

## The desert of our belief

What have we humans lost through the wretchedness of our consciences?

There we were ... in the Garden ... enjoying life ... taking pleasure in each other and the Paradise God had prepared for us ... not a care in the world!

Then ... along comes the serpent ...

Oh, we know who he is ... don't we?

The Tempter!

And he said to us:

“Oh, come on! Look at you! You don't even know that you're naked! God just wants you to stay ignorant ... his little pets. You're not going to die! Just try a little of this ... it's delicious ... just a bite ...

And so we did.

And we allowed ourselves to believe that we are just like God ... that we don't need God ... that we are gods!

And our easy life in Paradise became a world full of pain ... of suffering ... of lies and deceit ... war ... violence ... hatred ... abuse ... of one disaster after another.

How'd we get so low?

Because we gave in ... when we knew it was wrong.

The problem is in here ... in our consciences.

We lost the Garden because we disobeyed ... because we allowed what we knew to be wrong to be ... OK ... and so “sin entered the world” ...

God was with us when we were in the Garden.

And like a parent who disciplines his child, God continued to care even after the “tough love” he gave us as he kicked us out on our own.

Even today, especially when we are strong in our faith, God is here ... with us ... within us. We can feel him ... here ... inside ... telling us when something is wrong ... regardless of what the world may say is ... OK ...

Then ... as we start to slip farther and farther from our faith, it becomes easier and easier to go that next step ... to continue to backslide ... to sin ... until our consciences are nothing more than doormats for the devil’s temptations.

I was brought up in a fundamentalist culture ... and I was a very devout young man ... until I left the disciplined nest of my home and went out into the world on my own.

I was a man of faith ... but it wasn’t very deep.

I wasn’t ready for what was out there!

And it wasn't long before I was convinced by "friends" to try this and that ... to do one thing or another ... things that disturbed my conscience ... but I told myself that it was ... OK.

I struggled to hang onto my Christian identity as the popular culture washed over me, drowning my conscience, and convincing me that whatever was legal ... or even just tolerated ... must be ... OK.

Fortunately, I was discovered in the desert and led to the Church ... and my days of "everything goes" ... a la Charlie Sheen and Lindsey Lohan ... were ... mercifully ... over.

The Church taught me that consciences will wither and die if they aren't properly fed.

If we feed our bodies Twinkies at every meal we might enjoy it but we'll begin to pay for it as our strength and health start to fail.

Likewise, if we feed our consciences spiritual Twinkies we'll soon not have a clue as to what is right or wrong.

I was watching TV the other night and the program "World's Dumbest Criminals" reminded me of a story I had read a year or two ago about an addict who needed money to support his illegal drug habit ... so he broke into a house to steal a few things that he could pawn for some quick cash.

On his way out with the loot, he grabbed a handgun from a drawer and managed to shoot himself in the leg ... just as the surprised homeowner walked through the door. In pain and bleeding profusely, he knocked the woman over the head with the handgun, tied her up and stole her car.

Add to his original illegal drug use: breaking and entering ... burglary ... assault with a deadly weapon ... false imprisonment ... and grand theft auto.

As he sped away, his erratic driving led a police officer to pull him over. Full of panic and fear, the housebreaker jumped out of his car and fired his stolen revolver through the windshield of the cruiser, severely wounding the police officer.

As the policeman slumped over the steering wheel, the patrol car continued forward, running over the criminal.

Crawling out from under the car, the man dragged himself into the woods where he stumbled into some men who were tending a marijuana patch. The men shot him three times in his ... posterior ... as he did his best Frankenstein impression to escape both the police and the agitated “farmers” ...

Finally, he found himself on the other side of the woods where he took yet another car at gunpoint ... this time with a baby in the back seat.

By this time, the man was so weak from blood loss that he soon ran the car off the road where he was arrested and handcuffed before being taken to the hospital ...

Humorous ... to us maybe ... but not to him ... and certainly not to his victims.

What started as an “innocent” foray into drugs ... to which modern society generally looks the other way ... wound up being a whole litany of felonies ... including kidnapping and attempted murder of a police officer ... and a sentence of life in prison without parole.

Brothers and sisters, do you see how his conscience – or lack thereof – led him down the road to ruin? All because he felt it was OK to smoke a little weed, do a bit of meth, smoke some crack and generally mess up his life?

That conscience which he had blunted through constant ventures into drugs is a remnant of the ones our ancestors left us when they lost Paradise and were kicked out into a world hostile to God and His teachings.

If we fast forward from Genesis to Matthew, we can see how it should have been when the Tempter snared Adam and Eve.

After his baptism in the Jordan, the Spirit led Jesus into the desert where he fasted for 40 days. Then, weak from hunger, he is tested.

He is hungry ... yet he knows that the Tempter is not offering him unlimited food ... but, instead, ruin.

He knows that the angels will protect him if he should fall ... but to intentionally jump from a high place would mock the Father.

He knows that he already has dominion over the world which Satan offers him ... and that to accept Satan's offer would be an abomination.

Every one of those temptations would make Jesus into an ungrateful and selfish son ... unfit to serve the Father.

By rejecting them, Jesus solidifies his position as the true Messiah and true Son of God.

Remember his baptism? The father said "This is my son ... in whom I am well pleased."

What would he have said to Adam and Eve if they had resisted their own tests of loyalty?

What will he say to us as we follow our consciences?

Will he cast us out of his presence forever?

Or will he bless us and call us his good and faithful servants?

**END**

He is hungry ... yet he knows that the Tempter is not offering him unlimited food ... but, instead, ruin.

He knows that the angels will protect him if he should fall ... but to intentionally jump from a high place would mock the Father.

He knows that he already has dominion over the world which Satan offers him ... and that to accept Satan's offer would be an abomination.

Every one of those temptations would make Jesus into an ungrateful and selfish son ... unfit to serve the Father.

By rejecting them, Jesus solidifies his position as the true Messiah and true Son of God.

Remember his baptism? The father said "This is my son ... in whom I am well pleased."

What would he have said to Adam and Eve if they had resisted their own tests of loyalty?

What will he say to us as we follow our consciences?

Will he cast us out of his presence forever?

Or will he bless us and call us his good and faithful servants?

**END**

Based on Gn 2:7-9 & 3:1-7; Rom 5:12-19; and Mt 4:1-11