

Introduction:

- A. It began like this:

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.... The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." ... The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ... Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. [Gen 2:7, 15-18, 25]

- B. That last phrase, "they felt no shame," was the very best thing about that short, idyllic season in human history. Imagine having nothing to hide! No regrets or dark corners or hidden guilt. That has never been true since.
- C. **3:1**, *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made."* The serpent was not a slithering dust-eating snake because that posture would eventually be its punishment. But somehow the evil angel took the body of the serpent. The serpent was the devil incarnate—in flesh. At the end of the Bible's story **Rev 12:9** says, *"The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."* That's where his craftiness comes in.

Satan's strategy was to lead Adam and Eve to rebel against the LORD God, becoming his allies in usurping God's glory. If the whole human race bowed to Satan God's kingdom would be empty. God's love would be unrequited. Satan would break the heart of God and steal the glory of God. **Turn to Gen. 3.**

- D. All history turns on the short exchange that follows. Someone has observed, *"The Bible without this chapter would be unintelligible."* [Trench] What's more, this exchange just keeps echoing through us all. It is history we are doomed to repeat.

This story revolves around *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* which God put in the middle of the garden along with the tree of life, according to Gen 2:9. The thing Eve and Adam didn't realize was that the knowledge of good and evil wasn't somehow in the pulp of that fruit, but in their decision whether or not to eat it.

Knowing people like we do we might feel like God was entrapping them. You tell almost anyone, *You can have anything but that one*, and they will start to want that one. But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was really an opportunity tree. It was the **blessing tree**. Adam and Eve were *innocent* but they weren't *holy*. They hadn't sinned but they hadn't chosen righteousness either. **The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was their God-given opportunity to become holy, godly people, not by eating the fruit but by not eating it.** That tree was the best thing in the garden!

Well, back to the story. To destroy mankind the serpent did not provoke Adam and Eve to some vicious crime, some lewd debauchery. **He craftily convinced them that God is not all that good.** Oswald Chambers said,

I. **“THE ROOT OF ALL SIN IS THE SUSPICION THAT GOD IS NOT GOOD.”**

- A. *“Did God really say ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”* Of course, God had said nothing of the sort. He'd said they were free to eat from *every* tree but one. But you can hear the smooth skeptic's suggestion that **God is unreasonable**, asking if this is another of God's ridiculous rules.
- B. There's a more subtle change. Throughout this whole account, beginning in **2:4**, the name used is **the LORD God**. LORD, in all caps, is the English signal for God's covenant name, YHWH. It was sort of like saying *the God Who Is Committed to You*. The way a woman might say, *“This is my husband John.”* But Satan downgrades the name taking out YHWH, dropping the suggestion of a covenant. **He neutralizes God's love**, as if it is irrelevant. Temptation often does that—leaves God's love for you out of it.

- C. The woman corrects him in **vv.2-3**, *The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 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.’”* Eve didn’t really get it right, maybe because Adam hadn’t communicated God’s command to her clearly. God had said, *“You are **free to eat from any tree in the garden,**”* a vast generosity that she obscured. Then she doesn’t name the tree which makes the command seem arbitrary—*We can eat from any tree but one. Go figure!* Then Eve added something God had not said: *“and you must not touch it.”* The danger wasn’t the tree itself but disobeying God. But her reply gives me the sense that it just didn’t make much sense to her, that **God’s command was sort of arbitrary.** I don’t think she’d weighed God’s command or thought about why it was so good.
- D. The serpent now contradicts the woman in **v.4-5**, *“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* He was smooth, self-assured, knowing, and mocking. You’ve heard that voice in various places. People too smart to fall for God, too thoughtful to take the Bible as truth. Cynical skeptics. Silver-tongued gurus of good-enough. They all got their start here. The serpent was the master. I think the serpent was so convincing because he believed what he said. He believed *he* had become like God.

The serpent had already insinuated that the LORD God was distant and unreasonable. Now he says, *“God is lying to you. You will not certainly die.”* **God is dishonest.** I wonder if there isn’t the hint, *“Look at me. I don’t fall for God’s unreasonable commands and I haven’t died.”* Adam and Eve knew next to nothing about death, I assume, so they did not know that death begins long before your heart stops beating.

We hear this all over. Sexual promiscuity of every kind is excused because, with a smirk at the Bible, because clearly the God’s Word is naïve or worse, dishonest.

- E. The serpent continues, “*For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” In other words, **God is selfish and manipulative.** He doesn’t want us to know what he knows because then he will lose his power over us. And we shouldn’t put up with it. Don’t be God’s patsy; don’t play into his hand. Don’t let him fool you. *Once you know good and evil you can have what you want. You have control. You’ve got the secret of the universe. And it is as easy as eating the fruit of that tree!*

SUMMARY: As Oswald Chambers said, “**The root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good.**” Somewhere in the secret dialogues of our hearts as we wrestle with temptation we come up against these suspicions. That is God’s love doesn’t matter or that we can take it for granted. That God is unreasonable. His threats are toothless. He wants to deprive you of power and knowledge, keeping you ignorant and servile. God exaggerates and pontificates. “**The root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good.**”

- F. The serpent said if they ate the fruit they would be like God. Here’s the thing: they were already like God! **Gen 1:27**, “*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*” When God created the animals—like the serpent—they came into being breathing but when he created man God himself “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.*” We have God’s life within us and we bear his image—we have souls attuned to God, created for fellowship with him. We’re his kind of people. What’s more, God had given them dominion over all his creation—including the serpent. They were *already* like God. The serpent tempted the man and woman to sin in order to get what they already had!
- G. He also tempted them, of course, with the prospect of knowing good and evil. You read this and you might think, *That’s a good thing—to know good and evil—so why couldn’t they have it?* First of all, you really can’t know good and evil with a disobedient heart. You don’t have the aptitude for it.

What's more, as I mentioned earlier, Adam and Eve did not understand that they *could* have God's own knowledge of good and evil, not by eating from that tree but by *not eating from it*. Obeying God, being faithful to him and loving him, gives us the wisdom to know good and evil. A husband who is loving and faithful to his wife is not deprived of the knowledge of good and evil. He is not naïve. His eyes are opened by obedience, by love and faithfulness, by restraint and purity, to know good and evil truly. Jesus is the example, of course. He saw good and evil more clearly than anyone because he was completely obedient to God. **Obedience to God always nourishes our knowledge of good and evil.** Disobedience doesn't open our eyes; it blinds us.

So it was decision time. Gen 3:6 is the Bible's black-bordered obituary: "*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.*" **1 Jn 2:16** says those three temptations are the world's constant offerings: "*the lust of the flesh* [good for satisfying the body], *the lust of the eyes* [feasting our eyes on what we ought not to have], and *the pride of life* ["desirable for gaining wisdom" – seeking superiority].

Adam is so passive in this story. The Bible makes a point in a couple places that Eve was deceived into sin but Adam apparently knew that he was rebelling against God. So the couple—God's co-regents over his good world—disbelieved and disobeyed God. Their sin went straight to their souls, mutating their natures and metastasizing through them to all their descendants and even to the creation around them. And death came.

Vv.7-8, "*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. 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.*"

II. WHEN WE GET WHAT WE WANT IT'S A SHAME WHAT WE SEE

- A. They thought, of course, that they'd know good and evil as a kind of divine power—like knowing the future or like having a book of magic that they could use however they wanted. They'd walked often with God and they thought they would now be like him. But what they knew of good began to fade quickly and what they knew of evil became as serious as a heart attack.
- B. Sewing skirts from fig leaves to cover their nakedness was about as effective as a toddler who covers her face when she's caught lying. The problem wasn't that they didn't have clothes. The problem was that their **naked ambition** was exposed. Before they had been naked and unashamed. Now they were ashamed because they saw into themselves and knew that they were *not* like God. They felt the pall settle over their souls and knew that they *would* certainly die; that they were dying already. And they knew they'd been fools. Their covenant with God was broken, a pattern that would dog their descendants. [cf. Hos. 6:7]
- Now they hid among the trees from the LORD God whose evening walks had ennobled them. They were like the woman caught in adultery, clutching at leaves to cover their guilt. They would soon be driven from the garden to wander the weed-infested world, becoming the parents of the race of the dying, the hopeless and the homeless.
- C. It is striking that they do not cry out to God for mercy. They do not say they're sorry. In seeking to be like God they no longer knew the heart of God.

Conclusion

The serpent so arrogant in his strategy to isolate the LORD God from people was cursed by God: **vv.14-15...** It was a humiliation of the animal indicative of the certain humiliation of the devil. From the descendants of this very woman whom he deceived there would be men and woman who hated him and who trusted and obeyed God. God would have his covenant people. And there would be one born of woman to be our great Champion. The

serpent would slither to strike at his heel but with that heel our Champion would crush the serpent's proud head.

Jesus Christ is our Champion. Though tempted in every way as we are he did not sin. Though he bore our sins on the cross he did not retaliate nor evade God's will. Though he died for the doomed descendants of Adam he rose again, the second Adam, the pioneer of a new race of immortal human beings, destined to reign with him forever.

"If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." Born again. We can know good and evil from the position of righteousness, not guilt.

Stephanie Christensen shared her story:

Raised in a Christian home, I was taught what it meant to know, love and follow Christ at a young age. Yet, as I entered high school I questioned the plans of God and decided to trust in my own decisions instead. For six years I rebelled against the truth I knew, the family I loved, and the friends I made, but we serve a merciful and gracious God. After a series of events I found myself broken before the Creator as my younger sister said, "Stephanie, I fear for you. I fear for your soul!" I was transformed through the loving kindness of our Lord shown to me through my family. The consequences of my sin have left me with a long road of healing, but Christ died not only for my sin that I could be righteous but also for my shame that I might receive his honor.