For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:25

Painting Over Eden

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 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." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:1–6

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Painting Over the Inconvenient

Boiling down all the subtleties to the basics, individuals subscribe to one of only two philosophical positions today: one, man is essentially good, and indications to the contrary are simply aberrations; or, two, man, since Eden, is essentially depraved, and indications to the contrary only bespeak the influence of a gracious God. Stated another way, one subscribes either to the position that man is in charge, or one subscribes to the position that God is in charge. Those who adhere to the former, answer to no higher, absolute authority. Those who adhere to the latter answer to the absolute authority of God.

To those who do not answer to God, changing the rules is a piece of cake. Nothing could be easier. When a precept becomes inconvenient or uncomfortable, it is simply discarded. It is determined to be discriminatory, or at least outdated. Thus today we have same-sex couples who are "married." We have perverts given free reign to teach their perversions to small children. We are told that there are 439 "genders" (or at least one day will be) and that children too young to walk alone at night can know their plumbing doesn't match their dream-state gender, and have it surgically, permanently, altered.

God's precepts, government's laws, and thousands of years of heritage are discarded because a few people consider them to be, suddenly, inconvenient.

Today the truth of what happened in Eden has become inconvenient for many. The truth that man, since Eden, is a fallen, sinful being has become too hard for some to bear. So they just paint over that truth, creating a new truth more to their liking. But, of course, they are cunning enough not to splash on their garish final coat all at once. They begin with more subtle shades, almost imperceptibly building up layer after layer of colors, working their way gradually to the true colors of their intent.

Thus, for example, not so terribly long ago homosexuality was a practice of shame, kept hidden from the rest of society. Then the shame was challenged, and gradually society allowed itself to be convinced that homosexuality was no longer a shameful practice. Society agreed to "accept" the practice as just another part of normal—different, but normal. Then those who were once ashamed, decided that being normal but different wasn't good enough, and they began to demand "rights." Soon in places of business, in insurance policies, and in city halls across the land it was considered discriminatory not to extend to homosexuals the same rights as

others—not based on race (something over which the person has no control), but based on their choice of bed-partner.

Now we have supreme courts and legislatures across the land declaring that forthwith the definition of marriage is to include homosexual couples. And, to date, thousands of same-sex "marriages" have been performed.

The contemporary acceptance of homosexuality as something perfectly normal is just one—and today, small—example of how we have painted over the truth of Eden. Heterosexuals have done much the same thing with divorce and carnality; the church has done it by loosening the standards by which leaders and elders are selected; society as a whole has done it by so easily winking at deceit and corruption. When our sins become too burdensome, instead of repenting we just change the definition of sin. Soon there will be no sin left; we will all have evolved—by mutual acclimation—into perfect little angels.

For those who do not know God, there can be no absolute standard. Civil laws and constitutions can always be changed. But for those who *do* know God—and, more critically, accept His written word as absolute truth—there is no excuse. God's holy word is our unchanging standard. It defines who we are and how we are to live. It speaks the truth boldly, without compromise. It cares nothing about contemporary standards, or what is currently politically correct.

It is time that we began living by the standards in which we claim to believe. It is time to stop making excuses.

And it is time that we put away our cans of paint.

> For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.
>
> *Romans 1:26-27*

Rewriting History

It was an interesting period in the life of planet earth. Many today have probably forgotten (or have never been told of) the turmoil, but for several years prior to January 1, 2000, the press laid down a crescendoing cacophony of headlines and stories warning everyone about how the world was going to end at the moment the clock ticked over to 12:01 am. The grisly scenario painted was one of airliners plummeting from the sky, utilities ceasing to flow, world-wide markets collapsing, and people starving to death because grocery shelves would be empty. In 1997 *Newsweek* blared,

> THE DAY THE WORLD SHUTS DOWN. Drink deep from your champagne glasses as the ball drops in Times Square to usher in the year 2000. Whether you imbibe or not, the hangover may begin immediately. The power may go out. Or the credit card you pull out to pay for dinner may no longer be valid. If you try an ATM to get cash, that may not work, either. Or the elevator that took you up to the party ballroom may be stuck on the ground floor. Or the parking garage you drove into earlier in the evening may charge you more than your…

In 1999 the magazine ran another alarmist article:

> HELP! Y2K IS ON THE WAY. Think of Y2K as a hurricane being tracked offshore. It might strike the coast with gale force, or it might gradually blow itself out. Both possibilities are supported by plausible stories. Do you board up the windows or not? Y2K is, of course, shorthand for the Year 2000, year of the dread Millennium Bug. Some computers and microchips will read 2000 as 1900, or not read it at all. They might shut down or—worse—run steadily, yet give their users wrong results. Unchecked, the bug could…

Even their terminology was inaccurate. The Y2K "bug" was not a bug at all. A computer bug is an error in programming—something the software engineer either missed or did wrong. The early decision to use a two-digit designation for the year, however, was intentional, and based on memory and storage capacity of the computers at the time; back then every tiny byte was precious. January 1, 2000, was also decidedly not the beginning of the new "millennium" at all. It was, in fact, the first day of the last year of the current millennium.

Then, predictably, when the world did not collapse in on itself, the press quickly covered its tracks with we-knew-it-all-along articles—suggesting that anyone that had believed their earlier journalistic scare tactics was only a hopeless idiot. On January 3, 2000, *Time* magazine told us that

> the Year 2000 Bug turned out to be just another piece of vaporware. To the disappointment of survivalists, millennialists, and journalists everywhere, the much-hyped Y2K bug failed to bring about the end of civilization. At the very least, weren't all those third-world markets still running on old TRS-80s supposed to drag our shiny new mainframes down with them? Apparently not. Having barricaded ourselves in our bunkers with nothing but a pile of gold Krugerrands and a mating pair of hamsters, we now find ourselves asking, didn't any computers, anywhere, crash on the morning of January 1, 2000?

Countless articles during the early days of 2000 claimed that the whole thing had been one big hoax—that, since Armageddon failed to occur, apparently programmers around the world had just put one over on everyone, scaring them unnecessarily and earning for themselves obscene amounts of overtime pay. But this writer knows different, because he lives with someone who played an integral role in making all those necessary software changes.

She is now retired, but in her then position as a business analyst for an information technology company, for almost a year Linda wrote business designs that guided programmers in making necessary code changes. After the changes had been made, she performed exhaustive, government-mandated testing to ensure that everything was in place well in advance of January 1, 2000. Her clients were financial institutions: banks, savings and loans, credit unions—those serving both individuals and huge corporations. It is quite possible that your ability to withdraw cash from an ATM on 1/1/2000 was directly traceable to the many hours put in by business analysts like Linda and that army of programmers.

In January of that year almost everything went off without a hitch—not because it was all a hoax, but because of all that behind-the-scenes work performed by people like my wife.

One of the most persistent lies about the Garden of Eden is that it never happened at all. The easiest way for people to be at ease with themselves, to claim that all of this God stuff is unnecessary, is for them to deny their own depravity. If the Garden is just a myth, then man never fell; if man never fell, then there is no need for redemption; if there is no need for redemption, there is no need for Christ. Their conclusion: Christ—if he existed at all—was just another nice guy who taught love and kindness for his fellow man. Nothing more.

Man has a built-in need for his own importance. And, to some, there is nothing more emasculating than admitting one's need for redemption. This is the offense of the cross: that ugly and bloodied tree is the unflinching evidence that man since

Adam cannot stand on his own merits, that he is not righteous in himself, but needs Christ's death and resurrection to be once again whole—to reclaim that pristine condition he enjoyed in the earliest days of the Garden. Denying the need for Christ authenticates their own cynicism, establishes their importance, thus inadvertently contradicting the one they claim is a "good teacher":

> Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds."
>
> *Matthew 16:24-27*

Modern cynics find comfort in denying all the hard work an army of analysts and programmers did behind the scenes so that their bank accounts and ATM cards would still work properly after January 1, 2000. That lie (like almost all lies) somehow gives them a feeling of importance, of superiority.

Just so, modern cynics of faith find comfort in denying the sacrifice of God's Son. They couldn't live with themselves if they knew the work of Christ to be necessary and yet continued on without Him. Since they are determined to stay their own course, for their own peace of mind they must deny the events of Eden. No fruit, no foul. No serpent, no Satan. No Satan, no sin. No sin, no need for redemption. No need for redemption, no need for Jesus Christ.

But their own world contradicts their self-serving lie. Sin and depravity are indeed alive and well on planet earth. Only those blind to their own sin cannot see it all around them.

> Non-Christians seem to think that the Incarnation implies some particular merit or excellence in humanity. But of course it implies just the reverse: a particular demerit and depravity. No creature that deserved Redemption would need to be redeemed. They that are whole need not the physician. Christ died for men precisely because men are not worth dying for; to make them worth it.
>
> *C. S. Lewis*

Choosing to Believe

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Genesis 3:6–11

They were perfect. Utterly pristine. No deformities, no blemishes, no mental or emotional weaknesses. They were without sin. No dishonesty, no guile, no craftiness or secret motives. They were clean before their Maker, and thus free to enjoy His company. Their life was one of unfettered bliss. No worries. No anxieties. No fear.

The man and woman understood who they were—and what they were not. They understood that the Maker was God—and that they were not. Their relationship with Him was based on trust and honesty: they trusted Him, and He was honest with them. Everything was open and free.

But one day the man and woman chose not to believe God. They chose, instead, to believe a lie put forth by a stranger.

Both the serpent and the humans were God's creatures, so the test was ultimately from Him. Just as Abraham's faith in God had to be tested on Mount Moriah, and just as Jesus had to be tested before fulfilling His call on earth, man's spiritual development required a test of his trust in the Maker. But unlike the sinless Jesus and the trusting Abraham, the first man and woman failed the test.

In the test God gave them every chance to make the right choice. Satan represented himself as a beast, something over which the man and woman already knew they held dominion; the beast spoke, so they should have known something was amiss; and Satan, through the serpent, presented an argument at odds with what the man and woman had been told by the Maker. So, though the test was ordained by Him, God gave them every possible advantage. They were without excuse.

And still they failed.

Though their world was perfect, needing nothing to be added or changed, the serpent touched a nerve and tickled their vanity. He held out the honey of their becoming God-like, and the first couple believed the lie. They made a conscious choice to believe a lie, when they already knew the truth.

Modern man—more specifically, the modern believer in Christ—is still listening to lies. We are surrounded by them. Indeed, there are days when it seems that all of civilization itself is built upon the foundation of falsehoods and deceit.

Why is it so many people readily accept a lie before the truth? It is almost as if they *want* to be fooled. Our media and advertising are replete with falsehoods and misrepresentations that have become bland in their ubiquity; our courts are filled with those caught with the gun still smoking in their hand who blithely claim their innocence. In point of fact, the system itself seems to be designed around this deceit, where jurisprudence virtually demands a claim of innocence regardless the crime or guilt-level of the defendant. The impoverished adamantly remain on welfare because more money can be made by not working, and politicians know that honesty and candor will surely result in someone else being elected to take their place.

The worst liar, of course, is the father of lies.

> [Jesus said,] "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."
>
> *John 8:44*

Every day Satan plies us with tempting alternatives to the one Truth; he bends over backwards, going to exorbitant lengths to cajole us away from the quiet, steady truth of Jesus. The real mystery in all this may be why so many Christians actually believe Satan's lies. But then, when we do, we are only following the pattern set by our original father Adam. He knew everything we know—and more. But he still bought the lie.

Being flesh, we cannot avoid temptation. Satan is good at his trade, and there are days when we forget that we carry within us a superior power. So we give in. We believe the lie that what he has to offer is somehow better than what we already have.

Being flesh, about all we can do—on a human level, beyond the Spirit's power—is keep reminding ourselves of the truth. Scripture holds it all, and in one epochal statement Jesus said all we really need to remember:

> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
>
> *John 14:6*

I Am

No lie of Satan's can limit who Jesus is. If we could move backward through time, to travel through the echoes of things that have already taken place, Jesus would be there; to visit the ancients, to shake hands with Khafre and Homer and Anthony, Jesus would be there. If we could, likewise, travel forward through time, through moments and dreams that have yet to transpire, Jesus would be there. So why do we search for Him here, when his stride spans eternity on either side? Where is Jesus? He is always, and forever, now.

> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
>
> *Revelation 1:8*

The Way

> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.
>
> *Romans 5:1-2*

The Truth

> "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."
>
> *John 17:14-17*

The Life

No amount of whitewash will cover the truth of what occurred in Eden. The lie was believed—and man has paid the price ever since. But no lie will ever replace the truth of Christ's life—and the price He paid for our sins. On our journey we will listen to many lies, but none of them can be believed.

The life of Jesus is the only truth.

> "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."
>
> *Revelation 1:17b-18*