

Genesis 3:1-7

The Fall - Causes

Everything was just as it should be. Creation was complete. Man was complete. Adam and Eve walked through the garden in perfect harmony with each other, nature, and their God. And then, in a matter of moments, it was all entirely ruined.

Genesis 3 tells the story of the Fall of man. The encounter between Eve and the serpent is so culturally universal that it can be difficult to separate the biblical truths from the legends that have grown surrounding the event. Cultural stereotypes and fantasy have combined to shroud the narrative exceedingly. We must work our way through this, though, since the Fall of man is essential to any understanding of the process of redemption. Without sin, there is no need for atonement. Without a Fall, there is no need for a Savior to rise again. The historical reality of the Fall of man is required to properly appreciate the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, it is our goal today to take a look at what the Bible has to say about this encounter, specifically the causes of the Fall of man. It will also be important to look at what the Bible does not say, for that, too, is important. For example, some have argued that this passage is etiological; that is, it was designed to explain the origins of evil or even the reasons why men fear snakes. But the narrative says nothing about how evil began. We know nothing about how sin was born in the heart of Satan. Rather, Scripture makes it clear where evil did not begin. It did was neither inherent in humankind, nor was it a part of the divine creation.

The Serpent's Question and the Woman's Response

We are not specifically told that the serpent is Satan, but Christian tradition has long since considered it to be so. We are simply told that “the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (v. 1). We are also not told why Satan chose the serpent, rather than some other animal. Perhaps because that ‘clever’ creature was on more intimate terms with man than the others.

What we are told is that the serpent was crafty. This characteristic can be either evil or good. “If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die” (Exodus 21:14). “He [Abraham] divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus” (Genesis 12:16).

We are also told of the serpent's origin. The serpent was made by God. He was not supernatural or divine. The serpent is identified as one of the creatures God had made, therefore there is no argument that this is an equal and eternal being in competition with God. There is no room for a dualistic understanding of the universe. Also, the serpent, itself, was among the good animals God had made. There was no reason for the woman to fear the serpent. This was before the Fall. There was no enmity between the beasts and man.

The role of the serpent can perhaps best be compared to the role played by Peter in the following passage.

“²¹From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. ²²Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ ²³But He turned and said to Peter, ‘get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s’” (Matthew 16:21-23).

Jesus did not mean that Satan had possessed Peter, but rather that he was an unwilling advocate for Satan’s cause.

The serpent’s tactic is simple. He asks a seemingly harmless question. “He said to the woman, ‘indeed, has God said, “you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?”’” (v. 2). Notice that the serpent does not directly contradict or challenge God, but rather simply asked an innocuous question, as if looking for information. Importantly, the serpent changed the wording combining ‘not’ with ‘any’ to create a more exclusive prohibition.

Eve’s lack of surprise suggests this was not their first conversation. Perhaps Eve thought the serpent was an angel with a message from God. Certainly things were different in Eden. It was not then unnatural for the serpent to speak.

Graciously, Eve answered the serpent, “²from the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³but 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, or you will die’” (v. 2-3). The woman’s first mistake was to get into a dispute about something God had made clear. We can never forget that we trifle with God’s commands at our peril. Let us embed in our minds that what God has clearly said, let us never question.

Notice also that Eve changed God’s commands; she added “not touch.” She made the restriction much more than it was ever intended. There is something to be said about legalism here. God has, indeed, laid down clear, prescriptive commands in Scripture. For example, we are commanded to

“not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation” (Ephesians 5:18).

“let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment” (Ephesians 4:29).

“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

Yet how each of these may be manifest in the life of an individual believer is not prescribed. The role of the Holy Spirit is not to be usurped by even the most well-meaning fellow believer.

The Counter Argument

Satan lost no time in offering a rebuttal. “⁴The serpent said to the woman, ‘you surely will not die! ⁵For 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’” (v. 4-5).

Satan challenged God's command in three areas. First, he claimed that God did not intend to follow through with His threat. Second, he pointed out that the fruit had potential for self-fulfillment. Finally, he insisted that eating would bring divine knowledge.

At its most basic level, it is the motivation of God's command that is impugned by Satan. Satan tried to convince Eve that God had prohibited the tree of knowledge because He was jealous for His own sovereignty. God denied the fruit because He did not want to remain in sole possession of a quality that was beneficial to all. God was jealous. God was selfish. If God were really good and loving, He would share all that He had. Such arguments are at the heart of the temptation. And so today. Satan would have us doubt that God knows what is best for us and to believe that God does not give us what we want because of fault on His side. If she had but thought it through, she would have recognized that if that were the case, God would never have created such a tree in the first place.

Our view of God is crucial here. It is easy to fall into the trap of trying to think about what God *might* mean by this or that command, or by this or that event in our lives. But truly, can anyone really know the mind of God better than God Himself? Again it is worth remembering, what God has clearly said, let us never question.

As we analyze the serpent's temptation, we can also see that the serpent spoke only about what the woman would gain in the experience. He never mentioned what she might lose. This, too, is typical. Temptation is often brought before us in a one-dimensional aspect. We see all that can be gained, but we are blind (or are blinded) to what we might lose. Eating the fruit was a wrong that brought an advantage. But it was at a cost. The ends do not necessarily justify the means.

We might pause here to reflect on what was meant by knowing "good and evil." Many ideas have been suggested, but it seems the consensus is that the concept possesses a moral connotation. The word for 'know' can be used in the sense of to "have mastery over." That is, the idea of knowing "good and evil" might imply that man could decide for himself what was good or evil.

The Decision

At this point, the narrative takes a rapid pace. In a single sentence, mankind falls from grace. "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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6).

The author gives three reasons for Eve's fateful decision. First, Eve was compelled because of physical craving. She "saw that the tree was good for food." Perhaps she was hungry; perhaps she was just too lazy to walk a few feet to a different fruit tree. In any case, she allowed her physical appetites to overcome her reason.

Second, Eve succumbed to aesthetic attraction. She saw that "it was a delight to the eyes." For some reason, the tree of knowledge seemed more attractive than the others in the garden. Its appeal was that it

was pleasing to the eye. Eve judged based on the external. Eve allowed her passions to overwhelm her sense.

Finally, Eve believed that “the tree was desirable to make one wise.” This was simple pride. Not that there was anything wrong in what she wanted to attain. The issue, rather, was that Eve shifted from doing God’s will to doing her own will. She usurped God’s role in defining what was ‘good.’ She doubted God’s provision. She doubted that He was sufficient. Eve had been deceived. As Paul explained, “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

But what of Adam? Did Adam and Eve talk? Where was Adam? It is not stated why the serpent addressed Eve rather than Adam, if he was, indeed, nearby. Adam was “with her” (v. 6) and the ‘you’ in verses 1-5 is plural. Scripture is silent on the matter. But the context here, and in other passages, is that they acted in concert. Scripture does not suggest that Eve needed to tempt Adam. She simply gave him the fruit and he ate it. He neither challenged her nor raised objections.

Some final thoughts would require us to mention that there is no mention of an apple. The Latin for apple ‘*malum*’ and evil ‘*malus*’ might be how that part of the story has evolved. Also, one might speculate on the use of the fig tree for leaves. Perhaps because it produced the largest leaves of any tree that grew in the region of Palestine. Lastly, we can wonder that if man had not fallen, perhaps he would have received the knowledge by divine revelation instead of experience. As he did fall, we will never know. So it is when we defy God. “Whoever seeks to be more than he is becomes less. Whenever he aspires to be self-sufficing, he retreats from the One Who is truly sufficient for him.” Augustine, *City of God*

Adam and Eve had indeed gained knowledge. But it was not the knowledge promised by Satan. “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” (v. 7). Their nakedness had been a sign of a healthy relationship between them. Now it was a sign of shame.

The skeptic may ask, why man was tempted. Philosophically, we might answer that it makes no sense for man to be praised for living a good life, if he had never been tempted to live a bad one. But ultimately, man was tempted because that was God’s perfect plan of salvation. That is why we need to assert unequivocally that this is a true, historical account. If it were not what could we possibly make of the following passage.

“¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned - ¹³for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on

the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. ²⁰The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:12-21).

The truth of Christianity that links the sin of Adam with the atonement of Christ compels us to demand that Adam and Eve really sinned in the garden.

Truths About Our Adversary

Satan, as well, as his attributes. First, he is a liar. Jesus speaking to Jews challenging His authority said "you belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. 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). Second, Satan is devious. Paul challenging false apostles, "and no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Third, he misuses God's Word. "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" (Matthew 4:5-6).

Satan wants us to doubt. He wants us to doubt God's authority. Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Satan would have us believe there is another option.

He wants us to doubt God's expectations. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it'" (Matthew 16:24-25). Satan would have us believe that we shouldn't have to sacrifice.

He wants us to doubt God's power. Scripture states that "no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Satan would have us think we cannot help our sinful nature; that there is nothing we can do about it. We were simply born that way.

Satan would have us doubt God's standards. For example, Jesus taught, "you have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Satan would have us believe that our sins really are not all that bad. After all, others are worse.

Finally, Satan would have us doubt God's character. Scripture reminds us that "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). It commands us to "consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-3). Satan would have us think that God doesn't care. Satan wants us to doubt.

Takeaways

As we consider this passage, we must return to the first statement made by Satan, where he questioned whether God had really said what He had truly and clearly said. So temptation begins. We would do well to remember that while we do not have the luxury of living in Eden, or the small burden of only one command to obey, we also have (in more copies and versions than we can imagine) God's word. We would do well to remember that God has really said:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2).

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

"Finally, brothers, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Do everything without arguing or complaining" (Philippians 2:14).

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" Philippians 2:3

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

"Be joyful always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

"Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:14-15).

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1).

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Ephesians 5:25).