

In the beginning

Part 10 - “They realized they were naked”

What happened in the Garden of Eden happened, whether we like it or not, and we are now stuck with the aftermath. Like ripples from a rock chucked into water, or the shockwaves zooming out from a nuclear explosion, the effects of Eden have been felt all over our planet by every human born on it, and there is no escape, no hiding place, no going back in time to have another shot at getting it right, and no human ingenuity that’s been able to reverse the effects, or even make a minor dent in them.

So much for the “wisdom” that Adam and Eve gained from eating off the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But the tree had seemed so harmless. It even looked good, and it really did “open their eyes” as the serpent promised, but it opened their eyes to **an alternate world**, a hidden world they had no idea existed. But suddenly that world “realized” in front of them, not in a weird change of landscape where colours faded and everything turned to grey, but a change that occurred inside their own heads, described simply in **Genesis 3:7**, and in only one sentence too: **“They realized they were naked.”**

It’s the same word for “naked” back in **Genesis 2:25**. In Hebrew it’s *arom*, or *arummim* in the plural, and it really does mean naked, where nothing is hidden or concealed. But this was the moment when the man and woman both **“realized”** how true that was, that there truly was nothing about them that was hidden or concealed, because the serpent had seen right through them and knew exactly which buttons to push.

To the serpent these two humans were like an open book that could be read with ease, just like a seasoned car salesman can read a customer as soon as he steps on the car lot. In the company of such a man we are totally naked. Nothing about us is hidden or concealed. We are totally transparent to him, because he’s seen it all a thousand times before. Here we come, thinking we’re going to make a wise decision based on thorough research and good judgment, but to him we’re just another typical human ruled by desire, and if he can just tweak that desire the tiniest bit the result is always the same. All that wisdom and self-control we think we’re so famous for flies out the window and we’re just like puppies flopping around helplessly on the end of the salesman’s leash.

And it's embarrassing, isn't it, when you realize you're so naked. It's like the shock we first experienced as children when we discovered our parents could read us like a book. They could get us to eat our vegetables with the promise of ice cream, or get us to behave by dangling the threat of Santa Claus not giving toys to naughty children. We were like puppets on a string.

And if we thought we were wising up and not so easily fooled in our teenage, we then discovered to our embarrassment that other kids could read us like a book too. Knowing that we'd do anything for friendship and acceptance, they'd dangle the offer of joining their group and being part of their gang, and we'd come running like floppy puppies again, even if that friendship got us doing things we knew we shouldn't.

So what that first man and woman realized was the same thing we all eventually realize, that there really isn't anything about us that's not known by someone, including, of course, the devil and God.

And that was the shockwave that rippled through Eden when the man and woman realized how well the serpent had known them, and then used it against them. They felt shame and embarrassment at how easily they'd been fooled. But this was the dark side to being naked and having nothing about you that was hidden or concealed, because in the hands of a crafty creature - serpent or salesman - it could be exploited with embarrassing ease.

But God allowed this to happen. He even set the scene in Eden for it to happen, which naturally raises the question, "WHY?" Why would God allow a creature like the serpent - that could so cleverly conceal and hide its real motives and yet present itself as acting in one's best interests - into the lives of these two people at all? And why make humans so susceptible to being influenced by such a creature as well?

There's a clue in the name God gave to the forbidden tree, that it offered knowledge both good **and evil**. You mean, evil was already a known force to be reckoned with? Well, yes, because God was already warning the man about it. God's only just started into the man's education, but he's already telling the man that evil will eat him alive and spit him out dead. But why, in that case, would God create a tree that acted as a portal to evil? Why create a fruit that would open the man's eyes to this other dimension in which evil existed, with the horrible risk that the man might actually eat the fruit and enter it?

But why would God even be talking about evil in the first place, unless, of course, he'd already seen evil in action? And why would God be issuing such a stern warning to avoid evil, unless he'd seen what evil could do?

But if God had seen what evil could do and the damage it caused, why did he make access to evil so easy for humans - and from a tree that was so attractive too? On the other hand, a tree acting like an irresistible magnet would certainly give the man firsthand experience of **how powerfully attractive evil was**. One look at the fruit on that tree and the man could feel his defenses crumbling. It was almost frightening in its power, which would surely send off signals to steer well clear of it, just like some girls learn to steer well clear of certain types of men who are so attractive they exude a frightening power that can totally mess up a girl's mind.

Imagine being God, then, and knowing this is what evil could do. So like any good parent he warned his first human son about the dangers lurking out there that he knew would mess up the man's mind, blast holes in his ability to judge, blind him to consequences, and focus his attention on himself. And like any parent of a child, who in his innocence views the world through rose-tinted glasses, God had to sit that first innocent man down and let him know there was **another world out there**, another dimension with dark and dangerous waters. But rather than try to explain it in terms the man couldn't relate to, God simply said, "Don't eat off that tree, OK? It's bad."

It's like parents trying to get the point across to their children about the dark side of life without going into gory details that the child cannot relate to. But a parent cannot just breeze over the fact that evil exists. A parent knows what's out there and how vulnerable a child can be, so he sits the child down and says, "Look, kiddo, when I say don't do something, or don't go there - trust me, OK?"

A parent HAS to do that, though, because parents see **what their children cannot see**. And it's the same with God. He sees what we cannot see too, which you'd think would make us very willing to heed what he says and trust him for help and guidance, but Genesis shows us in the lives of those first two humans that it doesn't even cross our minds that God knows a whole lot more than we do and therefore we need to trust him. And that, unfortunately, has continued in every generation since, in children and teenagers who think they can handle life and all it throws at them without any need for their parents' help and guidance either, which is sad because it gets them into a lot of suffering and trouble.

But all is not lost, because it may help them see what that first man and woman saw very quickly after they got sucked in by the serpent. They recognized that they were naked. Now they **really** knew how vulnerable to temptation and deception they were in the hands of a crafty creature, and how silly they'd been for not trusting God. But this was the tough but very necessary lesson they had to learn, as we all do, that naturally we humans have great difficulty trusting God, so God lets us suffer to wake us up to our nakedness.

And there's an amazing "really-make-you-think" story in the book of Job that makes this point come alive. It's about a man who was really tested on his trust in God when everything he held near and dear was taken away from him - and with no explanation as to why it happened as well. And for 37 chapters God lets Job fume and sweat trying to figure it all out, which Job is never able to do, even with the help of some very bright friends. The moment then came in Job 38 to 41 when God gave the answer. It was very simple: "Job, you don't see what I see."

Did Job have any idea, for instance, that the entire reason for his dilemma was a bargain a satanic creature made with God? Was Job even aware that these sorts of creatures existed, or that they were communicating together in another dimension, or that they all knew him so well that one of them actually wanted to use him to prove to God that humans are driven purely by selfish desires? And could Job even begin to grasp why God actually gave permission for this scheme to unfold, despite the chaos he knew would cause?

Job knew none of that, nor did he have any idea that in the eyes of these beings nothing about him was hidden or concealed. They were talking about him as if he was right there with them. He was an open book before them, a man without clothes. In their eyes he was totally naked.

So, just as Adam and Eve realized they were naked, in the sense that they realized they were merely transparent pawns in the hands of a creature that could manipulate their minds with ease, Job also needed to realize that he too was merely a player in a much bigger game involving beings in another dimension that obviously knew him inside out, but he knew very little about them. So God lets Job react according to **his own limited view of things**, and lets him thrash around in frustration and confusion at not being able to come up with any satisfying answers.

But then the moment comes when God opens Job's eyes to **his** world.

And what a shock it was for Job, because the God he thought was being distant and uninvolved in what he was going through was in fact in total control and he had his finger on the pulse of everything. Job could now see that nothing in the entire history of the world had escaped God's attention and involvement, which, of course, included Job himself. How foolish Job had been for not totally trusting God, therefore. And how many teenagers bang their foreheads in later life when they come to that realization too, that their parents could read them like a book, so why on earth hadn't they trusted them?

But realizing we're not as smart as we think we are is a hard pill to swallow. It gets even harder realizing from Genesis and the book of Job that God actually allows evil-minded creatures to do serious damage in order to reveal our nakedness. Job lost everything that was dear to him. Adam and Eve lost everything that should've been dear to them. And, shock upon shock, God even predicted in **Genesis 3:15** that evil forces would continue to influence and do their damage, when he told the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers."

But who could have guessed that this mere serpent would morph into the devil, whose power would grow through the centuries to the point he could influence kings and control empires, and his own kingdom would include mighty princes that could put up a fight for weeks against God's messengers (Daniel 10:13, 20)? Imagine what Jesus was about to face many years later, therefore, when the devil's power and influence had increased so much he could offer Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world" (Matthew 4:8). This was no mere crafty serpent anymore; this was a mighty world-ruling king whose confidence had skyrocketed to thinking he could weaken and topple the very Son of God.

And if it wasn't for Jesus who knows what the devil's power would have looked like, and what damage he could have done? But as **1 John 3:8** tells us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." Jesus came to stop the devil's power growing any further.

But again, shock upon shock, even though Jesus defeated the devil and stopped him in his tracks, he still allows the devil to influence and deceive. And that begs the question again, "WHY?" Why allow a defeated devil to be "the god of this age, blinding the minds of unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 4:4)? And why allow a conquered devil to still be "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2)? Why oh why does Jesus continue to give the devil any power at all still?

At first glance it seems just as daft as letting a crafty serpent wreck God's plan for humans in Genesis, and just as daft as letting a satanic creature utterly destroy an innocent man's family and livelihood in the book of Job - and all with God's approval too. But why, now that Jesus has successfully "disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15), and why, after clearly proving in his ministry that he could "give orders to evil spirits and they obeyed him" (Mark 1:27), does God **still** approve of loosening the leash on evil spirit powers so they can continue to do damage to people?

That's a lot of "Why" questions we've been asking - fourteen so far - but that's not the end of them, because if Jesus now has full authority over the spirit world why on earth does he let that spirit world **mess up the CHURCH** as well? Maybe it's understandable that God allows the devil free rein to mess up the lives of the disobedient and those who consciously resist God (Ephesians 2:2), but why unleash the devil on those who are obedient and **don't** resist God?

God even allows "false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ" to infiltrate the church (2 Corinthians 11:13). In the King James Version of that verse it says "transforming" rather than "masquerading," which really pictures the cunning of these evil spirits, because having lost their power as princes in the old world of great empires they simply "transformed" or **morphed** into apostles with power in the new world of the church instead. So, from the serpent in Genesis morphing into the powerful devil of Matthew 4, we now have the defeated devil of Matthew 4 morphing yet again into another clever disguise, but this time aimed at bringing the church under his authority, rather than empires and nations.

But God had already revealed this in Genesis, when talking about the enmity between the serpent and the woman. The serpent had already won the first round with the woman, bringing death to all her human offspring - but the woman would still be allowed to produce children, making it an ongoing battle. Every human child born, though, would enter a world ruled by evil, causing heartache and sorrow (especially for mothers), but now that evil had lost that power, it turned its attention on those born of the **new** woman, the church.

And that had Paul really worried: "I'm afraid," he wrote in **2 Corinthians 11:3**, "that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning **your** minds (as Christians in the Church) may somehow be led astray...."

Paul brings Genesis right up to date, and the striking point that even Christians in this new world ruled by Jesus can be bamboozled just like the serpent bamboozled Eve. And it's still embarrassingly easy too, **2 Corinthians 11:4**, "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, **you put up with it easily enough.**"

The story hasn't changed at all from Genesis, has it? Humans are still being easily taken in by what Peter described in **2 Peter 1:16** as "cleverly invented stories." Replace the word "clever" with "crafty" and we've got the serpent in Genesis all over again, but now it's morphed into something even more deadly, because it comes up with variations on the gospel so convincing that now Christians are like floppy puppies on the end of evil's leash.

But this is what God told us from the beginning we'd be up against, and how easily we are fooled. The message from both Old and New Testaments is clear, therefore, that **we don't stand a chance against evil**; it is way too clever for us.

But why does evil WANT to be too clever for us? Why does it hate us that much? Well, let's dive into a little speculation here using a message from God to the King of Tyre in **Ezekiel 28**, because it helps explain why evil exists on this planet in the first place, why it hates us, and why it wants to mess us up so badly. It's all because of a very beautiful and very wise "guardian cherub" (verses 14 and 16) that was present "in Eden the garden of God" (13).

According to verse 14 this garden of God was in fact "the holy mount of God," meaning it was the centre of God's operations, and God had specifically created and assigned this mighty cherub to guard it (13-14). Being a guardian of the garden of God in Eden, therefore, was THE supreme job for a created being.

But this mighty cherub blew it and was expelled to this planet (17). The public disgrace he suffered was terrible (18-19), so he now had one mighty great chip on his shoulder as well, which may explain the temper tantrum that buried what life on this planet existed into fossils in rock, leaving the planet empty and formless. But imagine how this thoroughly disgraced and furious cherub now felt when God then comes to this planet and sets up his centre of operations here instead in **another** "garden of God in Eden," but this time God gives the supreme job of guarding it to a mere human being. Is it any surprise, then, why evil hates us so much and wants to destroy us?

But why would God set up shop here and then create humans on a planet where evil in all its fury and cunning already dwelled, and its fury would only increase when passed over for the job of guardian?

Well, based on the fact that God came here too, it was clearly to confront evil head on. Now that evil existed it had to be dealt with. But how on earth could God get it across to his newly created humans how deadly and cunning evil is?

Fortunately, he starts off small with a serpent, rather than the might of a cherub, but even then humans failed miserably. So Round Number One goes to evil. In one very easy swipe evil proves beyond doubt that we humans are totally incapable of ruling and guarding the planet as God intended.

What seemed like a terrible defeat, though, opened our eyes to what was really going on. **We were pawns in a much bigger game**, a game that only God could see in all its reality, and only God knew how to play. The game was rather simple, that God made humans to be the new guardians of his garden, the centre of his operations on Earth, and humans would not make a mess of it like the cherub did. Humans, therefore, would learn how to defeat evil, but learn in the worst situation possible, under constant bombardment by the power and cunning of evil in territory where evil had all the advantages, and we had no clue what evil was bargaining with God to do to us.

But Genesis introduces us to God's first move. He creates a serpent to help us realize our nakedness, so we can see how vulnerable we are to evil's tactics, and how evil sees right through us and knows exactly which buttons to push.

And that hasn't changed one bit for us Christians either, because as Paul pointed out back in **2 Corinthians 11:14**, "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light," and he has "servants masquerading as servants of righteousness" that are so clever in their tactics that Paul even had to admit in **Galatians 1:6-7** that "I am astonished how quickly you (Christians) desert the one who called you...and you are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all."

It's a hard pill to swallow, but the first step in the game for all of us in our training as guardians of God's heavenly Kingdom on Earth is recognizing we don't stand a chance against the hatred and the fury and cunning of evil. Even in the church evil can easily "pervert the gospel" and "throw us into confusion" (7). But why does God allow evil such influence in the church as well?

That's now twenty one times the "Why" question has been asked. But the answer to all of them is given in Genesis, that God allows evil to have its way with us - in both Old and New Testaments - to help us realize our nakedness, as the first vital step in us humans seeing evil for what it is, and the first vital step in us learning how to defeat it, because God is making absolutely sure in his new centre of operations on Earth, his new garden of Eden, that the guardians of it don't do what that original guardian cherub did.

But for that to happen we must face the cherub himself, just as Jesus did, or as Paul phrased it in **Ephesians 6:12**, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

God has set things up so we all get our turn in the ring with the serpent, because we must learn how to defeat it. And what is the first step? It's the same first step revealed in Genesis: It's realizing we are naked. It's realizing we don't stand a chance against an enemy we can't even see, let alone know what ambushes he's set up, or what temptations he knows we're susceptible to. It's realizing we are helpless, defenseless pawns in a much bigger game in which the spiritual forces of evil are craftily trying to disqualify us from holding the positions they once held and now see slipping away.

Which is why Paul says in **verse 13**, "Therefore **put on the full armour of God**, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground (against the devil's schemes, verse 11)." Don't hang around, Paul says: When you've got the point that you truly are naked in the eyes of evil, then the next obvious step is go get some armour and cover up.

Paul knew how crucial that was too, because in **2 Corinthians 12:7** he'd been hit personally with "a messenger from Satan to torment me." And God clearly allowed it too, just like he let a satanic creature torment Job and he lets "flaming arrows of the evil one" strike at us too (Ephesians 6:16). But it got the point across to Paul what he was up against, and therefore what his only defense could be. It was "praying in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18), meaning he was utterly depending on **God's "mighty power"** (verse 10) to protect him, or as he phrased it in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses (or my nakedness), so that **Christ's power may rest on me.**"

And in that simple statement is the second step to us defeating evil.

It is having our eyes opened - not to our nakedness and vulnerability to evil this time - but to Jesus Christ, who is now doing the job of guarding this Earth, God's new headquarters, the garden of God in Eden, that the first Adam did not do. And God exalted Jesus to that supreme position because he willingly took his turn in the ring with the serpent too, and despite every bit of cunning and intimidation the devil threw at him, Jesus successfully fended him off so that all of us would be protected from evil taking over this planet completely.

But what we also see is how he did it. He willingly emptied himself of all power so that he was totally dependent on God's power resting on him, because this was the only way evil could be defeated. And he knew firsthand the frightening power of evil, because it messed up his mind so much it had him crying out in desperation for God's help. But he's now there for us, as his fellow co-rulers and guardians of the garden of God, to help US now grasp what we're up against - and the only way of defeating it. It is having his power rest on us, just as God's mighty power rested on him.

When Paul realized that it totally switched his attitude to his nakedness. He actually boasted about it in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, and even wrote in **verse 10**: "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties." Unlike people in the world who love to boast about their strength, and how clever and smart they are, we in the church boast about how weak, vulnerable, helpless and naked we are, because we know that the best of human strength has no chance against evil, so we don't have the stress of relying on it anymore.

Imagine being able to say: "Isn't it great that I'm being hit with a trial that's too big for me and way beyond my ability to handle, and it's so impossible I can't see any way of getting through it without my head exploding?" We CAN say that BECAUSE we only have to pray in the Spirit, meaning depend on God and not ourselves, and Christ's power comes launching out of the garden of God in Eden to help us, again and again.

And Paul had experience of that too, when he talks of the pressure he was under in **2 Corinthians 1:8** that was "so far beyond our ability to endure, that we despaired even of life." Paul had his turn in the ring with the serpent too, and he too discovered that he hadn't the strength to fight it. But he also realized that God allowed it to happen, **verse 9**, "that we might not rely on ourselves but on God." It's the only way in this life, after we realize our nakedness, that we can defeat the cunning and power of evil. And when did God get that point across to us? Right from the very beginning - in the book of Genesis.