

The Second Lie | BY GREG PROUT

The second lie says your created self is not good enough; that God is holding out on you; that you are deficient.

You surely shall not die" is the first lie in the Bible (Gen. 3:4).¹ Some churches have staked out vital doctrinal positions on this "first lie" emphasizing their belief in "soul sleep" and thus asserting no intrinsic immortality of the soul. They argue only God has immortality, an important value for them, but it is the flipside of that lie—a second lie often ignored—which has proven to be far more insidious and self-destructive. The second lie promises "you will be like God..." (Gen. 3:5). An obvious distortion of fact, it is the implication that packs a debilitating wallop. The insinuation is *you are not*. C. Baxter Kruger writes insightfully about this in his book *The Great Dance*.² The second lie says your created self is not good enough; that God is holding out on you; that you are deficient. The idea that "you don't measure up" creates the inference that your essence is undesirable as it is; you need something more to be acceptable.

The serpent's mendacities attack two sides of the human ego. One side is his devious suggestion that a creature could become Creator. History is brimming with the havoc this notion delivers. Mankind has felt its sting. We all know the obnoxious windbag, the know-it-all, the self-referential big shot who knows better than you, who thinks his opinion demands your

attention. These individuals think they are God. They glory in their god-ness. We frequently see this bloviating manifested in our politicians or pompous actors. But they can be deadly too if their delusions of grandeur take over a country and seek to dominate the world (classic figures like Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, or Pol Pot come to mind). A god complex deceives us into thinking

we are more than a created being, leaving us acting the fool, or worse.

What is interesting is when God declared it was not good that man remain alone, he made a helper for him, giving Adam and Eve an inside track to understanding the Trinity God. The love and communion they shared was to experience first-hand what it is

like being God. Yet the snake injected the thought, "You could actually be gods if you only listen to me." Masked in his fabricated concern for their welfare was the sinister notion assaulting the very core of a person, an ontological put-down; and through Eve, humanity bought it!

The other side, the second lie, is craftier with its poison, less braggadocio, more often observed in the quiet and slow destruction of personal lives. It lays siege to the underbelly of the human psyche. Less flamboyant, more pervasive, more devilish than the god com-



The temptation

plex, this “I am not good enough” is more subtle as it sneaks up on us. One does not have to look far to see its cruel results. Witness the American slave history. Treated as chattel, slaves grappled with penetrating inferiority. Being bought and sold like farm tools by their white owners created a mentality of “I am not good enough, I am less-than,” and inbred self-loathing. Such beliefs cruelly embedded in the soul of the slave and his ensuing generations fashioned a whole subculture of the US population suffering from the lie “you are not.” In 1963 Jesse Jackson delivered his famous chant “I Am Somebody”³ to address the dignity-robbing, life-destroying effects of thinking you are less-than. His “I am Somebody” mantra directly countered the tragic lie foisted on a people by a mainstream culture that just happened to think it was God.

In the Genesis story, once Adam and Eve swallowed the lie that the fruit would make them wise, they immediately found grievous change and sought loin coverings to conceal their shame (Gen. 3:7).

This launched the very first cover-up and the genesis of regaining our stature with God through our own efforts. Sewing fig leaves, emblematic of ritual and religion and the first attempt to save ourselves, was evidence we departed from simple trust in the loving Father. Illusions, erupting from distrust, are vain efforts to regain our place in Paradise; “fig leaves” (illusions) became our tradition, the original self-righteous ritual of hiding from the truth about who we are. Our behavior says “we are okay.” Salvation by performance is a sorry remedy for core feelings of worthlessness, of feeling “you are not.” When we do not

qualify, we are less-than, incomplete, unworthy, unloved, and on and on it goes.

Could it be that much of evangelical Christianity promotes this feeling of “you are not good enough,” particularly the more fundamentalist traditions? Fundamentalism cartons God up in dogma and creates conformity,

insisting the believer accept certain truths the authoritarian church deems necessary for belonging and salvation. If the acolyte decides she can’t accept specific beliefs based on her own spiritual convictions, she is admonished, and if she persists, she is shown the door, keenly aware she was not approved. Creeds and doctrinal lists deconstruct God to a prescribed lifestyle which often demands the believer to separate from those who don’t believe like they do. We separate from those whom we judge as falling short; whose beliefs we consider less than what is “fundamentally” correct. Fundamentalists therefore disassociate from

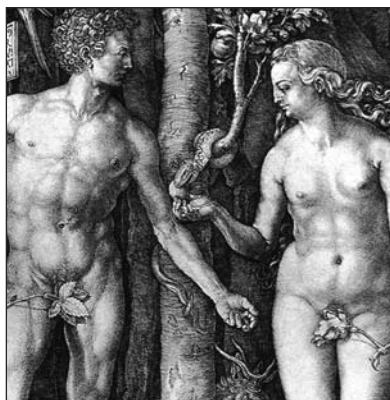
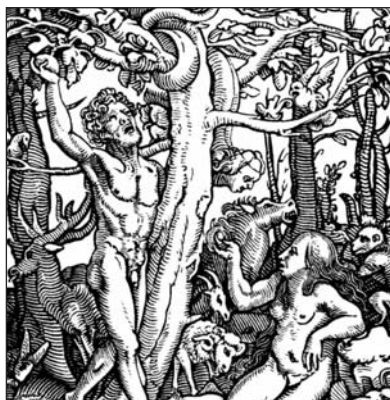


Fig leaves



The serpent

interfaith dialogue, feeling such practice is dangerous. Harvey Cox writes, “...fundamentalists in every tradition concur on one thing: they vociferously oppose interfaith dialogue. They see it as clear evidence of selling out.”⁴ Community and fellowship are sacrificed for the sake of identity purification. In effect, they are living out the lie of the serpent in Eden: “you are not good enough for God to accept you; you must find doctrinal fig leaves to secure his approval.”

Furthermore, the fundamentalist believer is forever flirting with his own paucity of character as he never quite lives up to the high stan-

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dards required of him. Failing to adhere to doctrinal purity is intrinsic with the implication of being less-than, leaving the believer battling guilt and feelings of failure as they strive for perfect performance. The message “Jesus loves you as you are” gets fuzzy, often implying you need to do more (believe more, pray more, surrender more, witness more, give more, etc.) to win his favor. Sanctification is a popular term that means to perfect yourself for God’s glory, with the self the focus and behavior the emphasis; God’s grace is subservient, though fundamentalists would deny this. “Character development” is a code term for this holy exercise. Grace is distorted by claiming it is the *opportunity* and *power* to perfect your life, not the reality of divine acceptance as found in the love of the Father. God is occluded as the Self strives to overcome. In this environment, guilt is inevitable and “fig leaves” are never in short supply. Much of evangelical religion and fundamentalism in particular unwittingly promote the second lie the serpent sold to Adam and Eve.

Admittedly, we are fallen and in need of redemption. We see how quickly things unraveled in Genesis 3:7 ff., which describes the resultant shame, fear, blame, pain, burdens, thorns; and with Cain and Abel, envy, and eventually murder. Something had changed, but it wasn’t God; it was us. We had fallen, a condition in which we found ourselves helpless. Fig leaves could not mask our new identity; only God could fill the void that inhabited our souls. It was not God who became wrathful and vindictive—it was we who saw him that way. We were broken, but in God’s eyes we

were never worthless, less-than, or deficient. And this is vital. God never rejected us nor did he find us unworthy of his presence and love. Hurriedly he sought us out in the Garden as we cowered behind trees, and clothed us in skins signifying our adoption (Gen. 3:8–9, 21).⁵ Religion must never teach that we do not measure up because God is angry with our sinful condition. As Philip Yancey writes: “And grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and there is nothing I can do to make Him love me less.” I am invited to the table of grace just as I am, not scolded or condemned as worthless, not berated to develop my character, but loved and redeemed by him.

It is one thing to negate a person’s value, but it is another for the victim being diminished to believe the negation. God’s grace interrupts that cruel process by affirming our value in his eyes, our sins notwithstanding. Common sense affirms that believing “I am less than” or “unacceptable” is rudimentary to aberrant and destructive behavior. Google “self-concept” or “self-esteem,” and you will be overwhelmed with studies affirming the need for healthy self-views. It is particularly devastating to believe God is affronted by our character, often revealed in our self-view of unworthiness. Yet religion is frequently behind this notion. The idea that God is distant and angry with us, and that we need a savior so we can have a relationship with this offended God, is a nasty belief that pervades much of evangelical Christianity. It underscores the second lie.

Observe Jesus relating to the Samaritan



Cain and Abel



The Samaritan woman

TOP: CAIN MURDERING ABEL BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD; BOTTOM: “JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA” BY GUSTAV DORE

woman who had moral issues staying married. He speaks to her as an equal, though the Jews treated her Samaritan people like dogs. Watch him address the “wee little man” Zaacheus, a thief and much-hated tax collector: he has lunch with him, a gesture of friendship and honor.⁷ Jesus lifted people up, treated society’s outcasts like he does all future kingdom-dwellers—with dignity, respect, and acceptance. Never did he react to anyone as less-than or beneath him. Should the church be any different? Yet fundamentalism often finds an enemy to rally against, be it the homosexual community, abortionists, atheists, or people of other faiths. They believe God’s honor is at stake and they must defend his honor by rallying against groups they feel deserving of God’s displeasure. All the while they miss the glaring testimony of Jesus’ inclusive address of the other, regardless of who that might be: thief on the cross, woman caught in the act of adultery, Roman centurion, the leper, you, me. It did not matter who it was then, nor does it matter now.

It is crucial to remember we are the creature and not the Creator, but it is equally important to remember that in God’s eyes, “we are somebody”—persons to be loved, respected, included and forgiven. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he did so as a human being. As our representative, we went with him as more than “somebody,” and we sit with him as co-regents (1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12). We have gone from hiding in fear behind trees to ruling with him; for with God, there is no “you are not.”

Jesus commands us, “Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves.” Judging is a form of put-down, dismissal, condemnation, portraying others as excluded or beneath us, and is simply another rendition of “you are not,” the

second lie. In Jesus’ compassion for us, the second lie is obliterated. We need to rise from the grave of this sinister idea and firmly believe, “He has now reconciled you in the fleshly body through His death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...for in Him you have been made complete” (Col. 1:22, 2:10). ■

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