

The Fall3rd in series: *Genesis: Rated "M" for "Mature"*

Genesis 3:1-7

06 20 2010 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Introduction of Series

Today we are continuing our summer worship series entitled *Genesis: Rated "M" for "Mature."* The first sermon began in the beginning with the creation of the heavens and the earth. Last week we examined the sixth day of creation, exploring what it means to be *"created in the image of God."*

This morning we come to the third chapter of Genesis. We hear for the-first-time-all-over-again the sad and sorry business of humanity's disobedience and fall.

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-7**Introduction**

When we last left our newlyweds, **Adam and Eve** were tending Eden's Garden in perfect bliss. They lived in total harmony with God and one another. The second chapter of Genesis concludes: *"And the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* (Genesis 2:25) The story appeared to end with the traditional blessing, *"And they lived happily ever after."*

And if only we could close the book and say, "The end. AMEN!" But we have all read the next chapter. Paradise did not last for long.

I. The Talking Snake

The third chapter of Genesis introduces a new character to the story: **a talking snake!** The author acts like this is nothing unusual and goes on to say: *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made."* (Genesis 3:1)

Genesis does not give much information about **the snake**. It serves as an agent of temptation in the Garden of Eden which will lead to the eventual disobedience of First Man and First Woman. Traditionally, the serpent has been identified as the devil; however, this interpretation is not directly supported by Genesis itself.

The devil is also known as Satan or Lucifer in the Bible. Scripture, tradition, and myth combine to describe the devil as an archangel who rebelled against God. He was cast out of heaven for his sinful pride and disobedience. In John Milton's classic, *Paradise Lost*, Satan said: *"Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."* Later Jesus called the devil *"the Father of Lies."* The snake certainly personified this title in Genesis.

The snake is described as *"crafty."* This term is an ambiguous word. Synonyms include cunning, clever, sly, sneaky, shrewd, and devious. To give the devil his due, the description recognizes both wily intelligence and evil intent.

Genesis 3:1 continues: *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the other wild animals the Lord God had made."* The verse refers back to the sixth day of creation when the Lord made all of the creatures that lived on the land, including human beings.

The description raises a theological dilemma of **free will**. Genesis reminds us that God even made the serpent; but as we will see, the snake decided to go its own twisted way.

II. Temptation

The serpent encountered Miss Eve near the middle of the garden. Watch carefully the **pattern of temptation** and deception that unfolds. He struck up a conversation with her. The snake began with what appears to be a rather innocent question, “*Did God REALLY say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’*” (Genesis 3:1)

Note how this was not a question that could easily be answered either “Yes” or “No.” Instead, it invited First Woman into a **dialogue** with the snake. The only other choice was not to answer and to avoid the conversation altogether.

Eve made her first mistake when she chose to respond. It’s never a good idea to begin a **conversation** with the devil—it only leads in a hellish direction. So often, however, temptation begins with an idle thought, comment, or question. When we begin to turn the thing over in our mind, it gains life and power. You’ve heard me say countless times that **seduction always begins with flirtation**.

The best place to meet and defeat the devil is at the doorway of our lives. Once a dialogue begins, it is difficult for it to end. Remember the advice we give to our children: “*Don’t talk to strangers.*” 1 Peter 5:8-9 warns: “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in faith*”

According to the Genesis account, God gave the original warning about the forbidden fruit to Adam before Eve was created (see Genesis 2:17). However, the woman clearly knew about the command. So she shared in the responsibility of obeying it.

But notice Eve’s response to the serpent. Something curious happened in translation. EITHER Adam did not relate the command accurately OR Eve chose to paraphrase it. She told the snake, “*We MAY eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit that is in the middle of the garden—nor shall you touch it—or you shall die.’*” Eve added the “nor shall you touch it” on her own.

It’s always a dangerous business to add to or subtract from God’s Word. Eve had expanded God’s prohibition from eating to even touching. Her words gave the appearance that she might have already given the forbidden fruit a great deal of thought. Or even considered building a safety rail around the tree to prevent any trespass.

Humanity finds forbidden fruit so appealing. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. A “*Wet Paint*” sign tempts us to touch. “*No Trespassing*” signs make us want to step over the line. “*Do Not Enter*” warnings invite us to open the door.

A poem by William Carlos Williams gets to the heart of temptation. The note left on the refrigerator door is entitled “*This is Just to Say:*”

*I have eaten
The plums
That were in
The icebox*

*And which
You were probably
Saving
For breakfast*

*Forgive me
They were delicious
So sweet
And so cold*

I love the simplicity of the poem. It summarizes temptation, fall, and regret in a few words. The sweet aftertaste of the plums seems to outweigh the author's guilt or remorse. Even the threat of death did not make the forbidden fruit any less appealing.

Once Eve had engaged the snake in conversation, the serpent hit her with the BIG LIE. The "best" lies are mostly truth to disguise the falsehood. The snake hissed, "*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.*" (Genesis 3:4-5)

The words weren't a total lie—if Eve tasted the forbidden fruit, then she would indeed know the difference between good and evil—absolutely guaranteed! However, the REAL temptation was the claim that "***You will be like God.***"

A strong argument can be made that the desire to "*be like God*" is the basis for ALL sin. God is the Creator, and we are his creations. The Lord calls us to faithfully serve him, praying "*Not my will but thy will be done.*" However, we want to take God's place and serve as the lord of our own lives, seeking our will rather than God's.

Recall this was Lucifer's sin, too. The devil abandoned his rightful place in service to God and sought his own way instead. Remember Milton's quote: "*Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven.*"

Ultimately, it is a matter of trust and obedience. Do we REALLY think that we can manage our lives better than God? Or are we willing to trust and obey in the assurance that the Lord knows the best for our lives?

The snake had baited the hook, and Eve took it hook, line, and sinker. Notice again the progression of temptation. Conversation leads to action. Seduction results in flirtation. Temptation gives way to sin.

"*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 (Can't you just HEAR Eve justifying her actions with all of these reasons?), she took some and ate it.*" (Genesis 3: 6) The next sentence says, "*She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*"

Misery loves company. When we sin, we want others to join us. We justify our actions by getting others involved. But also note a detail here that we often overlook. Apparently, Adam had been with her all along during the conversation with the snake! At the very least, he was with her when she picked the forbidden fruit. At no point did Adam protest, "Now Eve, I don't think this is a good idea." He went along with the sin and shared in the responsibility of their actions.

III. The Fall

"*THEN the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.*" The snake's words proved to be prophetically true in an unexpected way. They DID now know the difference between good and evil—because they had done what was evil; and they were so ashamed.

Recall how the story ended in Genesis 2: "*The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*" After they tasted of the fruit, however, "*they realized they were naked*" and were filled with guilt and shame.

So they sewed **fig leaves** together to cover themselves. Have you ever FELT a fig leaf? It's the consistency of coarse sandpaper! Hardly a fit material for undergarments! Adam and Eve suffered both spiritually and physically for their sin.

THEN the man and woman heard the Lord God Almighty walking through the garden in the cool of the evening. So they hid themselves among the trees because they were naked and ashamed.

The Lord called out, "*Where are you?*" And Adam reluctantly answered, "*I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked.*" God asked, "*Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?*"

Then the "**Blame Game**" began for the first time in human existence. Adam responded, "*The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*" What an artful answer! In one sentence, Adam managed to blame both Eve and God! "It was the woman—that YOU gave me—who made me eat it!"

The Lord turned to Eve and asked, "*What is this you have done?*" Eve followed Adam's example and said, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate!*" And no doubt Eve also wanted to remind God just who made the serpent to begin with.

Sin led to an immediate rejection of responsibility. Humans possess an innate ability for self-rationalization and irresponsibility. It's never MY fault—there's always something or someone else to blame. But God was having none of it.

Temptation . . . disobedience . . . sin . . . were followed by **judgment**. The Lord's sentence came in three parts:

- 1) The snake was cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust. Enmity would exist between its kind and humanity.
- 2) The woman would endure increased pain in childbirth.
- 3) The man would scabble a tough living from the cursed ground. What had been a labor of love would now be toil and drudgery.

Sin conceived and gave birth to **death**—both physically and spiritually. Humanity was now doomed to die. For the first time, Adam and Eve experienced broken relationship between themselves and God—and between each other.

Paul later summarized the whole sorry mess of human existence in Romans 3:23: "*There is no difference, for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .*"

Bible scholars use shorthand to describe Adam and Eve's disobedience as "**the Fall**." Humanity fell from God's grace through willful disobedience. The temptation of the forbidden fruit proved too much for Adam and Eve to resist.

Genesis 3 describes in story form what theologians call **original sin**. The Biblical word for the spiritual disease is Sin—"Sin" with a capital "S." Our sinfulness is more than the sum of all the bad things we do and the good things we leave undone. There is something fundamentally broken about the human condition. Our best efforts fall far short of God's glory.

Paul summed up our experience in this fallen world when he wrote: "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do; but what I hate I do.*" (Romans 7:15-16) And we know exactly what Paul meant.

Mark Twain once said: “*Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.*” God forgive us, Mr. Twain was right. We sing the hymn, “*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*”

The Lord cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and posted a protective guard of angels at the entrance. First Man and First Woman began their lives east of Eden. We understand full well what it means to live as their children in a fallen world.

IV. Grace

However, **God’s grace** continued to abound even in the darkest moments of the Fall. Consider these four things:

1) When God cursed the serpent, the Lord said: “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between you offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” On the surface, this is an explanation for the instinctive fear humans have of snakes. The snake strikes at the heel, and humans crush its head.

However, C. S. Lewis suggested this was the first Old Testament prophecy that foretold the coming of Jesus Christ. The serpent represents the devil along with the power of sin and death. At the cross, Satan would strike at Christ’s heel by having him crucified. However, what seemed like evil’s triumph became its defeat. At the cross and empty tomb, Christ, crushed Satan’s power, saving us from sin and death.

In Paul’s letters, he referred to Jesus Christ as “*the second Adam*” who has undone what “*the first Adam*” did in the Garden of Eden. We heard Paul’s words earlier in Romans 3: “*There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .*” But now hear the rest of the verse: “. . . *and are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.*”

Later in Romans 7 when Paul wrote about not doing the things he wanted to do and doing the things he hated, he finished the chapter with the exclamation: “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*”

2) Here’s a second sign of God’s grace. I have called First Woman by the name of **Eve** throughout this sermon. However, she did not gain her name until after she and Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit.

In the next verse after God’s judgment upon Adam and Eve, Genesis 3:20 states: “*Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living.*” “Eve” literally means “life” or “living.” Even after the Fall, life literally went on.

In Genesis 4, the author described the birth of Cain and Abel—the first children of Adam and Eve. She became the mother of all humanity.

3) A third—almost unnoted detail—about God’s grace is also found in Genesis. Notice what God did AFTER he pronounced judgment upon the man and woman. He told them to get rid of those scratchy fig leaves. Instead, he made **garments** of skin for his two children and clothed them. A small thing, perhaps. But YOU try wearing fig leaves for underwear all day, and I think you might consider this an act of grace as well!

4) Finally, outside Eden's gates, Adam and Eve still maintained their original vocation as gardeners. Even in their fallen state, God still entrusted the creation to their stewardship. In our best moments, we continue to care for what God has entrusted to our hands; and we occasionally experience moments of joy that echo the first days in Eden.

Conclusion

To use a phrase that I often borrow from C. S. Lewis, we are all **sons of Adam and daughters of Eve**. Their sin is our sin; their fall is our fall. There's no need for a talking snake to lead us into temptation—we can find it quite well on our own. We know the taste of forbidden fruit and, and we live east of Eden's gates. There is nothing we can do to make right what is wrong.

But at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us! (see Romans 5:6-8)

In Romans 5, Paul compared Adam's sin to Christ's salvation: "*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*" (Romans 5: 15)

We might be the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve; but never forget that in the name of Jesus Christ, we are also the **children of God**. In the name of Jesus Christ, our sin can be forgiven and the gift of eternal life received. Amen.