

The Delusion of Independence

Genesis 3:5 [Amplified Bible] “... *you will be as God, knowing the difference between good and evil...*”

Surely such a state of mind is commendable, to be like God?

How could there be anything wrong with that?

Yet it was such a seemingly beneficial goal that enticed Adam and Eve into a disaster, the evil consequences of which have affected all their descendants, including all of us.

Why was this an undetected snare, set by Satan, to which Adam and Eve fell pray?

Can we also be trapped and destroyed by Satan by being caught in the same snare?

What makes such a goal a deadly snare?

The motive, unstated, but implied, the promise of independence.

Once we know good and evil, we will be free to make our own decisions.

We will no longer be dependent on our Creator God.

This self-asserting desire for independence has been transmitted by inheritance to the whole human race that is descended from Adam and Eve.

This desire for independence is the distinctive mark of the “*old Adam*”, the fallen sinful nature that lurks in each of us.

Humanity has taken different routes to independence.

Independence through the route of knowledge

It was a critical moment in history when Adam and Eve turned away from the “*tree of life*” and chose the “*tree of knowledge*”.

Ever since, the attainment of knowledge has been the one main goal of humanity.

This emphasis on science [Latin word for knowledge] has been ever-increasing over the last two to three hundred years.

This explosion of knowledge has **not** solved humanity’s most basic problems, of injustice, cruelty, war, poverty and disease.

In fact in some ways science has increased the intensity of the problems.

Independence through the route of religion

In various different forms humanity has established religious rules and systems of worship so complete and all sufficient that there is no further need of God.

All you have to do is to keep the rules.

This is true in the major world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and even some versions of “Christianity”.

In these religions people can become so satisfied with their rules and procedures that they become independent of God Himself.

This explains why earnest, good living religious people are often the slowest to respond to the gospel’s offer of grace that cannot be earned.

Accepting such an offer of grace would destroy their independence.

Independence through amassing large amounts of money and material possessions

Luke 12:13-20 [NIV] *“Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”*

Countless people throughout history have been lured by the same desire for independence into making the same tragic error.

Countless people are still making the same error today.

This desire to be independent of God is the distinctive mark of all who belong to the kingdom of this world.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [NIV] *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

Who is the God of this “age”?

Revelation 12:9 [NIV] *“The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*

Satan is the one who has lead the whole “world” or this “age” away from God.

Satan was the first to seek independence from his Creator God and has desired all humanity to follow his example.

John 17:16 [NIV] *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”*

Jesus says that His disciples will not be of this “world”.

In this sense the “world” consists of all the people who have never submitted themselves to the authority of God’s appointed King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of these people are moral, religious people but when they are challenged with God’s requirement of total submission to Jesus, the rebellious, independent seeking “old self” rises to the surface and they reject God’s offer of salvation through grace alone.

This desire for independence is **only** found in humans, the rest of God's creation are unquestionably dependent of their Creator.

Psalm 104:19 [NIV] *“The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.”*

Psalm 147:4 [NIV] *“He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.”*

Psalm 148:8 [NIV] *“...lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding...”*

Psalm 104:21 [NIV] *“The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.”*

Psalm 104:25,27 [NIV] *“There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small.” ... “These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.”*

No wonder that rebellious humanity at times feels lonely and alienated from the universe around them.

In a world in which all other creatures and elements all function together in unquestioning dependence on their Creator.

What is the way back to dependence?

On the cross Jesus provided a double remedy for our fallen condition and isolation from our Creator.

a) Jesus paid on our behalf the full penalty for all our sins.

This makes it possible for God to forgive our sins without compromising His own justice and holiness.

b) Jesus identified Himself with the independent, self-seeking ego that dominates our fallen nature.

In Jesus this rebel was put to death.

Romans 6:6 [NIV] *“For we know that our **old self** was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...”*

To become disciples of Jesus we must each avail ourselves of this double remedy.

a) We must make sure that through repentance [a change in our direction in life] and faith [in what Jesus has done for us] all our sins are forgiven.

Romans 8:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”*

b) We must agree to the sentence of death to be pronounced upon our rebellious, independent ego.

Luke 14:25-33 [Message Bible] *“Jesus said to them [all followers] **anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters, yes, even one's own self! cannot be my disciple.** Anyone who will not shoulder his own cross and follow behind me cannot be my disciple. Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, does not first sit down and figure the cost so that you can complete it? **Simply put, if you are not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people and kiss it goodbye, you cannot be my disciple.**”*

Becoming a disciple of Jesus means saying farewell to everything on which we would normally depend, family, friends, money, career, worldly honour or prestige.

Once we have truly renounced all these things, God may return to us any of them that fit in with His purpose for our lives.

But we are no longer possessors, we are merely stewards, required to give an account of the use we make of them.

Our dependence, however, is now solely upon God.

Sometimes it may take a crisis, or even a seeming disaster, to bring us to the place where we fully acknowledge our dependence on God.

Gradually, through the years, I have been learning this lesson of total dependence.

I admit I have been a slow learner.

God has used different circumstances at different times to enforce the lesson.

But what I have discovered is that the more completely I depend on God the more He is able to achieve through me.

Far more than all my own efforts could ever achieve.

Jacob's struggle with independency

Jacob literally had a physical struggle to give up his independence.

Jacob as a young man was astute, ambitious and self-seeking.

He used a moment of weakness in his elder brother Esau to buy from him his birthright and through deception gained Esau's rightful blessing from his father.

Yet neither the birthright nor blessing did Jacob much good, he had to flee Esau's vengeance, to Mesopotamia, and become a refugee with his uncle Laban.

Here again Jacob demonstrated his astuteness by marrying into Laban's family and wealth.

When told by God to return to his inheritance Jacob encountered on his return journey a mysterious stranger who wrestled with him all night.

Eventually the stranger dislocated Jacob's thigh [the strongest muscle in his body] and Jacob clung to the stranger in helpless dependency.

Only after this encounter did Jacob return to his inheritance but for the rest of his life he walked with a limp, the outward sign of his independence having been surrendered.

Who was this stranger who wrestled with Jacob?

Genesis 32:24-30 [NIV] *“So Jacob was left alone, and a **man** wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with **God** and with men and have overcome.” Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw **God face to face**, and yet my life was spared.”*

The stranger is called “a man” and “I saw God face to face”.

Hosea 12:4 [NIV] *“He struggled with the **angel** and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favour. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there...”*

“*He [Jacob] struggled with an angel...*” An angel is a messenger of God.

Only one person, Jesus Christ, answers to this description.

A man, yet God and also a messenger of God.

Jacob’s destiny was finally settled by this encounter with Jesus of Nazareth.

Perhaps we have been struggling in our own strength to gain a spiritual inheritance, eternal life, but we feel God has for some reason eluded us.

We need to do just what Jacob did, surrender ourselves without reservation to the Lord Jesus Christ.