

“Are You As Good As You Think You Are?”

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Texts: Genesis 3:7-13; Zechariah 3:1-8

Ray Comfort has a recognizable approach to witnessing/evangelism. It is shared like this: when a person claims to be “righteous” (“I’m a good person” is an assertion of righteousness!), he asks them a series of questions: “Did you ever lie, ever steal, ever look lustfully at another person, or want for yourself what rightfully belongs to someone else?” This litmus test of personal righteousness is lifted from the ten commandments—the “Thou shalt not sections.” And what this does is draw a line between the claim to be a good person (or the “At least I am not as bad as some others are” line of reasoning which is, frankly, an evasive piece of rationalization, or subjective self-justification). At this point it dawns on Comfort’s interviewee that either their claim to be a “good person” is under some unfamiliar scrutiny. There are many examples of the effectiveness of this approach—it is clever, if not brilliant. But it is not original—at least not to Ray Comfort. It goes back to Genesis 3:7-13:

7 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 [a]loin coverings.

8 They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the [b]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. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” 11 And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”¹

When **the eyes of both were opened**, Adam and Eve realized **they were naked**. They were naked before this and it didn’t matter; it was not part of their self-awareness—it was nothing they saw, or noted. Now, under the influence of the forbidden fruit and after they had disobeyed the Lord’s explicit command (**of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Thou shalt not eat.** Gen. 3:3) I am not the first to notice that imbibing in this forbidden fruit bears an uncanny resemblance to drug-taking! This means that this rebellious act has immediate relevance to drug addiction and altered states of consciousness—something replicated in the addict’s/sinner’s life routinely. What we have here is a culpable action: that they ate means they disobeyed—they broke trust with God and that relationship was fractured. It was lost. Being lost, man’s relationship to God had to be recovered, or restored—and that, of course, is about redemption. Adam and Eve had always been accountable; but now they were accountable for something shameful, something sinful. Their rebellion was exposed, open for all

¹ Footnotes

a. Genesis 3:7 Or *girdles*

b. Genesis 3:8 Lit *wind, breeze*

to see, and that rather than physical nakedness is the point of the shame they felt for what they had done. Clearly they were no longer presentable to God so they *covered their nakedness and hid from the presence of the Lord*.

The Lord, seeking their company, **walking in the garden in the cool of the day**, calls out to Adam, **Where art thou?** I think it is obvious that Adam's condition and not his location is the matter at hand in this question. "Adam, what condition are you in? What happened to your innocence and original goodness? Why have you forsaken Me?" These questions take us nearer the heart of the matter. These questions expose the consequences of the couple's joint actions. **What have you done?** What have you done to bring yourself to this state of ruin? Of guilt and condemnation, impure and simple nakedness.

So nakedness is the least of Adam and Eve's troubles. What is really at stake here is their awakening to the moral construction of the created order; or, say, of the world and everything about, or around it. Our actions are consequential. Suddenly, like those confronted by Ray Comfort's discomfiting questions, Adam and Eve are asked to give account of what they have done. What they have done brings them before the judgment seat of God and it does so immediately. And let there be no mistaking the predicament, Adam and Eve were not children—they were fully cognizant and functioning adults. Their sin was considered and deliberate. They would have to answer for that.

I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid. So, sin wasn't the only thing imported into paradise that fateful day! So was fear. Fear of a loving, benevolent and good God?! How irrational! All the trusting provision, all the protection, all the love went out the window?! How could all of that be restored? How could justice be achieved and how can a broken, fearful, guilty heart be mended? Those are the contours of fall—not fig leaves sewn together, or hiding from God as well as one another. How could the ending be altered? **I heard thy voice in the garden, and I rejoiced . . . I ran to you, Lord, and in grateful love, I threw myself at your feet and I worshipped you freely fully and contentedly. I came home and you welcomed me.**

To accomplish that God would have to prove both **just** and **justifier of the unrighteous**. If you are unjustified, there is nothing more terrifying than to **fall into the hands of the living God**—his holiness, his purity has an annihilating influence on all our sin and dross. God is a **consuming fire**. But if the Lord has removed the filthy rags of our unrighteousness as it is recorded that he did for Joshua, the high priest (Zechariah 3:3), we are not consumed.

3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and [a]Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him
2 The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. **4 He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him."** Again he said to him, "**See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and [b]will clothe you with festal robes.**" 5 Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the Lord was standing by.

6 And the angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you [c]free access among these who are standing here. 8 Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the [d]Branch².

No, we are not consumed, but we are justified—God performs everything necessary for complete restoration of relationship between himself and mankind. This is the clearest picture of redemption that I can find in the Old Testament. The New Testament unfolds a bigger and better deliverance. I have taken your iniquity away from you—God, the just, has justified the unrighteous!

What follows in Gen. 3:14 is a revelation of divine justice: the extension of his holiness into the matters of decision which distinguish our lives from every other living creature. God sets and reveals the standard for all relationships—what we can expect from him and what he expects from us. Let’s start with the divine expectation: consistent and unwavering obedience. This is what he wants from us, and for us—this is what glorifies him. This is what magnifies his greatness, his name! To achieve this end, God imparts the Holy Spirit into every believer’s heart, every believer’s new heart, and the power of God implanted there makes possible what was *ever impossible before*: sincere, complete and joyful obedience. Jesus declared, **I have come to do thy will** and every believer responds, “Amen, me, too!” (Hebrew 10:9 and Philipians 2:8)

Then he said , LO, I COME TO DO THY WILL, O GOD (Ps. 40:8)

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross

Gen. 3:14-21 then lays out that God’s justice is legislative and distributive. The punishment always fits the crime and the crime is a violation of what we were commanded: (**Thou shalt not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden.**) And also parties to the crime are dealt with separately, justly: Eve, Adam and the Serpent. They pay for the role they played—that’s justice. For example, when Abraham interceded for the city of Sodom, he appealed to divine justice: **the Lord of lords will surely do what is right for he is judge of all.** It was on that basis that he appealed for mercy! The curses are God’s just judgments—for his judgments are right and good. And that is the essence of the Adamic covenant. Part of that covenant is the enmity that God placed between the seed of Eve and the seed of Satan. That is why Satan is the sworn enemy of mankind and that is why sin is fatal—a lethal weapon in Satan’s arsenal. There is a war between Satan’s people and God’s people and that goes a long way towards explaining the reality of warfare, and mass killings. There is something much bigger than mental instability going on here. Satan executed the Lewiston massacre. The pattern of evil is unavoidable, the malice undeniable. The instigator is the villain, not the instruments of his will. It is good to know who

² Footnotes

- a. Zechariah 3:1 Or the *Adversary* or *Accuser*
- b. Zechariah 3:4 Lit *to clothe*
- c. Zechariah 3:7 Lit *goings*
- d. Zechariah 3:8 Lit *Sprout*

our enemy really is so that we may employ spiritual weaponry to deflect his attacks and defeat his purposes.

Hate crime legislation is futile—too after the fact, ineffectual. Attacking the social problem of violence is, I'm afraid, above the pay grade of legislators! Human laws are not spiritual weaponry. The power of God alone can nullify Satan's evil penetration of all things social, political and economic. Yes, attack the root cause—no, the real root cause!—and that is done God's way.

Amen