

Pride Comes Before Destruction: Genesis 3:1-6
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This morning I want you to look into your own heart and life, and I want you (and me) to better understand the ways we're tempted to disobey God. We're going to look at the temptation and sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. But, I'm warning you, don't point your finger at them, thinking that you wouldn't have been so foolish. As soon as we accuse them, we're accusing ourselves, because that's me, and that's you, in this story. Put in the same circumstances, we would have done the same thing. And, in fact, we have done the same thing. We have been just as blatant and foolish in our disobedience of God. Looking at this account of their fall into sin is like looking into a mirror, and my hope is that we will see into the sinful depths of our own souls and feel the gravity of our problem as sinners. And when we realize that there's no hope to be found in ourselves, we can turn and find great hope in Jesus Christ, who came as the solution to this great problem.

There are two themes I want to look at in this passage.

Temptation and the Word of God

God placed Adam and Eve in this wonderful garden. He provided them with every good thing, every good pleasure. They enjoyed intimate communion with each other and with God. There was no guilt, no shame, no regrets. They had a beautiful existence, living at peace with God and at peace with God's creation. It was paradise. We don't know how long Adam and Eve enjoyed this paradise before falling into sin, but it probably was not a very long period of time.

Satan, in his pride and jealousy, was eager to attack this good thing God had created. Verse 1 says "the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made." Revelation 12:9 refers to Satan as "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." It was fitting for Satan to reveal himself as a serpent, because the serpent's silent, slithery movements serve as a picture of Satan's spiritual craftiness and deceit.

The serpent approached Eve, and we immediately see his craftiness in a couple ways. First of all, he spoke to Eve rather than to Adam. Two weeks ago I preached on God's design for manhood and womanhood from Genesis 2, and chapter 3 confirms those observations about God's design for the man to be the leader and the woman to be his helpmate. In the fall, we see the sad breakdown of that beautiful design. Adam was intended to be the loving leader and protector. But Satan defied God's design and approached the helper rather than the leader. This was part of his crafty scheme to bring about rebellion. And Adam failed to live up to his role, because we find out in verse 6 that he was with her. He was right there with her, and yet he apparently did nothing to defend God's Word or protect his wife from the lies of Satan.

Another indication of God's design for male leadership is seen in verse 9 when God called "to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" Even though Eve ate first and then gave some to her husband, God held Adam primarily responsible, because the role of leader and protector had been given to him. Eve was still guilty, of course. But God addressed Adam first, and in the New Testament Paul attributes human sin to the one man, Adam. So the breakdown of manhood and womanhood that we see in Genesis 3

confirms our understanding of God's good design in chapter 2. The man is meant to be a loving, servant leader, and the woman is to affirm and nurture and follow that leadership.

The serpent approached Eve rather than Adam. Then, secondly, he is crafty in the way he attacks God's Word. He begins with a question. A cunning question. A deceitful question. A question designed to plant seeds of curiosity and discontentment. He asks the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" What kind of question is that? God NEVER said, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden." In fact, what He actually said was, "You may surely eat of EVERY tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:16-17). Satan takes God's good blessing and good command and tries to seduce Eve into thinking that God's instructions are overbearing and burdensome and restrictive. Satan misrepresents God's Word. He twists it, and the seed of temptation takes root. Temptation comes through lies that contradict God's Word.

At first, Eve seems to be defending God's Word, but even in her response it's evident that she has been affected by the serpent's deceitful question. She says, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in 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.'" That IS what God said, right? Well, mostly. Although she changes a couple things, and those slight changes show that she is already beginning to doubt God's goodness and she is falling into Satan's trap. Again, what God actually said was, "You may surely eat of EVERY tree of the garden." Eve left out the word "every." She left out that emphasis on God's goodness, that He had given them everything for their good pleasure. He lavished blessings upon them. But you can almost hear the tone of Eve's voice as she responds to the serpent. She doesn't respond boldly, with a confidence in God's good Word. She doesn't rebuke the serpent and say, "What are you talking about!? God said we could eat of EVERY tree in the garden." Instead, she responds half-heartedly, simply acknowledging that they can eat of the trees in the garden, but then over-emphasizing the prohibition. The other change she makes is adding to the prohibition. In her restatement of God's command, it's not just that they can't eat of the fruit, but they can't even touch it, or they will die. God never said they couldn't touch it.

In Eve's response to the serpent we already see her being swayed by the devil's schemes. Instead of seeing God's "Yes," she is now focusing on the "No." Instead of dwelling on God's goodness to her, she is beginning to think of God as the One who gives burdensome rules. And the way this temptation came was by Satan tampering with the Word of God.

In stark contrast to this temptation, we read of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Matthew 4:1 says, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and He was hungry. Then the tempter came to Him. And just like in the garden, here in the wilderness Satan tried to use his crafty schemes to thwart God's good plan. But unlike the garden, Jesus responded with a bold confidence in God's Word. He quoted Deuteronomy 3 times in response to the three temptations. When the devil tempted Him to make bread out of stones, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Jesus is modeling for us what it

means to live in reliance on God's Word. We must depend on God's Word. We must fight temptation with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

In the second temptation Satan twists God's Word, like he had done in the garden. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Satan quoted Scripture. He quoted that from Psalm 91. The point of Psalm 91 is to TRUST in God, but Satan rips these verses out of context and uses them to justify TESTING God. Of course, Jesus saw right through this and responded with Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Then, thirdly, the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if He would fall down and worship him. Jesus said, "Be gone, Satan!" and then quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus Christ succeeded. He confidently depended on the Word of God, and when the flaming arrows of the evil one were unleashed against Him, He fought back with the sword of the Spirit.

That's the battle we're in. Satan tempts us. Sin tempts us. And the temptation comes in the form of a perversion of God's Word. God's Word is good. His Word is full of blessings and wonderful pleasures for us. But the temptation will always be to view His Word as restrictive rules. God doesn't have your best interest in mind. He just wants to rain on your parade. He just wants to make you unhappy with all of His rules. "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" That's how Satan and sin seek to drive a wedge between us and God's good Word.

In the face of those temptations we need to dwell on the goodness of God's commands for us. His instructions for us will NOT diminish our happiness. They will greatly INCREASE our happiness. Think with me for a moment about some of the commands we read in Ephesians 5, for instance. Paul writes, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving" (Eph 5:1-4).

The fight of faith is the fight to remember God's absolute goodness in giving us all of these commands. We need to fight against the urge to think of these as burdensome requirements. These instructions are here for our good. Sexual immorality brings sadness. It brings guilt and shame. It may be exciting for a moment, but it will leave you empty and miserable. Covetousness (wanting what someone else has), will likewise leave you discontent and unhappy. Instead, "let there be thanksgiving." Be thankful for the blessings God has given. Rejoice in the instructions He has given us. The path to joy is the path that God has laid out for us in His Word. In this life sin will always be there to lure us away from God's good Word by enticing us with deceitful pleasures. But true pleasure, lasting pleasure, is only found in obeying God's Word.

Preach to yourself this week, and every week. We need to constantly remind ourselves of God's goodness. And we need to meditate on His Word, study His Word, memorize His Word, so that when the temptations come we'll be able to take up the sword of the Spirit and confidently wage war against those temptations.

All of that is under the heading Temptation and the Word of God.

Pride goes before destruction

The second point I want to look at is: Pride goes before destruction. Proverbs 16:18 says “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” That seems to describe what happened with Adam and Eve. Let’s pick up in Genesis 3:4. Remember, in verse 3 Eve seemed to minimize the God’s goodness and emphasize God’s prohibition. She diminished what God said they *could* do, and added to what God said they could *not* do. And now Satan seizes on that, and whereas he started with a cunning question, he now fires off a blatant lie. He says in verses 4-5, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So first, he denies the reality of the punishment. “You will not surely die.” That’s one of the devastating lies of temptation. We doubt the goodness of God, we resent His guidelines for our lives, and then we ignore the reality of the consequences. Going back to the verses in Ephesians 5 that I read, one can think, “Sexual immorality won’t hurt me.” “Looking at pornography isn’t going to hurt anyone. It won’t have any lasting consequences.” “Using filthy language or telling crude jokes, that’s not a big deal.” But these things ARE a big deal. There ARE consequences for our sin. All sin. Anger and bitterness and pride and lust and gluttony and gossip and lying, they all have consequences. Praise God that Jesus Christ bore the punishment for those sins, for all of us who are trusting in Him. But even for Christians who will not suffer the eternal punishment for their sins, there are still very real consequences for sin. And we need to understand the gravity of each sinful action or thought that we have. In the moment of temptation we need to resist the lie that says, “It’s not a big deal. Everybody’s doing it. Just this once. You will not surely die.”

Satan continues to paint God in a negative light. His initial question was intended to make Eve focus on God’s harsh rule rather than His lavish goodness. Now he makes God out to be not only harsh, but also jealous and selfish. The only reason God doesn’t want you to eat from that tree is because He doesn’t want you to have the same knowledge He has. And in this way the curiosity in Eve’s mind turned into a lust for knowledge and power.

For Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signified God’s absolute rule over His creation. Because God had commanded them not to eat of it. God had given Adam and Eve the responsibility of ruling over the creation, but this one tree from which they could not eat, was a reminder that they were not the supreme rulers. They were under a master. They answered to someone above them. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil made it clear who was the creature and who was the Creator.

And just like Satan himself had said, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14), he now tempts Eve to pursue that same deadly goal. It was pride that turned a beautiful angel into the most wicked being in the universe. And it was pride that incited Eve (and Adam) to eat the forbidden fruit.

Verse 6 says when she “saw that the tree was good for food . . .” In other words, there wasn’t any obvious reason not to eat of it, other than God’s command. It was good for food, and “it was a delight to the eyes.” So the serpent’s words seemed to make sense. How could eating this fruit cause her to die? But then the third statement about the tree is what reveals the root issue. When she saw “that the tree was to be desired to

make one wise . . .” You see, it was that lust for knowledge and power, the desire to be equal with God, the desire to usurp His authority, the desire to be independent from Him. The desire to decide for oneself what is good and evil rather than depending on God’s Word to define those for us. The desire to know and experience the world *apart* from God.

That was the knowledge and wisdom that Adam and Eve sought. They had every good thing available to them in the garden. But the one thing they did not have was absolute autonomy. They did not have complete independence. They were responsible to God. They were under His dominion and authority. And the sin of pride rose up in their hearts, just like it had done in the heart of Satan, and they rushed headlong into sin. They defied God’s Word because they wanted to do things their own way. They wanted to be their own God.

And the pride in my heart and the pride in your heart wants the same thing. Our sinful flesh desires autonomy. We desire independence. We don’t want to rely on God or anyone, and we certainly don’t want to take any orders. I’ll do what I want, when I want, how I want, thank you very much. Why? Because I’m that important that I have the right to do so. That’s how we often view ourselves, isn’t it? I’m the center of the universe. Everything ought to revolve around my wants, my desires, my plan, my schedule.

And so we begin to see how pride is at the root of all the other sins. Impatience in traffic or in the check-out line. Why? Because I’m too good to wait. Anger at a family member or friend or co-worker. Why? Probably because they didn’t meet your expectations in some way. In other words, they didn’t do what you wanted them to do. They didn’t conform their life to your wants. Even self-pity, which may seem very different than pride, is really rooted in pride. Because self-pity arises when we think we’ve been wronged. We deserved better. They can’t treat me like that. I’m too good to be treated like that. And if the people who wronged me aren’t going to passionately apologize and make everything right, then I’m going to sulk over it and seek sympathy from others. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not trying to minimize or justify the wrong things that others do to us. But the tendency to fume over those things and pity ourselves and seek pity from others, that’s pride.

Here’s a test for all of us. How many of you are thinking of someone else right now? You don’t have to raise your hand, because it’s probably all of us. And it’s evidence that we’re all prideful sinners in need of God’s grace. Pride is such a subtle sin, and it can creep into our spiritual lives so easily. We start talking about pride and we think, “Yeah, I know someone who needs to work on their pride. I know someone who struggles with impatience or anger or self-pity.” And we try to take the speck out of our brother’s eye when we have a plank in our own. Pride makes us blind to our own pride. Look at your *own* heart right now. This is a time to see your own sin, your own pride, your own self-righteousness. We’re all just like Adam and Eve. We’re enticed by the idea of being our own god, and so we rebel against the only true God. This is pride, and it is deadly. In our pride we are enemies of God, and we are cut off from the only source of joy and happiness. Pride brings absolute misery, because it traps us in the wretched world that revolves around me. And that is a sick world. A world without beauty, without wonder, without glory, without majesty. It is a finite world with only ugly things to look at.

Oh, but there is a glorious alternative! When God's grace invades our lives He gives us eyes to see beyond the cage of mirrors we've trapped ourselves in. And then we're not so wrapped up in how great I am, and who wronged me, and why aren't things going my way. But instead we see a much larger reality, a God-centered reality. And it's then, when we are drawn out of ourselves to enjoy something much greater than ourselves, that we begin to find true joy and peace and satisfaction.

God's grace that can break through our pride and draw us to Himself is the grace that Jesus Christ purchased on the cross, by humbling Himself to the point of death. Our fighter verse this week, which we'll say together at the end of the service, is from Matthew 20:26-28. It says, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Do you want to live a great life? Then give up on the illusion of your own greatness. Look away from yourself, and look to Jesus, who truly is Great, and yet humbled Himself to die a criminal's death, in order that prideful sinners like me and like you could go free.