



Adam, Eve, and Satan by William Blake

It's intriguing to dwell on the fact that original sin came about when Satan sowed doubt in the mind of man concerning God's word. That's what actually happens at the beginning of chapter 3 when Satan convinces Eve that she won't really die if she disobeys God. So the birth of evil in the human being came about by doubting God's Word.

That's a loaded statement with layer upon layer of meaning. The great theologian Karl Barth saw The Word of God as having three dimensions. There is The Word revealed in the fully human and fully divine person of Jesus Christ. There is The Word written in holy Scripture. And finally, there is the Word proclaimed by the faithful church in the Gospel<sup>1</sup>. Casting dispersion on any of these dimensions of The Word surely leads to death in sin. So, you see, the nature of sin and its cause hasn't really changed since that first deception practiced by Lucifer in the Garden of Eden. Destruction still awaits us when we come to doubt the faithfulness of the Covenant God, and when we lose faith in The Word (of if we never find that faith in the first place), then we are surely on the road toward perdition.

But it's also intriguing to think about why God permitted that original sin in the first place. I mean, we know that God is sovereign, so he certainly could have stopped Satan's mouth before the deceiver had a chance to deliver his poisonous lies. But, he didn't; God permitted the Devil to deceive his children. Now why would God let that happen? I think it has to do with God's plan to ultimately defeat Satan. Not only that, but since God is love, and there is no darkness at all in him, then God had to create a strategy to destroy evil without resorting to sinful violence. To do that, God had to come up with a way in which Satan would actually destroy himself. And that's exactly what he did.

You see, when Satan convinced man to sin, the Devil sowed his own destruction. Because while he could twist God's creation and mar its joy by making it aware of evil – in fact, Satan could actually place man into such a state that he would be constantly vulnerable to sin. But what Satan could **not** do was to take away that God-Spark which exists in all of us. Since we are all made in the image of God, that means man in the human state is created with a deep yearning for good. Surely this is part of that it means to be made in the image of God.

This is what C.S. Lewis called the law of human nature<sup>2</sup> Regardless of what culture a person is born into, with the possible exception of a psychopath, we all are given the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Furthermore, it is the nature of man to admire and long for the good, the courageous, the fair, the beautiful, and the truthful in life. No one actually gets up in the morning saying to himself, "I want to see just how bad and hurtful I can be today." Only the demented do that.

Oh yes, we are all subject to being led into temptation. But we don't start out by actually desiring to be bad. Paul understood this only too clearly, and expresses it well in places like Romans Chapter 7 when he laments that in his fallen state he does the very things he does not want to do. So yes, he ends up sinning, but not because he **wants** to be bad. In fact, it's quite the opposite. (See Rom.7:14-25) The yearning which comes from the God-Spark in all of us is a deep yearning to be good.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://theologo.wordpress.com/2012/05/13/karl-barths-the-threefold-form-of-the-one-word/>

<sup>2</sup> See [http://mywisegeneration.blogspot.com/2008/04/cs-lewis-mere-christianity-law-of-human\\_23.html](http://mywisegeneration.blogspot.com/2008/04/cs-lewis-mere-christianity-law-of-human_23.html)

This yearning for good, the God-Spark within is surely the focal point for Psalm 32, and a beautiful peace of poetry with which to begin Lent. One of what we know as the “Penitential Psalms,” it proclaims near the beginning the joyous state which is to be had in one whose spirit has no deceit, and concludes by exclaiming how joyous it is to be righteous and upright – you see, it’s that deep yearning to be good again, that God-Spark that rests in us all.

As I was praying over and reading the Scripture passages for this 1<sup>st</sup> Lenten Sunday, this year I was struck by how much verse 6 of Psalm 32 seems to echo the voice of the Prodigal Son when he comes to his senses. You may remember that moment of revelation that happens among the pigs when the young man came to his senses and said, “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.’” (Lk.15.18) Similarly, there is that same moment of repentant commitment in verse 5 of this morning’s Psalm, when David declares, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” You know, God really does want all of his children to come home to him. And the only way we can do that is through making a clean breast of it through sincere confession and repentance. Sooner or later, we must all become prodigal children who realize the wretchedness of our earthly state and the supreme need for the Father’s forgiveness and mercy.

In the Epistle, Paul states that while this yearning for good is the thirst for freedom from the condemnation that comes from sin, what we have through Jesus is so much more than that. In Rom. 5:17 we read, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the first of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” By grace we have dominion over sin. Yes, we yearn to be free from enslavement. But what many do not understand is that what Jesus gives us is not just freedom but Kingship. The grace of God received through faith in Christ is for me the equivalent of a sailor who has been taken prisoner and enslaved by pirates, who is suddenly rescued, and upon returning to his homeland, discovers that in his absence, he has inherited the paternity of the King’s family with all the rights that adhere thereto. You see with salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, you and I are not only given freedom from sin. We are also gifted dominion over sin in this new life in Christ. We are, by adoption, children of the King.

The Gospel for today clearly demonstrates the weapon that Satan is most likely to bring to bear as those deceptions which blind us to the consequences of actions that rob us of our freedom. He seems to do this most often by twisting context until we don’t know which way is up. Lucifer does this both in the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel account – except that when he’s dealing with the Son of God, Satan has met more than his match. This perverse ability of the Evil One to twist and contort the contexts of our lives so that we become confused as to the true nature of things is perhaps why rules of holy living are so important – not to render us more worthy in God’s sight because of pious works. But rather a holy rule of life is wonderfully useful to keep us focused on what perils really lie out there which can steal our freedom and enslave us to a half-life void of joy and celebration.

Yes, God let Satan deceive his children. But God also knew that this story would have the happy ending of Easter morning. Because the Father put some of himself in each of us, and birthed within the human heart his own spark of yearning for the good. And with the passion of Our Lord and the empty tomb, Satan has destroyed himself. When Our Lord was nailed to the Cross, Satan must have rejoiced.

What he did not know is that it would be by this act of total, loving submission that the Savior of the World would bring to fruition his Kingdom, and render God’s children co-regents with him, granting us dominion over nothing less than death itself. So, in this holy season of Lent, let us contemplate again the face of love. For He is indeed mighty to save.

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