

First Things
Genesis 3:1-6
"The First Temptation"

1. **TEMPTATION IS STARTED WITH A DECEPTION**
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1. A young Christian once made a very insightful statement about temptation. She said, "If only I could see my temptations as I see other people's, they wouldn't be a bit hard to fight."

2. She explained, "Other people's temptations always look so ugly and mean and foolish. But my own temptations come with a rosy glow about them, [and] I don't see how bad they are until afterward."

3. Looking at the story of the first temptation in Genesis 3, the tendency is to say, "How in the world did Eve fall for this?"

4. We see all the beauty, glory, and perfection of the garden, and we wonder how Eve was so easily duped by the serpent.

5. The reality is, however, the same basic tactics that Satan used in the very first temptation are the same ones he successfully employs a million times a day on people like us, who ought to know better.

6. In II Corinthians 11:3, the Apostle Paul writes, "*But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*"

7. Just as the serpent lured Eve into the first sin, we all face the daily danger of being "drawn away" and "enticed" by the enemy of our souls.

8. For that reason, there is great value in examining what the Holy Spirit has inspired for us here in the details of the first temptation.

9. As we look at the anatomy of this initial fall into sin, we are given some instruction that can help to keep us from yielding when we are likewise tempted.

10. Notice what we learn about temptation from this first temptation. We see here that:

I. TEMPTATION IS STARTED WITH A DECEPTION

1. In John 8:44, Jesus makes a pointed statement about the devil. He says, "...*He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*"

2. Understanding that our enemy, Satan, is nothing but a liar, it makes perfect sense that his temptation of Eve was presented through a subtle and seductive lie.

3. After he posed a question about what God had said to her, the serpent said to her in verse 4, "*Ye shall not surely die.*"

4. We need to recognize that whenever we find ourselves presented with a temptation, we will have to believe a lie before we will ever commit the sin.

5. At the risk of sounding crass, Eve was a sucker even before she was a sinner. The same can be true of us if we don't recognize the deception that gives birth to temptation.

6. Look at the nature of the deception in this first temptation. Firstly, it was a:

A. Deception regarding the commandment

1. Look at verse one. There the serpent strikes up a conversation with Eve by asking her, "*Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*"

2. The question could be translated, as it is in the *ESV*, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

3. From the very beginning the devil was twisting the Word of God, distorting it so as to cast doubt upon it.

4. Eve does not help the situation. She too misrepresents what God had said, adding to it in verse 3, the phrase, "*...neither shall ye touch it...*"

5. In chapter 2, God's command regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil says nothing about touching the tree. The commandment is in regards to eating from it.

6. Do you see what happened in that moment? The serpent had very subtly, and yet very successfully, cast a doubt, or at least a question on what God had actually commanded.

7. A temptation to sin, while it is an attack upon us personally, it is first and foremost an assault on the commands of God.
8. The devil is still saying today, "Did God really say that? Is that actually what He commanded?"
9. A little girl got in trouble for disobeying her mother, and when the mom was dealing with her, the little girl asked, "Mommy, why do we do bad things?"
10. The mother answered, "Sometimes the devil tells us to do something wrong, and we listen to him. We need to listen to God instead." The little girl dropped her head and said, "But God doesn't talk loud enough!"
11. Whenever we are tempted, we will have to ignore the clarity and authority of what God has said in order to be deceived by the enemy.
12. Notice not only that this deception was in regards to the commandment, but notice also that it was a:

B. Deception regarding the consequences

1. Notice again the serpent's words in verse 4. He boldly says to Eve, "*Ye shall not surely die.*"
2. He then goes on to explain this statement. Look at verse 5. He says, "*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*"
3. It is interesting to note that there is a dangerous mixture of true and false in what the devil told Eve.
4. To some extent, Adam and Eve *would* become like God after they ate of this fruit. In verse 22 of this chapter, God says, "*Behold, the man is become as one of us...*"
5. Yet, Satan presents this knowledge of good and evil as a *good* thing for Adam and Eve. He denies that it will bring death, as God had promised, but instead presents it as a doorway to a higher kind of life.
6. Francis Schaeffer says of this text, "...what Satan has said is a half truth but a total lie."ⁱ
7. Though God has clearly revealed to mankind the consequences of sin; that its wage is death, and that in sinning we shall surely die, nevertheless, the devil still deceives us about what our sin will actually cost us.

8. He tells the addict, "You can quit whenever you want." He tells the adulterer, "You will not get caught." He tells sinners of all kinds, "Don't worry. There is no wrath to come."

9. God is brutally honest with us about the consequences of our sin. Satan tempts us by first deceiving us about those inevitable consequences.

10. Looking at this text, and this first temptation, we see a further truth. We see not only that *temptation is started with a deception*, but we see also that:

II. TEMPTATION IS STRENGTHENED WITH A DESIRE

1. As I meditated on this passage, a text from the book of James came to mind. In his opening chapter, Bro. James explains the process of temptation.

2. He writes in verses 14 and 15, "*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

3. The indication of those verses is that temptation involves something within us that reacts to the work of the devil around us.

4. Even though Eve was still in her innocence before she took of the fruit, I still believe we see in her those seeds of desire that strengthen the temptations that the devil presents to us.

5. Think with me about this. Looking at this first temptation, we observe that:

A. Temptation appeals to the core of our desires

1. Verse 6 is a fascinating verse. In it the Holy Spirit gives us a peek into the thoughts of Eve at the moment of her temptation.

2. It says, "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*"

3. Now notice here that none of the things that attracted Eve to this tree were inherently bad. In fact, they were all products of perfectly natural desires that God had implanted into her at her creation.

4. For instance, she saw that the tree was "good for food." The desire for food - the urge of hunger - is a natural, core desire that is a part of our created make-up.

5. Likewise, she saw that the tree was “pleasant to the eyes”. Again, the appreciation of beauty is one of the things that help us to recognize and worship God. It is natural to admire that which is beautiful.

6. She also saw that the tree had the capability to “make one wise.” The desire to learn to and know is another core desire that God has placed in human beings. It is the fuel that draws us to seek and find.

7. Someone once observed that Satan, like a good fisherman, baits his hooks according to the appetite of the fish.

8. Satan knows how we were created. He knows the natural drives and desires with which God equipped us.

9. In tempting us, Satan will always appeal to one of those natural and normal drives. Temptation appeals to the core of our desires.

10. It is important, however, that we recognize something else. While temptation appeals to the core of our desires, understand also that:

B. Temptation aims at the corruption of our desires

1. All of the things that appealed to Eve about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were things that were naturally a part of her makeup.

2. Her thoughts about this tree, however, served to strengthen the temptation, because in order to satisfy those natural desires, she would have to disobey the Word of God for her life.

3. Satan sought to corrupt these natural desires, by using them to lure Eve into disobeying and dishonoring God. The old Serpent is still working in this same way today.

4. Think about it. Take, for instance, the sex drive, which is a natural and vital part of human nature. It was given to us by God for the purpose of procreation and pleasure within the bonds of marriage.

5. So long as the sex drive is fulfilled in a way that pleases, glorifies, and obeys God, namely in marriage, it is a perfectly legitimate, wonderful, and even spiritual experience.

6. However, when Satan succeeds in corrupting that desire and people pursue it outside of God's will, what we have then is fornication, adultery, prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, and every other sexual perversion that disobeys the commands of God.

7. In the beginning, God created. Satan does not have the ability to create. All he can do is pervert. All he can do is corrupt what has been created, and he will seek to do so with our natural desires.

8. People who know me well know that have a notorious aversion, even phobia, toward seafood. I don't even eat animals that live *near* the water.

9. I have never, ever been tempted by an all-you-can-eat seafood buffet. The *Red Lobster* restaurant holds about as much appeal to me as the dentist office.

10. There are other foods, however, that I love. I have awoken at two in the morning craving ribs. I can be tempted by pork.

11. In all seriousness, Genesis 3 and this first temptation remind us that the devil knows what we like, and temptation is often strengthened by our own desires.

12. Consider with me a third truth we see here about temptation. We see not only that *temptation is started with a deception, and temptation is strengthened with a desire*, but we see also lastly that:

III. TEMPTATION IS STOPPED WITH A DECISION

1. When we read our text at the beginning of the message, I purposely stopped reading after verse 6.

2. The close of that verse says, "*...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*"

3. I stopped reading there, because this is the end of the temptation. With the decision to eat this fruit, temptation ended and sin began.

4. Likewise, every temptation that you and I will face will be ended and stopped by a decision. That decision in the moment when we are tempted is the difference between life and death, defeat or victory.

5. Think about this. Consider first of all that temptation is stopped by:

A. The decision to relent

1. Once Adam and Eve had relented to the temptation, they were no longer tempted with the fruit of that tree.
2. The devil says nothing else to them following their sin. He has had his way, and he needs not tempt them anymore with regards to the tree.
3. There is a sense in which the decision to give in to our desires and relent to temptation will, at least temporarily, end its lure to us.
4. Verse 7 reveals that Adam and Eve were not tempted anymore by the fruit that had so allured them just moments before. Something else now occupied their minds. It says, *"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."*
5. You will find that when you relent to temptation, it is never as alluring, and never as appealing once the fruit of sin sits hard on your stomach and heavy in your heart.
6. Sure, there is pleasure in sin for a season, but it is never as fulfilling and never as satisfying as you thought it would be when you were considering the offer of the devil.
7. Ask that young girl as she leaves her appointment at the abortion clinic if she is in any hurry to sleep with that boy again. Ask that man lying in his own drunken filth and sickness if he'd like another drink.
8. We have all experienced the let down that comes when our sin falls short of the bliss it promised at the moment of temptation.
9. Yes, it's true. Temptation is stopped with the decision to relent. However, there is another way to stop it. There is not only the decision to relent, but there is also:

B. The decision to resist

1. Are you familiar with the term "counterfactual"? A counterfactual is a "what-if" question that is applied to historical events in order to examine the effects of what actually happened.
2. For instance, we could apply a counterfactual to the Revolutionary War, and say that if the colonies had *not* won, we would be singing "God Save the Queen", and earning pounds instead of dollars.
3. In the case of the first temptation, we can take the Word of God, and apply a counterfactual. What would have happened if Eve had said, "No", and decided to resist the serpent?

4. Whatever else would have been different, we know at least this much, her temptation would have stopped.
 5. James 4:7 says, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"
 6. When we submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus, and choose to obey him rather than the temptation that is presented to us, the Word of God promises that our enemy and adversary will flee from us.
 7. Whenever we are tempted, we must choose how that temptation will end. We can relent, and suffer the consequences, or we can resist, and walk in the victory that has been promised us through Christ.
 8. A shopkeeper noticed a little boy that kept creeping by a display of apples out in front of his shop. He went outside and said to the boy, "What are you doing, son? You're not trying to steal my apples, are you?" The little fellow looked up and said, "Nope. I'm trying *not* to."
 9. Temptation is not something we must endure indefinitely. It can be stopped with a decision, and by God's grace we can decide to resist rather than relent.
1. Counterfactuals aside, the reality is that Eve *did* relent, and so often, so do we. Not only do we fall because she fell, but many times we fall *just like* she fell as well.
 2. There is an encouraging truth for those of us who too often lose our battles with temptation. That is, when we are faced with temptation, we have a Lord to whom we can turn who knows just exactly what it is like to be tempted.
 3. Matthew 4:1 says, "*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*" Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus, our Great High Priest, "*...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*"
 4. The answer for Eve's sin and for ours as well, is found in the only One who has ever truly overcome temptation – the Lord Jesus.
 5. We stand against the devil, not in our own strength, but in the strength of Him who has overcome the wicked one, and by whose blood all our sins have been washed away.
 6. If you find yourself being beset by temptation, learn from the story of the first temptation. The Spirit has recorded this for our example; that we might learn from the failures of our first parents.

7. Most of all, when you are tempted, cry out to Jesus! Seek Him who knows what you need and can give you strength to resist the devil.

8. Hebrews 2:18 says of Jesus: "*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*"

ⁱ Schaeffer, Francis A., Genesis in Space and Time; The Flow of Biblical History, (Intervarsity Press, 1972)
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