

# Combating the Relativization of Scripture

## Lesson One

### The Surprising Capacity For Relativization

**Text: Genesis 3**

*BASIC CONTEXT:*

1. Adam and Eve had been placed in the Garden of Eden by the expressed will and power of God. Gen. 2:8
2. Revelation had been given to them to guard their steps in that environment. Gen.2:15,16
3. Question for consideration: Did our forefathers Adam and Eve relativize the Word of God? If so to what?

*RELATIVIZATION INDEX:*

1. The design of the lesson is to now link or index the nine suggested categories of relativization to the personalities in the passage and note the results. By way of review, the Nine Categories of Relativization are: EXPERIENCE, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, TEMPORAL VARIABLES, COMMUNITY, HISTORY, CULTURE, RACE, TIME, DESIRE/AMBITION

*APPLICATION TO GENESIS 3:*

*At least three sources or forms of relativization can be detected:*

**1. HUMAN INTELLIGENCE:**

- (a) Adam and Eve were approached by the serpent in his craftiness. The serpent's proposition was aimed at encouraging the pair to trust in their own intelligence instead of the Word of God (3:1,2).
- (b) The serpent offered an outright contradiction to the expressed will of the Lord: "You will not surely die" (3:4).
- (c) Thus, a distinction had to be made between what had been revealed and what

human intelligence could determine. It is precisely at this point that Adam and Eve shifted their dependence to their own God-given intelligence and away from the Word.

(d) They began to use their personal intelligence, which was part of their nature and was given to them as a gift from the Lord, in an exceedingly dangerous way! Instead of surrendering to the Word of God, their intelligence began to exercise dominion over what the Lord had said. Adam and Eve elevated human intelligence above the Word. This is the first biblical example of such an action. It will not be the last.

(e) Our forefathers did indeed relativize the Word of God. The lesson is that one must be careful of this most powerful aspect of our nature – our intelligence. Surely it was not given to us exercise influence over Scripture, rather to be influenced by it.

## **2. TEMPORAL VARIABLES:**

a) Our forefathers lived in the tangible world of things. The Garden of Eden was a perfect place. They lived between two imposing facts: on the one hand, the eternal/invisible world; and on the other, the world of temporal realities.

b) Our presence in the world of tangible, fungible (or interchangeable) things must not be allowed to influence us toward a relativization of the Word.

c) “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it (3:6).” Adam and Eve were mere human beings whose five senses were constantly bathed in one sensation after another. Though such a human condition is inescapable, that condition of human existence does not have to be determinant nor decisive in regard to our behavior.

d) The temporal variables, which are unavoidable, were used to relativize the Word of God. This is a basic and repetitive practice throughout the whole of Scripture. No doubt other examples readily come to mind.

## **3) DESIRE/AMBITION**

a) Before the sin in the garden occurred Adam and Eve were untouched by the wrath of the Lord, and untouched by the true effect of sin.

b) However, there was something that was already present in the both of them: personal desire and human ambition. One of the obvious lessons of this episode is that desire and ambition must be held in check – even in a perfect world which has ceased to exist!

c) The serpent assured them that “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will

be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (3:5).” The desire and ambition of man knows no limits. Even the pretension of attaining the status of God is not beyond the imagination of some. But our desires and ambitions are not harmless; to the contrary, they are excessively dangerous and overreaching.

d) The Word of God given to our forefathers was to help them relativize their desire and their ambition. Such powerful human dynamics must be devoted to the service and knowledge of God. In this instance they were not.

e) Thus we see that, yes! Desire and ambition became instruments to relativize the Word of the Lord. Unless they are strictly controlled and monitored, they will always reach out and beyond their assigned place. The result is death.

#### *THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE:*

Adam and Eve were faced with the task of developing a discourse. They chose, as we do, between two options:

(a) **A DISCOURSE THAT TRIES TO RELATIVIZE SCRIPTURE.** This is a way of thinking and speaking that has been overtaken by the categories of relativization. Eventually, Adam and Eve arrived just here. Their thinking and discourse reveal the full extent of the effects of relativization. They would have said that the Word of God stands as a prohibition against the eating of the fruit, but that their presence in the garden altered all of that.

(b) **A DISCOURSE SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE.** Here is discourse that has been shaped by exposure and obedience to the will of the Lord. Adam and Eve could have responded to the serpent by saying that they would not depart from the revelation of the Lord in order to seek their own ends.

#### *QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION*

What follows is a series of questions formulated to aid an awareness of the two kinds of discourse and how to develop the most preferable for an individual, which is a personal discourse shaped by Scripture.

1. Why do you think we as human beings are surprised by our capacity for relativizing the Word of God to our own ways of thinking?
2. List the nine categories of relativization.
3. Think of television shows you watch, and books and magazines you read. From those sources, give an example of the relativization of Scripture to each of the nine categories.

4. Look closely at the passage in Genesis 3. What specific words in this passage indicate the operation of human intelligence?
5. What did Adam and Eve say and do that demonstrated that they relativized the words of God to their own intelligence?
6. Look closely at the passage to find specific terms that indicate temporal variables.
7. What did Adam and Eve say and do that demonstrates that they relativized the words of God to the temporal variables?
8. Look again at the passage for specific words that show the presence of human desire and ambition.
9. What did Adam and Eve say and do that demonstrated that they relativized the words of God to their desires and ambitions?
10. What conclusions must you draw about the ability of Satan to manipulate a human being's capacity to relativize Scripture to intelligence, temporal variables, and human desires and ambition?
11. Think about the three most important decisions you have made in your life (except for the decision to become a Christian.) Did you make those decisions based on a discourse shaped by Scripture, or on the basis of discourse that attempted to relativize Scripture to other considerations?