the accountability as well."

Genesis 3:17-19 (KJV)

17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; **18** Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; **19** In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

God wasn't punishing Adam and Eve; he was making them accountable for their sins. If they wanted to know the difference between good and evil, then God could no longer look the other way. Forevermore there would be a conflict between what our intellect knows that we should do and what our flesh wants to do.

Subtle Evil

Remember when I said that the Hebrew word for "naked" and "subtle" were the same? They are. Your flesh is constantly trying to undermine what you know you should do.

Romans 7:19 (KJV) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Romans 7:23 (KJV) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

So, Paul tells us that there is a war that exists within him. His mind knows what he should do, but his body wants to do something else. Even though he knows he should do something else, the subtlety of that sin still fights him.

Each of us must constantly be on the lookout for that nakedness; that instinct within us. For that instinct, will constantly try to drive us away from God and into actions that God considers a sin. It was one thing when Adam and Eve didn't know about right and wrong; God didn't hold them accountable for their actions. But we were born after the Garden of Eden. We come from a legacy where we are expected to know the difference. Even though we know the difference, we must work hard to be vigilant. The Bible describes it as a "war" between our mind and flesh. Some days our mind wins the war against our flesh, but some days it loses.

Returning to Eden

When we allow our carnal flesh to win the battle, God cannot look away. We've known the difference between good and evil ever since the day that Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. God must hold us accountable for that knowledge.

When Adam and Eve were younger, God could ignore the shame of their nakedness, but after they ate of the tree He made them clothes.

Genesis 3:21 (KJV) Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

Adam and Eve tried to cover their shame with fig leaves, but it was not good enough. God had to shed blood of an innocent animal to make a covering that was good enough to cover the shame of Adam and Eve's nakedness.

Just as God hid the shame of their nakedness by making clothes for Adam and Eve, so God has made a way to cover the rest of our shame as well.

Revelation 1:5 (KJV) And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

So even though we are held accountable for the shame of our own sin, Jesus Christ gave us a covering for that sin just as He did for Adam and Eve. And just like Adam and Eve, that covering could only be good enough if it involved the shedding of blood from an innocent; a spotless lamb without sin.

Returning to The Garden

Perhaps you're like Adam and Eve. Perhaps you lived your life by following your instinct; your carnal flesh; you lived a life of sin for which you are now ashamed. Just like Adam and Eve, you were naked and you knew it not, but now you know that your actions are sins; that your activities are against what God desires. You know that you have been living in sin. There's a way to cover that nakedness, that sin in your life. Jesus has presented himself as a sacrifice already for you. All you need to do is to wash yourself in his blood through the waters of baptism in Jesus name to have that sacrifice applied to your life. Then you can put on the cloak of the Holy Ghost to cover that sin. Just like Adam and Eve, your sin is a shameful thing and perhaps you did not know it, but Jesus has made a way to cover that sin and take away the shame.

If you have already covered your sin through baptism in Jesus' name and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, you should remember that the blood of Jesus has covered your shame. You should not continue to feel shame for your past sins. A sin is whatever God says it is. But likewise, when God says that something is not a sin any longer, then you should stop feeling the shame for it and move on. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden naked, but were not ashamed because God did not treat their nakedness as a sin. To live with your sins covered in the blood of Jesus is to be just like them; it means you are living in the Garden of Eden once again. You may have committed something shameful, but God does not count it as sin.

Go, live once again in the garden.