

THE FALL OF MAN

Genesis 3

The third chapter in Genesis is one of the most important in the Bible. Here are the foundations upon which rest many of the cardinal doctrines of our faith. Here we trace back to their source many of the rivers of divine truth. Here is the beginning of the great drama which is being enacted on the stage of human history and which is not completed. It is here that we find the divine explanation of the present fallen and ruined condition of our race. Here we learn about the subtle devices of our enemy, Satan. Here we behold the utter powerlessness of man to walk in the path of righteousness when the divine grace is withheld from him. Here we discover the spiritual effects of sin--man's seeking to flee from God. Here we discern the attitude of God toward the guilty sinner. We learn about the universal tendency of human nature to cover its own moral shame by a device of man's handiwork. Here we are taught of the gracious provision which God has made to meet our great need. We are also taught that man cannot approach God except through a mediator.

In the midst of the garden which "the Lord God planted eastward in Eden," God placed two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit of the latter tree gave insight into matters beyond what God knew to be best for man. Of the fruit of this one tree, man was forbidden to eat on pain of death. In love God warned of the penalty which would be incurred if His prohibition was violated.

From the necessity and nature of the case this single restriction was placed upon man's liberty. Man is a responsible being and, as such, subject to the divine government. There was no other reason why the fruit of this tree should not have been eaten except for the plain command of God.

I. The Tempter.

How long Adam and Eve remained in a sinless state it is impossible to say. Conjecture is useless and vain. While Adam and Eve were enjoying their wonderful surroundings, they became acquainted with a very beautiful animal called the serpent. At that time the serpent did not resemble the writhing and ugly reptile which bears that name today. It is not at all surprising that Satan selected one of the most beautiful animals as a medium of temptation. He indwelt the body of the serpent and used it as a vehicle of expression as he approached and tried to corrupt the creation which God had made in His own image. The serpent was merely a tool in the hands of Satan who tried to thwart the purposes of God and to rob man of his blessedness.

Satan is introduced without any word of explanation concerning his previous history. From this third chapter of Genesis we learn what is the sphere of his activities, the method of his approach and the form of his temptations. The religious or spiritual realm is the sphere of his operations. His chief aim is to get between the soul and God, to estrange man's heart from his Maker, and to inspire confidence in himself.

In his work Satan indwells or uses some being. He is a spirit. That accounts for the fact that he uses some being to accomplish his purposes. He has to use something or somebody that men can see; they cannot see a spirit. He frequently uses a Christian. If he does not use a person,

he uses an animal. Here he used a serpent. He has used a dog, a cat or a bat in a meeting house.

II. The Temptation.

It is interesting to note how Satan made his approach to Eve in order to get her to disobey God's explicit command. He approached her when she was alone. The serpent excited her curiosity by speaking to her. He raised a suspicion about God by the question which he put to her, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Thus he sowed the seed of broken confidence in God's Word. He simply sought to decoy her by raising a doubt in her mind. Let us note the steps in the temptation.

1. Doubt of God's goodness. Genesis 3:1.

It was as if the serpent had said, "Is it really true that God has restricted you from the use of every tree in this delightful place? Are you quite sure that you are not mistaken?"

As to God, Satan's first insinuation was that He was unfair. His remark implied that if God had really loved them He would not have restricted them in this manner. He further implied that for no justifiable reason God had made a difference between the fruits of the garden and was deliberately withholding the best from the use of Adam and Eve. He was insinuating that God was withholding something from them that would be beneficial to them, and that He did not want them to have all the good things that were coming to them.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He emphasized the liberty with which He invested them. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" save one. But when Satan spoke, he concealed the privileges and harped on the single prohibition. Keeping out of sight what God had done for them, the unnumbered gifts and proofs of love everywhere, the serpent fixed on the one thing denied and brought it forward in a way calculated to awaken hard and evil thoughts in the mind of Eve.

2. Distortion of God's Word. Genesis 3:2-3.

By her answer Eve clearly revealed that the poison of doubt which Satan had injected into her mind was beginning to do its deadly work. She exaggerated the severity of the prohibition and minimized the danger of transgression. She spoke as if God were a hard master and a lenient judge.

In this connection, it is well for each of us to remember this threefold principle and be guided thereby in our study of the Bible:

- (1) Take nothing from it.
- (2) Add nothing to it.
- (3) Change nothing in it.

Eve made the foolish mistake of doing all three of these things.

- (1) She took from the Word of God.
God had said, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" save one; but Eve omitted "freely" thus making God to appear less bountiful than He was. "Ye shall not diminish from the word which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).
- (2) She added to the Word of God.
God had said of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "Thou shalt not eat of it." But in her reply to Satan, Eve declared that God had also said: "Neither shall ye touch it" which He had not. "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6).
- (3) She changed the Word of God.
God had said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die"; but when Eve quoted the words of warning she said: "Neither shall ye touch it lest ye die" and by doing so changed an absolute certainty into a mere possibility.

Thus Eve disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the divine permission as to the other trees, overstated the restriction by misquoting the divine prohibition and underrated her obligations by misquoting the divine penalty.

3. Denial of God's warning. Genesis 3:4.
Satan observed that the pernicious seed had taken root in Eve's heart and she had really begun to question the love of God. But, not being content with sowing the seed of doubt, Satan propagated a lie by saying, "Ye shall not surely die." He proposed only a slight change--just the one word "not" to be inserted--"ye shall not surely die." Here is a splendid illustration of the clever way in which Satan works. He first gets people to doubt God's veracity, and then he gets them to dispute His word. When he gets them to doubt he has them in his grasp.
4. Deception as to the consequences. Genesis 3:5.
In addition to the perversion of truth, and the injection of an unholy ambition into the heart of the tempted, Satan got her employed in an occupation which was wrong. He took her mind away from God and got it occupied with sinful pleasure. This is always disastrous. Nothing will get a person into sin any quicker than to get his eyes off the Lord and on self.

Having insisted that God had cheated her out of life's highest privileges, Satan appealed to Eve's pride by promising her two things provided she would eat of the forbidden fruit: that her eyes would be opened, and that she would be as a god, in that she would know good and evil. In this temptation there was an appeal to the physical, the aesthetic, and the intellectual. She looked at the fruit, and it appealed to her as something good to eat. She beheld its appearance, and it appealed to her eyes. She thought of what it would accomplish in making her wise. By disobedience she came to know good without the power to do it, and evil without the power to resist it. She was deceived. In her case we see how disobedience presented itself, and justified itself to her. She judged of the tree and its fruit entirely in the light of what the serpent had said and not at all in the light of what God had said. How solemn is all this! How often we reason ourselves into

believing that wrong is right! When God and His goodness are left out, the sight of the eyes and the judgment of the mind are sure to be wrong.

III. The Transgression.

Eve's temptation was threefold. There was the lust of the flesh--"good for food"--the appeal to the physical nature; there was the lust of the eye--"pleasant to the eyes"--the appeal to the aesthetic nature; and there was the pride of life--"tree to be desired to make one wise"--the appeal to the intellectual nature. Beyond these three things Satan has nothing to offer a man.

Having heard Satan's falsehood and concluded that God had dealt a little unjustly with them, Eve decided to disobey Him and partake of the forbidden fruit. Of her own volition she made the choice and therefore stood guilty before God.

When Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, she went immediately and influenced Adam to do likewise. How true to life that is! Oh, that God's people were as zealous to get other Christians to do right as sinners are to get others to join them in their sin.

While Eve was beguiled and sinned under deception, Adam sinned, as we say, with his eyes open. He knew what he was doing, and with purpose linked his destiny with that of his wife, while he cast the blame of his act on God, saying, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Genesis 3:12. Adam was far more inexcusable than she, because he acted intelligently as well as voluntarily. He knew what he was doing. His sin also had a far more important connection with the human race than the sin of Eve. The man, and not the woman, was to be the head and the representative of the race. We are therefore told that "by one man sin entered into the world" (Romans 5:12); and that "in Adam all die" (I Corinthians 15:22).