



Paradise Lost

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #7

Genesis 3:1-7

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We are in Genesis 3 today which is one of those chapters in the Bible that, if we don't understand it, we are not going to get anything else that is in Scripture. This is an essential chapter to the whole plotline of Scripture.

Hear God's living Word in Genesis 3:1-7:

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ 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.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

This is the Word of God. Let's pray.

Father, we pray, let no vice nor sin remain that resists Your holy war. You have loved and purchased us. Make us Yours forevermore. Use the teaching, the proclamation, of Your Word to engage us, equip us and make us more vigilant in the spiritual warfare we fight. It is not an occasional war, but it occurs every day. Every moment of our lives, we battle against the world,

the flesh and the devil. Hallelujah for the war He fought and for the victory Christ won!
Hallelujah for the cross! Thanks be to You, our God. Amen.

I heard D. A. Carson ask a question that I cannot forget. He asked, “Can you imagine what it would be like not to have anything in your life of which you are ashamed?” The very question gets us thinking of things of which we are ashamed. What would it be like not to have anything in your life of which you are ashamed? Carson went on to say:

You men, would you like your wife, mother, daughter or sister to know everything you are thinking? Everything you say? Everything you do? You women, would you like your husband, son, brothers or father to know everything you think? Everything you say? Everything you do?

Not just the lusts, no; but the hidden resentments as well. The scorn. The one-upmanship that goes on in your mind. All the secretly nurtured scorecards of vengeance that we keep in our hearts. And, besides all these things, there are really many grotesque things in our lives that we hope our loved ones will never find out about us. Even if no one ever does find out some of these things, there are crimes, there are sins that, once they're committed, the stain just stays with us. And we feel the punishment of guilt and shame.

What would it be like never, ever to have lied? Never, ever to have been puffed up in arrogance? Never, ever to have hated? Never, ever to have anything of which to be ashamed? What would that be like? What would you give, what wouldn't you pay, to be able to have that experience not to have anything to be ashamed of?

It's hard to imagine, isn't it? If we are honest, I doubt a day goes by that we don't have something of which we are ashamed. You get to the end of your day and do the inventory of your life and, like King David, you say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious heart. See if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:23-24). If we are being honest and attentive to our own hearts, there are things of which we are ashamed each day. We are ashamed! But that was not the case in the Garden of Eden where we left off last week.

Genesis 2:25 says, “*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*” They were completely open. They had nothing to hide, no flaws to cover. But by 3:7, this is shattered. There are only six, short verses between 2:25 and 3:7. In those short verses is the story of how we got from there to here, from having nothing to be ashamed of to being full of

shame and wanting to cover ourselves and hide. In six short verses, this is the story behind all our sin and shame.

If you were to test the DNA of every sin in the world and every sin you have ever been guilty of, you would find a match to the sins that were committed right here in the Garden of Eden. Every one of us is going to be tempted this week. I can guarantee that. It doesn't matter if you are 90 years old or if you are nine years old; you are going to be tempted this week. In fact, you will be tempted today. Every temptation you face is really a variation on the same themes that are being played out here in the Garden of Eden. None of us will experience any temptation except what is common to man (1 Corinthians 10:13). That temptation is recorded for us right here in this garden.

Satan Starts with a Sneer

The enemy, the tempter, is not creative. He is hopelessly unoriginal. But he's shrewd. He's clever. He's cunning. I have only one aim in preaching this sermon. I want you to know your enemy, so that you will not be outwitted by Satan's schemes. In 2 Corinthians 2:11, Paul says, "...for we are not ignorant of his designs." As we look at this very familiar passage, I want us to become more aware and vigilant regarding Satan's schemes.

Let's start in verse one. Satan begins with a sneer. He says to the woman, "Has God placed you in this garden and not allowed you to eat the fruit of these wonderful trees?" That quote comes from a storybook for children. I think it does well to capture what the devil is doing here. He is called "the serpent" in this passage.

It doesn't really matter whether he takes the form of a serpent or whether he's speaking through a serpent. The Bible doesn't answer the questions that we want to ask here: How did this serpent get into God's garden? Where did evil originate? The purpose of Genesis 3 is not to answer those questions. Genesis 3 is very personal to us. It is directing the question to us. How did we get to be the way we are? How did we go from a people who had nothing to be ashamed of to a people who are filled with shame? These are the questions Genesis 3 wants to answer, but we cannot answer these questions without recognizing there is an enemy of God who has crept into this garden and has insinuated his sneering lies into our minds and hearts.

We know the serpent is the devil because Revelation 12:9 speaks of him like this: "*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*" Here we are told that he is a beast, created by the Lord, and he is under the Lord's control. He is also crafty and shrewd.

If you listen to the Hebrew language, there is a very important play on words here. The word for “naked” that we read in 2:25 is *arom*, and the word for “crafty” or “shrewd” in 3:1 is *arum*. To be shrewd or crafty means to be aware of the snares and dangers that are out there. To be naked is to have nothing to be afraid or ashamed of. The man and woman were blissfully naïve in the garden. They did not know about evil. All they knew was God and His goodness and provision. But there was an enemy who was aware of the lurking dangers and who knew how to set the snare. He started by mocking God. His question to Eve in verse one was not so much an action that he tempted her to do; it was an attitude that he brought to her. It was a sneering, mocking and questioning attitude of the Word of God.

Satan said, “Let’s enter into a dialogue about what God has said to you.” He flattered her and smuggled in the assumption that God’s Word is subject to our judgment, and that we can stand over the Word of God and determine whether it’s right or wrong. That sneering comes to us today with this telltale phrase: “What kind of God would do this? What kind of God would command such restrictive, repressive sexual ethics? What kind of God would have such exclusive truth claims, such as, ‘I am the way, truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6)? What kind of God would say, ‘You cannot eat of that tree?’” He sneered and mocked. His aim was to plant doubts about God’s goodness. He tried to paint God as restrictive and harsh, a God Whose primary language is “do not,” rather than “you may surely eat.” He misrepresented God’s rule and perverted God’s Word.

The questions in our minds as we read verse one is, “Will the *imago dei*—Eve, who is created in God’s image—fulfill her creation mandate? Will she rule? Will she take dominion? Will she subdue this evil serpent and cast this slithering snake out of God’s garden? Will she do it?”

At first, we have hope. She said to the serpent in verse two, “*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden...*” She did not say, “We may eat freely of all of these trees,” but she acknowledged that God gave them much freedom. But then we begin to wonder what is going on in her mind when she says in verse three, “... [*B*]ut God said, ‘*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden...*’” We are okay so far, but here is the phrase that should worry us: “*neither shall you touch it.*” Where did that come from? That’s not what God said in 2:16-17. There we read, “*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘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.’*”

God said nothing about touching the tree. Eve added that prohibition about the character of God. Satan started with a sneer, mocking, “Let’s start a dialogue about God. Let’s debate His

Word. Let's create a little confusion in the minds of God's people. Let's get them thinking, 'Maybe that sin I want to commit is not really that bad. Maybe it is not really forbidden by God. Maybe the Bible is not so clear about that.'

Satan's sneer succeeds. Satan is sneering in our world today. Tim Keller, who works at a church in New York City, says that for every one good argument he hears against Christianity, he hears 99 sneers. Usually, it starts with an attitude of wanting to accommodate ourselves to the spirit of this age and this world, and the ways of God in Scripture just seem so out of sync with the ways of this world. We are bitten by this flattery of wanting the praise of men and the approval of this world, and we start listening to the sneering attitude that Satan and his people have against God. Once we adopt that sneering attitude, we are only steps away from outright rebellion.

Satan Strikes with a Lie

This lie in verse four denied God's judgment. We find in verse four a flat contradiction of the Word of God: *"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'" Now we have Satan's word versus God's Word. Satan suggests to the woman that God exaggerated the consequences of disobedience. "This is not really such a big deal—this one tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What could be so wrong about eating of that tree? You're not going to die."*

Is it not interesting that the first doctrine denied in Scripture is the doctrine of God's judgment? Isn't that often the case? We deny that there are consequences to disobedience. We deny that there is a God Who judges on earth. We deny that there is heaven and hell.

Satan strikes with a lie. He denies God's judgment; then he also maligns God's integrity in verse five. Look at what he says: *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened..."* In other words, Satan is saying, "God's threatened by this. God is envious. He is jealous. You can't trust Him. God knows that when you eat of this your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

What the serpent says to Eve is, "God is holding back good from you." She's in a perfect environment. God is exceedingly kind and generous to her, but Satan suggests to her that God is holding back good; He is a cosmic killjoy; He is envious and untrustworthy; and that Eve must decide for herself what is right for her. He is saying, "Don't let God tell you what's right and what's wrong. Don't submit to His authority. Has He given you a reason why you shouldn't eat of that tree? No! He's just saying, 'Trust Me. Obey My Word.' Why would you trust Him, Eve? Isn't He trying to keep something from you? You should be able to be like God. You should be

able to make up your own rules, design your own religion and determine what is right and wrong for yourself.”

That same sneering lie that maligns the integrity of God is being spoken millions of time each day into the minds of billions of people. The Apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth, *“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:3). How does that happen?

Satan has his servants cast doubt and deny the Word of God, maligning the integrity of God. Later in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, Paul says, *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”* What is the basic trap of Satan? It is to create a false impression of God.

I heard Tim Keller talk about an illustration from Sinclair Ferguson, who put it like this:

Imagine taking your son to the great toy store, F.A.O. Schwartz. It is a few days before Christmas and you spend a half hour showing him all these wonderful things in this toy store. You say to your son, “Wouldn’t you like that? Do you see that over there? What about that?” And your son is just so excited about all the things that he might get for Christmas. Then after about 30 minutes, the father sits down with his son and says, “Now, I want you to know something. I want you to know the reason I brought you into this store is because you are never going to have any of this. For the rest of your life, I’m never going to let you have any of this. Now, let’s go home.

Wouldn’t that son be crushed in his spirit? Wouldn’t he be warped and wounded in his mind when considering the character and nature of his father? His dad did that to him? Sinclair Ferguson says, “That’s the basic lie of Satan and we have all taken it in.” We have all believed it on some level.

What is spiritual warfare? It is fighting against that lie. It is rooting out that lie from our minds—that suspicion of God. Every temptation gets its power from these two basic lies:

1. God is not good. If you give yourself wholly to Him, He will not let you enjoy what is best for you. You cannot trust Him.
2. God will not judge you if you disobey Him. You can write your own rules for your life because there will not be any consequences.

Can you think of a single sin that hasn’t been fueled by those lies? If you really believe that God is good, if He always has your best interest in mind, if He is never withholding from you any good thing that you really need, if you really fear the Lord and believe that He will call you to

account for every action done in the body, if He will hold you accountable for the words you've spoken, if you will stand before Him for His judgment, then is there any sin you could commit if you really believed these two things about God?

Paul said, *"But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."* How does that happen? Denying His goodness; not trusting His grace; believing, "I am going to have to take my life in my own hands here because He is not thinking about what is best for me." That lie penetrates our minds and hearts.

You know that God says sex should be kept within marriage, but you are thinking, "It would be great if I could sleep with her...if I could indulge in this pleasure."

You know that God says, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. What you have comes from Me. It is not good to keep all your money, all your possessions, all your time and all your affection to yourself. It is not good to be stingy and hoard these things. You are to give freely as you have been freely given." But you are thinking, "Oh, it would be great if I could just spend more and more and more on me, giving less and less and less to Him!"

You know that God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Romans 12:19; citing Deuteronomy 32:35). If your enemy strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39). Forgive. Don't harbor a grudge." You know God says these things, but in your heart, you are thinking, "It would be great to get back at them for the evil they have done."

Tim Keller says, "You are tempted because already, underneath, your heart is saying you can't trust God. If you obey, you won't be happy." And if that's where your heart is, you are sliding down a slippery slope. If your heart is not trusting in the goodness of God, your battle against sin is just a mirage; it's not even happening. The enemy has you in his grip. He has you in the hold of his lie.

Do you, then, see why it is so vital to have your mind and heart saturated in the Word of God? Do you see why it is so vital to meditate on His law day and night, being captivated by what He has revealed of Himself in Scripture? If you do, when these lies come, you won't be led astray.

I hope you will read [the article Jim Gordon wrote](#) a couple weeks ago about the importance of meditating on the character of God that is revealed in Scripture and about the things that he is learning from the book of Ezekiel. Jim writes of God's holiness and judgment, and how it is so vital for us to not let this book of the law depart from our mouths. We must meditate on it day and night (Joshua 1:8).

As we read this story, I hope we are gaining a better understanding of why the Psalmist spends 176 verses in Psalm 119, in an acrostic poem, rigorously going through the Hebrew alphabet and saying things like this in 119:9-16:

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!
With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.
In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.*

Do you understand why the Bible continually exhorts us to be in the Bible? To be meditating on this Word? To let our minds be renewed by the good teaching of this Word? It is because the Bible understands. In the words of Hebrews 5:12b-14, *“You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”*

You see, without that constant practice, the powers of discernment are not trained, and we cannot distinguish good from evil. We are snared. Listen. Saturate yourself. Read the Word, whether you feel like it or not. Let it wash over you. Let it shape you and mold you. Listen. Listen. Listen to the Word of the Lord. If your heart is not conditioned by the Word to trust God’s character and fear the Lord, you will fall for the lie every time.

Satan Slithers Away

This brings us to sin’s anticlimax. As Satan slithered away, we don’t see anything more of him after verse five. He did his dirty trick and left the scene. The power of this narrative is in the dialogue between Satan and the woman. This is where God wants us to really understand what is going on. .

In verse six, everything happened so fast. Temptation was appealing. She saw that the tree was good for food (the physical appetite). She saw that it was a delight to her eyes (the

aesthetic appetite). She saw that the tree was desired to make one wise (the spiritual appetite). She saw all these good things and wanted the good apart from God because she was convinced God was holding something back from her. It happened so fast. She took of its fruit and ate.

Think of those words: “take” and “eat.” The Bible does not tell us how she felt immediately after she ate the fruit, but I suspect that there was shame immediately rising up in her. She realized, “I have been duped. What I am feeling right now isn’t what the serpent promised.”

She did not want to be alone and isolated in this shame. She went to her husband and gave some to him, but he did not even think about it. She was beguiled, but he willfully disobeyed. He who should have stood up and protected, defended and led her was sitting on the sidelines, going along with the show. And he ate.

It was just one little fruit from one tree. This was the only prohibition in this garden and the only word from God. God said, “You just need to trust Me with this. I don’t have to explain Myself to you. I don’t need to tell you why because your relationship with Me must be based on trust. You will live by My Word.” And they disobeyed. It seems so little, yet what disastrous consequences flowed from that disobedience!

In his little commentary, Derek Kidner tellingly writes, “So simple the act, so hard its undoing. God will taste poverty and death before ‘take’ and ‘eat’ become verbs of salvation.” “Take. Eat. This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me” (Matthew 26:26).

Sin Leaves a Bitter Aftermath

This is not what the serpent promised. He sold a false bill of good. In verse seven, we see the eyes of both of them were opened. They knew more, but their knowledge became evil. They saw more, but their sight became spoiled. They knew that they were naked and they were ashamed.

There is no way back; that is always the way with sin. Once the deed has been done, there is no way back. You cannot take those words back. You cannot undo that action. You cannot change the fact that you murdered someone; or that you committed adultery; or that you lied. If you have stolen something, yes, you can restore the goods, but you cannot change the fact that you are a thief. You have taken that which is not rightly yours. There is no way back.

So the cover-up begins. “*And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.*” Alisdair Paine insightfully says:

The fig leaves in our lives take all sorts of forms. We pretend to be what we are not. We are one thing to one person, another to another. We spin the truth to make it presentable. We lock away

our secrets. We clear the history on our web browsers. We stick stuff in the shredder. We are less than candid at a thousand points. We dread embarrassment. We are private and we need to be private, for we have stuff to flush about.

Why? It all comes back to this: We have believed the lie and it has gone in deep. But thanks be to God!

O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.

(Praise to the Holiest in the Height words by John Newman; music by John Dykes; 1865)

We are going to hear more about that next week, but remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, what did He do? He took God at His Word. In whole-hearted trust, He clung to the Word of God.

Listen to what Jesus said in John 8:31-32 to those who believed Him: *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* There is no way back from sin, but Jesus says, “There is a new path that has opened up. Follow Me. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Jesus continues in John 8:34, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”* Isn’t that the story of humanity? How true that is!

Someone has written:

We human beings are a mystery to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger. We are Rembrandt and Hitler, Mozart and Stalin, Antigone and Lady Macbeth, Ruth and Jezebel.

Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. It does not bring you freedom. It enslaves you. It has enslaved all of us. But thank the Lord for these words in John 8:35-36: *“The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Can you imagine what it would be like not to have anything of which you are ashamed? Follow Jesus and that is where He is bringing you. That is your destiny. He is leading you to a place, a world and a reality where you will feel no more sin, no more sorrow and no more shame.

Isaiah 61:7 says, *“Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.”* Follow Jesus. That is where He is leading you.

Back on June 20, 2014, our dear elder, Frank, sent me this prayer. He said he was praying this for me. I am so grateful for our elders and for the shepherds God has given this flock. They shepherd me. I copied this out on a sticky note, hung it up on my computer and look at it all the time. It is a perfect way to respond to this message.

This is a prayer from The Valley of Vision. I want to invite you to pray this with me:

Lord, I commend my heart to your watchful care
for I know its treachery and power;
Guard its every portal from the wily enemy,
Give me quick discernment of his deadly arts,
Help me to recognize his bold disguise as an angel of light,
and bid him begone...
May I make the mind of Christ my inward guest,
and his meekness my covering garb.

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