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Decisions and the Enemy

While reading Genesis 1—2, you may have noticed, as God finished each stage of His creation, that He used the word ‘good’ to describe it. God’s pronouncement that something is ‘good’ means it came into existence because of His act of will (that is, because He decided to make it). It is ‘good’ because what God decides *is* good. The word ‘good’ also conveys the idea that God was satisfied with what He had made. There was no discrepancy between what God thought in His mind and what actually came to be in the created world. When God calls His finished work ‘good’, we are assured it is how He had decided it would be. (This tells us very clearly at the outset that we should firmly resist any idea that God created ‘evil’. As we shall see, the use of the word ‘evil’ is fairly muddled in men’s minds.)

When we say that God ‘decides’, we need to be sure we are not implying that He decides in the same way that we, His human creatures, decide. Let’s examine two aspects of creaturely decision-making which help clarify how we are to think about the will of God.

CREATURELY DECISIONS

When we think about 'deciding', we usually think of it as a matter of 'deciding between' one course of action and another. We view a decision as an act of choosing between a number of options. This 'choosing between' kind of decision-making is quite appropriate for us, because as God's creatures we are 'presented' with all the various options our Creator provides for us.

However, we need to understand there are differences in the decision-making Adam and Eve performed in a pre-Fall world and the decision-making we perform now.

DECISIONS ADAM AND EVE COULD MAKE

In the Garden of Eden there is a choice between a number of 'good' things. If the man or woman wish to lie under a tree or dig the garden, these are choices presented to them by God as proper and 'good'. They are in accordance with God's mind, and therefore Man is free to do them (just as he is free to choose *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil).

These choices between 'good' options are truly free choices for two reasons. First, they are exercised within the freedom which God has created for His creatures; they are an experiencing of that freedom. And second, they do not lead to a place of bondage and slavery which jeopardizes the *future* experience of God's freedom.

In this way, Genesis teaches us that voluntary obedience—*deciding* to obey—is the way God intended Man to experience freedom. Free choice in this sense does not and could not arise from the Rebellion. It is in the world before the Fall.

DECISIONS WE MAKE NOW

We, however, live in a rebellious world, and this affects our decision-making. After the Fall, there can now be choice

between what is good and what is evil—between what is the mind of God and what is not.

This is often mistakenly called 'free choice'. People frequently think that freedom to choose came through the Fall. They are deceived; choice was already within God's good plan. What came through the Fall was not freedom to choose but rather slavery—slavery to having to continually decide between good and evil, and to do so from a compromised position of 'unfreedom', a position of active egocentric rebellion.

This means that freedom as it was known in the garden has been lost. Man is no longer free to become what he ought—he has lost the ability to please God because he has chosen to adopt a rebellious stance. He can no longer do 'good' works. This is truly a fall (although 'dive' would more accurately emphasize the deliberate nature of the decision).

When we speak, then, in the context of Genesis 1—2, of God 'deciding' things, we must be careful not to attach mistaken ideas, drawn from our rebellion, to the concept of 'deciding'. God does not 'decide' as a creature does. There is no one who precedes Him in time and no one who is before Him in authority; therefore, no one presents Him with a set of options to choose between. Similarly, He does not have to choose to be obedient to another, as a creature does. God simply wills and does what He wants. He knows His own mind; there is, for Him, no alternative at a given moment of time. His mind is always good.

We can even say there are some things which God cannot do—things which are contrary to His character. This is not because of any powerlessness on His part, but because He limits Himself. His character is such that He *will* not do certain things.

MAN MATTERS BECAUSE OF WHO MADE HIM

However, once God creates Man in His image and calls him to freely relate to Him, a new situation arises. Because of

Man's freedom, it is now possible that something other than God's 'good' will might come to be.

It is important to see that this other, which we call 'evil', really describes a set of relational circumstances; evil is something which can be known only by *doing* it. In this sense, 'evil' is really manifested as rebellion, or, to give it another name, sin. God does not create evil—it is something that can only be done by a creature.

Yet when it is done, evil has a cost, and substantial changes accompany its doing. This is so because rebellion against God is a violation of the relation between God and man.

When God commits Himself to His human creatures, He does so in trust—and trust is a relation involving both decision and action. In this commitment we can see His love for the creature He has created. It is a commitment which God maintains and assures us about many times after the Rebellion. Indeed, God's commitment is so great that eventually He initiates a covenant which is sealed in the costly blood of His only Son.

It is against this perspective of the cost of redemption that we can understand something of the awesome and expensive nature of God's act of creation. When we consider the fact that God knows all things in advance, even our sin (although He does not will it), we can see that His decision to create also involved a decision made in advance to redeem the creation when it fell (as He knew it would). His commitment to not spare His only Son was made in advance. Such is the courage and determination of God's mind to create.

We can also see that God's intention for His creatures is that they respond to Him by acting in faith—that is, in trust in what He has said. This means that to be unfaithful has great consequences. Our decisions are profoundly significant.

This is not to say Man is significant *because* he chooses to sin—such an idea comes from our fallen perspective. Man matters even before his rebellion because the God who made him matters. When you are made by the Best, and in His own

image, you are a masterpiece, and you certainly matter because He does.

When a masterpiece is created, it draws attention to its maker and gives him glory. When a masterpiece is marred, no one says the creator should never have made it; rather, there is a profound sadness at its ruin. God's masterpiece is marred, and the tragedy is that now we must learn of the true greatness of God's creation by contemplating the damage it has sustained. Through Scripture, God reveals to us just what it is we have lost.

So before we come to consider the Rebellion itself, we need to balance our thinking. The balance we require is to remember that Man matters because the God who made him matters; and that, had Man preserved the creation in loving and obedient trust of God, he would have mattered just as much as he does now he is marred. So often we ponder Man's messes to learn how significant he is, and it is true they show us this. However, here at Point 1, before the Fall, it is right to remember the great truth that to obey God is to be significant and to matter—with the marvellous joy of knowing that, unlike rebellion, obedience pleases Him.

THE ENEMY

Before we go on in the next chapter to consider the Rebellion and its consequences, let's pause to learn about the Enemy which Adam and Eve encountered, and which we still meet in our daily life.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will

not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1-7, RSV).

In the encounter between the serpent and the woman, the serpent is simply described as being 'more subtle than any other wild creature'. In this way, two major ideas about Satan are emphasized.

The first is that the serpent is a *creature*. This means that, in his approach to the woman, he too must acknowledge—whether he likes it or not—that, like everything else in the universe, he owes his existence to the Word of God. He too is dependent on God for his life. Whether we see in Genesis' use of the serpent a way of speaking of Satan himself (see Revelation 12:9) or simply Satan's use of a wild creature as an instrument, the point remains. Satan himself is a creature, albeit a fallen and rebellious one.

ACTION

We must never forget this fact. There are only ever two kinds of reality: God and what He has made. There is no third kind of reality. Although the demonic may present itself as being independent of God, this is a deception; whatever we encounter, if it is not God, can *only* be creaturely. Accept this basic truth because God reveals it to be so.

THE ENEMY'S METHODS

The second idea about Satan we find here—an idea to which the whole of the Bible testifies—is that he is cunning and

devious. By using the word 'subtle', Genesis indicates there is some ulterior purpose behind the serpent's words. Here we learn that the enemy is in the business of deception.

Because Satan is a creature, he must work within created reality; consequently, all he can do is to distort that reality, to try to present it so it seems different from how it really is. Deception arises only when there is an already existing situation which may, by the subtle use of words, be presented as being other than it is. That Satan must, of necessity, deceive indicates he has to work with the reality God has made.

ACTION

1 This gives us an understanding of all 'knowledge' that is contrary to God's Word: it has its origin in deception. This truth is the foundation of the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged (and about which we have no option).

2 When we say that someone is deceived, we are really acknowledging they are the victim of such warfare. But more, they are a willing victim: they are responsible for acceding to the enemy's false presentation of reality, just as Eve was. We must clearly resolve to acknowledge both the deception of the enemy and our willingness to accept and yield to that deception. We are held responsible for the latter.

3 Give thanks to God that we may know this truth by His revelation—and recognize it is often very disturbing for deceived people, who are rebels, to receive it. It causes some to scoff in an attempt to discredit God's revelation by ridicule. Others express fear because they find the idea that knowledge is not neutral after all too disturbing to contemplate. Fix it firmly in your mind that the enemy is real, and take strength from God's further revelation that this enemy is a defeated foe who has been put to open shame by Jesus (Col 2:15).

The serpent's opening question to the woman emphasizes the fact that it is a creature and must operate within the universe

God has made. 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?' The serpent can do its subtle work of subverting the woman's relation to God only by standing over against the very Word of God that it itself, as a creature, is dependent on!

It begins by quoting what God has said, not only because it *has* been said, but because it is to this Word that the woman is committed. God has committed her to it; her calling is to stand fast and be obedient, by an act of her will.

However, she allows herself to be moved. A subtle shift takes place in her relation to the Word of God: she allows herself to become preoccupied with *discussing* what God said rather than *doing* it. Immediately, her basic commitment of obediently standing under God's Word has been altered. Now she and the serpent stand back from the Word of God and attempt to discuss it in a 'detached' way. This decision to distance herself from the Word of God by talking about it rather than doing it is the commitment which initially draws her into disobedience.

ACTION

1 We should not be surprised that the enemy quotes the words of God. He *must* do so because that is the reality in which he, too, has been set; and he *wants* to do so because he knows other creatures also live in relation to God's words. What God has said is therefore the starting point for his deception.

2 Consequently, do not be moved by the mere quotation of Scripture. The *use* to which Scripture is put is much more important than the fact that it is quoted to you. (Later, we will look at Matthew 4:1–11, where this matter is dealt with in more practical detail.)

3 The serpent's question seems innocent enough, but it cloaks a deception. Here we learn the great need to examine every question anyone ever asks us to see what lies behind it.

We do not do this to be clever but to see whether the very acceptance of the question involves us in a sin of omission, and thus in changing our position of obedient submission to God. If we examine the Gospels, we notice Jesus never accepts a question without searching for the implications which lie at its root. Often, the answers He gives show He does not accept a question in the form it is asked of Him.

4 We must also understand our own commitments here. In Chapter 2 we said that our attitude of heart matters immensely when we read the Bible. The reason is that all enquiry or discussion of the revealed Word of God must be conducted in a way which sets out from the decision to obey it. If we miss this, we have already adopted an attitude to God's Word which subverts us from understanding it.

Notice the progression in the boldness of the serpent's questions. They begin with a seemingly casual, 'Did God say...?'; they end with the bold contradiction, 'You will not die.' This progression is the clue to the way we should test what is actually meant by the use of familiar words. If we wait for the *conclusion* (or results) of the enemy's words, we will be able to test their truth.

ACTION

1 Do not be afraid to quickly reason to the end of an argument to see where it goes. This is often a helpful test to decide whether you will proceed with a discussion.

2 Ask yourself at every point this simple question: What, in practice, is being asked of me here? If I do what is being suggested, what will I actually have done? Will I have gone against God's plain Word? In spiritual warfare, in other words, maintain by a resolute decision your intention to be obedient to God's Word—that is your goal. Do not accept, particularly by way of discussion, any other stance.

After hearing the woman repeat what God had said to her, the serpent interjects with a clear contradiction to God's Word: 'You will not die.' Then, before the woman can reply, the serpent rushes on to attribute to God, by innuendo, an unsavoury motive—that somehow He has hidden something from the woman, that He has not declared His whole hand.

Now, of course, it is correct that things are hidden from Eve. God has not told her (or any of us) everything. Our knowledge of God is true, but it is not exhaustive. God chooses to reveal to us enough to obey Him and bring Him pleasure; but there are things secret to His mind which He has not chosen to speak about. (This is the meaning of the 'occult'—it is an enquiry into matters which are secret and which God has not chosen to teach us.)

The serpent, however, implies God is withholding from the man and woman a piece of essential information, namely, that if they eat of the tree, they will know good and evil, and be like God. Further, the serpent implies that because this act of eating will be an 'eye-opener', it is to be desired. He stirs up curiosity. He stirs up curiosity by convincing Eve there is something here she can have for herself.

ACTION

Here we learn the truth, shocking to our generation, that 'knowledge' and 'experiences' are not necessarily to be sought after. The statement 'If we can experience something, we should' is no more true than the statement 'If we have the technological ability to do something, we should do it.' Be careful of the subtle offer to 'be in the know'—the enemy often uses it to tempt people by fascination. It is the great attraction of all mystic sects and secret societies that you can know about them only by committing yourself blindly to them. Demonic secrets (and they are just that) require blind commitment. Never abandon the idea that you should test them by the standards of Scripture.

We notice, then, that the serpent's approach begins with a flat contradiction of God's Word (which goes unchallenged) and then suggests that God is withholding from His creatures some knowledge which they could know (this contains within it the unspoken presupposition that the creature has a 'right to know'—which is simply not true). But the serpent's deception contains a further implication: that God did not want His creatures to be like Him.

The true situation is that they are *already* made in God's image. The preservation of that image depends on Man's obedience to God's Word as spoken and revealed, not on some twisted interpretation of other material. Rather than gaining something if he complied with the serpent's discussion, Man would lose what he already had. The idea that he could somehow be more like God by disobeying Him, implied by the serpent, is clearly shown to be a lie.

The serpent's subtle deception is that what the Creator has and knows, the creature can also have and know. This fact has a certain validity which God Himself acknowledges.

And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever' (Gen 3:22).

Yet what the enemy does not say is that a creature can experience this knowledge only by active rebellion. The woman has to go against the Word of God to 'know' what the serpent promises (even though the promise is not true). But for her, the 'knowing' of evil is the doing of it; and it is the doing of it by the woman which the serpent achieves. In focusing the woman's mind on what can be 'gained', the serpent deflects her from the fact that the way to get it is to do what God has forbidden. The serpent appears to be offering a goal; in fact, he is achieving the performance of an act of

rebellion (which, we notice, he never explicitly asks the woman to do).

We must remember that the 'knowledge' being spoken of here is not information, in the sense of data. Rather, it is knowledge which is experienced in the doing of the deed. Sin is known only where it is done. You cannot be said to know it without doing it (though the man and woman know *about* it from God's prohibition).

The verse quoted above (3:22) does affirm that the man and woman now have a knowledge of good and evil, as God has. However, this does not mean we can draw the inference that God has His knowledge of good and evil by doing evil. We know Man and Woman do; but we cannot reason that what is true for the creature will be true for God in the same way—that is to adopt in reverse the serpent's deception that what is true of God can necessarily be true of Man. Just what God means when He says 'man has become like one of us' is very hard to understand. In this setting, it may be no more than an acknowledgement that the man and woman have come into an awareness of secret knowledge which only the Godhead has. But that Man should not have eaten from the tree, and that he cannot continue and live for ever now that he has done so, is made very clear. He is not permitted to remain in the garden.