

# DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JULY 2023 | 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

*What no eye has seen,  
nor ear heard, nor the  
human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared  
for those who love him...*

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NRSV)

## WHO TOLD YOU?

It seems we are inundated with a wave of confusion about the nature of reality. What is real and how do we know? When the only source of knowledge is moved to our own personal inner feelings, things get a bit hazy. We hear conclusions being drawn with great confidence, and we want to ask, "Who told you?" It is one of the first questions God asked Adam and Eve when He found them hiding in the Garden of Eden.

Reality can only be understood as a story. Random events and unrelated facts give no meaning to existence. All civilizations have versions of the

story. Some are very interesting and demonstrate how creative the human mind can be in seeking to interpret what is. The biblical story is unique because it has never occurred to any human mind. It finds its origin in the mind of God and can only be known by His willingness to reveal it to us. It is truly the mystery that unveils the meaning and purpose of all things.

*But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of*

*glory. But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—" (1 Corinthians 2:7-9 NRSV)*

In Genesis, we find the story as God tells it. He is the Initiator of creation. As we observe it, we can conclude that He is a gracious Creator granting to humans the agency of choice and the privilege of being His earthly managers. As the story moves along, it is evident that He wants to share His very life with these humans and desires that they enjoy Him as much as He enjoys Himself. We get early glimpses of His nature as being "three in one." He has always enjoyed the intimacy between Father, Son, and Spirit. In creation, He sets things in place so that humans can access this fellowship. Humans are given the privilege of being His co-laborers on earth as He purposes to do His earthly work through human instrumentality. He grants them His **presence** as He walks and talks with them during the day, His **provision** as He has put trees in the garden that satisfy every taste and appetite they can have, His **protection** as there are angels protecting the garden, and His

**purpose** as they join Him in the discovery and development of creation. But, there is a serpent in the garden representing the cosmic enemy who creates the conflict in the plot. He, too, is a storyteller. His story to Eve is that God is not as good as He seems; that His word is not trustworthy; that humans can know enough without God to make a success of life on the earth. We learn later that he is the eternal liar, critic, and accuser. It is his nature, and he is always inserting his story and interpreting events and circumstances in light of his story. The original pair listened to his story and became enslaved to his perspective and thus to him. He had a continual hotline of suggestions to them from that point on. They were helpless in stopping the suggestions from invading their thoughts. After they had sinned by listening to the Serpent's story and yielding, they ran and hid behind a bush out of fear and shame. When God came looking for them, they told Him the story they believed about being naked and ashamed. "Who told you?" was God's reply. Somebody was telling them things that were dictating their actions. Instead of their eyes being opened and finding a new

liberation, their eyes had been opened to their own nakedness, and they were being accused of being a failure and a disappointment to God. Sadly, this is the story of all humans that followed Adam and Eve. As offspring of those two, the human race lives in conflict and confusion; creations of God, yet slaves to sin.

The Serpent's story is insidious. He criticized God. He condemned humanity. Those two characteristics continue to be the heart of his plot - criticism and condemnation. Wherever we find these in the lives of humans, we have detected the story from Satan. Doubt about the goodness of God is always from the whispers of Satan. He doesn't mind that we have a God, but he insists on interpreting Him as not really good. He sells his product as the ability to have greater freedom, then laughs when we struggle with the slavery of guilt, shame, and victimization.

It helps simplify our battle when we acknowledge that there are two storytellers that have access to our ears. We are listening to one or the other at all times. We must learn to ask our own mind, "Who told

you?" The storytellers use the same words, but they interpret life-events differently. The Liar uses everything to shore up his contention that God is not as good as He seems. After all, why would He allow sickness, injustice, suffering, and death? "God" must simply be a fantasy that superstitious people have created in order to survive. Criticism of God merges into criticism of His creation, His order, His people, the church, the future... When we encounter people who live with a critical, pessimistic bent, we can be sure they have listened to the criticizer. The criticizer interprets the brokenness of humans and their institutions as fodder to argue that God is not a good creator or ruler. Yet, his is the broken story! He is the one who promised perfection and freedom, but lied. His original proposal is still his main sell: "Since God is not capable or willing to run things, you should. You can know enough to be a better god than Jehovah." Of course, when we yield to his version of reality, we end up hiding while he turns into the cosmic prosecutor accusing us of being unworthy of love, disqualified for fellowship, and worthy of condemnation.

Praise be to God, there is a fuller story that destroys the accuser's version! The gospel story fills in all the possible gaps. It makes sense of the failure in the garden, the call of Abraham as the father of the ultimate Seed that would crush the head of Satan, the role of Israel as the instrument exposing the fallacy that humans could be good enough to be blessed, the mystery that Jesus became humanity and Israel in one person bringing redemption to creation, so that we who by faith in Christ are His restored people who are commissioned and equipped to bless the whole world by sharing Jesus who has all the blessing of God. What a story! As we listen to that Storyteller, and share His life, we discover daily that there is no condemnation for us. It doesn't exist. It has been extinguished in the heart of our Savior. Instead, we have the Spirit of God living in union with us making real our intimacy as we cry, "Father." We are constantly being reminded that we are heirs of God, sharing the inheritance with the Only Son. The Spirit comforts us in our suffering, displaying the grace that overcomes and the humility that serves those around us.

He also helps us as we pray because we don't always know how to ask.

He reminds us that Jesus is now ruling over all that His blood purchased and is working in all things to show us what all that means. Nothing in all of existence can separate us from His eternal, unconditional love, and there is no being in heaven or earth who can legitimately bring an accusation against us. (See Romans 8.) So when we hear ourselves thinking about our own failures and life's disappointments, and we are tempted to say that we are hopeless, we must ask: "Who told you?"

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