

Sermon on **Gen 3:1-13**

July 11, 2010

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty [cunning] than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 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 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, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Often when preachers sit down to write their sermons, they try to start with a thought-provoking story or catchy phrase that introduces the gist of the sermon for the day. The idea is to grab the congregation's attention immediately in the hopes that their imaginations will be captured for the succeeding 20 minutes.

When I was thinking about how to begin today's sermon, I prayed, looked into some resources, and actually faced an unusual problem. Many times it's hard to find just the right phrase or illustration, but with today's topic, there are too many to choose from. Anybody who is honest with himself or herself sees that we each have a problem with sin. The more honest we are with ourselves, the more we understand that we don't just sin now and then. We each are sin-full. No matter how good we try to be, the dimension of sin remains in us.

This realization is at the heart of confessing faith and trust in Jesus Christ. We humble ourselves to admit that apart from God's help, there is nothing we can do to please Him. Each and every one of us has a sin problem. We all have fallen short of the glory of God. The only way we do anything right and good is because God condescends in mercy to enable us to do so. The only way we even want to love and please God is because He enables us to do so. Albert Einstein understood this reality. In 1948, he stated, "The true problem lies in the hearts and thoughts of men. It is not a physical but an ethical one. What terrifies us is not the explosive force of the atomic bomb, but the power of the wickedness of the human heart."

As a Jew, Einstein knew his Old Testament. The passage I read today, along with the one for next week, explain what went wrong with humanity. But aside from this explanation, these verses in particular remind us of the dynamics of sin: what it takes for us to be tempted, what it takes for us to fall from temptation into sin, and what it takes for us to resist temptation in the first place.

In these verses we also see how our sin impacts us, others, and our relationship with God. Many churches and preachers avoid taking sin seriously, but we cannot fall into that trap. Without truly understanding our sinfulness, we cannot be honest with ourselves about our need for humility before God, and before other sinners. And the more we understand and take to heart our own sinfulness, the more we can rejoice and praise God for sending His Son Jesus to die in our place. Facing our sin can be very painful, but this

honesty leads us to richer relationships with each other, and abiding joy in the Lord. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if someone professes to be a Christian but is not joyful, they need to seriously consider whether they truly understand their own sinfulness, and whether they fully appreciate the magnificent mercy of God. ///

I'd like to approach this passage by starting with the serpent. For thousands of years Jews and Christians have assumed that the serpent was either possessed by Satan or represents Satan. That may seem obvious to say, but we have to note it. This scene in the garden is not just about a creature interacting with another creature. This is a spiritual event that plays itself out in a spiritual conflict that has existed ever since. The New Testament has numerous references to spiritual warfare, and this scene is the first battle of that war.

Note what the serpent says in verse 1. Right off the bat he misquotes God's command to test whether Eve knows God's instructions. God did not prohibit Adam and Eve from eating from all the trees. She corrects the serpent by saying they can eat from the trees, but not from the tree in the middle of the garden. However, she adds to God's words by saying that they cannot touch the tree; this is something God said nothing about. And then, Eve states that the consequence of eating and touching will be that they die. While this seems correct, it's not. God had said that they would surely die, or "die, die" in Hebrew. Eve lessened the severity of God's punishment. What does not come through in English is the name Eve uses for God. The intimate name for God from the previous chapter is Yahweh. Instead, Eve uses the name for God that the serpent uses, which is the term for divine creator.

While these may seem like minor nuances, in Hebrew these issues are gigantic. Eve is weak because she does not know God's words. She does have the basic idea, but her poor knowledge leads her to add her own spin on God's commands. She distances herself from God by referring to Him just as Creator, rather than the loving Yahweh she'd spent intimate time with in the garden. And when we don't know God's word and distance ourselves from Him even slightly, we will take His holiness and His discipline lightly, as Eve does here. This is why Hebrews 10 warns those Christians who take the saving blood of Christ lightly that the Lord will judge His people. Christians who trample the Son of

God and His Spirit as if they were common and unholy will one day face the facts: it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

As we look at verse 4, we see Satan move from a half-truth to an outright lie. He tells Eve that they won't surely die. Then he goes one step further, calling into question the love of God and tempting Eve to covet God's knowledge and power. With the wording of verse 5 there's one thing we need to clarify. Today we learn from the Scriptures that we want to be like God. I've preached nearly every week that we need to imitate God's love and holiness, that we need to know God and seek His wisdom. We need to have the eyes of our hearts opened to see God's majesty and notice His work in our daily lives. But that is not what verse 5 refers to.

Satan's ploy was first of all to get Eve to listen to a snake instead of God. Satan's words lead her to question whether all the blessings God had showered upon them in Eden were really enough. God provided perfect peace and all they needed for food and delight. But Satan tempts her to want more than God's perfect provision. Having a perfect life in glorious fellowship with Almighty God is not enough. Satan basically says, God hasn't given you everything He has. You need it all. You deserve it all. It's not enough for you to be made in God's holy image. You deserve to be a god, too. What's wrong with God that He didn't make you a god as well? You're just a creature made of dirt. God lied to you. You won't die. Instead, if you eat the fruit, you will gain all the knowledge and power He has, but doesn't want to share with you. He's keeping it all for Himself!

Satan is a master of deception, especially through half-truths. Satan appeals to our senses, our egos, and our pride. If we look at the ten commandments just as a sampling of God's laws, all of them have to do with wanting more than God has blessed us with. Instead of being content in all circumstances, we sinners want more of whatever our desire of the moment is. In sin we refuse to trust that what God has blessed us with is enough. We refuse to trust that whatever the situation, God will take care of us perfectly and provide for us as a supremely loving Father. We doubt His character and whether He really keeps His word. The root of our sin lies right here in Genesis 3. We are blessed by the Lord abundantly, but when we sin we give in to the temptation to want even more.

We basically say, God, what you've given me isn't enough. I'm going to do this my way, and go out and get what I want, what I deserve. ///

To Eve, the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked awfully pretty and tasty. Verse 6 tells us that it appeared desirable for gaining wisdom, but this is not the kind of wisdom that the rest of the Scriptures commend to us. This is worldly wisdom that is acquired by our own means instead of God's way. Proverbs twice states that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Instead, the Scriptures say 8 times that the fear of the Lord, with reverence for His holiness, is the beginning of wisdom. For us creatures, wisdom cannot be attained through a quick fix. We honor and obey God according to His designs, through a process of trial and error, failure and repentance. If we use Eve as a model, we'll try to take the easy way out, and end up estranged from God.

So where's Adam been through all this? He hasn't been protecting the beautiful bride the Lord gave him. He hasn't been correcting her or the serpent as to the commands of the Lord. He doesn't stand up and resist the serpent, or the temptation Eve passes along. If Adam knew God's word, he remained silent, gave in to peer pressure, and caved in to evil. How often do we sin by failing to speak God's word? How often do we sin by failing to stand up for the weak, or speaking against those who do others harm? How often do we just plain go along with the crowd, instead of going against the current to do things God's way? If Adam had truly loved God and truly loved Eve, he would have rebuked Satan, and just said no.

In a sense, the devil was right. When they ate of the fruit, they did gain knowledge of good and evil, but it was a knowledge that destroyed because it was gained apart from God's way of doing things. As a result, all of humanity came crashing down. Their nakedness here lies in direct contrast to the last verse of chapter 2, where they were both naked but felt no shame. The effects of sin distort us. Not only are we no longer innocent as Adam and Eve had been, but our bodies are now subject to decay. We bruise, we bleed, we break bones, and ultimately we die.

But we also have a distorted view of ourselves. We struggle to be honest with ourselves and each other. We struggle to communicate our thoughts and feelings, sometimes because we barely grasp them ourselves. Our minds don't think clearly, we

forget, and we get confused, regardless of our age or health. Everything about us is now distorted.

That's what Adam and Eve first realize in these verses. They know shame for the first time because they understand that they are no longer who they were created by God to be. In Reformed theology this condition is called "total depravity." This does not mean that human beings have nothing good at all in them. It means that sin has corrupted every part of who we are, and everything we do is tainted. The image of God in us is marred, but it is still there. We are capable of love, but without God's help that love is skewed toward self-centeredness. We are capable of wonderful creativity and great thought, but apart from the Holy Spirit we seek to glorify ourselves, and not the Lord. When we are redeemed by Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to wean us away from this self-centeredness and starts to heal our brokenness, but the process is never complete this side of heaven. And that is why reminding ourselves of Genesis 3 is important. We as Christians can still fall into sin's traps if we do not know God's word, and if we do not trust and obey Him in everything.

Adam and Eve probably sewed fig leaves together because they are the largest leaves in that part of the world. But this quick coverup tells us that their shame impacted their relationship. Unlike before, they had to hide their most intimate and precious parts from each other. They could no longer be totally open and honest because their shame caused them to cringe at who they had become. We do this today. Even our closest friends, even our spouses, cannot know us completely. We may choose to hide some things, but even when we try to be honest, our brokenness as human beings can get in the way. In a sense, that makes us cherish close relationships all the more, because they come the closest to being what God intended human friendships to be.

So the effects of sin fractured us as human beings, as well as our relationships with one another. But the most important effect by far is that our relationship with God is broken. Before they ate of the prohibited fruit, Adam and Eve had peaceful, glorious fellowship with God in a beautiful garden. Here, they rush to hide from Him in the very garden He created for them. Of course they couldn't really hide from Him, and neither can we. But like them sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking that nobody really

knows the sins we've done, and conveniently forget that we cannot hide from the Lord. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

God hasn't lost track of Adam and Eve when He asks where they are. He is giving them a chance to confess. Today parents may come upon a broken cookie jar, and ask rhetorically, "What have you done?" even though they know perfectly well. Here, Adam answers that for the first time in his life, he was afraid of God. But note what he says: Adam does not say he feared because He had disobeyed. He feared because of the effects of his disobedience. A child may be afraid of a parent because they broke the cookie jar and made a mess, not because they disobeyed in the first place. Many times our remorse at sin is not because we offended the Lord or others, but because we've been inconvenienced or embarrassed by getting caught.

In verse 11, God gives Adam another chance to confess. Instead, he passes the buck and blames God for his own sin. "This woman you gave me made me do it! She gave me the fruit, so what else could I do but eat it?" So the Lord kindly gives Eve a chance to confess. She passes the buck, too. "The serpent made me do it." How many times would we rather blame others for our circumstances than accept responsibility for our own actions? This is why confessing our sins to the Lord is so important. At least every day we need to come clean to the Lord about how we have messed up, hurt Him, offended others, and harmed ourselves. When we confess our sins to Him, we own up to the reality that we are sinners, and we need Him all the more. When we wholeheartedly confess, we glorify God by affirming our constant need for the mercy we have been shown through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The magnificent work of the Holy Spirit seeks to undo the effects of sin that first impacted the world through Adam and Eve. So, what can we take from this passage to help us in obeying the call of the Spirit to holiness? First, unlike Eve, we are to know God's Word. We know it well enough to refute the half-truths we encounter day by day, and well enough that we do not add our own spin to it. Second, we imitate Jesus when He encountered temptation for 40 days in the desert. In that account, Jesus knows God's Word precisely, uses that knowledge for His Father's honor and not His own, and has the wisdom to apply the Scriptures within the right context. If Satan knows the Bible better than you do, then just like Adam and Eve, you are in serious trouble.

Third, from this passage we learn to stand together to protect each other. We speak for those who are weak. We pray for each other, especially for spiritual growth and protection from Satanic attacks. Instead of blaming each other as Adam blamed Eve, we offer each other compassion and encouragement because all of us have sinned and failed. We battle sin and evil together as a united front, as brothers and sisters. Adam and Eve show us that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, our sin is a rejection of God, His loving provisions, of His way of doing things. It's a weakness that covers itself with arrogance, and declares that it deserves this or that. To battle sin, we have to remind ourselves that as sinners, we don't deserve anything good from God. The only thing we really deserve is punishment for our sin.

Aleksandr Solzenitsyn once wrote, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

When we lay our hearts before the Lord, we admit that apart from His grace our hearts are corrupted and desperately need His touch to be cleansed and made righteous. Our humility needs to be so deep that we fall on our knees before Him in confession, and then rise to rejoice in Him, no matter the circumstances. This does not mean that we are always happy. It does mean that we are always trying to rest in the Lord, be content in how He blesses us, and trust that our heavenly Father really does know best.

Let us pray.