

## SESSION 23: THE FIRST TEMPTATION, PART THREE

Genesis 3:1-6

March 24, 2024

### A CAUTIONARY NOTE

We ended class last week with many of us sharing a number of different thoughts on motives, on supposed communication between God and man, communication between man and woman in the garden, in an attempt for us to understand the written record of this first temptation.

There is nothing *inherently* wrong with such supposition; we probably do it, in our minds at least, every time we read God's word. But I want to raise a cautionary note—to *all* of us.

Let us be circumspect in our imaginings. Our God has graciously given us His written word, but beyond that He has determined what is *in* it—and *not* in it. He hasn't told us everything, and He has His reasons for that. 📖

Let us be diligent to hold to what God has told us—not to what He hasn't. Now let's return to that text.

### Read Genesis 3:1-6.

I am fascinated by the rhythm of this conversation between the serpent and the woman—especially regarding one point, even one word. In v2:17 God said, "...for in the day that you eat from it you will **surely** die." In v3:3 the woman claims that God said, "lest [**otherwise you might**] die." Then, remarkably, in v3:4 the serpent, speaking for Satan, retorts, "You **surely** will not die!" The serpent uses God's very word—*mot tamut*—this time in the negative—*not* surely die—to refute His very command. To employ a Yiddish term, that, my friends, is real *chutzpah*.

I have found, in my experience, that there is a reliable, almost textbook pattern to sinning by temptation—and we see it established right here in our text.

#### 1. God lays down His ruling:

in v2:17 Yahweh God said, "...for in the day that you eat from it **you will surely die.**"

We all can probably recall instances in our experience of someone—perhaps even ourselves—citing "scripture" that is not really Scripture. My favorite is when a believer who had just lost his job sat in our living room and said to me, "Well, you know what the Bible says, 'God helps those who help themselves.'"

No, the Bible doesn't say that at all—in fact it says quite the opposite in a number of places.

2. *The tempter introduces doubt:*  
in v3:1 the serpent said, “Indeed, **has God said**, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?”
3. *The one being tempted hedges his or her bet:*  
in v3:3 the woman answers, “[God said,] ‘You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it, lest [otherwise **you might**] **die.**’”
4. *The tempter declares God absolutely wrong:*  
in v3:4 the serpent says to the woman, “You **surely will not die!**”
5. *The one being tempted is convinced by the tempter:*  
in v3:6 the woman “took from [the tree’s] fruit and ate.”

#### vv4-5

**And the serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 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.”**

Before we go any further we need to establish what is meant by “in the day,” used both here in v5 by the serpent and back in v2:17 by God Himself. It can be confusing because God said, “for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Yet Adam lived for 930 years (Genesis 5:5). How do we reconcile this? Leupold explains it well.

*Leupold (on v2:17):* In this instance the expression *beyôm*, “in the day,” is to be taken very literally and not in the sense “at the time,” a meaning that would not fit here. For the thought actually to be expressed is the instantaneous occurrence of the penalty threatened... This at once raises the question, “Why was this penalty not carried out as threatened?” We answer: “It was, if the Biblical concept of dying is kept in mind, as it unfolds itself ever more clearly from age to age.” Dying is separation from God. That separation occurred the very moment, when man by his disobedience broke the bond of love. If physical death ultimately closes the experience, that is not the most serious aspect of the whole affair. The more serious is the inner spiritual separation.

The experience of humanity since Eden is actually the *reverse* of what happened to the first man and woman—but, of course, *because of* the choice they made and the consequences of that choice. Different from Adam and Eve, all human beings today are born “dying”; we are born corrupt and separated from God. We are dead. Only in Christ is that process reversed, transferred from the path of death to life in Him. Yet throughout it all, believer or no, we remain physically “alive” and breathing.

For what it’s worth, note the contrast between the woman’s feeble rejoinder to the serpent in vv2-3 and his energetic, vehement response in v4: “You surely will not die!” She does not rise to a strong defense of her Lord, but the serpent certainly does to his.

*“You surely will not die!”*

Only the LSB and NASB of our common versions word it this way, and more than one commentator explains how this is preferred. There is a subtle but important difference between “You surely will not die!” and “You will not surely die.” The latter seems to suggest, *You will not die completely*, while the former says, *You absolutely will not die*. And no matter how the words are arranged, it is this that the serpent is saying: *God has lied to you. You will absolutely not die if you eat from the tree.*

*Leupold: “A.V., “Ye shall not surely die,” is not strong enough; rather, “Ye certainly shall not die.” For the negative, which in cases where the absolute infinitive accompanies the finite verb usually stands between infinitive and verb, here emphatically stands first, yielding the emphasis we suggest by our translation.”*

*“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.”*

In v4 the serpent lies through his teeth—if the serpent even has teeth. But in v5 he offers a mixed bag of truths and vague half-truths.

Note the irony in v5: As created, the man and woman were as close to being “God-like” as they could possibly be. They were without sin, in close communion with their Maker, and, since “death” will be introduced later with their fall, we can only assume they were created immortal—or at least, like Elijah, would not die but be “translated” into heaven while alive (2 Kings 2:11). But believing the serpent’s tempting words—“you will be like God”—they were instantly reduced to mere humans: *with* sin, having lost their regular communion with God, and destined to suffer and age and die like every human since.

The power of temptation is that there can be at least a glimmer of truth in it. Even in his disparaging of God's motives the serpent is somewhat correct.

**Read Genesis 3:22-24.**

Their eyes *were* opened, as v7 attests: "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked..." And they were suddenly aware that they were naked because they now knew good and evil. But it was in God's *motives* that the serpent was wrong. As he paints it, God was being greedy, zealous to retain sole possession of such knowledge and godliness. Leupold says it well, "Such a charge attributes envy to God and makes Him appear as one who withholds good from His creatures lest they mount to heights reserved for Himself."

Being evil, the serpent speaking for Satan does not recognize God's true motive of love and protection. He doesn't want the man and woman to be introduced to evil for *their* good, just as the reason parents will shield their small children from things evil and profane, for they know that then—even if the child is initially repulsed by what he has seen or heard—the demonic seed will have been planted: the knowledge of evil will have been implanted where it had not been before.

But also being evil, Satan wants humanity to experience the precipitous fall *he* experienced because of his own desire to "be like God."

**Read Isaiah 14:12-15.**

Yet even acknowledging Satan's supernatural power, we must not forget that temptation does not *force* us to sin; it simply *entices* to sin. Boy, did James ever nail it:

**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully matured, it brings forth death. (James 1:14–15)**

Satan through the serpent may have opened the door, but the woman and the man walked *through* that door because of their own unholy desires. We may wonder where that perverse desire came from, since they were created “good,” but then we can just as well wonder where and how that same desire came into the archangel Satan. We just do not know, other than it somehow percolated up from within themselves for, as James says in his v13,

**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.**

*Luther:* It was an awful step into sin for Eve to turn from God and his Word and to lend her ears to Satan. But this her next step is more awful; for she now agrees with Satan, while he charges God with falsehood, and as it were smites him in the face. Eve therefore now is no longer the woman merely turned away from God, as in the first stage of her temptation. She now begins to join Satan in his contempt of God and in his denial of the truth of his Word. She now believes the father of lies, directly contrary to the Word of God.

v6

**Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, so she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.**

Do we not see the evidence here that the woman has already fallen from the presence and influence of God even before she takes the first bite? Here is the description of someone who is seeing something “as if for the first time.” This is not a picture of someone in the early, entrancing moments of sin, but one in whom sin is fully developed, one entirely engrossed in its contemplation (Leupold).

Look at the words used to describe the tree: it “was good for food,” “a delight to the eyes,” it “was desirable to make one wise.” *What could be wrong about this? I want this. I need this. It’s right for me. My wife doesn’t understand me. My husband no longer loves me. It’s not stealing if I truly need it.*

It all began right here, right in these early moments of Creation. It is not a sin to be tempted; the sin is in *believing* the lie and *acting* upon it.

*so she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

We don't know how much time passed between vv21-24 of Chapter Two and v6 of Chapter Three, but the impression we get from Moses' narrative is that it was not much. We are told nothing of their daily lives, their conversations, their discoveries in the natural world, their joys and sorrows, their frustrations and victories.

If this were a novel or a play we would say that the characters are poorly developed. This happens, then this happens, then they are booted out of the scene. But this is not a novel or play; it is God's word setting the stage for the need for the Law, and later, redemption in Christ. We don't need to know what they ate for breakfast; we only need to know that they were created "good" and sinless, but in very little time they believed the serpent over against the goodness and generosity of Yahweh God.

That is sufficiently tragic in itself, but what is especially tragic is that there seems to be very little time between that wondrous moment when God presents the woman to the man—

**And Yahweh God fashioned the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman, and He brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:22)**

—and their mutual descent into corruption and rebellion against their Maker and Father as the woman proffers the forbidden fruit to her husband—and he takes it.

*K&D*: Doubt, unbelief, and pride were the roots of the sin of our first parents, as they have been of all the sins of their posterity. The more trifling the object of their sin seems to have been, the greater and more difficult does the sin itself appear; especially when we consider that the first men "stood in a more direct relation to God, their Creator, than any other man has ever done, that their hearts were pure, their discernment clear, their intercourse with God direct, that they were surrounded by gifts just bestowed by Him, and could not excuse themselves on the ground of any misunderstanding of the divine prohibition, which threatened them with the loss of life in the event of disobedience" (Delitzsch). Yet not only did the woman yield to the seductive wiles of the serpent, but even the man allowed himself to be tempted by the woman.

# SESSION 23

## The First Temptation, part three Genesis 3:1-6

### **Chutzpah**

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### **Verse 6**

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