

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

God created paradise. Adam and Eve had everything. They lived in thankful and loving obedience to God. There was nothing hidden between God and man, and between Adam and Eve. Everything was perfect since Adam and Eve were created by God without sin. Being without sin, temptations to evil could not arise in their hearts.

But then came the agent of temptation. ***"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made"*** (Genesis 3:1a). This serpent was very subtle, cunning, and crafty. Now, this was not some mere snake, for snakes and every other creature had no sense of right and wrong. So, what we have here is something more than a snake.

This serpent spoke. But snakes don't talk! Yes, we know that. And Adam and Eve knew that! So, when this serpent began speaking to Eve, she would have known that she was dealing with something more than just a serpent.

The serpent said to the woman, ***"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"*** (Genesis 3:1b) This is the temptation of all temptations. The first temptation was to doubt God's Word. This is the main temptation to this day. You see, Eve was not having a conversation with any ordinary snake. She was conversing with Satan himself, who is using this serpent as his tool. Now, Satan did not come out with a flat charge against God from the start. All he did was pose the suggestion that God may be holding out on her. Satan wanted to plant doubt in Eve's heart regarding God's Word.

But up to this point, Eve had a perfect love and trust toward her God of overwhelming love. Trusting Him, she also trusted His Word. She regarded His prohibition regarding that one tree as what it truly was: an opportunity for her and Adam to express their love with wholehearted obedience.

Satan's intention was to sow in Eve a suspicion concerning God's goodness. From sowing doubt in God's Word, it would be an easy step to the thought: Then why did God utter any prohibition at all? *Is God really good?* All Satan desired was to plant this suspicion.

But Eve rightly responds to Satan: ***“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’”*** (Genesis 3:2).

Here, Eve is clinging to her faith in God and His goodness. She understood very well that the serpent was trying to make God’s commandment doubtful in her mind. Eve used God’s own Word as her shield and weapon. You see, by pointing out that God’s commandment allowed them to eat of the many other trees, Eve was praising the bountiful goodness of her God. That one tree was not necessary for food. So, they did not find the prohibition of that tree as any problem. Yes, that tree was there, but there were all those other trees available for food. Essentially, Eve is saying: “God has told us to have nothing to do with that tree, and we shall gladly obey His loving warning.”

But at the same time, by Eve saying, ***“lest you die,”*** those words gave Satan an opening. And all Satan needs is just a smidgen of a crack to cast any doubt. He says: ***“You will not surely die”*** (Genesis 3:4). Here, Satan moves from sly insinuation to bold denial.

Satan proceeded to darken the name of the good and gracious God by saying, ***“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”*** (Genesis 3:5). Satan is saying: “You know, you thought God was good and gracious. No, he’s not! He’s actually holding out on you! He is keeping you away from being like Him! He isn’t good and gracious at all. No, He is envious and jealous of you. You could rise to new heights, but He won’t let you. He’s holding you back, since He doesn’t want you to enjoy everything with Him.”

Here, Satan is seeding pride in Eve. He is saying that she and Adam deserved equality or near-equality with God, and Satan was charging God with denying them their rights. You deserve compensation. You deserve reparations. Oh, yes, I do!

Satan promises to Eve that they ***“will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*** But knowing good and evil in what sense? Satan did not say. His promises to his intended victims are always vague. He holds out as the bait for disobedience some gain or pleasure or honor so great that it can only be imagined, but he never defines them. And this tempting method of Satan is only too effective.

Again, Eve was not helpless. God had made her and Adam in His image. Eve had a perfect relationship with God. But Eve made a decision. When she ***“saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate”*** (Genesis 3:6). Paradise lost. Satan’s lie took over Eve’s heart. She sinned in thought and deed as she pushed away God’s Word.

Through Satan’s deceit, she found that tree to be good for food – a tree which God had said was ***not*** good for food. Her reason was perverted. She should have been repelled by the tree, but now she is attracted to it. Eve’s emotions were all awry. Sin thoroughly corrupted her heart.

But what about Adam? The Apostle Paul tells us: ***“Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor”*** (1 Timothy 2:14). So, Adam was not seduced into transgression the same way Eve was. She was seduced directly by Satan; Adam was persuaded by his wife in the face of better knowledge.

But Adam was not less guilty than Eve. Adam had the same knowledge of God’s goodness to cause him to reject Satan’s lie and to remain unmoved in his trust in his God.

In fact, Adam is the one who is solely responsible for the Fall. You see, ***“Adam was formed first, then Eve”*** (1 Timothy 2:13). Adam and Eve stepped out of the roles given them by God at creation, since Eve was to follow the leadership of her head, Adam. Eve was created as Adam’s helper. But we see here that Eve usurped Adam as she took the lead while Adam gave up his role.

Their eyes were opened. They now knew good and evil. They knew good as something they had lost. They knew evil as something terrible and accursed, as something that filled them with an unbearable sense of guilt.

Their eyes were opened to changed feelings. Before the Fall, it did not trouble them to see each other naked. Everything they did was innocent and in harmony with God’s will. But now all they felt was guilt as ***“they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths”*** (Genesis 3:7b).

In their guilt, they could no longer walk in the garden freely. Instead, they attempted to hide from God among the trees of the garden. They had never felt this way before. Fear was foreign to them. By their fear, they revealed their guilt.

Their attempt to hide from God reveals something else. Did they actually believe that they could hide from the all-knowing and omnipresent God and so escape His punishment? Yes, they did. They showed their stupidity and this foolish attempt has found imitators all through the ages. How often do you think you can hide your sins from God?

In His righteous anger, God could have destroyed them then and there. But He didn't. Though man had proved to be unfaithful, He remained the God of faithful and unwavering love. He remained faithful to them.

Despite God knowing that Adam and Eve would attempt to play the blame game with Him, He announced a new dimension to His love, a love for sinners. But in order to prepare them for that announcement, He had to bring the guilt of their sin home to them. His Good News of salvation would have no meaning for them if they did not realize their sin.

God says to Adam, ***“Where are you?”*** Adam replies: ***“I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself”*** (Genesis 3:10). In one breath, Adam admits his sin. He admitted that he was afraid of God and showed that he knew that his sin was the cause of his fear.

But why didn't Adam confess his sin openly? He didn't because he was now a sinful man and sinful men hate to confess their guilt. Notice that Adam did not say what disturbed him by his nakedness. He knew it was the result of his fall into sin, but he tried to cover up the fact.

But God never gave up on Adam. So, He asked Adam: ***“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”*** (Genesis 3:11). This is God saying: “You confessed your shame over being naked. But out with the rest of it! What caused the shame? Tell me, have you broken My commandment by eating of the forbidden fruit?”

Instead of making a straightforward confession, Adam placed the blame on God for giving him Eve. “It's her fault! Why did You give me such a wife? If you had not done that, she could not have seduced me!”

How many of us have done the same? I didn't mean to! If it wasn't for my friend, I would have never done it! But you did it.

Then Eve says to God: ***“The serpent deceived me, and I ate”*** (Genesis 3:13b). She admitted that she had transgressed God’s will, but she, too, would not take responsibility for her sin. Adam blamed Eve and God. Eve, in turn, blamed the serpent. But, passing on the blame to others does not absolve you from your sin. Adam and Eve may have been deceived, but they are responsible for sinning against God.

At this moment, Satan believed that he has won the victory over God and mankind that was created after His likeness. But unbeknownst to Satan, God says to him: ***“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life”*** (Genesis 3:14).

Satan is to be held responsible for the seduction, and he will experience humiliation and defeat as the just divine retribution. ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”*** (Genesis 3:15).

Now, Satan had to hear this announcement of his own judgment and defeat. But at the same time, Adam and Eve were to also hear and ponder this word revealing God’s grace, His undeserved love toward them.

In short, God foretells the constant enmity or conflict between the believing children of God and the unbelieving world – a conflict that will go on until the end of the world. The source of the hostility and hatred are the unbelievers, just as it was in the Garden. But it is also true that it is God who established the enmity between believers and unbelievers. God is the one who puts into our hearts the godly and childlike trust in Him to serve Him in loving obedience. Unbelievers, however, cling to their life under Satan as they resent and hate all those who trust in God as disturbers of their “so-called” peace.

In this struggle, there will be a champion who will represent all men, just as Adam was the representative of mankind in the first and fatal encounter with Satan. ***“He – the offspring of Eve – will crush [Satan’s] head, and [Satan] will strike His heel”*** (Genesis 3:15b).

Despite paradise being lost in the Garden, Paradise is found today in none other than Jesus Christ. Just as Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, Jesus was tempted. But unlike Adam and Eve who were deceived, Jesus resisted every temptation for us and for our salvation! He resisted Satan all the way to His atoning death on the cross as He kept God's Law and bore the Law's just sentence: death. He died in Adam and Eve's place. He died in your place! His death was like a torturous burn like the venom of a serpent's bite, but in the process, He would ***"bruise the serpent's head."***

Out of His grace for us poor miserable sinners, God gives us the certain promise of paradise through His Son Jesus Christ as He has destroyed Satan's power to accuse us of our sins. By grace through faith in Christ alone, we are set free from what our sins deserve: eternal death and hell. In turn, by clinging to Jesus, we are given what we don't deserve: eternal life and salvation! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +