

Perceiving With Believing

I'm about to do some marriage counseling for a young couple planning a wedding in the Spring and I'm glad I have a manual! Oh, it's not a matter of inexperience, rather it's that apart from the truth of the scriptures which we'll share, much of the 'good advice' I can offer them is born out of my 'blow-its' – and my wife agrees don't you, Honey! (Stop nodding so hard, you'll hurt your neck.) You see, my ability to perceive the state of my better half is not all that reliable.

And my son isn't doing much better it seems. I recently wanted to take a picture of him in order to do a piece of artwork, but I didn't tell him immediately who I wanted him to model. Later when I arrived at his home to take the picture, he said he'd figured I was going to draw him as Samson but his wife suggested that it was probably going to be Balaam's ass! Ha!

Perception has been a problem in my family for a long time...

In fact, it started about 6000 years ago or so with my ancestors Adam and Eve. Here's the story: They really had some nice digs – ideal in fact – and they were into gardening. Spiritually, they were really close to the Lord and their daily devotions were awesome. However, the Lord had told them not to eat of this one tree in the garden and said that if they did, they'd die. Now, one day, they were hanging out close to this very same tree (and don't ask me why) and up comes this crafty serpent. Well, he starts a conversation with Eve and she tells him about the deadly tree, but...

"Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day 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, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband and 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 coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen 3:4-10)

So here's the deal – what changed there in the garden of Eden was Adam and Eve's perception. The Hebrew word for "know" in the passage above is "yada" (as in yadeh-yadeh-yada) which literally means to ascertain by seeing. That is, to perceive. And it is correctly translated as "perceive" much of the time in scripture. Now, up until this time, they had only perceived good but their sin brought in the perception of evil. The Hebrew word for "evil" is "ra" and literally means to 'spoil by shattering.'

But evil was already there before they had this new viewpoint; they simply could not perceive it. Here's the kicker though – sin, like a computer virus, infected their new perceivers. What happened is that man now indeed perceived both good and evil, but having the new mental file labeled "evil" as well as "good" was the only thing that made him more like God. You see, what goes into the files is a totally different matter. We can assume that man gained the ability to distinguish good and evil accurately, but that is NOT at all the case. For sin not only created the new 'file' called evil, but it also began spoiling or

shattering man's perception of what was truly good as well.

Earlier in the Genesis story, we see that man's natural tendency is to label everything – fundamentally, this means that he trusts his perception or judgment. To distinguish, to discern and then to declare what something or who someone is – this is what God did as we read the story of creation and this is what He had Adam do with all the animals and with his mate. Like baby steps into life – man's perceiving was the 'creature's' limited copying of the Creator's knowledge. God doesn't 'perceive' like man – He knows.

But man perceives.

And his enemy, Satan, knew that if man's perceiver was malfunctioning, then the whole unit would be doomed.

Imagine this, what if you had a TV set that had a secret software component that changed everything you saw on it from what was really being broadcast? How about if it believably changed everyone's appearance and everyone's words and actions? Now, imagine that this faulty receiver is your only window on the world. In essence, this is what happened to man in the garden.

And three perceptions are mentioned as changing as a result:

- man's perception of himself
- man's perception of God
- man's perception of paradise and his home

First, referring back to the scripture passage above, man's immediate impression of himself with this new perceiver was shame. That which was created and declared by God to be good now needed to be covered up. Man ceased to agree with God – their physical condition of nakedness had not changed but their perception of it had.

*Indeed, ever since, man's coverings (of all sorts) have served his desire to hide his shame. **Fundamentally, deep within his heart, man is ashamed and discontent with who he is (how he perceives himself).** Even his boasting, arrogance*

and seeming self confidence are cover ups.

So they used these large scratchy fig leaves to clothe themselves which, of course, was an uncomfortable reminder of their disobedience and new sin nature.

Next, was Adam and Eve's new perception of the Lord. God, with Whom they once fellowshiped, was now feared. This was because they believed Satan and perceived God as hard, resentful and repressive (like the man in the parable of the talents – see Mat 25:24,25).

But God did not and does not change (see Mal 3:6). It was their perception of God that changed. Indeed, man has never since truly been able to recognize God for Who He is. **Fundamentally, man sees God, in character, as a 'man'** – loftier and grander than himself, but still imagining that the Lord perceives as he perceives, thinks as he thinks – i.e. he continues to believe Satan's lie. And God addresses this many times in Scripture. (See Num 23:19; Isa 55:8,9; Jer 29:11; Psa 50:21, etc.). It is a gross misperception.

The irony is that in order to bridge this perception gap, God did become a man – Jesus Christ; and having spent three years with his disciples, was still not recognized by them (see John 14:8,9). Not really, not until His atoning death and resurrection. The guys who had followed Him for these years were arguing the day before His arrest and crucifixion who was going to be the greatest in the coming kingdom. They were shocked and amazed that very evening when Christ washed their feet as an example of God's will for them. Genuine humble servanthood did not and does not equate with greatness in man's perception even within the church at times.

You see, in the garden of Eden, fig leaves didn't really do the job. They were like man's efforts to cover himself by religious observances or keeping the Mosaic Law. But mercifully and

graciously, God gave them coverings of skin (see Gen 3:21). And this revealed His heart for them – it clearly implied an animal died, blood was shed, a sacrifice was made, a gift was given – all to adequately cover man, to truly cover his shame. Prophetically, this clearly speaks of the unmerited gift of Christ's sacrificial death and the covering of our sins by His righteousness.

In the book of Revelation, Christ speaking to the last days Laodicean church says, "*Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked* (talk about a perception problem!) – *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich, and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.*" (Rev 3:17, 18) God wants to cover us.

Lastly, there was their new perception of paradise and planet earth. Man was once a resident of paradise. He woke up to it everyday. His life was so peaceful, purposeful and productive – we can't conceive of it. To picture it as two people frolicking in their B'day suits amid a botanical wonderland is a cruel and hideous parody, a trivial and mean imagination.

God Himself had planted this garden – it was a holy place where He fellowshiped with man. However, with his new perceiver, man was unfit to dwell there, so God moved him out and barred the entrance. No longer could they see or perceive paradise and this world looked much, much different -- thus it is today. The apostles Paul and John saw heaven but only by supernatural revelation.

Fundamentally, man cannot see his true home.

And so, the problem of perception is the 'perception problem'. Satan lied:
- *he said we wouldn't die but we die*
- *he said we would clearly perceive good and evil but we are blind,*

perceiving much in error, even good as evil and evil as good.

- *he said God was holding back something good for us but God was protecting us. He has not and will not hold back that which is good for His children* (see *Psa 84:11*)

And we have believed him. In fact, this enemy still lies to us everyday and there are times when we 'take the bait' – right?

So... can we 'clear the fog'? Can we fix the problem? Can we make our 'perceivers' function as designed?...No. No?!!?

President Kennedy once said that man has made his problems and man can fix them. Well, he was dead wrong on the latter part. But there is hope...let me explain.

In the upper floors of one of the WTC towers was a very successful company. The employees were well off and fully engrossed in the realm of financial fantasy. Their view of the world was literally panoramic and their lives quite prosperous. It would seem that they needed nothing, not even God.

But God knew differently, and He'd planted among them one soul who was a continual Christian witness before them. Until September 11th, they paid him little attention. But then came the terrible catastrophe by which we all were stunned – the jet that crashed into that tower hit it just below their offices and they all were trapped. In a moment, every perspective on life changed for them.

And yet, there was this one guy among them whose perspective was basically unchanged and many of them came to him now, earnestly seeking help. Just before the end, he was able to telephone his wife to say goodbye, and he reported that a large number of people, perhaps three quarters of the company's employees, had gotten saved and were raising their hands in prayer even as he spoke.

You see, the perspectives of God's witness didn't need to change because they weren't based upon what he saw before or after the catastrophe. As a born-

anew Christian, what he knew about himself, his Lord and God's promise of heaven was a matter of faith – not sight. (See 2 Cor 5:7) You could say that, as Christians, what we 'know' in our 'knower' is far more certain than what we perceive in our 'perceiver'. This kind of knowing is faith, childlike faith which is born out of our relationship with God and hearing His words.

You see, we can't fix the perception problem but God can. Generally, He starts with how we perceive ourselves. Often, He puts us in circumstances that can strip away the fig leaves. Sometimes, we scramble to pick them back up or even to add more. However, fig leaves will not do – they must go. (And you know most of your fig leaves.)

That is, fig-uratively, we must bare all to God, give Him all our cover-ups and our sins. No one will ever perceive themselves correctly apart from this. Now, as we do this, as we emerge from hiding amongst the trees so to speak, there is a shame of nakedness, a shame of insufficiency. It's like the emperor's new clothes – in reality, apart from God's tailoring, we are naked --shamefully so, and when we finally see ourselves as such, we are positioned to receive God's covering.

No man could stitch this real covering together. In fact, like Christ's earthly robe, it has no stitching. It's a single work. It's a robe of righteousness or right-ness. It's a gift to you and me, yet like the animal skin given to Adam and Eve, it came at the expense of One's life – Christ died to clothe you.

And as you receive it, you begin to perceive God correctly – to know Him relationally as gracious, loving, just and holy, merciful, longsuffering and... that He's "for you".

And then there's your perception of home. Clothed in heaven's high-fashion, you are no longer the worldly trend-setter you once were nor do you care to be. You come to realize that where God places you, outside the 'garden', is no picnic – though you're here on planet earth, it's not

your home and never will be. Your vision clears and you perceive this world as a pilgrim does, for you know that heaven is your eternal home. (And while you're here, there's divinely directed work to do!)

Now, here's something I find radically wonderful -- because we are created beings, we will never be able to perceive omnisciently – in fact, one of the joys of heaven will be the eternal growth or bigness of our perceptions of these three things – who we are in Christ, Who our Lord is and the incredible delightfulness of our heavenly home. What an unspeakably grand eternity!

Now, if you're a 'born-anew' believer, you probably have understood these things already and are looking forward with eagerness to the time when God fixes the fix we're in.

But if you're not sure of your eternal identity, relationship or home, listen to Christ's call – you see, you're potentially His bride – if you'll say yes to His proposal – a proposal He gave with bended knee on the cross of Calvary. Make Him the Lord of your life, for He is very soon about to say, "I do." by snatching us outta here and you DON'T want to miss it! He's going to take us home to a honeymoon that never ends.

It begins with a sincere prayer – say yes to the One Who loves you – Jesus our Christ.