

TEMPTATION

Genesis 3:1–7

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Temptation and the fall of man. In speaking of the Fall, one is reminded of the little poem that we knew as children: “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again.”

This little poem speaks of human life without God. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men could not put you together again. God has appointed Christ to bring us back into paradise. To bring us back to Eden. The Eden we see lost in Genesis 3:1–7:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’ ‘You will not surely die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ 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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (NIV).

As man begins to enter the stage of Genesis, we see things that had been going in a beautiful and orderly direction now reversed. When we concluded Genesis 1 we saw the tremendous order that God had accomplished in creation. Indeed, there was not an inharmonious feature in all of creation. When we looked at Genesis 2, from the zoom lens of Scripture, we saw man in his

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original setting—Eden, or paradise. Actually the word “paradise” is a Persian word. “Paradise” meant a garden with a wall. That’s why “Eden” in the Greek was translated “paradise”—a garden with a wall. A unique spot.

Here we see man in this beautiful setting of paradise without a cloud on the horizon. But when we turn to Genesis 3 we begin to see what has gone wrong—not only with the human race but also within our own lives—necessitating the entrance of Christ into the world. It is very easy to see why Genesis, and particularly in our own time Genesis 3, has been under such great attack as biblical mythology. Nothing would be more serving of the enemy’s purposes than to have us conceive of him as a myth, or have us see the fall of man and our individual fall as something that is fiction.

Among the trees in the Garden of Eden, God places two unique trees: the tree of life—which in Eden man and woman do not choose to eat of—and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It should be noted that the Genesis record certainly does not say that God created evil. He created a tree, which was good. The tree, however, was not to be eaten. If the choice of eating it was elected by a man or a woman, it would initiate disobedience—the essence of sin. In fact, if there is any definition of sin that is brought home to us from this passage, it is one that is startling in its simplicity. It is simply this: God says, “Do not do this,” and then man goes ahead and says, “I will do it anyway.”

I. Freedom of choice

The Lord could have made a choice in any number of ways. He could have said, “Don’t cross the stream.” He could have said, “Don’t climb this hill.” But in choosing the tree as a fitting contrast to the symbol of the tree of life, He has something to say to all of us. We are the part of God’s

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creation that is not programmed to behave in certain kind of way. The universe is made to go along at established dimensions. We're free. Freedom of choice.

One of the elements of freedom of choice is obedience. Essential in obedience is love. God asks for loving obedience. If you think of man and woman in the Garden of Eden you'll recognize that God, who is their creator, is also their parent.

When you have young children, how do you measure their love? Young children tell you with their words that they love you. But those words must also be somewhat consistent with deeds. For example, if a child is continually and everlastingly and always disobeying you and yet coming to you and saying, "I love you," we recognize a total imbalance there. The deeds are betraying the words. So what the Lord does in making man and woman with choice is to say, "I want you to respond freely with your love. Your love will be marked by your obedience to me."

We do not separate duty from love. That's clear in Genesis 3.

The price for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that one knows good and evil. One has personal, experiential knowledge. According to Genesis 3:22, God himself knows good and evil. But God's knowledge of good and evil is so much unlike ours. We know evil from an experiential point of view.

For example, if I tell my children, "Do not play with matches," I, as an adult, do not need an experiential impact with fire and being burned to know what matches will produce. I know intellectually what is going to happen if they take those matches and play with them. They're going to set things—maybe themselves—on fire. If a child chooses to know good and evil and sets the match on fire that he might know experientially, what will he pay? A horrible price for that knowledge. He will know what fire is. I know it in a different way because I haven't been

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burned. But he will know it, and he will experience it. This is what is happening here in Eden.

An experiential knowledge of evil.

If all of us are honest, this is something we've all experienced. You can go back somewhere in the recess of your mind, in your life. Maybe you can even isolate one event where you so totally failed God, where you so totally sinned. It may have been something small to someone else, but you knew it within you and you felt dragged through the mud. Your soul and heart was sullied.

You had experienced evil. You knew it in all of its damaging force.

This is what Adam and Eve experience as they yield to the suggestion of the enemy. What we see in these seven verses from Genesis 3 is a process of temptation that Satan employs not only to get to the first man and woman, but also to get to us. Adam is not only the first man; He is every man. In Hebrew, *adam* is simply the name for "man." So he is a man and he is every man. Likewise, Eve is a woman and she is every woman.

II. Temptation

How does Satan work? He has some rather time-honored processes of infiltrating. If we were to look at the process of temptation I think we'd have to say, both on the basis of this text in Genesis 3 and also texts in the New Testament, that there are really four parts to temptation.

A. The first aspect in temptation is the suggestion level, where from outside of ourselves there comes the suggestion that we might do something to disobey God or to sin. The suggestion comes from the serpent. The serpent, by the way, is to be seen as something far more than a snake. We'll talk about the literalness of that in a moment. But it should be noted that Satan, when he first manifests himself, does not do so in some form of monster or drudge. He comes off as a very pleasant, winsome, attractive personality.

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Second Corinthians 11:14 tells us that he has the capacity of disguise. He disguises himself, Paul says, as an angel of light. If the devil were to present himself before us with all of his monstrosity and say, “I am the devil. I am the enemy of God and I’m here to seduce you and ruin you,” you’d better be certain that we’d have some kind of affirmative response toward God and against Satan.

It would be a positive thing if Satan always revealed himself as something awful and hideous. But he reveals himself in a totally beguiling kind of way. There are images in Scripture of Satan that we should not ignore. For example, Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 have similar descriptions of him. Revelation 20:2 says, “The dragon, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil, or Satan” (NIV). It uses four names for Satan.

The more we read in Scripture, the more we begin to understand the starting point. Clearly at the end of Scripture, Revelation tags down the serpent as being Satan in incarnate form. In Luke 22 we see Satan entering Judas. In Revelation 13 we see Satan entering an Antichrist-like figure. Here in Genesis we see him entering into something very beautiful—a serpent. On the one hand you can him in Revelation as a dragon—a total monster. On the other hand you see him when he first presents himself as someone who is very beautiful, subtle, and beguiling. But ultimately, two words stand for him: *devil* in the Greek meaning “deceiver” and *Satan* in the Hebrew meaning “adversary.” That he is. He seeks to deceive and he is our adversary. We should avoid, on the one hand, the idea from Genesis 3 that Satan is a snake. But we should also avoid the symbolic idea that simply says that what we have here is an ancient myth that simply tries to personify Satan. What we have instead is a terribly evil, supernatural figure that has power to incarnate himself in a form that is not his own.

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You will always recognize Satan's identity by what he's saying. His mouth gives him away. You will recognize suggestion as temptation when Satan begins to say the following: "Did God say, 'You shall eat of any tree of the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1).

Notice two things about his remark in the suggestion level. First, his purpose in temptation is to get us to begin to doubt whether God has spoken. Did God really say that?

Have you ever faced that in temptation? You're being pulled to do something that you clearly know is against Scripture and then you have all kinds of attacks released in your mind that try to discredit the Word you are relying upon and depending upon. Did God say?

Second, once Satan tries that line, he then goes on to distort what God says so that God looks just as bad as Satan can make Him look. Did God say you shouldn't eat of any tree of the garden?

What a cruel God to tell you not to eat anything!

Eve is sharp enough to catch part of what he said as being wrong, but she is not astute enough to single out the other untruth being stressed there.

Interestingly, there is nothing in Genesis 2 that tells us the origin of Satan. Rather, we are right away seeing Satan's conflict with men. That's where we wrestle with Satan—on that individual and personal level. God does not always satisfy every element we have concerning origins. But has God said? Can you begin to doubt God's Word and can you begin to distort it? The purpose of temptation is to get us to substitute our judgment for God's judgment. If he says no, we say yes. If he says yes, we say no. By that means we take our stand in agreement against him.

What also is coming at the suggestion level in Eden is not what we might call gross sin. We often make the mistake of thinking of sin as something that is gross and hideous. Some form of sexual deviation. Some sort of drug possession or the last stages of alcoholism or whatever. So we get a hideous idea connected with sin. Yet here in Genesis, the sin that is being entered into appears to

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be so harmless. It's simply the disobedience of a command. There is nothing sexually deviant about it. There is nothing in the sense of being filled with narcotics or going out and killing somebody. It enters in a very subtle way. It enters on the mind level. But once inside it brings with it capacities for all kinds of things, so that it isn't long until we read of murder. The first sin was not a temptation to murder. That probably would have been a very easy temptation for Eve to have turned down.

Satan attacks us at our level of strength. For example, in Christ's own temptation in the wilderness, Satan came to him and said, "Turn these stones into bread." I couldn't do it; that would be no real temptation. I don't have the power to turn stones into bread. But the Lord did. The temptation was at his level of strength. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us we're not allowed to be tempted beyond that which we're able to bear. In other words, the Lord puts a guard around us so that the temptations that rush in against us are not beyond our ability in Christ to cope with and deal with. But here Eve is being presented temptation on a level it's possible for her to fail. It's not a gross sin, but it is the entry into disagreement and disobedience of God.

At the suggestion level how does Eve respond? She says something true and something false. She says, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it lest you die" (Genesis 3:2–3). Notice what she's added—"neither shall you touch it." If you go back to Genesis 2 you'll find that the Lord did not say that. He simply said, "Do not eat." Nothing was said about touch. One of the ways sin often conquers a person is to begin to add to the Word of God so that God is looked at as some mean, rules-giving kind of a person.

What has happened in religion? So often we've seen this way of adding to the Word of God in terms of prohibition. In the tradition I was brought up in, I often heard additions to the Word of

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God in terms of prohibitions. Particularly to young people, God came off as somebody who didn't have anything to do but cause you to have a bad time. That's exactly the concept that Eve is getting in her mind here in reference to God. She's already beginning to entertain the suggestion that maybe God is down on her and down on mankind.

So the suggestion is entertained. As you look at the temptation of Christ you'll find that He repudiated the temptation at the suggestion level. He simply quoted—and quoted accurately—from the Bible, the Word of God, to turn the tempter away.

B. The second process in temptation moves past suggestion to the level of meditation—where one begins to think seriously about what is being presented. On this level the serpent now knows he has an inroad and that the woman has not repudiated his suggestion. The serpent said to the woman, “You will not die.” He flat-out disagrees with God.

Notice that the first disagreement Satan has with God is over the question of judgment. “God said, ‘If you eat you will die.’ I’m telling you on my authority you will not die. There is no judgment for sin.” Have you ever heard that line before? In the world today, do people really believe the witness of Hebrews 9:27: “It is appointed unto man once to die, but after that the judgment”? Do you really believe that about yourself—that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world? Notice here in Genesis that judgment is the first doctrine Satan tries to come at. Disagreeing flatly with God is something he could not have started out with, but now that he's got an inroad he can flatly disagree. Then he begins to attack the character of God. He says God knows that “when you eat of it your eyes will be open. You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). In other words, God wants to put you down. He's not for you. He's got a privileged position and the reason why He made this rule is so He can always keep you as His slave.

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At this point Eve could have ended the conversation. She could have said, “I don’t believe that about God.” In temptation we can put an end to things when we put our foot down and say, “That is not true. I recognize the deception.”

C. But Eve goes on so that the meditation level in temptation becomes consent—the third level of temptation. She agrees within herself that the tempter is right and she will indeed do it.

Genesis 3:6: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and the tree was desired to make one wise...” What’s happening? The temptation has arisen from the outside, but the circuit is completed by her own desires. Flip Wilson’s statement, “The devil made me do it,” is only half true. Yes, the devil is involved in temptation. But the devil is held at bay unless I assent to what he is suggesting, unless my own desires get involved in what he is asking for.

James 1:13–15 says: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (NIV). First John 2:16 it goes on to tell us what our desires are: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

What are those? We see them very clearly in Genesis 3. The lust of the flesh: Eve saw that the tree was good for food—that’s for the body. The lust of the eyes: Delight to the eyes. Something esthetic. Something to be participated in. And the pride of life: It’ll make me wise. It will enhance me and it will fulfill me in my personality. It is something that will help me be a more complete individual. So by appealing to all of these things, Satan works on that consent level to get Eve to say, “Yes, I give in. I will commit the sin. It looks like a good thing to do.”

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Isn't it clear through this thing that Eve is really every person? For sin, when it presents itself, always looks attractive at the beginning. When we first enter into sin, we begin doing so in a very subtle kind of way. If you enter into sin very subtly, you'll find over a period of time that the temptation becomes less and less subtle and more and more direct. Ultimately, you become so captivated by what has happened to you that even though you may want to be free you no longer have the power to be free. That's why Christ comes to set the captive free.

D. We look into the fourth level of temptation, which is the level of commission. The consent in the mind is carried out by the activity of the deed. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus locates sin as being on the level of commission. It's not a sin to be tempted. All of us are tempted. The sin comes into our life when we say, "Yes, I want to do that." Then it's acted out.

Eve takes and eats. The word for sin in both the Hebrew and the Greek fundamentally means "to miss the mark; to fail." That's what it is here in Genesis 3. Again, it's not something that initially presents itself as a heinous crime, but rather as missing the mark, falling short. What happened with Eve? She followed her impressions rather than her instructions. That's a terribly dangerous thing to do.

I was talking to a pilot recently about something called vertigo. Vertigo is the condition where a pilot temporarily loses his understanding of where the ground is. He may be flying the plane upside down and think he's flying right side up. Or he may be flying the plane straight into the ground and think instead that he's climbing. When a pilot gets vertigo, the only thing he can do to be safe is to look at his instrument panel and see what the instruments are telling him. Pilots are trained: Follow your instruments. Never trust your judgment. Always believe the instruments, even though you don't feel like it. Even though it doesn't make you feel good, follow the instruments.

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Follow your instructions rather than your impressions. That's why it's so important to be in the Word of God and find out what God is saying to us as individual people and how He's telling us to behave in life. Our impressions and our feelings often carry us in wrong directions. But God's instructions never do.

Eve took and ate. Compare that with the words about of Jesus in the Upper Room. He took and ate. What a contrast. There will be years and years of poverty and death before Christ takes the verbs "take" and "eat" and translates them from verbs of death to verbs of salvation. But when we reach out to take the bread and the cup in Communion, or when in our spiritual lives we reach out to take hold of Christ, we are eating from the tree of life that is in the garden in the midst of us. Christ himself takes on the function of the tree of life, and Satan takes on the function of the fallen race, giving to man the experiential knowledge of evil. What a contrast!

What the woman tries to do next is again a common thing in relation to sin. She tries to get someone else in on the act. We'll say more about the effect of the Fall next week, but it should be noted right now that when Eve sins, she goes to Adam. Evidently he isn't tempted the same way, but rather than break his relationship with her he participates with her. When Eve first offered him that fruit and he knew that she had eaten, Adam should have said, "Let us go immediately to God with our problem. God has appointed me as covering for you. Let us implore God that He may not exercise His judgment against you." I almost think that God would have granted, at that moment and under Adam's urging, repentance. He'd have done the same thing for her that He was willing to do for Ninevah when He said, "I'm going to destroy it." But when Ninevah repented, He gave it another chance.

III. The effects of sin

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But Adam associates in sin with Eve, and the effect begins to be noted in the breakup of their strong communication in marriage. The first thing that sin begins to attack is interpersonal relationships. Now it is noted that the eyes of both of them were opened. That doesn't mean they were born blind. It means something inwardly. They see the potential for evil in each other.

Their eyes are open. They perceive that they're naked. They sew fig leaves together as aprons to clothe themselves. That doesn't help, because they still have the naked feeling on the inside—that they have been stripped of innocence and they're naked in the presence of God and in the presence of each other.

There is a contrast between Eden and now. This contrast has made it different in regard to how Satan works. In the Garden of Eden there was life all around. In the midst of life God spoke of death. Now all around us there is death. But in the midst of death God speaks of life. The same serpent who sought to persuade Adam and Eve that there was no death now incredibly seeks to persuade us that there is no life. But to those who are in Christ Jesus there is life.

There is also a fantastic symbol of paradise that comes to us in the New Testament. We have seen the beautiful garden of paradise in Genesis 2 and 3, but in Luke 23 there is another picture of paradise. A desolated, barren hill. Again a tree is involved. This time it is a tree cut down by the hands of men and centered on the middle of a hill. Christ, the Son of God, hangs on that tree that man had placed. Next to Him are thieves dying for crimes they have committed. All their lives they have been excluded from the walled garden, from the paradise, from the place of God's rest and the place of God's companionship. In the midst of dying on that lonely hill, one of the thieves cries out to the person on the central cross: "Remember me when you come into your kingly power." And Jesus, calling to mind Eden, from paradise says to him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise. Today you will enjoy the unblemished communion with God that

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the first man and the first woman had before the Fall. Today you will be with Me in the walled garden in the presence of God himself.” Jesus stands in the middle of life, the tree of life, and invites us to share in His life so that the curse of Eden is reversed in the activity of the life of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is here today, persuading us of the life that is in Christ Jesus. He wants us to always reach out and take hold of that life, to eat and live.

Closing Prayer

Lord, as it only took a moment for Eve and for Adam to fall into sin, so You have ordained through the cross of Jesus Christ and exemplified by the thief on the cross that it only takes a moment to come back into the garden. Already, Lord, You’ve taken a piece of the future age with You and broken it off and placed it in our hearts. Already we know what it is like to have communication with You restored through prayer and through the Scriptures and through the ministry of the Spirit in living relationship with You. We look forward to that day when we shall be complete before You and stand always in Your presence. Where never again the tempter will be allowed to stand. Where the accuser of the brethren and the deceiver will have been thrown down. Never will his words fall upon our ears again.

This day we remind ourselves through the counsel of Scripture and through prayer that You have given us the possibility of being made again, made new. When we read the story of Adam and Eve we are not picking something out of myth. Rather, we read the story of our lives. That we have failed to be what we started out to be. That we too have fallen short of the glory of God and have sinned. That sin might not necessarily have been heinous, but it has been disobedience. It has been disregard. In Your sight, Lord, it is laid bare. You give us the chance to come before You with our sin, and instead of hiding and covering it up to stand before You and say, “Here am

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I, O Lord,” and to hear the gracious words of invitation from the prophet: “Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow. Though they be as crimson they shall be like wool. If you obey you shall eat the fat of the land” (Isaiah 1:18–19). Thank You that the promises of God are sure and steadfast for the faithful. We pray that all may have the knowledge of eternal life through Christ our Lord. Amen.