

Text: Gen. 3:1-13

Title: "The deceitfulness of sin"

Time: Dec. 2, 2007 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We finished Wednesday evening the video on William Tyndale, "God's Outlaw." Tyndale was, of course, one of the English Reformers who sacrificed his life even to martyrdom so that the plowboy could know more of the truth of Scripture than the priests of his day did. And we saw how that Tyndale might have lived to see the eyes of the king of England opened, had it not been for the work of Henry Phillips. Henry Philips had a gambling habit, had stolen from his father and fled from England to Europe, and had made it known that he would do anything for cash. Tyndale welcomed Philips into his home and ministry only to be betrayed by the man. This betrayal ultimately resulted in giving the authorities the opportunity to burn Tyndale at the stake. Deceit is a dangerous thing.

Sin is deceitful and dangerous. Had the events of Genesis 3 never happened, the world in which we live would have been a very different place than it is today: no crime, no selfishness, no death, no disease, no war. Even much of the warnings of Scripture never would have been required, passages such as Heb. 3:12-13, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called, 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

But Genesis 3 did happen; sin and its consequences are with us; and the warning against being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin meets a critical spiritual need of our hearts this morning. I want us to heed that warning and understand 5 things from Genesis 3 today about the deceitfulness of sin.

I. Sin uses deceitful advocates (v. 1a).

Note: The text begins with a description of the tempter. Scripture tells us some important things about him:

First, he was a serpent, a beast of the field made by God. Now the serpent was at this time very different from the snakes we know of today. The morphology and constitution of the snake greatly changed when God cursed it (3:14). The Hebrew word *serpent* is closely related to the Hebrew word for *shiny bronze*, so many believe that the pre-fall creature was a brilliantly shiny creature.

Second, he was the most intelligent beast of the field that God created. The word translated here *subtle* can be the possession of both good (1 Sam. 23:22, David) and bad men (Ps. 83:3, Asaph's enemies). This characteristic makes good men better and bad men worse. It refers to a skill level rather than to a moral quality. It could be translated *skillful* and is often translated *prudent* in the book of Proverbs, where it is synonymous with wisdom, knowledge, and discretion and the opposite of being a fool or naïve.

Remember that when we read that the serpent bore this characteristic prior to the fall, we are reading about something that God made "very good" (Gen. 1:31). So the serpent was more skillful than any of the beasts of the field that God had made, which would include the chimpanzee, for instance. Evidently, this level of skillfulness included the ability of the pre-fall serpent to speak intelligibly to man. I say that only because it is evident that neither Eve nor Adam appear at all suspicious that this creature is speaking to them. Today, science is learning more and more about the intelligence of animals and their ability to communicate. Bible believers are not at all surprised by these findings.

Finally, Scripture makes clear that the serpent was possessed by Satan. We are told about the crushing of the serpent in 3:15, and Paul makes clear that this refers to the crushing of Satan (Rom. 16:20; see also Isa. 27:1, 2 Cor. 11:3, 14, Rev. 12:9, 14, 15, 20:2).

Application: We say all this to note that sin is deceitful because it always employs deceitful advocates. The advocates of doing wrong are never those who have no beauty, credentials, or skill. The advocates of doing wrong are always those who have some kind of persuasiveness and credibility.

Illustration: I spoke with a gentleman from the AA about the use of our facility this past Monday. I expressed concern that the organization allows a person in need to define God for himself and never seeks to correct that definition. This is really nothing more than pagan polytheism. The man became angry with me during the course of our meeting, but before he did he made sure that he showed me a long list of churches nationwide that endorsed the AA and allowed the use of their facility without worrying about how someone defines God. He then asked me, "Are you telling me that you are right and all these people are wrong?" I said, "Yes."

Application: This is one way sin deceives. It employs credible advocates, good causes, credentialed experts, only the best and the brightest. Sin uses deceitful advocates. We need to not let them deceive us.

## II. Sin deceitfully questions the Word of God (vv. 1b-5).

Eve's departure from God's Word is tragic, but subtly gradual. Notice some of these steps with me one by one.

1. Satan successfully convinces Eve that she was a judge over God's Word. (v. 1b, "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?").

Illustration: People who sit under a judge's authority in a courtroom are in trouble when they forget who is the judge. I saw a report this past week of a judge who became angry when a cell phone went off in his courtroom. He asked who owned the phone, and when no one confessed he put everyone carrying a phone that day in his courtroom in jail. He later lost his job for an abuse of power, but the point here is that in the courtroom,

there is only one judge, one person in charge, one person doing the judging. People who get confused about who this is are in real trouble.

Application: Satan is striking a tone of incredulity with his question to Eve here. Not only does he mischaracterize and misunderstand the meaning of God's Word, he also mocks it. The word translated, *Yea* carries the connotation of "Can it really be?" or "You have got to be kidding me!" Henry Morris notes in this regard: "In other words, 'Did God really say such a thing as that!' Note the slightly mocking superior condescension to Eve's 'naïve' acceptance of God's command, a technique followed by Satan and his human emissaries with great success ever since."

What Satan tempts Eve with here is the opportunity to assess the validity of God's Word. He distorts the command so as to make it seem more unreasonable than it truly would otherwise seem; but the real trick here is that Eve is invited for the first time to offer up an opinion on the worthiness of what God has said. Once a person grants that he himself is the final arbiter of truth, the outright denials of vv. 4-5 become much easier to digest.

2. Satan successfully confuses Eve about the content of God's Word (vv. 2-3).

Application: Did you notice the little phrase Eve adds to the original command of 2:17: "neither shall ye touch it"? Is this an important detail? I believe that it is, because in order for Eve to eat the fruit she first had to touch it. If her understanding was that death would come when she touched the fruit, then that understanding would have been shown to be false the moment she did so. Death did not happen until she took a bite.

Details are important when it comes to knowing and defending the Word of God. We need to be patient students of the Word of God, hungry for the details, and never satisfied with a vague kind of overview understanding. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Illustration: The man from AA quoted some Scripture to me as he tried to convince me to agree to sponsor a meeting. We were discussing the point I mentioned earlier, how that it is wrong to be satisfied to let people define God for themselves. So Charlie decided that to make his point he was going to tell me the story of Paul's Damascus road experience and thereby argue that each one must go down his own Damascus road. That turned out to be an unfortunate choice for his argument, because on that road Paul clearly asked the voice he heard, "Who art thou, Lord?" The voice answered back, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." The passage explicitly teaches the importance of defining the Lord correctly. Suddenly, the man did not want to talk about Acts 9 and the Damascus road anymore. Details matter.

C. Satan successfully concerns Eve over the silence of God's Word (vv. 4-5).

Application: An attack on God's Word is always an attack on God's name or God's nature. Note that Satan says some things that are true in verse 5, things that God had been silent about: 1) their eyes were opened (3:7); and 2) they became like God in a new way (3:22). The lie is in verse 4, "You surely will not die!" Note the emphasis here. This emphasis is in direct opposition to the Lord's emphasis in 2:17, "for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." So to get Eve to believe this lie, the direct opposite of God's plainly spoken truth, Satan puts Eve's focus on truths about which God has not spoken. These now become the all important topic. God had somehow withheld information from Eve that was useful to her, and consequently God cannot be trusted because He is silent.

We need to be faithful before the Word of God, but we also need to be faithful before the silence of God, don't we? We wish we understood more than we are told, sometimes. We ask the question, "Why?" and sometimes do not find the answers. Satan likes to use the silence of God against our relationship with Him. He likes to impugn God's character as untrustworthy and God's plain Word as false or somehow insufficient. Yet we have to work on trusting the fact that what we have been told is exactly

what we need to know, what is best for us to know, and that in regard to the things we do not know and have not been told, both God's Word and His silence are always trustworthy.

### III. Sin promises deceitful advantages (vv. 6).

Illustration: Do you remember the poisonous apple the witch gave to Snow White? If not you need to get that video again and watch it. It was a beautiful thing. It was not dirty and rotten with a bunch of worms running through it.

Application: Sin is deceitful because it is attractive. It is always more advantageous, at least in some immediately perceptible way, to do wrong rather than to do right. What the tree was to Eve, the world is to believers today. 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Eve faced these three categories of the attractiveness of sin. It offers deceitful, temporary, fleeting advantages that in the end bite with a bitter poison that kills the soul and ruins the destiny. Believers ought not be surprised at the attractiveness of sin, but we should always remember that this attractiveness is ultimately a lie. It is a lie because these advantages are not ultimately good for us, nor are they permanent.

Bob Jones Sr. – "He is no fool who forfeits what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." "Never sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate."

### IV. Sin deceitfully avoids personal responsibility (vv. 11-13).

Application: We see the blame game going on here. This is a part of the deceitfulness of sin. We always have a rationale for our sin that puts the onus on someone else. Our society is full of victims rather than sinners. But this is merely sin's lie. Where we have sinned, we are accountable. It is our fault, not the fault

of extenuating circumstance. We need to make it right. The three most difficult words to put together in the English language are the words, "I am wrong" followed closely by the words "It was my fault" and "I need forgiveness." Believers who understand well the deceitfulness of sin will embrace their need for these phrases on a regular basis.

V. Sin brings consequences that never deceive (vv. 7-10).

Note: One Old Testament scholar, Jeffrey Niehaus, has studied this passage and translates verse 8, "And they heard the thunder of the Lord God echoing back and forth in the garden during the wind of the storm." I believe this is the best understanding of what Moses is describing, so in verse 10 when Adam explains why he has hidden himself, he speaks not only of the shame of his nakedness, but also of his fear.

Application: Hiding could not take away the fear, and the fig leaves could not take away the shame of sinful nakedness. Man died spiritually the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He became spiritually separated from God whose holiness now made His former presence in the garden seem like a violent thunderstorm. The procreative anatomy of man and woman filled him with public shame, because being fruitful and multiplying would now mean bringing sin and destruction into the world through their offspring. Genesis 3 is as clear as Gal. 6:7 in this regard, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God said they would surely die, and so they did. The consequences of sin never deceive. They always tell the truth.

Conclusion: Has God spoken to you about the deceitfulness of your sin this morning? We are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, and in ourselves have all the susceptibility to sin's devastation that they had. Hiding and self-made solutions will not help our fear and sense of naked shame any more than they helped Adam and Eve. But Christ is the victorious Second Adam, the one not deceived by sin. He took our sin on Himself on the cross, bearing its consequence, that we might be welcomed

back into the arms of our Creator who still calls out for sinners from the garden of heaven throughout the corridors of time. In Christ we wear robes of spotless righteousness never to feel the shame of sin's nakedness again. Do you need His help this morning in view of the deceitfulness of sin?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*