

## Temptation

How could Adam and Eve have been so foolish? Because of something that is always true about sin. For if sin always ends in death, it always begins in deception. And that deception is only possible because of the way sin deals with God's Word.

For what is the first thing the serpent says in verse 1 – “Did God really say that?” Sin so often begins in such a way, in casting doubt on the reliability of the Scriptures. The so-called theologians who today claim it to be God's will for two men or two women to marry each other are the same ones who yesterday scorned the Bible as mere myth, or who dismissed it as the simple strivings of primitive people to express what they felt about God. It just isn't possible to imagine that the Bible could be wrong in its teachings until you first state that God was not responsible for writing those words. But rejecting the truth of God's Word is nothing new. It's as old as Eden.

Of course, the serpent isn't satisfied simply to cast doubt on God's Word – he moves on to misquote it, to mischaracterize it: “Has God said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Every tree? Where did he ever get that idea? Of course God told Adam and Eve that they could have lots of fruit – at the end of Genesis chapter 1, God gave the fruit of the trees to them and to all the beasts of the earth to eat. And in chapter 2, God specifically told Adam he was allowed to eat of every tree of the garden – with only one exception. The serpent was obviously wrong, and Eve was perfectly right to correct him.

Many modern theologians do the same thing the serpent did, twisting God's Word into unrecognizable forms, and as a result coming to increasingly bizarre conclusions. Liberation theologians begin with an understanding of God's concern for the poor, and then conclude that the Church should cooperate with communist governments in redistributing the means of production. Feminist theologians begin with an understanding that men and women are equally made in God's image, and then conclude that there are no differences between men and women, and that husbands should not provide leadership to their families. And so we shouldn't be surprised at the recent action of a majority of our presbyteries. Many Presbyterians begin with the truth that God welcomes sinners and that God's justice rejects bigotry. But like the serpent, they draw the incorrect conclusion that God doesn't require people to repent of sin if they truly believe that what they are doing is not sinful. Unfortunately, twisting and distorting the Word of God is nothing new. It's as old as Eden.

But sin is never satisfied with casting doubt on God's Word, or even with twisting God's word around. It always moves to a direct denial, an open defiance of God's word. In verse 4, the serpent directly contradicts what God had said in chapter 2 verse 17. God had said that sin would cause death, and the serpent now says that it will not.

Just so, many modern people look at what God says about marriage, how Genesis 2:24 clearly says that marriage is for one man and one woman to become united and form a new family. They look at God's clear prohibition of adultery in the Ten Commandments. They look at Paul's command to husbands to love their wives unconditionally and self-sacrificially. They

look at Paul's challenge that wives respect the leadership of their husbands. They look at what Paul and Jesus said about divorce – that what God has joined together, man should not put asunder. And they simply reject all these teachings. We should not, therefore, marvel when people within the church claim that two men should marry or that two women should marry, for they have already rejected so many other things that the Bible says about marriage. But unfortunately, rejecting the Word of God is nothing new. It's as old as Eden.

But there's one more thing about sin that the serpent's last comment reveals – at its root, sin always expresses opposition to God Himself. Sin is nothing more and nothing less than a profound rejection of God's love and mercy and grace. In verse 5, the serpent says that the reason God told Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit was because God wanted to withhold something good from them, because God didn't want them to be like Him. The serpent thus sows not only the seeds of doubt, but also the seeds of distrust in Eve's mind.

And so we see the age-old path of temptation. It moves from doubting the truth of God's Word to twisting God's Word to defying God's Word to rejecting God Himself. For make no mistake – all sin is ultimately a rejection of God. Whenever we reject God's rules and make up our own, we are either saying that God didn't really say that, or that God doesn't know what He's talking about, or that God is a cosmic killjoy just trying to steal our fun or that God doesn't really love us. And whenever we believe any of those things, we are really just putting ourselves up on the throne of our lives, worshipping ourselves rather than God.

And why would we want to do that? Well, let's look at Eve's motivations in verse 6. The first thing she noticed is that the tree was good for food. In other words, the forbidden fruit appealed to her normal, natural, healthy desire to have nourishment. And so, the problem wasn't that Eve wanted something to eat. The problem was that she wanted something to eat in a way that went against God's will. In eating the forbidden fruit, she thus placed her healthy physical desires and urges ahead of God's desire for her life.

In the same way, most of the things that tempt us are good things, not bad. Oh, sure, some people are tempted to smoke crack or cut themselves, doing things that are obviously self-destructive. But most of our temptations are simply to take something good to the extreme, or to do something good in the wrong way, or to place too much emphasis on something good. It's a good thing to desire food, but too much of it will increase your blood pressure or your blood sugar, and certainly your weight. It's a good thing for men to desire intimacy with women – but marriage needs to come first. It's a good thing to have good friends and to seek their advice, but it's a bad thing to value what they say over what God says. God gave us a beautiful world that contains everything that we need, but if we value the creation over the creator, just as Eve listened to the serpent rather than listening to God, we fall into sin.

What was Eve's second motivation? She saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes. Now, this goes beyond mere aesthetics, although it would be hard to believe that God would create any tree or any fruit that wasn't beautiful. No, the Bible often makes a contrast between walking according to our eyes and walking according to faith, between living in a way that trusts God's will and in a way that uses our own reason and experience as our guide through life. In

the days of the Judges, for example, everyone did what was right in his own eyes – that was a way of saying that they were not trusting in God or obeying His Word. That’s what Eve is doing here – sizing up the forbidden fruit according to her own observation and understanding instead of trusting God when He said not to eat it, even though that prohibition didn’t make sense to her.

And we often do the same thing, don’t we? When a challenge or a problem or a difficulty comes into our lives, where do we look for solutions? What is our final source of truth? And if our own reason and our own experience lead us in one direction while the clear teaching of God’s Word leads us another way, which way will we go? And if we choose to believe what makes sense to us rather than what God’s Word teaches, are we really any better than those people who are trying to change our ordination standards? Are we really any different from Eve?

Oh, but there was one more thing that motivated Eve to take that forbidden fruit – it was desirable because she wanted to be wise. Now, again, it is a good thing to desire wisdom. Solomon prayed for wisdom, and the Lord praised him for such a desire and answered his prayer. And it certainly wasn’t wrong for Eve to want to be like God, for she had, after all, been made in the image of God. No, the problem was that Eve wanted wisdom on her own terms. She wasn’t satisfied to have the knowledge and wisdom that God wanted her to have. She wasn’t satisfied to have the mastery and control over the world that God had given her. She wanted more. She wanted to have no boundaries at all. In such a way, she wanted to be more than simply like God – she wanted to be her own god.

And in giving in to all these desires – preferring the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life to the God Who had created her flesh and Who had given her the ability to reason and Who had fashioned her in His own image – she fell into sin in the way that we all do each and every day. All of us in one way or another walk down the Garden path with Eve, all too often embracing pride rather than humility and devotion. And like Eve, all of us are thus separated from God and from one another.

But as Paul points out in our responsive reading, it wasn’t Eve’s sin that was the main problem – it was Adam’s sin. Somehow it was Adam’s transgression that caused death to reign over all humankind, indeed to poison all of God’s creation. How could that be?

Genesis 3 doesn’t tell us, at least not directly. But you may have noticed that it wasn’t until Adam ate of the fruit that the eyes of both of them were opened. It wasn’t until Adam joined Eve in her sin that they both began to experience the deadly consequences of what they had done.

And there is a very real sense in which Adam’s sin was qualitatively different from Eve’s. The Scripture, after all, describes his temptation in a much more succinct way – all it says is that Eve gave the fruit to her husband who was with her. So what was Adam’s temptation?

Well, Adam certainly had the same sorts of desires that Eve had. He had the same hunger for food, he saw the same fruit, and he had the same longing to be like God. Adam thus had the same temptation to put his bodily cravings, his human reason, and his pride ahead of God’s Word and God’s glory.

But there's another sense in which Adam's temptation was even more powerful than Eve's. After all, there she was, standing right in front of him, forbidden fruit in hand. She had obviously taken a bite of it, and yet she was not dead. But didn't God say they would die if they ate the fruit? Wasn't Eve living proof that what the serpent said was right? Adam thus had much more reason to doubt God's Word in favor of his own reason and experience.

But there's another way in which Adam's test was greater than Eve's, and it's something to which Paul points in our responsive reading. Adam was in some way a figure, a type, a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. There was thus some way in which Adam was more directly like Jesus than Eve was.

And knowing what Jesus did for us, that makes sense, doesn't it? After all, the Church is called the bride of Christ, right? That means that, before Adam took the forbidden fruit, both Jesus and Adam faced a common problem. Both Jesus and Adam were at that time righteous men, and both of them had wives who had fallen into sin, wives who were thus condemned to death. What should they do?

Adam obviously made the wrong choice. Adam chose to join his bride in sin. Did he do that because he couldn't bear for her to suffer God's punishment by herself? Was Adam thus elevating his love for Eve over his love for God? We don't know – the Scripture is silent about Adam's motivations. What we do know is what Paul tells us in Romans 5: by Adam's offence, all his descendants are doomed to death. Because Adam chose his own way, pulling his hand out of God's hand, and thus cutting himself off from the source of his life, death now comes to all of us.

The gospels tell us that Satan tempted Jesus to do the same thing that Eve did – to try to gain good things like food, to try to gain the power and respect that He deserved on His own terms. His own disciples tempted Jesus to save Himself, to shun the cross out of a sense of self-preservation. But Jesus chose a different path. Because of His love for His bride, instead of joining her in sin, Paul tells us that Jesus did for His Church what she most desperately needs. We sinned, and we deserved to die, but it was because of His great love for us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And because of His perfect sacrifice, the grace of God, the free gift of eternal life is extended to all those who are justified by faith, to all who trust in Christ as Lord and Savior.

We can only wonder what God would have done had Adam offered to make the same sacrifice for Eve, dying in her place. But we know what Jesus did for us, and we know that by His death on the cross He has opened up the way to eternal life, the way back into true fellowship with God, the way back into true love for one another, the way into freedom from the power of sin and the death it always brings.