



Mark Twain once said, “We’re all like the moon—we have a dark side.” I think this is a pretty accurate description of our human nature. Despite our capacity for great good, we are also inclined towards great evil. This is what Twain is saying. On the bright side we have an inborn desire for God that forms our greatest longing and deepest ache. Nothing is more fundamental of our humanity than the inescapable drive toward God as the source and giver of all meaning. But something interferes. Not only do we fall short of honoring God with all He has created us to be; we often ignore our desire to even do so. The longing that burns at the core of our hearts disappears and our energies are captured by forces that are not at all loving. Where does that come from?

Have you ever stopped to wonder why toddlers always do things you hoped they wouldn’t or why teenagers instinctively rebel against authority? Have you ever questioned why a respected pastor or government leader would risk losing family and reputation for a moment’s pleasure or power? Have you ever been shocked to discover that a co-worker who seemed so solid turned out to be an imposter that took advantage of the weak? Have you ever thought about where that inner attraction to gambling, pornography or gossip comes from? Or why we may lose our temper just because the traffic is backed up in the church parking lot? These are questions we all have to face. The truth is we are all very vulnerable to temptation. So the question we have to consider is, how does the tempter do his work? What strategies does he employ to lure us away from the light of God’s grace? And what are its consequences for our lives?

This morning we are going to look at the anatomy of temptation from Genesis 3. Ray Stedman writes, “In Genesis 3 we have the answer to the eternal ‘why’ question that arises from within our hearts during times of tragedy or sorrow. Here is the explanation for over a hundred centuries of human heartache, misery, torture, blood, sweat, and tears. Here is the reason for the powerful fascination that drugs hold for young people today, the passion for power, the lure of wealth, and the enticements of forbidden sex to young and old alike. Here is the only reasonable answer for the existence of all these things. Remove this chapter from the Bible and the rest of it is incomprehensible. Ignore the teaching of this chapter, and the story of humanity becomes impossible to understand or explain. We cannot read this story without feeling that we have lived it ourselves...because we have. The Temptation and the Fall are reproduced in our lives many times a day. We have all heard the voice of the tempter. We have all felt the drawing of sin. And we all know the pangs of guilt that follow.”

From the Genesis narrative we have seen how God formed the first man and woman “*in His image*.” He placed them in a perfect garden paradise with explicit instructions. Adam was created to steward God’s creation on earth. Eve was created to be a helper

in that awesome responsibility. She was to be one with Adam in both purpose and in flesh. Together, they enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. He had created them for fellowship with Himself. He delighted in them, desired to communicate and counsel them in the work of His hands. Our purpose today is no different from that of Adam and Eve. God has given each of us something to do that is part of His divine command. He has called each of us to Himself that we might walk with Him in daily intimacy. And He has prepared others to walk alongside of us for fellowship and assistance. Every desire, every longing and every need that Adam and Eve had was completely met. At this point in history there were no deficits, no sense of separation, nothing to compare with what they had already received from God. Even the word **Eden** suggests satisfaction. The garden was a place of delight. And in this environment man was relationally fulfilled. So the first thing we see is that God was the total inner provision for Adam and Eve. Secondly, He had placed them in an environment that was compatible with those needs, and as long as they functioned within the boundaries He created for their protection and care, those needs were absolutely met. What a beautiful picture we get from this account.

How is it then that while living in perfect relationship with God and His creation the first man chose to rebel against it? How did this reversal take place? The scripture tells us they were tempted beyond their means. Disguised as a serpent the tempter came into the garden “*more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made*.” The original Hebrew translates “serpent” as “the shining one.” So this creature was not merely subtle and practiced in the art of deception but was also a creature of great beauty and seduction. 2 Corinthians 11:14 speaks of Satan disguising “*himself as an angel of light*” which implies that he has the ability to alter his appearance, like a chameleon changes color. Jesus called him a “*murderer*” and “*liar*” (John 8:44). The Apostle Paul called him the “*god of this age*” who blinds us to the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). But regardless of the many labels scripture attributes to him, he is the one whose massive pride caused him to deny God in rebellion and now “*prowls about like a roaring lion*,” seeking to persuade us to assert our independence in the same way as he did. His intent is to see us deny God and seek to satisfy our own desires. The Book of James clearly describes these strategies: “*Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death*,” (James 1:14–15.)

This raises a curious question—How could a sovereign and loving Creator allow evil to pervert the innocence Adam and Eve shared with Him? Doesn’t that seem a bit odd? It appears that the only sensible answer has to be tied to the doctrine of free will. God asks us, as He asked Adam and Eve, to respond voluntarily to His love. Any love that forces itself on another is not love at all. God

has given us the right to reject Him. He has created within us the capacity to make moral choices, for or against Him. And in so doing has given all of mankind the greatest of dignities, human freedom. But He also placed a limit on this freedom: ***“From any tree you may freely eat”*** he told Adam, ***“all this is yours, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”***

The great theologian Francis Schaeffer writes, “God simply confronted man with a choice. God could just as well have said, ‘don’t cross this street’ or ‘climb this mountain.’ God is saying, ‘Believe me and love me as a creature to its creator, and all will be well. For this is the place for which I have made you.’ It’s perfectly true that in making man as He did, God made the possibility of evil. But the mere possibility of evil is not the actualizing of it. And in making that possibility God validated choice and validated man as being significant in history. All love—man to woman or woman to man or friend to friend—is bound up with choice. Without choice the word love is meaningless. God has indeed made the possibility of man’s choosing, including the possibility of choosing wrongly. But God has not made evil. There is simply choice. When God finished creating there was nothing which was contrary to His character.”

So from this context let’s track the tempter as he moves to lure Eve’s heart away from God’s perfect will: ***“And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the tree of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.”’ And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”*** (Gen. 3:1–6.)

The first thing the tempter does in drawing Eve towards temptation is to awaken the wrong desire. This is accomplished through his appeal to the emotions. In the book of Samuel we see King David, on one sleepless night, indulging his visual lust upon Bathsheba who was bathing on a nearby rooftop. This is the way temptation first attacks, through arousing an appetite for forbidden fruit. And so it was for Eve. Satan drew Eve’s attention to the one thing God had specifically commanded, “Don’t go there!” We can see something of the craftiness of the tempter from the intent of his comments. Each statement he makes is designed to sabotage the woman’s relationship with God.

His first step is to implant in Eve’s heart a distrust of God’s love by challenging His credibility. In v.1, he raises the question, ***“indeed has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”*** The tone of this question is both significant and distinct. Hebrew scholars say that it is one of shock and dismay. “You must be joking! Did God really say something like that? Wow!!” In effect he is saying to Eve, “You certainly misunderstood Him or maybe He’s not the kind of God you thought He was.” And with this single question casts a small cloud of doubt over Eve’s heart: “Could God really have said a thing like that? If He loves without reserve, why would He forbid anything?” In asking the question

in this way the tempter focuses Eve’s attention on the limitations that God has placed before her. If we could climb inside of her thinking for one moment we would probably hear, “Hmmm! Why is God so restrictive? Why is He so intent on keeping me from all that I would have?” Rather than hear an attitude of gratitude for all that God had provided there is a subtle shift in perspective. A seed of doubt has entered a once unblemished heart. There is now a sense of restlessness and discontent.

Notice that the temptation comes at the point of limitation. God had told Adam and Eve that He must limit them for their own protection. “You may eat of any fruit, any tree, anywhere—but one.” And this is what God says to us as well! It’s in this sense that the tree of good and evil is still right in the midst of the garden of our lives. Whenever we are confronted with the fact that we are limited or powerless in some way we are put to a test. We have a choice to make—whether we will accept the limitations that God puts upon us, or not. Are we willing to trust that God restricts some things for our own protection and does so because He loves us as His children? So the tempter, ever so skillfully, creates a sense of deficit in Adam and Eve, that somehow God is withholding a blessing and can’t be trusted for their growth. We can see by this that the real temptation in the garden was not the forbidden fruit, but to fill that sense of deficit through meeting their own needs. They wanted to become, in a sense, their own god. As a result their reference point shifted. Rather than being God-centered, man became self-centered. And we’ve been self-absorbed ever since.

I pray that the parents among us would have a deep appreciation for God’s devotion to detail in this area. There are certain things my daughter Jessica doesn’t have the capacity to understand. But regardless, it’s so important that she honor my boundaries for her own protection. No parent wants to see their children play in the middle of a busy intersection. It may look exciting and sound like a great idea but because our love desires to protect them we can’t allow it. In the same way we have to decide whether or not we’re willing to let God be God and live underneath His authority in our lives; acknowledge that His wisdom lies far beyond ours and be willing to sit at the feet of the Creator and heed His instruction. Throughout the entire history of our race a refusal to accept this limitation has brought sorrow, heartache, and misery time and time again: whether it’s as a husband crossing a sexual boundary because the opportunity just happened to be there, or a person blaming the economy to justify his dishonest financial choices. Regardless of the specific, it’s man’s choice to deny the limitations of God that has brought so much pain to our experience.

Now in the tempter’s second statement, we can see that he denies the results that God said would occur. Verse 4 says, ***“and the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die!’”*** He openly denies God’s commandment at this point by lying about the consequences. But he does so in the realm of the future where the outcome can’t be tested. In a sense he is saying, “it’s not going to happen the way that God says. If He is indeed a God of love, then this can’t be a life or death matter. Don’t take it so seriously!” This is exactly what happens to us today. It’s so easy for us to think, “This is not a big deal; nothing is going to happen. I can manipulate my taxes or act out sexually and not feel guilty or ashamed. This can’t be a life or death matter. Give me a break.” Now, we

are not talking about physical death. We know that Adam and Eve didn't die on the day they sinned. But they died spiritually. They disconnected from the source of life. And they died relationally as well. Where they had been "one," united in spirit, soul and body, they were now two needy individuals with competing agendas. Before the fall they were naked and unashamed as they trusted God explicitly. There were no barriers between them, no protective insulation, no pretending, no concealment. But after the fall, they became aware of their differences and fashioned loincloths to cover their vulnerability. And we've been doing the same thing ever since. So the tempter cleverly twists the great truths about God's character and uses them against us.

Then in the third statement in v.5 he supports his lie with a distorted truth by saying: ***"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*** What he's saying is, "God gave you that command because he wants to spoil your fun, keep you on a tight leash. He really doesn't want you to roam free about the garden. He knows that when you eat of it you'll be like Him, without boundaries, knowing both good and evil." Now technically this last statement is true. If we look down to v.22: ***"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.'"*** That's exactly what the tempter said would happen. But there is a great difference. Adam and Eve had already known the goodness of God's created order. But by tasting the forbidden fruit they now had what they couldn't have had otherwise, an experiential knowledge of evil and its consequences. Every thought, every attitude, every decision now had the capacity for great evil. The serpent did not say that this would be the most disastrous thing that could ever happen. Their eyes were opened but now they were ashamed. So, the tempter's initial ploy is to arouse a desire for what God has strictly forbidden.

The second stage of temptation comes in the first part of v.6, engaging the mind with a ration of lies: ***"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate."*** At this point a terrible thing has already happened to Eve: the arousing of her emotions—that strong desire to bite into the forbidden fruit with all its seductive mystery—has already prepared her will to act. So when her mind comes into action it can no longer do so rationally. Her mind is no longer able to consider the facts as they are, but must rather act on the facts as they appear to be. This is the deadly power of the mind. We have this amazing ability to rationalize, to twist the facts so they accord with our desires. Look at the process here: Eve first looked upon the fruit in the same way that David looked upon Bathsheba bathing in the moonlight. She saw that it was "good for food," that is, it was physically profitable. And in so doing bit into the lie that man's deepest need is to gratify his desires and satisfy the flesh. "Never mind the long-range effects," the tempter suggests, "it will feel good." Then she saw that it was "a delight to the eyes." In other words it pleased the aesthetic sense in that "it looked good," in fact, too good to be true. So it is with us. Who can deny that sin is fun, for a minute. And it's this pleasure that makes it so alluring to our senses. The desire to have that pleasure, at all cost, lies at the root of all temptation. Finally, Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was desirable "to make one wise." She made a decision not to trust in God for her

knowledge but lean into her own understanding. She was convinced at this point that she needed more than what God had to offer. Eve didn't realize that her mind had deceived her. She had taken the apparent facts that the tempter had laid before her and justified them. So now the most reasonable thing for her to do was bite. How we fool ourselves in the same way! Our emotions get so caught up that we reinterpret reality. We can look upon something that is clearly wrong, know it to be destructive, hear countless warnings from those we respect and still be convinced that it's okay. How reluctantly the mind consents to reality! How powerful are the forces of rationalization when our emotions are already invested!

At this point Eve is in deep trouble. The last part of v.6 tells us that, ***"she took from its fruit and ate."*** The will surrenders and acts out the sin. This is the third stage of temptation. She acted on a lie and created her own rules in utter violation of her humanity. She gave also to her dumb husband, and he ate. Now I want you to notice something very curious here. In this passage, Adam has been absent from the text. But here we find that he's been with Eve, presumably all along. One would think that as soon as he heard the tempter seducing his wife and misusing God's word that he would have stepped in to protect the garden sanctuary. But he remained passive and so willingly joined in when Eve asked him to partake of the party favors. And we, as men, have been prone towards passivity in this area ever since.

Now, the brevity of the account speaks of the swiftness of the act. The actual sin is over in a moment's time because the battle was not with the will. Once the mind is committed the will simply follows. So when James says, ***"When lust has conceived it gives birth to sin,"*** conception may take nine months, but the birth happens in the twinkling of an eye. It's here that the tables start to turn as the compulsive side of our nature takes hold of us. The irony is that which we desire to possess actually ends up possessing us. Do you see that? Just ask the former stockbroker who waits in line at the Skid Row soup kitchen. He knows this story from the inside out. He'll tell you that's how he got there. So will the widowed mother of three who stood by and grieved while her husband was destroyed, step-by-step, by a progressive addiction to pornography. Or the gambler who has nothing left but the bitter memories of loved ones that never want to see his face again. Ask him. He'll tell you that, like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, the power he sought to harness for his own purposes spun out of control until, in the end, he became a shadow of what he was created to be.

We are often shocked when we hear that someone has gone astray after years of dedication to the Lord. It appears that it came out of nowhere. But it doesn't just happen out of nowhere. It may seem that way to us, but it's always a process that involves denying the goodness of God, resurfaced desires, obsessive thoughts and rationalization of the mind. The mind has been working for months before the slip occurs. Once that battle is lost the will simply acts. And once the action is committed we find out who's right, God or the serpent. God had specifically told Adam and Eve, "In the day that you eat of it you shall die." But the crafty snake had said, "You won't die! God wouldn't let that happen to you. He's a God of love."

One would think that after thousands of years of being badgered with the same lies, the same tactics, we would eventually catch



on and see them for what they are. And yet we are still listening to that voice which says, "You desire a little more wisdom? I have just the thing for you. You feel the need for sex? I have just the partner. No harm done. No negative side effects. Need greater status? I have just the means." His tactics are always the same. He always attempts to cast doubt on the truth of God's Word and the goodness of His character. He twists and warps it in the attempt to create a sense of deficit in our relationship with Him. He then holds out the promise of something that will make us more than what we presently are—more rich, more beautiful, more acceptable, more powerful, more valued or loved—while subtly downplaying any consequences associated with sin. He tries to get us to believe that in some way we are above the law and therefore not prone to the consequences others will experience. These are the big lies in Satan's arsenal.

But the truth is God never denies anything that is for our good. Anything that is for our eternal good, God makes available in His timing. James writes, "***Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.***" God is the source of all truly good things. What the Father gives is for our perfection. He doesn't tease us with a blessing only to snatch it back at the last minute. This is not to say that God may not withhold some things from us in order to work out something in our spiritual development, but ultimately everything our hearts truly desire is possible for us to experience in Christ. It's a lie of the tempter that God has a vast storehouse of internal and external blessings that are locked away, inaccessible to us. So don't believe it!

In closing let me suggest some practical steps we can take to overcome the tempter's strategies: First of all we must counteract temptation, not tolerate it. If we don't want to slip into darkness then we should stay away from slippery places. That's pretty simple! What this means is, if we want to bridle our lust then we should stay away from pornography, X-rated movies or strip joints. If alcohol has been a problem, then the corner bar or liquor store is probably not the healthiest place to be. By allowing those things that can trigger alluring images into our minds or our homes we're not counteracting temptation, we're tolerating it. How often do we pray for deliverance from some temptation only to turn right around and expose ourselves to it? As someone once said, "To pray against temptations, and yet to rush into occasions, is to thrust your fingers into the fire, and then pray they might not be burnt."

Secondly, we must remind ourselves that the long-term pain will erase any temporary pleasure associated with the temptation. Remembering the pain and loss we may have suffered in the past can be a great ally in the present. In the moment of temptation we need to ask ourselves questions designed to bring us back to this truth. "How will this affect our relationship with the Lord? How will our families receive the news of our fall? What about our credibility or our ministry?" If the cost outweighs the payoff, as any sober evaluation will prove, then we will be more prone to turn away and turn towards God's provision through faith. Hebrews 11:24-25 tells us, "***By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.***"

Finally, we must fortify ourselves against temptation through a daily renewal of God's word and the support of His people. The scripture, as God's blueprint, helps us navigate the potholes that mar the landscape of our world. Jesus Himself wielded God's word each time Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. But not all temptations can be handled in the same way. For example, every time sexual sins are mentioned in the New Testament, we are told to flee, to run, to get away. That's exactly what Joseph did when his master's wife tried to seduce him (Gen. 39:1-12). For the one who wrestles with the love of money, the scriptures teach that we can subdue it through a spirit of generosity and sharing our wealth with others (1Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19). If our working environments are laden with temptations, Proverbs 4:25 suggests that we put the leash of self-control on our wandering eyes to keep them looking straight ahead. Furthermore the scripture encourages us not to neglect the fellowship aspect of our walk. We need the support and prayer cover of one another as much as we need God's word to be a lamp unto our feet. And though our tactics may vary as we go through different seasons, my prayer is that we never get lulled into believing that we've arrived at some spiritual plateau and are no longer vulnerable. We are! But here's the good news. God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, "***but with the temptation will provide the way of escape.***" Both God and the tempter work most profoundly in the midst of our weakness. The enemy exploits us there so we might slip into darkness, while God the Father of All Creation perfects our weakness through His empowering grace

So as we take our leave this morning, I want to ask one last question—the next time temptation arouses a desire for what God has strictly forbidden and you're right there at the crossing point, what side of the moon will you choose to stand on?

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