



THE ENTICEMENT OF EVIL

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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Genesis 3:1-7

Fourth Message

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The third chapter of Genesis, to which we come today, is perhaps the most important information that has ever been conveyed to mankind. Here we find the ultimate explanation for the tensions and conflicts that constantly flare up around the world. Here we find the answer to the eternal "Why?" that arises in our hearts in times of tragedy and sorrow. Here we find the explanation for more than a hundred centuries of human heartache, misery and torture, blood, sweat and tears. Here we find the reasons behind the powerful fascination of substance abuse, the passion for power, the lure of wealth, and the enticement of illicit sex. If Genesis 3 were removed from the Bible, the story of humanity would be impossible to understand.

Why does man act the way he does? Why are we so self-centered, so mindless of the needs of others? Educators, psychologists, social workers and anthropologists offer different answers to these questions. Man's education is lacking, they say, or there is something wrong with his genetic structure or his environment. Adherents of a certain Eastern religion blame man's problems on "bad karma." But the Bible says that mankind is sinful because sin entered the world through one man. And if we believe that Jesus is Lord, then we must accept his view of Scripture, which is that there is something desperately wrong with man.

Genesis does not make Adam the origin of sin. When God called Adam and asked him what he had done, Adam replied, "Eve made me do it. She is the culprit." And the blame-passing did not stop there. Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." It is obvious that God regarded the serpent as the culprit. Satan, then, is the source of all the evil in the world. Thus we discover early on that man has a spiritual enemy, and that enemy is Satan. He is an evil, malicious killer who is bent on destroying mankind. As Christians, we must accept the fact that there is a personal devil. The Lord himself believed as much. We only have to look to the gospels for evidence of this. The name Satan is mentioned twenty nine times in the gospels, in twenty-seven instances by the Lord himself.

As we open to this account this morning, we will see ourselves once again. We have already learned that this Genesis narrative is supra-historical. We all find ourselves here, because we have all been here; we know the enticement of evil.

Chapter 3, verse 1:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of

the field which the LORD God had made. (3:1a, NASB)

There is much that is mysterious in these words. The text does not address either the origins of evil in the serpent or the nature of the animal. The New Testament, however, identifies the serpent as the devil. John writes in the Book of Revelation, "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back" (Rev 12:7, NIV). But he was not strong enough. The great dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the being who leads the whole world astray, was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

In the Ancient Near East, the serpent was thought to be one of the most beautiful of all the animals. The serpent represented eternal life. It was the symbol of healing, perhaps because it shed its skin and renewed itself. Thus, Satan, the diabolical adversary, appeared before Adam and Eve in a beautiful guise.

But where did the serpent come from? Everything that God had created was good, but this creature, obviously, is not good. He is a murderer, and he is diabolically opposed to both God and man. We might assume, therefore, that he is some kind of spirit which stood apart from the creation of the earth—an alien, in other words. God gave man the gift of speech in order that man might bring everything under his dominion, but this creature, this fast-talking snake, is smarter than man. By his treachery he dupes the man away from his childlikeness and his duty to live under the word of God.

Let us focus on the strategy which the tempter employs with Eve. There is much for us to learn here, because he uses the same tactics with us. In the eighth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus described Satan in these words: "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44, NIV). Satan is a liar and a murderer. His goal is destruction (he destroys and ruins human life), and his method is deception (he lies).

We see Satan's strategy operate right from the start. He begins his deception by sowing seeds of distrust in the woman's heart:

And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (3:1b)

Satan's attack is designed to undermine the woman's

confidence that God really had her welfare in mind. Thus Satan asks her, in effect, "Is it really true that God does not want you to eat from every tree?" Satan's first step is to plant in the woman distrust of God's love for her. He is intimating, "Could God have said a thing like that? How well do you know him? Do you think that a God who loves you would ask you not to eat of a tree in the garden?" Concealed in his question is the idea, "I can't believe it. God really told you not to do that?" That would be akin to a mother putting a Super Nintendo in the middle of a room and telling her child not to play with it. Satan is asking, "Is it true that God does give you the freedom to expand your mind and to fulfill yourself in every possible way? Don't you know that God is trying to suppress you and make you irrelevant? He is keeping you from being what you know you want to be."

That was Satan's attack then, and that his approach now—to get us to distrust God, to believe that he really does not have our welfare in mind. In fact, Satan uses the generic name for God, *Elohim*, not *Yahweh*. He uses God's title, not his name, referring to him as the being who created, rather than a personal God who not only created us but who knows us and cares about us. This is a distortion of the truth. Satan accentuates the negative, not the positive. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Have you ever heard that question? Can a God who loves you forbid anything to you? Is it really love if he forbids something?"

The deception works. Apparently Eve begins to wonder if God is holding out on her. Verse 2:

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" (3:2-3)

There is confusion in Eve's response. She has lost the precision and clarity of the commandment. The Lord had said, "You may *freely* eat." She simply says "we may eat." God was positive: Eat from any tree in the garden, only stay away from this one. But the serpent focused on the one thing she was forbidden to do. Now she is enticed to focus on what she could not do. She forgets about the tree of life and all the wonders of the garden that were hers to enjoy.

And second, she adds to the prohibition. God had not said anything about touching the tree, but Eve says that God (she uses his title now, not his name) said not to touch it. Lastly, she weakens the penalty for sin. The Lord had declared, "You shall surely die," but now Eve says that he said, "lest you die." Her concentration on the forbidden object is the thing that leads to these modifications. She says, "We must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden." She forgets that the tree of life was also in the middle of the garden. But that is the one thing that Satan does not want her to see.

Satan detracts from God's word. He acts like a per-

fectly serious theologian. He is not denying God, but he detracts from God's commandment, reducing the word of God to a question. He is saying, "Now we can have a good debate about what the word of God really means. I am not sure what God is talking about. Maybe he didn't mean that after all. When God gave the commandment, it was perfectly clear and simple. Let's think about that; let's debate that. You never can be sure what God is talking about."

Following this detraction, deception and distortion, there is an outright denial of God's word. The evil one moves quickly. He openly dares to deny the results that God said would occur if the woman ate the fruit. Verse 4:

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die!" (3:4)

Satan openly substitutes a lie for the truth. But he does so in the realm of the future, where the results could not be checked. Things would not happen as God said they would, he suggests. Do not take God so seriously. These issues are not that important. It is not a life and death matter.

Then he supports his lie with a distortion of the truth:

"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (3:5)

There is truth to this statement. Verse 7 says that when the woman and man ate, their eyes were opened. "The Lord God said, 'Behold the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil'" (verse 22). That is what the devil said would happen. But with this difference: Their eyes were opened and they did become able to know good and evil as God knows it, but they learned to relate everything to themselves. Like God, they now used themselves as the instruments to measure good and evil. But the devil did not tell them that this would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to them. They thought he was offering them something glorious and expansive, but when their eyes were opened, they felt shamed, sordid and sad. "Oh," you say, "how diabolically clever!" Exactly! That is the way the devil works. The woman's eyes are opened, but not to what she expected. This is what the serpent was intimating: "God knows that when you eat you will be more than human. You will be like God himself. You will reach your full potential. You will be all you can be. These commandments from God are but an obstacle in your path to full realization. Throw them away!" That is the serpent's hiss. All of us have heard that voice. All of us have tasted that forbidden fruit.

The devil is now finished with the woman. He has succeeded in arousing desire in her, and that is all he wants. Eve is left standing before the fruit. It is hanging there in all its luscious fascination, tantalizing her, offering her an experience she never dreamed possible. The devil had planted the seed in her heart. He had caused her to slightly distrust God's love, to believe a lie, and

to expect an unwarranted result. Now he can safely leave her, even though she has not committed the act. He is fully certain that the desired result will follow.

Verse 6:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [the lust of the flesh], and that it was a delight to the eyes [the lust of the eyes], and that the tree was desirable to make one wise [the boastful pride of life], she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (3:6)

The fall itself is instructive. The act is reported in a rapid sequence of verbs: “she took,” “she ate,” “she gave,” “he ate also.” Eve ate the fruit. It does not look as though anything ethically suspect is occurring. She did not hurt Adam. She did not hurt anybody else. She did not hurt the creation. There is no question about ethics here. The issue is sin. She broke trust with God; that is the point. She is no longer totally depending on God’s word. She discounted the promises of God. She depreciated his character and broke relationship with him. She preferred sensual pleasures (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life) over God and his word.

The comment about Adam is noteworthy. I think Adam was with Eve throughout this episode. He did not know what to do, so he passively sat and watched the whole sordid drama unfold. Remember that he was supposed to guard the garden. He should have taken a rake and gone after the serpent. At the very least he should have warned his wife, “What the serpent is saying is not true,” or, “Let’s take a time out and talk this over.” He should have done something. But he did nothing.

Adam’s silence underscores some one of manhood’s essential failures. When the chips were down, he chose Eve over God. He was not deceived, but he chose the woman, whom he could touch and love, over God. One commentator makes an interesting observation on the coincidence of words used in the Bible. He notes that the words “take” and “eat” describe a simple act in the garden. The act, however, required a very costly remedy, for the Lord himself would have to taste death before these verbs became verbs of salvation.

And now the aftermath. Verse 7:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (3:7)

The result is somewhat anticlimactic. Their eyes were opened, but instead of divine enlightenment, what they experienced brought them only shame and embarrassment. They knew more, but the additional knowledge they had gained was evil. Mistrust and alienation had replaced the security and intimacy they had enjoyed. They make a futile attempt to cover themselves with leaves.

What went wrong here? you ask. How could they have avoided this? Where was the battle lost? It was lost right after the first sentence, when the devil raised the question, “Did God say...?” Eve was beaten from the moment she accepted the idea that God was not to be fully trusted.

That is why I am convinced that everything the devil does is designed for one purpose only: to draw us away from God’s love. It is not so much that the devil hates us, but that he hates God and will do anything to break his heart. And nothing breaks God’s heart more than being separated from those he loves.

Satan, Jesus said, is a liar and a murderer. His goal is destruction; his method is deception. He is the source of all our doubts about God’s goodness. He is the one behind the deceits that buffet us all day long—the messages that encourage us to find something or someone more trustworthy than God; the subtle seductions to meet our own needs rather than trust God’s provision. The devil fills us with guilt over the past, denying God’s forgiveness. He makes us anxious about the present by insinuating that God cannot provide. He exacerbates the final terror of death, ignoring the Lord’s conquest over the tomb.

Anxiety, guilt, and fear: these are the marks of Satan’s presence. They are based on the lie that God cannot or will not do anything about our condition; that our sin, our suffering, our inadequacy, our destiny all are beyond his control and care. Satan’s subtle craft is to make us suspicious of God. “He is holding out on you,” he whispers in our ears. That is Satan’s fundamental deception.

Satan is the one behind the bitterness of some of our questions. Why must infants become drug dependent *in utero*? Why are women battered, abused, and then discarded like waste? What about the homosexual’s lonely despair? Does it occur to God that it is hard for us to live with only his invisible presence to comfort us, that sometimes we long for human arms to give us a hug? Is he aware that his silence deafens us to his word, and that it’s hard to believe he still speaks to us today? Can he possibly comprehend the terrible pain of our loneliness? Satan plagues us with these questions and uses them to push us away from God.

Adam and Eve’s doubting of God has been passed on like a virus to every human being since that time, except one. Underlying our fallen nature is our doubt of God’s goodness. It creates a terror of being alone in an uncertain world. That fallen personality structure within each one of us is built on one central lie that says: *God cannot be trusted with the things that matter most*. We can thank him for finding a parking place for us this morning, but we can’t trust him with our souls.

The key to life is believing that God is good. If you do not believe this, you will be taking responsibility for your own life.

Can you believe that God is good in spite of that posi-

tive biopsy?

Can you believe that God is good although you have lost your job and you are fearful of tomorrow?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your spouse's unfaithfulness?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of rebellious children who provoke deep pain?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your demanding job that keeps you moving at a frantic pace?

Can you believe that God is good in spite your battle with self-hatred, and the notion of finding your identity in Christ seems like so much mockery?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of the memories of abuse that haunt your every waking moment?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your personal failure?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of the consuming loneliness that fills your life like a fog?

You will know that you have found God when you believe that he is good, no matter what the circumstances may seem to be saying. Every temptation of the devil is designed to draw us away from the love of God, who is the only one who can give us life and love. We should not use God to solve our problems. We should use our problems to find God. That is what they are designed to do. May God grant to us the eyes of faith to see difficult circumstances as opportunities to draw closer to him.

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