

The Anatomy of Temptation

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October 21-22, 2000

Roots: A Study of the Book of Genesis 1-11

Genesis 3:1-6

I have been doing a series from the book of Genesis that I have called "Roots." And one of the things that I have communicated to that these opening chapters of Genesis 1-11 ask and answer most of the fundamental questions that people raise today in the 21st century. These chapters written several thousand years ago speak so clearly to our contemporary situations. They deal with all the big questions of life – who are we? Where did we come from? What does it mean to be created as a man or as a woman?

And over the next few weeks we are going to be tackling the very large issue of what's wrong with the world. How do we get a handle on what we read in the newspapers or what we see in our very own homes? Genesis 3 deals with what's wrong with the world. Only the willfully blind would assert that there is nothing wrong, but every philosopher, every religion, every thoughtful person sees that something is off kilter.

Why are the courts jammed with civil and criminal cases? Why are our jails over-crowded? Why is it that in some neighborhoods in America there are more young men in prison or on parole than are going to universities? Why are our schools continually interrupted by bomb threats? Why do police feel overworked and sometimes overwhelmed? Why have so many families disintegrated?

Just open up the newspaper on the weekend and you will see a list of people who have just dissolved their marriages or have gotten divorced. You will see another list of people who are asking to dissolve their marriages or who are suing for divorce. Every weekend you will see dozens and dozens of couples who want to get out of their marriages. These couples represent hundreds and hundreds of people who are going to be affected by the divorce, not the least of which are their children.

Genesis 3 deals with the origin of what is wrong in the world. No one can look at life closely and not recognize that something is amiss, something is wrong. The closer we get to people, the more we see their flaws.

The world has a lot of ways to try to give an explanation regarding what is wrong. Psychiatry uses medical terms. It says, "Well, what's wrong is that people are unhealthy or they are sick, neurotic. Their behaviors are maladaptive." Freud taught that what we find to be wrong is really a neurotic response to some childhood trauma. B.F. Skinner said that the problem is that what we see around us is the result of poor conditioning. Rewards and punishments have not been handed out properly and so we need to engineer our environment better.

Recently a lot of scientists, people called socio-biologists, have suggested that what's wrong is the result of evolutionary miscues or some gene that used to have evolutionary value but no longer has it. If you look at the popular magazines, like Time or Newsweek, they love to report on the so-called Rape Gene or Murder Gene. For some people, every time a kid has a problem they always immediately point the finger at their parents. Most of the folks who point fingers at parents are

people who don't have children themselves or who are in profound denial about the behavior of their own children.

Of course, religions all have different explanations for what's wrong with the world. Hinduism would say that what's wrong in your life is the result of accumulated bad karma from your past lives. Buddhism would say that what's wrong with the world is the result of desire that needs to be extinguished.

Let me boil the problem down into a very simple question for us. How is it that you go into a nursery in a hospital and you see lying there the sweetest, most darling little baby. At six months that baby is giggling and laughing. At three years old that same baby is riding his tricycle down the street. We see him at his fifth birthday party with a little hat on eating cake and blowing a noise maker. We roll the tape forward 15 years and that child is using drugs and is profoundly unwilling to invest himself in anything meaningful. We roll the tape forward to age 30 and this person who was a delight as a child turns out to be a terror as a boss or is committing adultery.

We call this the "Here to There" problem. How do we start off with seeming purity and goodness and end up so profoundly messed up? Genesis 3 lays out God's perspective regarding what's wrong with the world, and more relevantly what's wrong in each of our lives. Genesis 3 gives us step by step, how we get from here to there. How we go from innocence and purity to self-destructiveness and misery.

I have called today's talk "The Anatomy of Temptation." Let's ask God's presence.

Genesis 3:1-6

Now the serpent was more crafty 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?’ 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 surely die.’” “You will surely not die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 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.”

We read in v. 1 of Genesis 3 that the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. We find right off the bat, a discussion of how evil has entered the world. Evil entered the world through the serpent. From the beginning in Genesis 3:1 to the end of the Bible, if you are taking notes, Revelation 20:2, the Bible portrays the devil in the guise of the serpent. There was in the ancient world an association between snakes and spirits of divination. You see in Acts 16 this false prophetess who has what Luke, the author of Acts, calls a Spirit of a Python. Apparently, snakes were seen as subtle, as crafty and so they became a fitting metaphor for the devil's activity.

Now, we simply do not know at what point, after God created the heavens and the earth, the devil, who was originally created good, rebelled against God. We aren't given a great deal of information about the history of things before this incidence in Genesis 3. The Bible just takes it as a given that at this point in humanity's history, the devil exists and that he is subtle and crafty.

It is really important, if you want to understand the world, to believe in the devil's existence. I believe one of the main causes of the very weak state of the Christian church in America and in the West is the fact that most Christians do not sincerely believe in the devil's existence. They don't believe what is taught here in Genesis 3, that there is an opponent on the field who is very subtle and crafty and who is working day and night to destroy them. Everything that is a problem in our lives these days is attributed to us. We become so psychological in our thinking and in our attitudes that we ignore this one great objective fact that into our lives a serpent comes with the aim of defeating us and destroying our paradise.

One of the best things you could do for your Christian life is to begin to believe in the reality of the devil. I have told you in the past about how Christians think the game of life is played. Many Christians think the game of life is that God has tossed us a football and that we run up and down the field, utterly unopposed. We throw a pass and someone in the church catches it. We run down the field and the fans cheer wildly. And then when we get in the real game of life, we walk out of the church doors and we see a big scratch on our car or our kid throws up in the back seat, or we are reminded of something that irritates us or someone cuts us off on the road – we are thoroughly depressed and discouraged – we wonder why life is so much more difficult than it is often portrayed to be. We have forgotten that we aren't the only team on the field, that we have a very real opponent – the devil.

Do you think about that often? Do you recognize that you and your kids have a gigantic target painted on your chest?

It says regarding the character of our opponent that he was more crafty than any of the other wild animals that God had created. Obviously, all snakes are not invaded by the devil. In this case, this was one of the guises that Satan took. Satan is often portrayed in the Bible as subtle, as crafty. He doesn't come on directly. The devil does not come to you announcing his intentions with trumpets. He does not scream in the ear of Eve, "I am a horrible monster, Eve. I intend to ruin your paradise, your relationship with God, your marriage, and your reputation."

He doesn't come your way and say, "Look, I just want you to know right off the bat that I have a goal to completely destroy your life and your reputation. I want to give you AIDS or a sexually transmitted disease. I want you to become a drug addict and to steal from your mother and father. I want to pour into your life such horrible suicidal thoughts that you will eventually try to take your own life. I have an intention and you just need to know where I am coming from. I want to turn you into a devil-worshipping atheist."

You know, Christians are so consumed in their attention to the obvious. Some kid in school is dressed in black. Or some heavy metal band is shrieking or cursing into a microphone. Or some New Age bookshop sells incantations. I will tell you that 99.9% of the problems that we face in life have nothing to do with some witches gathering in some park in Columbus or some devil-worshipping band. The devil almost never comes to you like he is portrayed in the horror movies – leaping out of a skull at night from your closet. Because if he came that way almost every one of us would run in fear from him.

He is subtle. He doesn't say to a happily married woman or man, "What do you say that you get up today and commit adultery? Let's blow up your marriage, ruin your chances for future happiness."

The most dangerous aspect of the devil's activity is his subtlety, the craftiness, what politicians have been calling for decades "The Art of Spin." The devil whispers in your ear. He spins things.

Here is how he spins temptation. A thought enters your mind that you find disturbing. You feel a feeling that you don't want to feel – anger, depression, lust. You find yourself drawn or attracted to something that you know is wrong and the devil comes along and whispers in your ear, "you have already blown it." One of the most used tactics of the enemy is to convince those who are merely being tempted that they have already sinned. He doesn't appear directly to us, blowing a trumpet. Instead, he whispers in your ear, "Look at you. Look at how filthy you are, still desiring that same old thing, still feeling drawn. Still having that bad thought, that blasphemous idea." Then he whispers another thought. This terrible thing arises from within you. "There is no devil. You are a very bad person."

Listen to me, there are some of you who doubt whether you are, indeed, even Christians because you battle with temptation, and you believe the lie because you battle with temptation, and you are regularly sinning. You need to be reminded that the Lord Jesus himself was tempted, really tempted. If you are taking notes, you might want to jot down Matthew 4 or Hebrews 4.15, which says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." You are not defeated already because you are tempted. The fact that you are tempted doesn't call into question the reality of your Christian faith.

Sometimes the devil will go further and suggest to you, "Well, since you have already sinned [even though you haven't], you might as well just go for it. Resign yourself to failure."

He is subtle. He is crafty. He comes to you and whispers a thought. “Let’s talk,” he says, “Certainly far be it from me to ruin your life or lead you away from a relationship with God. In fact, I want to talk with you about God. Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ Let’s talk.”

Here’s the way temptation works. This thought enters your mind. That person across the room is very attractive. What would it be like to spend time with them. Let’s discuss this. Let’s consider this. Let’s weigh this. Let’s roll this scenario around in your mind – you and them. The thought comes, “You have really been mistreated by your supposed friend. You have a right to be angry. Why are you always the one to make the phone calls? Why are you always the one who has to initiate your relationship?” Let’s weigh the merits of getting bitter. Let’s consider whether you should retaliate. It might be a good idea for you to give her a cold shoulder. She is probably talking about you; you ought to talk about her.

See, the devil doesn’t care if you counter with an argument about the wrongness of some idea that he is injecting into your mind. He is crafty. He is subtle. He doesn’t care if you raise objections. “No, no that’s wrong. I am married. Here is what would happen if I pursued a relationship with that person in my office.” The devil says, “Let’s talk. Let’s discuss this. Raise all the objections you want, so long as I get you thinking and talking with me, so long as you engage me, so long as I get you introspecting, arguing with me, I am already on my way to victory.”

Friends, the devil’s job is simply to move from your front porch into your house. He doesn’t care why you open the door. “Open the door to yell at me.” he says, “I don’t care. Open the door so you can tell me all the reasons why I am lying to you. Open the door and present your best

debating points. Open the door and read me the riot act. Open the door and quote to me a bunch of scripture. I don't care so long as you open the door and engage me, I am already on my way to victory."

The best and easiest way to deal with the devil is to simply refuse to engage him. The moment you engage the thought, "Oh, I shouldn't be thinking that. There are seven reasons why I shouldn't be thinking that. Here is my list of rational defenses for that thought, idea or plan." The moment you begin to engage, that thought becomes emotionally enflamed. Do you think you will succeed in debating with the devil when Adam and Eve, who were absolutely innocent, who had no fallen nature, no habit patterns of sin, who lived in paradise and walked in perfect communion with God – do you think you are going to succeed in debating with the devil when Adam and Eve fell to his devices?

The moment you start fighting, you find yourself like a fly on fly paper. Every time you put your foot down to gain a position, to argue, you are more and more stuck. Haven't you discovered this? You just get yourself all wrapped up. The more you fight, the worse it gets.

The best and easiest way to deal with temptation is to simply refuse to engage. Debate and discussion and talk and arguments are the devil's MO. Refuse to engage at the front end. "Sorry, I am not going there." Hang up the phone. Don't pick it up. Don't think through the ramifications of driving to the place where you shouldn't go. Don't argue with yourself about what happened last time you allowed yourself to become embittered. Don't rehearse in your mind what you should say to your mother. Just keep the door bolted. Let the phone keep ringing. Focus your attention fully on the Lord. Not on debating with the devil. Focus your attention fully on the Lord.

Certainly, all of this requires spiritual sensitivity. That you actually are aware that the devil is knocking on your front door and is standing on the porch. All of this requires some level of spiritual sharpness. Often temptation is successful because you are spiritually or physically dull. We human beings are unities. We are unities of body, soul and spirit. And you are far more likely to open the door and engage in discussion when you have been softened up through an emotionally draining experience or through being over fed or over tired or when you have allowed distance to creep into your relationship with God.

We have to be aware that there is an opponent on the field all the time. And so the Bible calls us to be sober. To keep sharp. To watch our bodies, what we eat, what we drink. We keep ourselves physically sharp. That we engage in emotionally nurturing relationships as much as possible, so we keep our emotional tanks full. We incline our hearts toward God.

As we work down this chain of the anatomy of temptation, how we get from innocence to complete self-destruction, here are the particulars of the temptation. V. 1, *He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not, you shall not, eat from any tree in the garden?'"*

One of the major areas of spiritual attacks these days concerns what God has said and what God has not said. We live at a time when virtually every single biblical text is subjected to multiple conflicting interpretations. Where so much that seems clear gets dissolved into a sea of relativity and perspective. Friends, I tell you, politicians have nothing over some seminary professors and biblical scholars in terms of spin. You read certain books, or hear certain opinions, and you go, "WOW. How did you pull that out of this text? You mean what has always been regarded as sin

historically by the church is really not sin? Do you mean that God really doesn't hate divorce? Even though Malachi, the prophet, says that he does? You mean that continuing rejection of Jesus Christ will not result in eternity in hell? That there is no real hell? That hell is just a metaphor for being extinguished?"

The devil comes along and says, "You know, things are so much more complicated. This business of sex, who could possibly define when you are having sex and when you aren't?"

"Slander is so hard to define. You just never know when you are gossiping. It is all so very muddy. It is all so very confusing. It is all just a matter of perspectives, isn't it?"

A few weeks ago I went out to California to participate in a conference on postmodernism and the affect of postmodernism - the current philosophical mindset on the church today. I went out with Eric Pickerill, who is our Joshua House pastor. One of the pastors there kept saying over and over again that everything was just a matter of perspectives. Eric went over to him after he had gotten done speaking and he said, "How far do you take this thing that everything is just a matter of perspective?"

The guy said, "Well, from my reading, I have lost all certainty." It is the devil's desire, by the way, that we lose clarity, that we lose a sense of rooting, that we lose our certainty – not about things we should be uncertain about, but certainty regarding sin, certainty regarding Christ. There are lots of things that we shouldn't be dogmatic about that are matters of opinion.

But Eric said, "Well, how far does your loss of certainty go?" And then Eric came up with the silliest example he could think of. He wanted to raise a straw man and have this guy knock it down. He said, "Well, let's say a Jehovah Witness came into your church, someone that denies the deity of Christ, someone who denies the Trinity, would you let that person be a leader in your church?"

The fellow was a pastor of a Bible Church in the South. He said, "Well, yes, they could be a leader in my church."

Eric said, "Really? Don't you have a statement of faith?"

The fellow said, "No, our only statement is just 'follow Jesus' but everything else is just a matter of perspective."

Well, the devil is off the front porch and is running around the house.

Has God said, "This is all so very muddy, this issue that you are struggling with. It is hard to figure out. Maybe you need to read another three books on it."? Well, let's approach this a little differently. Maybe the thought comes not along the lines of interpretation. What has God said? But the devil engages you in speculation. What would God say? He might alter the question a little bit in your particular case and not say, "Has God said you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" In your particular case you might hear a question that sounds like, "Would God say to you that you can't have the fruit of this particular tree?" Would God say that? It sounds so limiting and legalistic, so narrow. God certainly wouldn't want you to miss out on the best life has to offer. God is not a God who sets up a bunch of limits, a bunch of "thou shalt nots."

"You know who God is; he is the God of freedom. God is the God of liberty. God is the God of abundance. He is the God of enjoyment. Do you think that God," the devil says, "would ever allow you to have a feeling and then tell you that you couldn't act on it? What kind of God would permit

you to have a certain desire, a certain passion, a certain feeling, a drawing and then post a sign that says, "Off limits"? Can you possibly believe in a God who would deny you what is so natural to you?"

Whenever you hear yourself saying, "I just can't believe that God would say that" or "the God that I worship would never say this," you are simply reliving the original temptation in Genesis 3. Here is the question, friend. Would God ever tell you to live in a difficult situation? Would he? Would he ever say to you, "Persevere even though this is incredibly painful, persevere." Would he ever ask you to persevere? Would God say that? Would God ever say to you, "Even though you feel this thing strongly, I am calling you to self-denial or self-sacrifice."? Can you imagine that God would ever say to you that you need to practice self-denial? Or that you have to crucify some feeling that you have?

Or do you insist that your God is just a God of freedom, a God of abundance, a God who never sets limits on you? Are you a person who insists that your God always says "yes" to every one of your thoughts, feelings and desires and never says "no"?

Let me speak really frankly to you and say that one of the most fundamental things about becoming a Christian is that you come to a place of rejecting your limits on what you permit God to say to you and what you say that God would never say. You can tell, friend, here is a great test, for telling whether or not you have ever become a real Christian. Here is a test for you. You can tell if you are a real Christian by asking yourself whether you simply allow God to be God and to define Himself. Christians are people who say to God, "God, speak. Your servant is willing to hear You. Whatever you want to say to me. You may say something I don't like. You may say something

that causes me pain. You may say 'no' to my marital plans. You may say 'no' to my intended move. You may say 'no' to my business prospects. You may call me to give something up that is precious to me. You may ask me to put to death something that I think is the source of my future happiness. I will even allow you to say something to me that I don't understand."

A Christian is a person who says to the Lord, "You are God and I am not." It is that simple. You are God and I am not. Do you say that? Do you say, "Lord, I will let you set the rules for the way my life, other's lives, are going to unfold. I will let you set the rules." By definition, if you set the rules for what God is allowed to say and what He is not allowed to say to you, what He would say and what He wouldn't say to you – then you are claiming you are Lord of the universe. If you are a person who says, "I simply cannot accept what the Bible says about this or that or about what God seems to be saying to me about a plan of mine, a desire of mine, a feeling of mine. I simply can't accept it." Then you need to go back to square #1 and ask yourself if you are really a Christian. Is Jesus really your Lord?

The serpent goes on to say, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" Of course, God never said that. He just said, "Don't eat from one tree." The devil always makes his requirements more burdensome. This is the problem of legalism. This is the place where conservative Christian churches can play into Satan's hands by adding a lot of limits and rules and regulations that God never demands of us at all. So many people have been pushed away from God because they look at a mountain of regulations and rules from a church and they say, "I can't do all of this. I guess I can't have a real relationship with God." And so they throw the baby out with the bath water.

If you are taking notes, you might want to jot down Deuteronomy 4:2 where God clearly tells the nation of Israel that it is sin not only to subtract from his law, not listen to Him, but also to add to His law. The problem of adding things - and the arrow may have found its mark in the life of the woman when she says, "You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it." It is possible that the arrow of legalism of adding to God's words found its mark. The problem of legalism is that we lose the really important thing under the mountain of trivia and pettiness.

You see this in conservative churches. Let's be frank. When people strain the gnat of drinking a beer and swallow the camel, to use Jesus' phrase, of unbelievably mean-spirited gossip and slander. Far be it from me to ever let beer enter my mouth this way, but garbage comes out of my mouth the other way. No problems. So in some conservative churches, people are straining the gnats of doctrinal correctness on some minor point and swallowing the camel of pride and self-righteousness and judgment of every other Christian.

Another way to think about the problem of adding to what God has said is that it is very easy to believe that you are pleasing to the Lord because you follow some humanly created rule when your heart is really far from God. It is incredibly deceiving to us as human beings. We check off all of our little check lists of what we don't do and we aren't really in relationship with God.

Well, Eve may have been adding to God's Word or it is possible that she is accurately reflecting the words of God. There is a German pastor whose sermons are, I believe, some of the best that were ever preached in the 20th century. His name is Helmut Thielecke. And he made this really helpful point. He said, "When God said 'don't touch the tree,' he meant keep your distance from it. Don't

put yourself in this tempting situation.” He went on to say it is important to remember that the Lord’s Prayer teaches us the petition, “Lead us not into temptation.” Don’t even allow us to get into the critical situation in the first place. The petition does not read, “Lead us out of temptation once we are in it.” Rather, lead us not into temptation.

Once we are in the discussion, once we are near the tree, our pulse quickens and our curiosity flares up. That’s why so much depends on not beginning to pray after temptation comes, after rebellion is raging in your life. By that point it may be too late. You have closed yourself off from the wisdom of God.

Let me put it this way. If you look at any sinful habit of yours, the tendency to be anxious, or the tendency to gossip or slander others, a sexual sin you might commit, gluttony – whatever your particular weak area is, what you will find is that your sinful behavior is often not just one act, but really is a series of choices or links in a chain along the way.

So for the person who struggles with pornography, a thought enters your mind early in the day. You engage it. You roll it over in your head. You choose to drive into a neighborhood where you shouldn’t go. You go to a video store where you shouldn’t be. You choose to not have a filter on your computer.

The way to battle temptation is to not go near the tree to begin with.

You are an anxious person. The thought enters your mind about a test tomorrow. And instead of immediately saying, “Well, then, I better study,” you start adding “what if” upon “what if.” What if it

is really, really hard? What if the teacher tests me on something I am not prepared to answer? What if I fail the test? What if I fail the class? What will that do to my grade point average? What if I fail this whole academic year? What if my whole future goes up in smoke? What if I am reduced to picking up cans along the highway?

There are a series of choices that we make that follow from us going near to the tree.

Single people are always asking “how do we keep ourselves sexually pure?” How can I save myself from this point on for marriage and not fall back into the same pattern that I was in or not get into a pattern? How do I save myself for marriage?

It is like driving a car. If you don't want to find yourself driving on the street, then you don't get in the car and you don't put the key into the ignition. And you don't rev the engine and at that point make a decision about whether or not you are going to throw the car into reverse. So, single people, stop revving the engine. I mean there is only one reason to rev the engine in the driveway and that is to back out and drive.

Stop touching the tree. Don't even touch the tree in your prayers. People are constantly touching the tree of their sins in their prayers. Satan is so subtle he can even go into your prayer closet and get you all emotionally wound up even as you are trying to pray about your particular temptation. Create some distance between yourself and the tree, even in your prayers. Instead draw near to God. Recognize how big God is, how loving He is, how much hope He offers for change. Don't focus on the tree. Focus on the Lord.

So often the anxious person says, "I prayed about this." No, No, you have just repeated in prayer your anxieties. Instead, focus your heart on Jesus, who he is, how pure he is, how completely in control he is, how loving he is, how much hope he offers. Think about how Jesus could change you.

Well, having gotten in the front door, having engaged, having gotten her to ask questions about what God said, we see in this anatomy of temptation a direct contradiction of God's Word. V. 4: "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. The poison is beginning to spread through the system. The devil is not just raising a question about has God said something or would he say something. Now the devil is suggesting that God lies when he threatens us with discipline or punishment. "Oh come on. You know that God is just bluffing. Come on, you don't have to take God seriously. All this talk about fearing God and being afraid of God's displeasure and his discipline, this is the 21st century. And we are in the Vineyard. We are not in a fundamentalist fire and brimstone church. You will not die. Don't take God seriously. Don't pay attention to what God says in his word. His is, after all, just one opinion."

"Yes, I see what God is saying here in the Bible, but the truth is that God is the only one saying it these days. My counselor told me something totally other. My counselor said that based on my past I should not allow myself to be back in that situation again. My friends said I should leave the bum."

"My mother said..."

“Come on. How can I listen to God when he says I am going to die about something when the polls show that God’s opinion is a distinctly minority one? Why God is not even polling 10% in the churches these days on lots of issues. Sure he says that discipline will come. Sure he says that I will wreck my life, but God is the only one saying it.”

Friends, I say this with all affection. I have been in Christian leadership now for a little over two decades. During that time I have had the privilege of watching literally thousands of people come to Christ, be built up and strengthened and develop their relationship with Jesus through the ministry of this church. But the other side of the coin is that I have watched thousands of others who were here and walked away. I have watched people go swimming where a “Dangerous Undertow” sign was posted. I have watched people jump in the water and get swept out to sea. I have watched people who were in leadership here. I have watched folks who used to lead prayer meetings and small groups. I have watched people who were pastors, some who were elders in the church in the past. I have watched people who came to the point of saying in their lives, “I don’t need to take God seriously. I don’t need to fear God. I can go my own way and not suffer spiritual consequences.”

I have watched folks get to the point in their spiritual lives of saying, “I don’t care whatever threats God makes. I want what I want when I want it.” And I have watched folks walk away from God and the church for 5 or 10 years. Some have not returned ever.

If you ever find yourself saying God is bluffing, God won’t follow through on his threats in my life, this business of my sin finding me out is false, I won’t face any consequences even though I disobey God, you need to run, don’t walk, you need to run back to God and fall on your knees and

repent. Because the poison is having its effect in your life. Satan is not merely in your front hallway. He is running through your house. He is paralyzing your conscience.

V. 5, "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be open and you will be like God knowing good and evil." The serpent not only calls God a liar. He slanders God, sows mistrust into the relationship. You know how that one works. You have a faithful employee who is only too happy to work hard for her boss. She works overtime. She is very loyal. A fellow employee shares, "did you hear how he treated so and so, who was a former employee? You had better watch your back. I would be putting out my resume, if I were you. You better be careful. He doesn't care about you at all." You have seen how slander destroys relationships. Some of you have been used to destroy relationships by slandering someone.

And so the serpent works the way that he always works. He says God's Word is muddy and you can't understand it. God wouldn't say it. If He did say it, He's lying. Now he says that He is holding back on you. Look, if God was really good, He wouldn't treat you this way. He wouldn't keep you in an unhappy marriage. He wouldn't let you get sick. He wouldn't have the one person in the whole world you love be taken from you. He wouldn't let you keep struggling and struggling and struggling with this desire. The reason He is letting this happen to you is that He doesn't care. He is not good.

Satan doesn't only whisper in your ear. He blows smoke in your face so that a cloud covers the face of God and you begin to think that maybe the world really isn't governed by God. Maybe looking at what's going on in my life, maybe it doesn't matter what you believe or what you do.

Doesn't the Bible say that God sends rain on the just and unjust alike? Maybe it ultimately doesn't matter if I obey God or I don't obey God; or if I pray or I don't.

God is holding back on you. God doesn't mean it. You can't tell what He's saying anyway. I don't think He would say it. God is lying. God is keeping you from what really will make you happy.

So, we read finally in v. 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." When the woman saw...Here's the quest for autonomy. To eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is to say, "You know, I want to be able to determine good and evil, right and wrong, myself without having to listen to God." When someone says, "I have my own moral standards. I don't really care what the Bible says or what God says. I have my own standards," you know that person is not a Christian.

The woman saw that the tree was good. I don't care what God says. It doesn't seem to me that this thing is wrong. Sure the Bible says that homosexual sex is sin. But I don't feel like it is. Sure the Bible says that I should be thankful in all circumstances. But that couldn't apply to the circumstances I currently am in. I can't see how someone could be thankful in my circumstances. Sure the Bible says don't get married to someone outside the faith. But I really love Joe, I really love Suzie. I get along great with them outside of this small difference of religious opinion. Certainly, it bugs me that they aren't yet a Christian, but he is so much nicer than any Christian I have ever met and we are in love and we have, maybe, even slept together. I don't see what's wrong with that. When the woman saw that the tree looked good...

A Christian is someone who has rejected his or her own standard of judging things and submits to the moral judgments of God.

The other night I spoke at a Unitarian church here in town. I was invited to speak. I will speak really anywhere in any forum, as long as they don't put restrictions on what I am allowed to say. I had a really nice time there. Someone came up to me after and said, "Rich, I can't believe what you believe because I still have some questions. I still have doubts."

I said to them, "Are you expecting to understand everything exhaustively and totally before you bow your knee to Jesus? Because if you are expecting to exhaustively understand everything before you bow your knee to Jesus Christ, that will never happen." Here's the way I deal with life. I know that I have at least three limits on me that prevent me from understanding everything:

1. I am a creature. I am very little and God is very big. So I am limited as a creature.
2. I am a sinner. I am limited by the twist of my mind and my sinful desires. So I am a sinner.
3. I am from New York and so I have all the limitations of being a New Yorker.

There is nothing wrong, friend, with saying, "This statement in the Bible totally puzzles me. I am going to seek out understanding. I am going to inquire of a mature Christian. I am going to read some books about this. I am going to pray. But I will not insist on understanding God's Word before I obey it. I will not insist that I have to be convinced, that I have to see it, that I have to understand how the future is going to roll out before I submit." A real Christian is someone who embraces their limits. Who bows before Jesus and says, "I will let you, Lord, be God. I don't care

what it looks like to me. I trust that You have the true perspective on this matter. And I know that You are working for my good.”

Let’s pray.

The Anatomy of Temptation

Rich Nathan

October 21-22, 2000

Roots: A Study of the Book of Genesis 1-11

Genesis 3:1-6

- A. You've Already Blown It
- B. Let's Talk (Gen. 3:1)
- C. "Has God Said...?" (Gen. 3:1)
- D. "Would God Say...?" (Gen. 3:1)
- E. "Don't Touch the Tree" (Gen. 3:3)
- F. "You Will Not Die..." (Gen. 3:4)
- G. "For God Knows..." (Gen. 3:5)
- H. "When the Woman Saw..." (Gen. 3:6)