

The Eden Experience

By Al Felder

“²²And 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 forever:

²³Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. ²⁴So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”
(Genesis 3:22-24)

The events that transpired in the Garden of Eden are foundational to a proper understanding of the word of God. In fact, if you consider all of the different beliefs that people have today (i.e. the denominations) they are determined by what they believe about the account of Adam and Eve. What exactly happened in that Garden scene, and how does it affect us today? That’s what we would like to consider in this sermon. We want to look at Adam and Eve’s experience in the Garden of Eden, and determine from the Bible what it means for us today. We will title our remarks “The Eden Experience.”

As we begin our discussion, it is important for us to understand some things about Adam and Eve. *“So God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”* (Genesis 1:27) God created Adam and Eve in His image. Well, what does that mean? We know that as Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4:24, *“God is a spirit.”* A spirit does not have flesh and bones, therefore, a spirit does not have a physical likeness. Man being made in the image of God is not a reference to some physical likeness that man has to God because God does not have a physical likeness.

Still, the question remains. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Well, the Bible tells us in Genesis 2:7, *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”* In this verse we find one of the key features as to how man is in the image of God. God is a spirit, and he made man a spiritual being. That is a likeness between man and God.

As we consider this idea even further, we can determine that there are qualities that man possesses that are godlike. For example, man like God is creative. God created all that we see before us, and He made man to have a creative nature. You could go even further and discuss man’s ability to reason, and his sense of morality. The main point, however, is that man possess certain abilities or characteristics that set him apart and distinguish him from the rest of creation, and these characteristics are godlike.

Some hold the position that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, but that image was lost after they sinned. This line of thinking equates the image of God with moral perfection. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were no longer morally perfect, and as a result

they were no longer in the image of God. Many take this to mean that man is not in the image of God today because of Adam and Eve's sin.

Yet, when we read the Bible this line of thinking is not consistent with the scriptures. *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."* (Genesis 9:6) After the flood God told Noah that it was wrong for one man to kill another because man is made in the image of God. *"For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of man."* (1 Corinthians 11:7) In this verse of scripture, the Bible teaches that it is wrong for a man to have long hair because man is made in the image of God. *"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."* (James 3:9) Finally, the Bible talks about the hypocrisy of man when he blesses God, but talks evil about his fellow man who is made in God's image.

The understanding that we get from all of these passages is that man is made in the image of God. That is not something that has changed as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. God created Adam and Eve in His image, and all throughout the Bible we find passages of scripture that state that man is still in the image of God. That is because the image does not refer to some type of moral perfection. Instead, the image of God refers to those characteristics that man possesses which are godlike, and set him apart from the rest of creation.

Adam and Eve were innocent, not morally perfect. If they were created morally perfect, than how would it have been possible for them to sin? They had not committed a sin prior to the one recorded in Genesis 3. Prior to Adam and Eve committing sin, they were innocent.

Notice what God said at the end of His creation. *"And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."* (Genesis 1:31) After God created everything, He considered His creation and said that it was very good. Now, what did God create? Everything! This would have included Satan prior to his rebellion, as well as man, and all of creation. Everything was good! There was no sin at this time.

Prior to sin, Adam and Eve did not have a knowledge of good and evil. This is something that they gained after they had sinned. Consider some other passages of scripture that talk about this idea. *"Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it."* (Deuteronomy 1:39) This verse picks up after the spies returned from spying out the Promised Land, and the people were afraid because of their report and did not want to obey God and take the Land. Notice, however, that God does not punish the children at this time because He says that they did not have a knowledge of good and evil. Who does that remind you of? Adam and Eve.

Consider another passage of scripture. *"¹⁵Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child shall know to refuse the evil*

and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.” (Isaiah 7:15, 16) This verse teaches us that a child must grow in order to know to refuse evil and chose good. This is basically the same thing that we read concerning the children of those whom God did not allow into the Promised Land.

Let’s look at some other passages of scripture as we try to make sense of this information. *“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 18:3) Jesus said that in order to be able to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must be converted and become as little children. In order to be converted, we must obey His word and once we do that we become as little children. What does it mean to become as little children? Children are innocent. Why are they innocent? Because they do not have the knowledge of good and evil. We become innocent when our sins are forgiven.

Consider this passage of scripture. *“Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:29) It can be easily seen from these verses that God makes man upright or innocent. In other words, when we are born into this world we are not born guilty of sin. We are born upright, but as we get older we seek out wickedness.

We find, therefore, that the Bible teaches that children, like Adam and Eve, are innocent not knowing good and evil. At some point they reach a certain age where this knowledge is gained. We often refer to this as the age of accountability. The Bible does not give us a specific age at which this occurs. At some point, however, a person reaches an age at which they have an understanding of the knowledge of good and evil.

Let’s consider this idea a little more by looking at Adam and Eve. *“⁶And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. ⁷And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”* (Genesis 3:6, 7) Adam and Eve went from a state of innocence to a state of guilt and shame. Before they sinned, the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed. After they sinned, they realized that they were naked, became ashamed, and tried to hide form God.

What happened to Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God, and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? They had experience with evil, and their conscience let them know it. In fact, what we learn of Adam and Eve we find to be true of every human being of accountable age. God made man in his image. At the end of the creation week God said that everything was good, yet evil still made its way into the world. Free will is the only thing that makes this possible. Adam and Eve, as well as we today, had the ability to choose. Unfortunately, they chose evil.

In the New Testament we find further passages of scripture that teach us about man's conscience. *"¹⁴For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ¹⁵Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing on another."* (Romans 2:14, 15) In the first three chapters of the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul through the inspiration of the Spirit is teaching that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are guilty of sin and in need of the redemptive work of Christ. He starts out by showing how the Gentiles rejected God and became wicked. The Jews enthusiastically agreed with this. The teaching became harder, however, when Paul showed the Jews that they weren't any better.

Notice what he says about the Gentiles. They did not have the Law of Moses, but they did some things contained in the law to which the Bible refers to as the law written in their hearts. In other words, God has created man a moral being. This is an argument that Christians have used against evolution and atheism for years. Those systems of belief cannot explain morality. How can morality exist, and be within all men? Only the Bible has an answer to this question. God made us that way.

There are certain truths that all men know. *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."* (Romans 1:20) All men who are born into this world at some point in their life face the question of the existence of God. Through creation, God has left enough evidence so that all men are without excuse in rejecting this truth.

Listen, It doesn't matter what remote regions of the world a person lives. They can be in some of the most primitive cultures that exist in our world today where no one has a copy of the Bible, and still they are without excuse for rejecting God. There are certain moral laws that have always existed, were contained in the Law of Moses, and are contained in the Law of Christ today. These laws are outlined in Romans 1, and other parts of the Bible as well. These are laws that all men know, and once they reach a certain age their conscience convicts them of these things.

There is a very important point that we need to make here. Our conscience can be corrupted. It is not a sufficient guide. We need the Law of Christ in order to be restored to God today. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6) God has placed in each and every one of us a sense of morality to let us know that He is real, and at some point our conscience convicts us of this truth. Yet, we need the gospel of Christ in order to be restored unto Him, and we serve a God who through His providence will give each and every man or woman who seeks Him an opportunity to obey the Gospel. It doesn't matter what remote parts of the world in which they may live.

The fact of the matter is this, all have sinned. *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Romans 5:12) Adam and Eve were the first to sin. As a result of their sin the world was changed, but each person is condemned because they have sinned. I nor any other person is condemned because of the sin of Adam and Eve.

There are two facts involved in sin, guilt and consequence. Guilt is personal. *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”* (Ezekiel 18:20) What the Bible teaches us here is that the guilt of my sin is my own. No one else will be guilty of the sins that I commit. Likewise, I am not guilty of the sin that Adam and Eve committed, nor are you.

There are consequences to sin, however. We can read of the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis chapter 3. *“¹⁶Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. ¹⁷And 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; ¹⁸Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field; ¹⁹In 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.”* (Genesis 3:16-19) As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve we find the following consequences: women have increased pain in childbirth, the relationship between the man and woman is marred by sin, man will have to work hard in order to have what he needs, and physical death is a reality. Now, do we deal with these consequences today? Absolutely! Each and every one of us deals with the consequences of the sin that Adam and Eve committed, but that does not mean that we are guilty of their sin.

The experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is the experience of every man and woman who has or will walk the face of this Earth. *“¹³Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* (James 1:13-15) The truth is not that we are considered evil because of the actions of someone before us. The truth is this: Human nature, is made by God good and moral, but when temptation arises we chose the evil rather than the good. This condemns us in the sight of God, and places us in need of the redemptive work of Christ.

In closing, remember what the Bible teaches about the Gentiles in Romans 2:14. They did by nature the things contained in the law. In other words, they were not born sinful. They had the ability to do good, and did do good or moral things. There is, however, another meaning to the word nature. *“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in*

the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Ephesians 2:3) Here the word nature means that which is done by habit. Both of these ideas were stated by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:29 when he said God has made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions.

Sin is personal, salvation is personal, and final judgment is personal. The moral problem of Eden is the story of the moral problem of every human life. Its story of temptation is my story of temptation, its story of sin is my story of sin, and its Savior is my Savior. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23) All men are condemned because all men have sinned. Every person must choose between self and God.