

WHEN GOD'S LOVE IS DOUBTED

Genesis 3:1-24

Key Verse: 3:15

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

In Genesis chapter 2, we learned that God created paradise in this world. He provided man everything necessary for his happiness. But the world in which we now live doesn't seem to be good. It is full of sorrow, tragedy and violence. Happiness is like a rainbow which we can never seem to catch. How could the good world created by a loving God get this way? And is there any hope for us in a world like this?

In Genesis 3 we learn about the first great turning point in human history--the fall of man. Man's sin transformed God's good and beautiful and happy world into a cursed world, groaning in travail, waiting for its redemption. Instead of living as rulers and stewards of God's world, men became servants of the devil. May God help us to have eyes to see this world!

I. THE FALL OF MAN (1-13)

Look at verse 1a. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.” In this passage Satan makes his appearance in the form of the serpent (Rev 12:9). The author of Genesis does not tell us about Satan's origin. He does tell us that he was crafty and that he was a created being. The implication of other scriptures (Rev 12:7-9; Jude 6; 2 Pe 2:4) is that Satan was a beautiful and powerful angel who forgot his position. He rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Pride destroyed even angels of God. John 8:44 tells us that he was a liar and murderer from the beginning.

This crafty Satan approached the woman in the Garden of Eden to tempt her. His purpose in tempting the woman is clear. He wanted her to listen to and follow his words instead of obeying God's word. This seems like a small thing. But until this time, mankind had obeyed God and walked with him in beautiful fellowship in the garden. The Bible says that we are slaves of the one whom we obey (Ro 6:16). By disobeying God and obeying Satan, mankind would come under Satan's authority. They would be transferred from God's kingdom to the kingdom of Satan. The creation order in the garden was kept by man's obedience to God. He maintained his fellowship with God, his creator, by obeying his command. They were happy in the peaceful and harmonious garden. But Satan intended to break the creation order and man's fellowship with God.

How did Satan lead the woman to disobey God? First, he asked a question about God's command. Look at verse 1b. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden.’?” Satan cleverly twisted God's command given to Adam. He tried to confuse her about God's word. God's command began with, “You are free to eat from

any tree in the garden.” God blessed man with freedom and generosity. But he omitted this fact and began with the negative; he suggested that God’s prohibition was unreasonable, and that furthermore, it impinged on her rights.

Likewise, Satan always tries hard to lead us to forget about abundant blessings of God. He does not want us to be grateful to God and be faithful to him. Instead, he wants us to look at what we don’t have. He draws our attention to negatives. One young man was blessed by God in many respects. He had good health, nice family, and material provisions. He even earned a Ph.D. in engineering. But because of a recession, he had to wait a while to get a job. Night and day, his mind was on this problem. He did not thank God for what he had; he did not pray. Then Satan worked in him. He began to doubt God’s love. He became a prey for Satan.

When Satan talked to the woman, he said, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” By effectively adding the adverb, “really,” he attempted to plant doubt about God’s love for her. God gave Adam’s Bible to them so that they might obey his words and have a spiritual fellowship with him. It was a reminder that God was the source of their lives and they could be truly happy in the creation order. But Satan twisted the words of God and coaxed her to doubt God’s love. Satan uses the same tactic today to plant doubt in our hearts. He comes to us when we are tired or weak. He would pretend to be our friends and ask questions such as, “Do you really have to study the Bible every week? Isn’t it hard enough to study for your classes? Do you really have to live a life of mission? Isn’t it hard enough to just live for yourself? Is there really God? If so, why there are so many evil things happening to innocent people?” These are very effective tools of Satan. When one pays attention to these questions, doubts creep into his mind and he becomes powerless. He becomes fearful. He becomes a prey for Satan.

The woman should have spotted Satan’s ploy. But she was taken in by his engaging talk. She was shaken. What was it in her attitude toward God’s word and blessings that weakened her? Look at verses 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 your will die.’” In the first place, she was not grateful to God for his gracious and abundant provision for her needs and happiness. The good and delightful trees of the garden were all prepared by God. He had commanded man to eat freely of their fruit. God said, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” (2:16). But the woman changed this into “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden.” Her tone of voice was not of gratefulness. This indicates that she took God’s gift and blessing for granted (2). At the same time, she put unnecessary emphasis on the negative part of God’s command. God did not say “Don’t touch it”; he said, “Don’t eat it.” She did not pay careful attention to God’s word, or hide God’s word in her heart. The woman’s attitude gives a sharp contrast to that of Jesus who rejected Satan’s temptations by quoting God’s word exactly (Mt 4:4,7,10). The woman’s problem was that she did not listen to God carefully and she

did not have God's word in her heart as the absolute truth. She was vulnerable to Satan's sweet talk.

When Satan heard the woman's answer, he quickly realized that his strategy was working. He knew that she lacked gratitude toward God despite his abundant blessings and she began to doubt God's love. He did not want to miss this opportunity. It was time for him to throw one-two straight punches. Look at verses 4-5. "You will not surely 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." There is enough truth in his words to make it the most effective kind of lie. When the woman and Adam disobeyed God's command, their eyes were opened (7) and they began to know good and evil (22), although these were not good things at all as was suggested by Satan. When he told her the lie, "You will not surely die," he was removing the absoluteness from God's word. He was saying that obeying God's word is not really a life and death matter. Then he suggested that God's motive in forbidding them to eat of one tree was not love but tyranny, and that God was withholding from them something very good. He led her to doubt the goodness of God. When doubt of God's love took root in her heart, and when the fear and respect of God and his word was shaken, she could entertain the possibility of disobedience. She became susceptible to temptation.

Satan told her that eating the fruit would make her as wise as God. He planted pride in her, and she believed him. She forgot about the fact that she had already been created in the image of God. Of course, Satan didn't tell her about the tragic consequences of disobedience. When she listened to him, her physical desires, which were intended to enrich her life, became unrestrained. The fruit was beautiful and looked delicious. It became very desirable. So, without any further thought, she took it and ate. Her act was an act of obedience to Satan and an act of disobedience to God. She moved from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of Satan. Guilt longs for company, so she gave some of the forbidden fruit to Adam; he ate and joined her in the kingdom of Satan. This was a tragic moment for mankind.

What happened? Nothing good happened for man. Look at verse 7. "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." Their eyes were opened, but only to a sense of shame and guilt. Their innocence was gone. They tried to cover themselves to hide from each other. It was the moment man lost his true self. Shame and guilt overwhelmed them. In desperation and fear, they tried to cover themselves. It was a moment man lost innocence and began to struggle to hide his sinful nature behind coverings. Another consequence was that they tried to hide from God (8). The beautiful relationship with God was broken. Before the Fall, they were happy to have fellowship with God, the source of their lives. They delighted to hear God's voice. They were assured that the loving God was with them. But now, they tried to hide from God; they were afraid because they were naked (10). Sin separated man from God. They were now cut off from the source of life. They became like cut flowers in a vase. Though they

looked alive, they were dying. The result of their sin was immediate spiritual death.

When the relationship between God and man is broken, the relationship among men is also broken. The perfect harmony and innocence between the man and the woman was broken and they began to blame each other. Adam blamed the woman for giving him the forbidden fruit, and he blamed God for giving him the woman (12). Fear, guilt and broken relationships are the gifts of Satan. Lost innocence can never be recovered.

Although man broke his relationship with God, God did not withdraw his love from man. In fact, in the midst of man's doubts, pride and rebellion, God's love shone more brightly. Look at verse 9. "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" The man and the woman hid themselves from God in their fear and guilty feelings. But God took an initiative to seek them out. He came to them and with compassion called out to them, "Where are you?" This is the voice of the loving Heavenly Father who wanted them to repent and come back to him. There are many young people who try to hide themselves behind some artificial coverings. But they cannot hide from God. Instead, they must respond to God's calling to sinners, "Where are you?"

II. A WORLD UNDER CURSE (14-19)

Look at verses 14-15. God cursed the serpent. But embedded in his curse is a precious promise that plants hope in the hearts of all men. God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (15). In God's right time Jesus, the seed of the woman, would come to crush the head of Satan. He would be painfully wounded by Satan, but he would win the victory. This is good news. Satan will be defeated; he will not always rule the world. This is the promise of God that plants hope in men's hearts. This promise is fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection (Heb 2:14-15; Ro 16:20).

This one act of disobedience seems very small, but it was an act of rebellion against God. Because mankind joined the rebellion of Satan, God put the world under curse. The writer of Romans says that God subjected creation to frustration (or futility) in hope that it would be liberated some day (8:20-21). So we are living in a world under curse.

The specific punishment given the woman was directed toward the special blessing God had given her. God had blessed mankind and told them to be fruitful and increase in number. But in a world under curse, childbearing became the woman's cross of pain. Joyful friendship with her husband, and the joy of sharing with him in doing God's work was replaced with selfish desire for him. The order of love in the family was replaced by man's tyrannical rule over woman, rule enforced by her fear and desire. This curse can only be removed by Jesus. He came to set mankind free from the curse. He died so that we might be set free from slavery to sinful desires and the guilt of sin.

He came to restore our relationship with God and to make it possible for men and women to have a healthy and right relationship with one another. He came to restore love and friendship in the home.

Man's punishment was also directed toward his blessing. God made the man fully responsible for listening to his wife instead of obeying God's word. Man was created to be the steward of God's world. He had tilled the ground to fulfill his mission and serve God, and he had named the animals to joyfully co-work with God. His work was joyful and full of meaning. But now, because of his sin, the ground and all creation were under curse. He lost his mission; he must work, not for God but for his own survival. Work became toil; the final enemy, death, awaited them both. Only Jesus can remove the curse and restore man's mission. He died and rose to give life and meaning and mission back to mankind.

III. PARADISE LOST (20-24)

God still loves fallen man. He covered their shame and guilt with durable clothes made from animal skins. Animals were killed for the sake of man. In verse 22, God said "man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." This was not a blessing, as Satan had suggested; it was a curse, because the knowledge of good and evil came through doing evil, and brought tragic consequences, which Satan had not bothered to mention. The knowledge of good and evil can also come through resisting evil and doing what is good. This takes a little longer, but this knowledge builds man's character.

God expelled them from the garden. To allow mankind to eat of the fruit of life and live forever in his sinful state would be to sentence them to hell immediately. Although God expelled them from the garden, he did not destroy the tree of life. The tree of life is still there, waiting for redeemed mankind to come and eat.

The consequence of sin is death. Man cut off from God by sin is already dead. He is dead spiritually (Eph 2:1). Only physical death and hell waits for him. So man's life becomes a pilgrimage back to the tree of life. He can eat the fruit from the tree of life when his sins are washed in the blood of Jesus (Rev 22:14); the tree of life is in heaven--in the New Jerusalem. Although we live in a cursed world, by God's grace we can live with a glorious hope. God's unchanging love and his wonderful promises give us hope.