

## ***New Lessons from an Old Garden***

[ the following is an excerpt from David Takle's book, *The Truth About Lies And Lies About Truth* available from Thrive Distributions on [www.lifemodel.org](http://www.lifemodel.org) (shopping area) ]

When Satan first took it upon himself to destroy the human race, he did not tip-toe around them with some trivial temptation. Instead, he coughed up two of the most bold-faced lies ever crafted for evil intentions: a distorted image of God and a distorted image of the human self.

“You can be like gods” (as direct as could be)

“God is not to be trusted” (from between the lines)

And thus the Enemy played his best hand. In response, Adam and Eve doubted God, desired what was unholy, and acted out of that desire. All this was possible even though they knew God, talked with him daily, and lived in a world completely free of human evil. They had none of the previous experience with sin, fallen nature, and unmet needs that now characterize our world, and yet they sinned.

So where are we today? We now live in an entire culture of deceit, where the truth is made to stand on its head, evil is called good, and prophets are hated. Pervasive darkness covers the earth<sup>1</sup> and makes us easy prey for deception at all levels of life. The Bible speaks endlessly of the perils of being led astray, of believing false teachers, and of being blind to the truth.<sup>2</sup> From every vantage point we see that deception is still the primary tactic used by the Father of Lies. Shocking as these two lies were to Adam and Eve, we now find ourselves in the tragic position of needing proof in order to *not* believe them.

Of all the stories the Bible has about the nature of deception, few are as instructive on the subject as the very first one to address the issue, the day when Adam and Eve were taken in by the schemes of the serpent.

The two greatest lies ever told were also the *first* lies ever told. They were powerful enough to deceive Adam and Eve, and they still haunt us today as the greatest obstacles we face. These lies are significant for two major reasons: (1) they are truly the archetype of all lies, just as the story itself is the archetype for sin; (2) they deceived our parents *before* the fall, before they could have had any “sin nature” to trip them up. We will examine these two aspects of the story in some detail to see what we can learn about the nature of deception.

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1 e.g. Mt.6:23; Jn.3:19; Acts.16:18; Rom.1:21; Eph.4:18

2 e.g. Mt.24:4-5,11; 2Cor.4:4; Eph..5:6; Col.2:8; 2Th.2:9-10; 1Tim.6:5; 2Tim.3:13

**Great Lie #1: A Distorted Sense of Who We Are**

“For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5).

When the serpent made his final play, he came up with a lie that was so bold, so shocking, that it must have hit the human couple like a sledgehammer. Up until that moment, the relationship that Adam and Eve shared with each other and with God had been based on trust and love. They had no prior experience of deceit and betrayal to prepare them for this event. We may envy their innocence, but at this moment it became their greatest weakness. The unheard-of idea that they could become like God had all the force of a revelation, a stunning new piece of mystery they had not considered before. And they were intrigued. They were amazed. *They believed.*

That was the hook. Like fish after a shiny new lure, they took the bait. The rest is history. Within a few generations the world was overrun by so many “gods” doing whatever was right in their own eyes that the Creator God may well have been sorry he had started the whole thing.

As it turns out, *this particular lie is one of the most fundamental problems that human beings face.* The belief that we can be masters of our own destinies is at the very core of much that derails our spiritual lives. It is also the source of the seductive individualism that shapes Western culture, which in modern times has blossomed into the “me” generation and a spirit of self-centeredness that is tearing our society apart. The idea that “I can be the master of my own life” is a lie. Because it is a lie, it cannot deliver what it promises (by definition). So it must be propped up by still more lies, such as “I at least *ought* to be a god” which helps to create the illusion of god-ness. This whole distorted sense of power and ego is one of the main reasons why we will promote *image over substance*, as well as put distance between ourselves and others so they cannot challenge our belief in our own god-ness. If the facade breaks down, we can resort to “what’s in it for me” which is yet another way of placing ourselves at the center of the universe. But since everyone else is doing this we are all in competition for center stage, which leads us to all forms of greed and violence in the name of protecting what is “rightfully mine.”

In short, the lie that I can replace God is the consummate distorted self-image, and it fuels a whole host of distortions of who I am including my selfish and self-centered attitudes and behaviors, both self-deprecating or self-promoting. It is a boldface lie and it destroys community, defies submission to the true God, and ultimately cuts us off from all that is holy and needful for a godly life.

Yet behind this lie there is another, even more destructive lie.

**Great Lie #2: A Distorted Sense of Who God Is**

You can’t trust God (implied).

This lie was so vile that the serpent did not even say the words. He only implied it by his audacity and his indirect use of language. From the abbreviated story we have in Genesis it is difficult to see the dynamics of the interaction between Eve and the serpent. But after she told

him, “God said if we eat from that tree we will die,” his comeback was loaded with implications. Using modern vernacular, his response was probably something like, “He said *what?* You can’t be serious! That’s not what will happen at all! He knows that!”

Now if you were Eve, what would you be feeling about that time? She must have been shocked by the idea that God might be keeping something from them, holding out on them. It had never occurred to her that God could have some ulterior motive for banning the tree. Why else would it be there? Here’s this serpent saying that this is the most ridiculous thing he ever heard. *Maybe God is not who he claims to be!*

This is the most foundational level at which we have all been deceived. To one extent or another, we all hold distorted images of God. We fear his disapproval, we do not trust him with our futures, we doubt his love, and we run away from him when we have failed. God for us is either too distant, too disappointed, or too uncaring.

Many people suffer from debilitating self-hate, which is really a fleshed-out disbelief in God’s love for them. They want another life, because the one that God gave them really stinks. Others find that the evil they have experienced causes them to thoroughly question God’s presence and goodness. Still others are so successful in their lives that they see little need for God at all.

As a result of these misinterpretations of life, people internalize deeply distorted images of who God is and what the nature of his relationship is toward them, or ought to be...For Adam and Eve, it was the doubt about God that made the other lie plausible, that perhaps they ought to determine their own destiny. Only by calling the character of God into question could the serpent hope to convince them that they should consider looking out for themselves. If God could not be trusted, they needed to take matters into their own hands. These two lies—a distorted image of God and a distorted sense of self—are the starting point for most other forms of deception and the foundation for all kinds of evil in the world.

### **The Great Lessons of Eden and Why We Miss Them**

Unless we are careful we will miss the significance of this story, both because of its familiarity and because of its long history of misinterpretation. Let us begin by reviewing the facts as we have them.

1. Eating the fruit of that one tree was the first human sin.
2. Prior to that sin, Adam and Eve were free of any form of sin, including pride or lust or any defect of character that would predispose them to sin.
3. They were not coerced in any way by the serpent. They chose to do this by their own will.

4. The option to make this choice had always existed. No doubt they had seen the tree before, without ever having desired the fruit. *They had no problem being obedient to God's instructions.*
5. The only thing that made this moment different was the conversation with the serpent in which *they were lied to* about power of the fruit and God's reasons for keeping them away from the tree.
6. The lie would have had no power if they had recognized it for what it was and believed that the serpent was wrong.
7. It was because they believed the lie that they made a choice they had not made before.

We conclude then that they sinned because they were deceived. There is no other plausible explanation, despite attempts by theologians throughout history to find some form of "concupiscence," pride, or natural desire to which the serpent might have appealed. Such explanations truly cloud the issue. With their trust in God severely challenged, Adam and Eve wondered if there was any validity to the serpent's proposition that there was something to be gained here. They then concluded that the only way to know was by experimentation (rather than trust), and that is when they wanted the fruit. Their desire and their action both followed from their confusion and misbelief. From these observations we can draw several conclusions.

First and foremost, ***being deceived is sufficient enough in and of itself to cause a person to sin.*** No prior predisposition toward evil or other defect of human nature is a necessary prerequisite. This is an incredibly important truth that should not be trivialized or brushed aside. Believing the wrong things leads to sin.

Second, if a lie was sufficient to derail perfect humans and cause them to sin, *how much more of a problem do we face*, given both a flawed soul and a climate of pervasive deception? Without some sort of divinely ministered truth, we would be completely without hope! The significance of this one truth is utterly staggering, and if it were not sufficiently emphasized one might brush past it without recognizing the weight of the matter. Deception was sufficient to cause Adam and Eve to sin. For we who live in a world of darkness, it takes so much less.

Unfortunately, the real value of Adam and Eve's story has long been obscured because we have focused on the outcome and minimized the process. Grenz is typical of many theologians when he characterizes the story of the fall as a divine test in which Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. His focus is on *the failure of the human pair to do the right thing*. The closest he comes to identifying the role of deception is to say that the serpent "subtly raised doubts,"<sup>3</sup> which really fails to do justice to the story.

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3 Grenz, Standley. *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994, p. 191.

This whole preoccupation with performance criteria and whether or not we get it right or wrong is pervasive in Christian thought, and it has a way of twisting the relational fabric of the Christian life into a moralistic evaluation of behavior. As a result, we end up with interpretations of this story that tell us how their sin damaged the relationship between Adam and God, and completely miss the point that ***it was actually the doubt cast upon the relationship that led to the sin!*** We keep making the relationship conditional upon our performance, when it might be much more accurate to say that the relationship with God is what makes or breaks everything else.

Genesis 3 provides the quintessential explanation for the presence of sin in the world. But more than that, we are given the model for *how sin happens at all*. Since Adam had no sinful nature, we cannot blame some predisposition to sin. If we say that he chose to rebel by the free exercise of his will, we still have not answered the question as to *why* he made that choice. The critical point around which the whole story revolves is that he was *deceived*. Prior to the deception he never considered disobedience to be an option. It was the lie that took him in, perhaps naively, and led to his error in judgment.

*Given that Adam could be deceived enough to fall into sin without any prior inclination toward evil, there is every reason to think that deception might be a major cause of stumbling for us.* Raised by flawed human beings, assaulted by mistaken values and goals, and left to our own resources to sort it all out, we do not stand a chance against a foe who is far more clever than we can imagine.

[ Read the complete analysis of belief, truth, and deception and how we can internalize truth to renew our minds in ***The Truth About Lies And Lies About Truth*** by David Takle ]