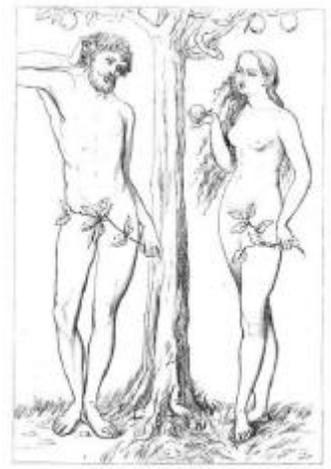


# The Great Fig Leaf Cover-up

(by Barry McWilliams)

CHAPTER TWO OF GENESIS ENDS WITH THE STRIKING STATEMENT that "*The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*"

something that is hard for us to comprehend. For in stating they were "naked," the Bible is telling us not simply that they wore no clothing – which for most cultures, including ours is significantly shocking in and of itself, but that they had nothing to hide from each other on any level, physically, emotionally, relationally. Communication was open and clear whether spoken or body language. There were no secrets, no hiding of feelings, fears or anything else to create a sense of "shame". They were completely vulnerable, and without any fear of their being completely exposed. Even in a Garden of Eden, there were probably occasional disagreements (but without the hidden motives, the need to dominate and prove the other wrong – which characterize sinful conflict) and the other dynamics that take place in any relationship between two individuals who are compliments, not clones, of each other; but they were focused and centered on each other, not themselves. The cry of Adam "*At last!*" as God had presented her to him, indicates that there was completeness in their relationship that nothing else could supply. There was a similar openness between man and God, open communion and fellowship.



This "innocence" has been lost to the human race and the next chapter of Genesis shows us how it happened and what was the result. Man was not placed in the Garden without purpose or responsibility. He was given the task of tending the creation – assigning names meant understanding nature and purpose. He was there to work and tend creation and to fellowship with his creator as a creature in God's image. Along with this responsibility came a command to be obeyed. Gen 2:16,17 – of the "Tree of Knowledge of good and evil," man was not to eat. The Bible is clear in teaching that man was morally free at this time – and his free choices were morally significant.

WE ARE INTRODUCED TO THE TEMPTER IN CHAPTER THREE – the serpent – not just a reptile – but a manifestation of a fallen angel – Satan. He came to the woman looking for a way of striking out at God. Upon finding a prohibition had been given the human race – he utilized a campaign of exaggerations, half-truths and lies to seduce her. "*Did God really say, you must not eat of any tree in the Garden?*" It should be noted in Genesis 3:3 that in response, the woman has added to God's commandment given to Adam not eat of the Tree of Knowledge a further suggestion of ". . . and you must not touch it. . ." The serpent appeals through a lie "*you shall not die*", and questioning God's purposes and motives: "*your eyes will be opened*" and "*you will be like God*," appealing through her appetites, aesthetic senses and pride – Compare 1 John 2:16: ". . . everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man [she saw it was good for food], the lust of his eyes [and pleasing to the eye] and the boasting of what he has and does [and also desirable for gaining wisdom] comes not from the father but from the world." Convinced she took of the tree and ate and gave to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Though "eating the forbidden fruit" is sometimes used as a metaphor for sexual relations – initiating sexual relations was not the sin. There are those that argue that the serpent chose her because she was the "weaker sex" – but despite some interpretations of 1 Tim 2:11-14 – gender seems not to be the issue, but her "role" – she was "the helper" in submission to the man. And while

some suggest that Adam was either tricked, or ate only out of a sexually desire to be with her – it would appear that he was both a party to the discussion and in agreement with the decision to disobey God. God certainly holds him, as the head in the relationship fully responsible for his sin, as we shall see.

**T**HE IMMEDIATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR SIN IS STATED in Genesis 3:7: *“the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”* It was not a sudden realization that they lacked clothing presented here, but guilt, a realization they now have something to hide. As it is stated, “both of their eyes” were opened – the suggestion is that each now felt individual shame, and threatened in the presence of each other. This sudden surge of modesty, and of grasping at whatever is handy to hide that sense of guilt manifests itself in a fear of exposure to each other and to God. Gordon MacDonald says: *“When Eve and Adam sinned, all relationships were radically altered; the first shock waves of that breakage came in the communications area.”* (Magnificent Marriage, p. 47) The schism between man and woman is revealed in the individual action of covering up, and then in hiding from God as He approaches. The original text indicates it was every one scrambling for themselves – a clear indication of the beginnings of the selfishness of sin. There has been no change physically in man, but within his heart that moral and psychological damage has taken place. From that has risen a strong urge to cover themselves – and cover their sin. Satan was half right – they would know good and evil – but now they are powerless to do good and equally powerless to resist evil.

*“Man has fear. Man has psychological problems. How does a Christian understand these? Primarily as the abnormal separation of man from himself. Man's basic psychosis is his separation from God carried into his own self-deception. All men are liars, but, most importantly, each man lies to himself.”* (Frances Schaeffer, Genesis in Time and Space, p. 98-99) *“. . . something has short-circuited internally. His touch with his inner being was severely limited. Adam lost the control he had over all his bodily and mental processes. His appetites and passions would become his worst enemy instead of his best friend. He could no longer be sure his emotions were trustworthy. Various facets of Adam's being began to enter in to combat with others. The wholeness of Adam had been shattered.”* (Gordon MacDonald, Magnificent Marriage, p. 49)

**A**S GOD APPROACHES – WAS IT THE SOUND OF WIND OF THE SPIRIT in the trees – then their fear drives them to hide – individually – from the Lord, Adam probably went one way and the woman another. God had communed with them numerous times before and there was no problem before with man's nakedness. Though hiding was impossible, God knew exactly where they were—no one can hide from Him, no matter how hard they try – for *He CALLS OUT TO the man “where are you?”*— nor can they hide from Him what they had done. But He approaches in a way that offers the possibility of confession of their disobedience. His questions: *“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the Tree I commanded you not to eat from?”* invite Adam to come right out and admit his sin.

But the response Adam offers to God reveals the denying and blaming nature of sin. He makes excuses and instead of admitting his responsibility blames both the woman and God for what has happened. *“The woman YOU PUT HERE with me – SHE GAVE ME SOME FRUIT from the tree and I ate it.”* And when God offers her a similar opportunity to clear this up: *“What is this you have done?”* – She too tries to pass the blame and guilt onto the Serpent: *“THE SERPENT DECEIVED ME and I ate.”* Again she makes excuses and attempts to shift the blame to others. It is notable that there is “no question” of an opportunity for confession offered to the serpent – just a curse.

**T**HE SHATTERING CONSEQUENCES OF ADAM'S sin upon mankind are clear. Man's relationship with himself has been damaged – he feels guilt and selfishness has taken control of his heart; he has lost control – man's heart is now driven by selfish appetites, lusts, pride and rebellion. His relationship with God has also been completely shattered – moral guilt, fear, estrangement and spiritual death are barriers he is powerless to overcome. And his relationship with his wife has also been wrecked. Shifting of blame, deception and hiding of self from others leading to miscommunication; and a severe loneliness that even marriage can't overcome -- roots from which anger grows and exploitation and violence results. And even Man's relationship to the creation has been changed – a struggle with thorns and a hostile environment culminating in certain physical death as well.

The curses God brings are also in a sense blessings meant to preserve mankind in a sinful world, and are important for us to understand in the dynamics of our relationships with one another as well. For the Serpent, there is a curse and a promise – the first promise of the Gospel – *“the seed of the woman will crush his head”* – and the cross – for Satan will *“strike his heel.”* The man and the woman however, are “cursed” in their primary roles, though there is some “blessing” too.

**F**OR THE WOMAN THERE IS BOTH INCREASED FERTILITY and increased pain in child-bearing. In view here is not just labor pains, but also all the heartaches of raising children. God's “blessing” is that both through that procreation will be many children (perhaps needful as man seems so determined to destroy his fellows) and one in particular would be the Savior. God also subjected her to an “intense desire” for her husband – which because of his sinfulness would be the source of much pain and hardship – especially as he would now “rule over her.” Schaffer comments: *“Man has separated his sexual life from its original high purpose as a vehicle of communication of person to person. Sexuality loses its personal dimension; men and women treat each other as things to be exploited.”* (Schaeffer, p. 99)

God is judging right at the point of woman's sin – she had taken the initiative with the fruit – now she will be exploited and dominated by the man. God's “blessing” was provision for order (government in all its forms) in a fallen world – without such “order” society would totally disintegrate. She has gone from “helper” to “subject” – *she had made a bad decision and God relieved her of the decision-making responsibility from then on.* (Gordon MacDonald, p. 107) Frances Schaffer says: *“In a fallen world (in every society – big and small – and in every relationship) structure is needed for order. God himself here imposes it on the basic human relationship. Form is given and without such form freedom would be chaos . . . it is not because man is stronger that he is to have dominion . . . but rather because God gives this as structure in the midst of a fallen world. The Bible makes it plain that this relationship is not to be without love. (But) in a fallen world it is not surprising that men have turned this structure into a kind of slavery. It is not meant to be slavery. In fact, it is in cultures where the Bible has been influential that the balance has been restored. . . . in a fallen world we need structure in every relationship.”* (Genesis in Time and Space, p. 94)

**A**DAM IS SINGLED OUT AS THE RESPONSIBLE ONE. It is because he “listened and ate” that the ground itself is cursed and making a living is also painful toil. Adam had heard God's voice before Woman was created. But Adam had listened to her voice instead, though she was ill-equipped to take the leadership. She hadn't heard God's voice – see her misinformed statement to the serpent in vs. 3 – and had based her decision on faulty grounds: what was desirable for the appetites, beauty, and wisdom – rather than God's Word – Adam had known better.

**C**REATION WAS EFFECTED TOO. The vegetative world mutated into thorns and thistles, and the soil's fertility (which probably included significant climatic changes as well) is severely reduced. Man was the caretaker of creation, now he is its slave, sweating out a life, but certain to return to the dust of the ground from which he was taken. Man's role has also been twisted by sin, still in a work relationship with the creation – but now an adversarial one.

God's blessing is that man still has purpose – distorted though it has become, and there is a promise offering hope. We see that Adam grasped it by giving his wife a name, "Eve" which means she would be "*the mother of all living.*" He has grasped the significance of the "seed" of the woman. Though driven from the garden and dominated by the violent passions of sin that would soon see brother against brother – there is a hope in that promise. Frances Schaeffer suggests that there are two great drives built into a man. The first is for a relationship with God, the second his need for a relationship with the opposite sex. Both were established in Genesis Two. The fall has damaged and distorted both these relationships leaving a emptiness and a hunger in the heart that somehow can't be satisfied. And that also explains why mankind still tries so hard to see those two drives filled.

**T**HE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FALL, THE FIG LEAVES and these curses for our marriage relationships are significant. Why do all marriages have problems – we are all sinners. We are infected with that exploitive selfishness that often overpowers promises to love and serve one another. There is something missing in our hearts – we were not created as we are – but to be in a "naked and without shame" relationship with God and each other. Instead, we are busy sowing together fig leaves, trying to cover ourselves up. In our basic roles in family life, as a result, in our relationships we struggle, and both inflict and suffer much pain. The tendencies of a sinful heart – guilt, fear, blaming, hiding, lust – and their fruits pride, anger, rejection, greed, unfaithfulness, betrayal, confusion – mean that in every relationship we will have to struggle with honest communication and selfless giving. There will be hurtful conflicts, hidden agendas, and self-serving activity. Even life itself is a constant battle with a hostile environment, human and spiritual foes, and an aging towards inevitable death and separation from those we love, To cope with this, we will need the mercy and grace and forgiveness that God alone can give us through His son.

Frances Schaeffer makes the point that in the fall – man has not ceased to be man. He still is an image-bearer – though twisted, broken and abnormal. He does not cease being human, and is still significant as a moral creature before God. He strives to recover what was lost in the fall, but that can only be recovered through Christ. But in Christ, there is hope of restoration. He alone can provide the covering we need for our sin – and he provides that in His blood shed on the cross.

**I**N FACT, IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE WE MAY FIND a demonstration of God's grace and restoration actually played out, admittedly incomplete in this life, but a testimony nonetheless. Marriage itself is used as an illustration of Christ's sacrificial love for the Church. "*Cleaving is in effect a part of the great reconciling act. It is the progressive effort to reclaim some of the communicational capacity we lost, to recover the genius and joy of relationships that God meant us to experience. That's why I keep insisting that marriage is the ideal arena to demonstrate the love and power of God. For in the family, people show the constant and practical ways the love of Christ can aid human beings in overcoming obstacles and barriers originally erected through sin.*" (Gordon MacDonald, Magnificent Marriage p. 49)

## What does the Bible say about being Married? **Worksheet 2**

The Word of God says, "Stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, let us be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble and fall" (Rom. 14:13, *Phillips*). Paul tells us to encourage one another (see 1 Thess. 5:14). Invest your energy in looking at your own contributions to the marriage and develop your own potential and capabilities. In place of excuses take some positive action.

*Do the following learning exercise and you may be surprised by your answers and the results of changing your present pattern.*

1. List six personal "musts" or "shoulds," such as "I must have a clean and neat house at all times no matter what!"

2. In response to each "must" above, list what you receive from this must, such as "I feel better about myself" or "I avoid criticism from my mother-in-law (friends, spouse)."

3. Ask yourself what would happen if you didn't fulfill this "must" for a week.

4. What do you really want to do? What could you do with some of the time you take in fulfilling this "must?"

One of the tendencies of human nature is to project blame onto others for difficulties, problems, or circumstances. When people have difficulty in marriage they seem to resort to two procedures: (1) they defend themselves; and (2) they try to discover why the other person does what he/she does. They think they'll be happy when they know *why* the other person acts as he/she does. However, knowing why a person does something doesn't necessarily solve the problem. Finding out why is not always important, nor is it always possible. What is important is spending time determining what is going on in a relationship and making plans for solving the difficulties or making the changes that are necessary. Reasons may be important at times, but too often they are used as excuses!

*Let's look now at the blaming and excuses  
that may be present in your own marriage.*

1. List any blames that you have projected toward your spouse in the last three months.
2. Have any changes occurred because of blaming? If so, indicate what they are.
3. Is your spouse aware of the blaming? If so, how has he/ she responded?
4. How do you feel about blaming?
5. Write out one problem for which you blame your partner. Then rewrite it in the form of a constructive, positive suggestion that would be acceptable to him/her.
6. List any excuses you may have made in the past six months as to why your marriage isn't better than it is.
7. What could you do to replace the excuses that you may have made?
8. Ask your spouse to share with you what he/ she sees operating in your life. As him/her to suggest what you could replace them with. Ask how s/he feels about the musts you have been focusing on.