

Eden Rediscovered

“And the Lord God planted a garden toward the East, in Eden, and there He placed the man who he had formed.” (Genesis 2:8); “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day.” (Genesis 3:8); “And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed...” (Genesis 2:25). In essence, Eden was the place in which man and woman lived and walked with God without shame. The story of creation gives us critical insight into the necessary preparations for such an experience to take place. In the creation of the world, the preparation for man's dwelling, three separations take place. First, there was separation of light from darkness; second, the separation of the waters above and waters below; thirdly, the separation of land from the waters. To this God added the fish of the sea, the vegetation of the earth, and the animal kingdom, before placing man in its center. God's evaluation of the entire project was that it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Sometime later, God gives an additional picture of how to experience fellowship with Him without shame. In the construction of the Tabernacle, which became the dwelling place of God, there are also three separations that must be removed in order to be in the presence of God. The first included a wall that separated the populous of man from the Outer Court. The second was a wall that separated the outer court from the Holy Place. And, the third wall separated the Holy of Holies wherein dwelt the Tabernacle and those things that symbolized the very things on the heart of God.

God reaffirms the necessity of these same three separations in the taking of His chosen people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt in preparation to bring them to Canaan, the Promised Land. Egypt has been a long-standing picture of the world, and, therefore, the first separation is to turn from the world and its value system. Just as there was provision for cleansing of sins in the outer court, so also God took Israel to a place in the wilderness away from their fleshly context, a second separation. As Israel journeyed up the east bank before crossing the Jordan, once again they were given the choice between the permissive will of God and the perfect will of God, which required one more separation. The same was required of priests who went once a year to enter into the Holy of Holies to be in the presence of God. It was essential that priests be absolutely clean, for if any sin remained, they would be struck dead.

These three separations include the world, the flesh, and the devil. The question that comes to the surface; is it truly possible and expected of us to be separate from the world, the flesh, and the devil (formerly Lucifer, a guardian angel) when we live in the midst of it all? Secondly, how is it that these things are evil when God said they were “very good” in their original design?

The Scripture addresses this concept by telling us that although we are in this world, we are not to be of this world (I Corinthians 5:9-13). In the same way, though we have been dead in sin (Rom. 5:8), through Christ our relationship is forever changed and therefore we are to be dead to sin, no longer to be a slave to it. Thus, it is not the world that is changed, but our relationship to it.

Furthermore, Scripture teaches us that we cannot be separated from something unless we are separated to something. In essence, we are called to turn from the world and its standards for approval, and seek instead the relationship and approval of our Heavenly Father. Secondly we are to turn from the things that are temporal by choosing the things that have lasting value and are eternal (II Cor. 4:18). In the third manner we are

separated from the devil by choosing the things that are excellent above the things that are mediocre. Jesus stated that the ruler of the world (the devil) is coming and he has nothing in me. Though the devil existed he had no entitled relationship to Christ. On this note, James tells us that we are to first submit to God and then resist the devil (James 4:7).

Why is it that we are to resist the devil and not temptation? Primarily because all that God has made is not evil, but good, in fact it is "very good". Therefore we can conclude that it is the devil's intent to use all that is good for the purpose of evil by taking it out of context or in excess. Thus, we can understand that God is not ashamed of the world, or of our design, or of His angelic beings. Indeed, He created them all for His glory and said that they were very good. However, with the fall of Lucifer, who ultimately became Satan, came the deceiving nature to cause man to distrust God, turning them to their own devices for satisfaction and fulfillment. Therefore, it comes down to a matter of daily choices in terms of choosing things that are honoring to Him, things that have worth and value, and the things that will display the righteousness of God. We are never to stand alone; we are called to stand with. Indeed, there are numerous righteous men and women, not only in this age, but in the ages before and after our existence. Eden still exists! I John 1:5-7 tells us that if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with Him. Proverbs 2:10 tells us that he speaks wisdom into our hearts. Psalm 84:5 tells us that we can have highways to Zion in our hearts. We can walk with Him in the light without shame.

Believe it or not, these three separations are also essential in the training of a horse. In order to effectively build a powerful and productive partnership with a horse, it is essential that he first be separated from the herd. As anyone knows, this powerful attraction is not easily overcome, it is a process in which the horse learns to recognize and value the presence of the trainer to be greater than that of the herd, in essence, the approval of his master over the approval of his companions. The second separation in the training of the horse is to separate it from its natural and fleshly desires. Though you may be riding the horse, he may often pull with the reins to eat grass or grab a tree branch, or run back to the barn where there is the potential for food and water.

The third separation, the training of a champion, includes that of separating him from his desire for less, he must constantly accept the challenge and the reproofs that will provoke him to excellence in his performance and whole heartedness. Only when he has willingly and thoroughly submitted himself to the master's will, which included separation from the herd, his own appetites, and mediocrity, can he begin to enter into a full and trusting partnership with his master, that results in greater achievement and satisfaction. And just as it is evidenced in the human life, so is it in the horse; he is not being separated from, but to the master. Does this imply that all of his horse friends are evil? Or that grass is wicked? Or that relaxation is not important? Not in the least! It rather implies that each has their rightful place and value under the authority of the master. Though your garden may not look like the original garden of Eden, it is still possible to walk daily with God without shame. -Lew Sterrett