

SESSION 22: THE FIRST TEMPTATION, PART TWO

Genesis 3:1-5

March 17, 2024

There is a character trait built into humans that we tend to assign to younger generations—perhaps only because their elders have learned how better to camouflage it in themselves. The young remain inartful in that regard.

Once again, Linda and I were watching a movie we hadn't for quite a while—this time the original *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, made in 1971. This trait I speak of was in full display in the character of one of the girls, Veruca Salt, a decidedly spoiled brat, whose favorite phrase was, "I want it *now!*" She didn't just demand everything from her rich daddy, she demanded it *right now!*

Not only is there nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), but this unsavory character trait was displayed even in the earliest moments of humanity. As we see in the text before us, the serpent will hold out an irresistible carrot to the first woman and man. That carrot is revealed in v5; if the woman would just eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil their "eyes would be opened, and [they] will *be like God...*" Because that was indeed her heart's desire, she could not resist.

And it was perfectly natural for the indwelt serpent to offer this particular carrot, for it was precisely the fatal flaw in the character of his puppet master. Satan, like Adam and Eve, was one of God's creations. He began "good," beautiful, one of the supreme archangels of heaven.

Read Ezekiel 28:14-15.

We discover the root of his downfall in this dual prophecy of both the King of Tyre and Satan in v1-2:

The word of Yahweh came again to me, saying, "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'Thus says Lord Yahweh, "Because your heart is lofty
And you have said, 'I am a god;
I sit enthroned in the seat of gods
In the heart of the seas';
Yet you are a man and not God,
Although you make your heart like the heart of God—'"

Many today still suffer from that inherited desire. They want to “be like God,” but they do not want to wait for the lengthy and sometimes arduous process of sanctification—they want it *now*. Some want to be like God without bothering to do it through Christ; even some believers grow impatient with the process that will take their entire lives and *still* not be accomplished until they see the Lord face to face. Why can’t they be like Christ *now*? It is hard work doing it a bit at a time. Yet that is how we are to become like Christ, as the apostle Peter put it.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16. 📖

See also Philippians 2:12-13

I take it that Eve knew none of the backstory; she certainly knew nothing of sanctification in Christ Jesus. But Satan knew which button to push.

We can rightly find fault with Eve and Adam for their behavior, for their rebellion against God. But we should never permit that criticism to blind us to this fact: There is not a person in this room—there is not a person on this earth—who could not do the very same thing. Every person on earth has the very same rebellion simmering within their flesh. Adam and Eve are guilty of being the first—and guilty of setting stage for the rest of us—but every one of us could have done the same thing—indeed do, in smaller ways, every day. It is only by God’s grace, and the lengthy sanctification process we are all part of, that we do not do it more often than we do.

Read Genesis 3:1-5.

vv2-3

In our last session I said, with regard to Eve’s initial response to the serpent in vv2-3, “Give credit to Eve that her response is right on.” Well, one must never stop studying God’s word, for one will always discover additional nuances, new depths, that one may have missed before.

Let me put a question to you: *In verses 1-6, precisely when did The Fall—or the Curse—occur? What was the initiating moment?*

What we are looking for is the “tipping point”—the precise moment when there would be no going back—or the moment of the first germ of rebellion and disobedience flowering in the first woman—she has not yet received her name; that will come later. Verses 2-3 reveal clues that that moment takes place earlier than we may have thought. And discovering this moment in the text may just reveal something about ourselves.

The scene begins with the serpent speaking to the woman. After reading this verse many, *many* times, I have concluded that the serpent is not meaning to trick the woman by splitting hairs, but is setting her up by making an obviously erroneous statement. He says, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” That is, *Did God make all the trees of the garden off-limits?* ❏

I would contend that the serpent does this so that the woman will drop her guard, imagining him to just be misinformed, and offering her the opportunity to set him straight. In other words, he instills in her a false sense of security—as well as a false sense of the serpent’s dependency on her—not realizing the full force of what she is up against in this beast who is, in reality, the voice of Satan.

Alexander MacLaren: For it [temptation] begins with casting a doubt on the reality of the prohibition. ‘Hath God said?’ is the first parallel opened by the besieger. The fascinations of the forbidden fruit are not dangled at first before Eve, but an apparently innocent doubt is filtered into her ear. And is not that the way in which we are still snared? The reality of moral distinctions, the essential wrongness of the sin, is obscured by a mist of sophistication. “There is no harm in it’ steals into some young man’s or woman’s mind about things that were forbidden at home, and they are half conquered before they know that they have been attacked.

And the woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat”

At first glance what the woman says in reply seems right, but there are subtle, tell-tale differences between what she says and what God said. Here is what Yahweh God had said earlier to the first man in 2:16:

And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may surely eat.”

The serpent/Satan cannot yet know the personal name of God (*Yahweh*), which reveals His covenant grace and fidelity to Israel and will first be revealed to Israel (and Moses the author of Genesis) as such in Exodus 3:14-15—although prior to that it will be used as just another title for God. Thus the serpent uses the only designation he has available: “God” (*elohim*).

So far, I would say this is a minor discrepancy, but she does leave out the all-encompassing “any.” Even so, where is the immediate and emphatic defense of the gracious God who has surrounded His first couple with paradise, withholding nothing good from them? Could this reflect a subtle diminution within her of honor and respect for her Maker?

How many of *us* have “diplomatically” held our tongue when faced with disparagement of our God and Savior by unbelievers? How many of *us* have failed to energetically rise to His defense? ➡

Leupold: “As soon as one does not wholeheartedly and unreservedly trust God, mistrust is gaining ground, and sin has entered.”

...but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden...”

Satan’s purpose, through the serpent, is what it always has been and remains today: to pull the believer away from his or her faith and trust in a holy and gracious God. He does this by placing doubt in the believer’s mind. And he has already set the hook in the woman; by v3 she is already lying about what God said—at least twice, perhaps three times.

First, there are *two* special trees in “the midst” of the garden, the designations of which she leaves out.

And out of the ground Yahweh God caused to grow every tree that is desirable in appearance and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9)

God said, ‘You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it...’

Next she rightly (if she is referring to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) states that “they shall not eat from it.” What follows is a blatant lie; nowhere does Yahweh God say “you shall not touch it.”

Read Revelation 22:18-19.

We can debate until the cows come home about whether or not the first man and woman ultimately make their way to eternity in heaven with God, but in this moment, the woman has turned away from Him. She is embellishing and lying about what God said—and on her way over to Satan’s side.

K&D: She added, “neither shall ye touch it,” and proved by this very exaggeration that it appeared too stringent even to her, and therefore that her love and confidence towards God were already beginning to waver. Here was the beginning of her fall: “for doubt is the father of sin, and [skepticism] the mother of all transgression; and in this father and this mother, all our present knowledge has a common origin with sin” (Ziegler).

...lest you die.”

Finally, now, the woman is truly off the rails. Note the difference between this and the original command in Chapter Two.

Read Genesis 2:16-17.

“...you will surely die.”

The Hebrew in v2:17 (*mot tamut*; literally, “dying you will die”) makes it clear that Yahweh is saying, “you will *certainly* die” (as the NIV2011 has it). Just before, the woman exaggerated the restriction; now she *diminishes* the penalty by claiming that God said “lest you die.” Instead of *mot tamut*, now it is *pen tamutun*. Our various common versions are a mixed bag on this verse, some showing the difference, others making it sound as if the woman is simply repeating what God said (even in the NASB95!). But there is a big difference between the two. God said, “you will *surely* die,” while the woman says, essentially, “you *might* die.” The Hebrew *pen* means “otherwise you might, perhaps” (the archaic but accurate word is “perchance”).

By this point the woman need not take a bite from the fruit to prove she has gone over to the dark side. Thus we can conclude that she, by the end of v3, is already disobedient and false to what Yahweh God said, and she has fallen into the serpent’s (Satan’s) trap by questioning her trust in God’s veracity. In so doing, she is, even in these early moments of Creation, either forgetting or blatantly disregarding the generosity and grace Yahweh God has shown the first couple in providing a bountiful paradise for them—not least, regular, face-to-face communion with the Creator of the universe. It is astonishing, coming so soon, but the same behavior (and timing) will be repeated—and repeatedly—with Israel in its Exodus from Egypt.

What we have here is a perfect picture of how evil, orchestrated by Satan, is insinuated into a believer's life. Satan is not God, but he is supernatural, once in the highest angelic echelon. He is an exquisite liar, casting into shade every politician, every dishonest used-car salesman, every door-to-door purveyor of Kirby Vacuums. He has been doing it for a very, *very* long time, and is rather good at it.

Satan begins quietly, seemingly innocent enough. In our mind he whispers, *Is that really what God's word says? Did He really mean you can't do even that sensible thing?*

We read God's word again, and maybe it sounds different this time—or maybe we just exchange one little word for another, a word more compatible with our desires and needs. *That sounds better now, doesn't it.* So we edge into disobedience, seemingly with the Lord's permission. And as a result, if even for just a moment, or an hour, or a day, we have shifted God out of our consciousness. Instead of being in the front of our mind, He has now been shoved into the background.

It occurs to me that when this happens in our life, along with seeking counsel from the New Testament it just might be profitable to read again the third chapter of Genesis. There is indeed nothing new under the sun. The desire to “be like God,” to claim total control over our lives, to answer to no one and change the rules more to our liking, was in the first woman and man, and it lives on today as strong and persistent as ever.

Then when we combine with that the additional human proclivity for wanting what we want *now*, rather than later, it makes for a toxic brew that works in our lives to exalt self over God, and the priorities of a fallen earth over the throne of grace.

When faced with these tensions, the advantage we have over the first woman, is that we have a Redeemer, a Savior, an Advocate—someone who stands *between* our transgressions and a holy God.

SESSION 22

The First Temptation, part two Genesis 3:1-5

A Fatal Carrot

it was perfectly natural for the indwelt serpent to offer this particular carrot, for it was precisely the fatal flaw in the character of his puppet master. Satan, like Adam and Eve, was one of God's creations. He began "good," beautiful, one of the supreme archangels of heaven. We discover the root of his downfall in this dual prophecy of both the King of Tyre and Satan in Ezekiel 28:1-2.

The word of Yahweh came again to me, saying, "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'Thus says Lord Yahweh, "Because your heart is lofty
And you have said, 'I am a god;
I sit enthroned in the seat of gods
In the heart of the seas';
Yet you are a man and not God,
Although you make your heart like the heart of God—'"

Alexander MacLaren: For it [temptation] begins with casting a doubt on the reality of the prohibition. 'Hath God said?' is the first parallel opened by the besieger. The fascinations of the forbidden fruit are not dangled at first before Eve, but an apparently innocent doubt is filtered into her ear. And is not that the way in which we are still snared? The reality of moral distinctions, the essential wrongness of the sin, is obscured by a mist of sophistication. 'There is no harm in it' steals into some young man's or woman's mind about things that were forbidden at home, and they are half conquered before they know that they have been attacked. (emphasis added)

"From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat..."

Where is the immediate and emphatic defense of the gracious God who has surrounded His first couple with paradise, withholding nothing good from them? Could this reflect a subtle diminution within her of honor and respect for her Maker?

Leupold: "As soon as one does not wholeheartedly and unreservedly trust God, mistrust is gaining ground, and sin has entered."

"God said, 'You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it...'"

K&D: She added, "neither shall ye touch it," and proved by this very exaggeration that it appeared too stringent even to her, and therefore that her love and confidence towards God were already beginning to waver. Here was the beginning of her fall: "for doubt is the father of sin, and [skepticism] the mother of all transgression; and in this father and this mother, all our present knowledge has a common origin with sin" (Ziegler).

Eve: "...lest you die."

God: "...you will surely die."

The Hebrew in v2:17 (*mot tamut*; literally, "dying you will die") makes it clear that Yahweh is saying, "you will *certainly* die" (as the NIV2011 has it). Just before, the woman exaggerated the restriction; now she *diminishes* the penalty by claiming that God said "*lest* you die." Instead of *mot tamut*, now it is *pen tamutun*. Our various common versions are a mixed bag on this verse, some showing the difference, others making it sound as if the woman is simply repeating what God said (even in the NASB95!). But there is a big difference between the two. God said, "you will *surely* die," while the woman says, essentially, "you *might* die." The Hebrew *pen* means "otherwise you might, perhaps" (the archaic but accurate word is "perchance").

For complete notes and audios for each session, go to DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/

