

## The Enticement of Evil

by Ray C. Stedman

We come to Chapter 3 of Genesis with a heightened sense of anticipation. In many ways this is the most important piece of information ever conveyed to man. Here is the ultimate explanation for the tensions this morning among the nations over the Korean incident, or the war in Vietnam. Here we have the answer to the eternal “Why” that arises in our hearts in 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 LSD and marijuana hold for young people today; for the passion for power and 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 these things in the world today.

Remove this chapter from the Bible and the rest of it is absolutely incredible. Ignore the teaching of this chapter in history and the story of humanity becomes impossible either to understand or to explain. The most striking thing about this chapter is that we find ourselves here. You can't read through this story without feeling that you have lived it yourself, because, of course, you have. This account of the temptation and the fall is 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. We know the pangs of guilt that follow. This is why many call this story a myth. In the sense that it is timeless truth, perhaps, that word has certain rationality. But there are

other implications of the term myth, which make it unsuitable to apply to this account. It is timeless in the sense that this is always happening to mankind, but it is timeless only because it is also fact. It actually did occur. It happens continually because it did once happen to our original parents, and thus, we, their children, cannot escape repeating it. In that sense there is no chapter in the Bible that is more up to date and more pertinent to our own situation than this third chapter of Genesis.

The first person we meet in this story is not Adam or Eve, but the Tempter. Up till now in the story of Genesis we have had only two people brought before us, but suddenly now we are introduced to the Tempter. We will have some very important things to say about him in this study. Then the story of the temptation follows, revealing to us the strategy which the Tempter uses – that which he used in the Garden and which he still employs with everyone today. Then the chapter goes on to trace the results that followed the fall and the ultimate fate of both man and the Devil.

Let us first look at **the Tempter himself** and the first point of the strategy that he employs. The Tempter is introduced in the first sentence of Verse 1.

**Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. {Gen 3:1a RSV}**

I am sorry that this word in the Hebrew was ever translated “serpent,” because it has given rise to a very false idea about this story – that there was in the Garden of Eden a talking snake. I have no doubt in my own mind that if God chose to make a snake talk, he could. I accept fully the other account in the Bible of a talking animal, when God opened the mouth of Balaam’s ass and spoke to the prophet through the donkey. I have no problem with this. Even man can teach animals to talk, and surely God can do so. But the interesting thing is that this account does not really say that there was a snake in the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew word here is *nachash*, which means literally “to shine,” or in the noun form here, “a shining one.” If you read it that way, an entirely different being emerges.

**Now the shining one was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made ...**

Thus, the first description that we have of the Tempter is that he appeared to Eve as a shining one. Undoubtedly, as is true about other animals, snakes were created to represent this being who appeared in the Garden as the shining one.

For instance, in the rest of Scripture we can see that wolves were deliberately designed by God to represent and symbolize rapacious human beings, vicious people. Sheep, I believe, were designed deliberately by God to represent believers. If you ever get to feeling proud of yourself, go study some sheep for awhile. I come from Montana and feel somewhat of an expert in this area. It is clear from the Scriptures that pigs were designed by God to symbolize unbelievers, unregenerate people. They are used consistently in this way throughout Scripture.

It is no wonder then that snakes have become the universal symbol of Satan. When I was in the Orient a few years ago, I was struck by the number of times that snakes appear in pagan temples as representative of Satan. But here it was not a snake that appeared but a shining one, of whom snakes have become symbols. You will recall that Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians speaks of the serpent that tempted Eve and then goes on to speak of him as “an angel of light” {2 Cor 11:14}. So it was the *Nachash* that appeared, the shining one. He is also called in the Book of Revelation

that “ancient serpent” {Rev 12:9 RSV}, i.e., the original serpent, the Devil. There is thus no question about the identity of the one who suddenly appears here. It is the Devil in his character as an angel of light, a shining being, all glorious to behold, who now confronts the woman in the Garden of Eden.

We are also told here that he was “more subtle than any other wild creature.” The word subtle means “crafty or cunning.” He had a craftiness about him greater than any other living creature (literally, rather than “wild creature”), any other being that God had made. This shining one was far more subtle, more cunning or crafty.

Here then is the being whom Jesus Christ called “the ruler of this world” {cf, John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11}, and whom Paul refers to as “the god of this age” {cf, 1 Cor 1:20}, the malevolent being who is behind the philosophy of men, who dominates the thinking of the world, who has the ear of humanity and whispers into it a lie, an outrageous but very attractive lie, that makes men drool with desire. Here is the introduction of that being into the history of man.

This is the one of whom Martin Luther properly said, “On earth is not his equal.” No man is able to outwit the Devil. He has defeated the greatest saints of God at times throughout all of history, except for the Son of God himself: “On earth is not his equal.”

His craftiness is evident right from the beginning in that he sought out the woman to make his play to her. As we saw last week, woman was created with a greater “emoter” than man. It was a desire to play on this emotional nature that led the Devil to seek out the woman and to begin his temptation with her. He comes, as he always does, in disguise. He never appears with horns and hoof and a tail, announcing that he is Satan. If he came that way, everyone would reject him. No one wants to be evil, in that defiant open sense. But the devil appears in disguise as he does here, as an angel of light, appearing not to be bad but good, a shining being of wholesome character and benevolent purpose.

Let us move on to consider **the strategy which the Tempter employs**. This is most instructive because it is exactly the strategy he employs when he appears as an angel of light to us – not that we shall see visions of shining beings but the

personality that he exemplifies, the character in which he appears, is the same now as then. He is an angel of light. Scripture makes clear that the Devil can also appear as a roaring lion, i.e., he can strike in tragedy, in sickness, in physical evil, as he did to Job or to the Apostle Paul with his thorn in the flesh which Paul called the messenger of Satan. He can appear as a lion too, and strike fear into our hearts. But his most effective strategy is to appear as someone good, someone very attractive, something or someone who appeals to us as an angel of light. When he appears as such his strategy is always the same.

This is an encouraging thing. If you learn how to recognize the strategy of the Devil, you will find that he invariably employs the same tactics. There is a sense in which he is very limited. He doesn't vary his tactics widely. Sometimes we feel as if we shall never learn how to anticipate the Devil. But we can learn. The Apostle Paul said that he was not ignorant of the Devil's devices {2 Cor 2:11 KJV}. If we learn how he works, we can easily learn to detect him in our lives.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle James has described this strategy very plainly in one or two verses. In the first chapter of James, Verses 14 and 15, he says,

**... 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. {Jas 1:14-15 RSV}**

There is the strategy of the Devil. It is his strategy here in the Garden of Eden and it is his strategy in your life and mine. The only difference between us and Eve in the Garden is that, for her, the Tempter stood outside. She was innocent and he stood outside attempting to reach into her mind and thoughts. Since the Fall, the Tempter is within us and has access to us, so that we are never out of reach of temptation; we are always exposed. This is why we cannot run from it. We can go a thousand miles away but we will never thereby avoid temptation. We carry a tempter within us wherever we go. He has access to us continually.

Yet he always approaches us in the same three stages and those steps are outlined clearly in this text. Let me show them to you:

- As James has told us, his first tactic is to arouse desire. James says that every man "is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." The first step the Devil takes with us is always to arouse desire to do wrong, to create a hunger, a lure or enticement toward evil.
- The second is to permit intent to form and an act to occur. This is what James describes as "desire when it has conceived bringing forth sin." Notice that the symbol he employs is that of conception and birth. There is a gestation period in temptation, for once desire is aroused there occurs a process within which sooner or later issues in sin, an act that is wrong.
- The third stage is that the Devil immediately acts upon the opportunity afforded by the evil act to move in and to produce results which Scripture describes as death – "Sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."

This is the Devil's ultimate aim. Jesus said that he was "a murderer from the beginning" {John 8:44}. He delights in mangling, smashing, twisting, destroying, blighting and blasting. He delights in this. We can see his activity present everywhere; it is going on around us, in our own lives and in the lives of others. These are "the works of the devil," says the Scripture {1 Jn 3:8}. He brings them about by the process we see in this story.

We shall only consider today the first stage of this.

Let us watch now how the Tempter cunningly moves to **arouse desire** within Eve's heart.

**He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." {Gen 3:1b-5 RSV}**

Step #1 is to make the woman want to sin.

That is not very difficult with us. We respond quite readily to these desires, these urges within us to do wrong. But it was quite a different story with Eve, for, remember, at this time she was innocent – she trusted and loved God. She felt no wrong desire springing up from within her, such as we must wrestle with. It is the task now of the Tempter to awaken a wrong desire in her heart. The opportunity that he has to do so is provided by the gift of free will which God has given to man. This helps to explain the question that many ask at this point in this story: “How is it that the Devil was ever allowed access to the Garden of Eden in the first place? Why does the Tempter appear in this story? How did he get into the Garden?”

The only possible answer, of course, is that God allowed him to come in. He was permitted to come. He came with the full knowledge and consent of God because it is necessary that man be tempted. He must be able to respond voluntarily to God. The greatest gift God has given to us is the ability to make moral choices; we have the right to be wrong if we insist. As you well know, God himself does not violate this. He does not coerce us. He does not force us to be right. We have the right to reject his love, and the right to turn off his grace, refuse his mercy, and to go our own stubborn way. God allows that to be. It is the greatest dignity given to man.

Many people struggle at this point. They say, “Why does not God make us behave?”

Well, if he did, he would have taken away the greatest gift he has given. These same people are the ones who say, “I don’t want anyone telling me what to do. I want to make up my own mind.” But you can’t have it both ways. Because God is a God of love, and love never coerces, never forces someone to love in return, it is absolutely essential that man be given the chance to choose whether he wants to continue to love God or to go another direction.

So the Tempter comes into the garden, and, on the basis of the gift of free will, he is given the opportunity to tempt the woman. Free will is that which makes us men, but it is also that which makes us temptable men. Even the Lord Jesus lived in this same relationship. He was temptable. He was given the gift of free choice too, when he came as a man, and, therefore, he was exposed to the power of Satan to tempt.

Notice that in trying to arouse desire in this woman that the Tempter follows a threefold plan. This again is very instructive to us, because it is the same way in which he will move with us:

1. His first step was to implant distrust in her heart, a distrust of God’s love. He raised the question, “Did God say you shall not eat of any tree of the Garden?” He means by this, obviously, “Could God have said a thing like that, really? Do you really know God that well? Do you think that a God who loves you would say that kind of a thing? To ask you not to eat of a tree of the Garden?” With that question he plants a seed of doubt in the woman’s heart. He is seeking to alter the image of God in her thinking. He is saying, in effect, “Either you misunderstood him and he didn’t really say that; or, if he did say it, then obviously he is not quite the kind of a God that you have imagined him to be.” With this single question he casts a small cloud of doubt over Eve’s trust in God, and the response of love in her heart. Could God have really said a thing like that?

Have you ever heard this question? Does God really love you enough to forbid something to you? Can a God who loves you forbid anything to you? Is it really love if he forbids something? The question hangs over the whole human race and has done so ever since this first occasion in the garden.

You will notice that the woman’s answer is perfectly forthright, without guile. She says immediately,

**“We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” {Gen 3:2b-3 RSV}**

There are some who have attempted to accuse the woman of adding to God’s statement when she says, “Neither shall you touch it,” because that was not part of the prohibition given in Verse 17 of Chapter 2. I do not think we need to view it that way. Doubtless the woman is giving a fuller account of what God had said. Very likely he did say, “You shall not touch of it.” God is thereby

saying, “Look, this tree is harmful and therefore don’t get near it. Don’t expose yourself to its temptation.”

Most impressively in the Lord’s Prayer we are taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” {Matt 6:13, Luke 11:4}. Notice the prayer doesn’t say, “lead me out of temptation once I have gotten into it.” No. By the time we have gotten into it we are already half lost. When we feel the raging of desire within us, it is no time to start praying. The Lord teaches us to pray beforehand, “Lead me not even into the realm of temptation. Don’t let me come to the place where I shall feel this tremendous arousing and awakening of desire within.”

It is instructive also to notice that temptation always comes to us at this point. God said to the man and the woman, “Here is something in which I must limit you. There is only this one place. The whole world is yours, the whole planet. You may eat of any fruit, any tree, anywhere, except for this one tree.” This is highly significant because we discover that God is forever saying this to us also, in one way or another. Have you noticed this? In this sense, the tree of good and evil is still right in the midst of the garden of our lives. Wherever we may turn we are confronted by the fact that we are limited in some way. The testing of our humanity is whether we are willing to accept and abide by the limitations God puts upon us.

This is always the nature of testing. Are you willing to accept your limitations? As a child, are you willing to accept the authority of your parents in the home? Are you willing to be a child under the authority of your father and mother? As a student, are you willing to accept the fact that you are a student and not a mature person yet? That you can’t make the rules of life for you are still learning them? You are not yet in a place to dictate what is the curriculum or what is the body of knowledge that you should be taught. You don’t see that plainly. You can’t. As a married woman, are you willing to accept the authority of a husband in your life? Are you willing to recognize that God has made a distinction between the sexes and that the man is given a role of leadership that the woman does not

have? That is the testing place in your life. As a man, are you willing to accept the fact that you are a man and not God? That there are things you cannot know and mysteries which you can’t yet explore? You are not an infinite being; you are a finite creature. You don’t know everything. You must sit at the feet of God and listen to his voice and learn from him. You are not equipped with all that it takes to explore life adequately. You are a man. Are you willing to accept that limitation? Throughout the whole history of our race the violation of this limitation has brought sorrow, heartache and misery.

2. Now see how the Tempter moves in quickly. He now dares to deny openly the results that God has stated will occur. “You will not die,” he says. He openly substitutes a lie for the truth, but he does it in the realm of the future where you can’t check the results. Notice his cleverness here. “It is not going to happen as God says. Don’t take God so seriously. Surely these issues are not that important. If God is a God of love, then this can’t be a life or death matter. After all, don’t make a federal case out of this! It is really rather trivial. It can’t be that important.”

Do you see how this is repeated in life today? “These things are simple matters which have to deal only with secondary issues of life. This is not what the Bible says it is – a life or death matter – at least you can’t take it that way if you believe in a God who loves you.” So the Devil cleverly uses the great truths about the being and character of God to plant a doubt in this woman’s heart and to support it with an outright lie, declaring that what God had said would not happen.

3. Then notice the third step. Quickly he moves in to support his lie with a distorted truth. At breakfast this morning some of us were discussing one of the cults of our day. One of the men at the table said, “It is always true, isn’t it, that every false faith is made up of a certain amount of truth? Ten percent error and ninety percent truth, mixed together, but ultimately it is the ten percent of error that leads men astray.” Notice that this is exactly the Devil’s tactic here. He said to Eve,

**“God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”  
{Gen 3:5b RSV}**

Now that was perfectly true. Look at Verse 7 of this same chapter: “Then the eyes of both were opened.” And look also at Verse 22, “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.’”

This is exactly what the Devil said would happen, but with this difference: Their eyes were opened and they did become able to know good and evil as God knows it, as we saw in a previous message. They learned to relate everything to themselves. They used, as the measurement of good and evil, their own feelings. That is what God does. But what the Devil didn’t tell them was that this would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to them. For man to be like God, in that respect, is to interject an element of sheer disaster into human experience. It all proved true. They thought that the Devil meant something wonderful, something expansive, something glorious, would happen. But when their eyes were opened it was shameful and sordid and sad.

“Oh,” you say, “how diabolically clever.” Exactly! That is the way the Devil always does it. That is the story of LSD today, isn’t it. It appears to offer something wonderful, something exciting, something far beyond anything the person has ever experienced before, something that will open the mind, expand the whole of one’s senses, and give a wonderful experience, yet when it is actually experienced it is something else entirely. Eyes are opened but not to what is expected.

But now the Devil is through with the woman. This is all he is after. He has succeeded in arousing desire, and that is all he wants. The other two stages will automatically follow, and they do. All that he wishes to do is to leave Eve standing before the fruit, watching it in all its luscious fascination, hanging there tantalizing her, offering her an experience she never dreamed would be possible. When he has done that he has planted the seed he wants in her heart. He has caused her to

slightly distrust God’s love, to believe a lie, and to expect an unwarranted result. That is all he needs to do. Now she stands aroused and deceived in the presence of the fruit and the Devil can safely leave her even though she has not yet sinned. He is fully certain that the desired results will follow.

What went wrong, you say? How could she have avoided this? Where was the battle lost? As you look through the account you can see that the battle was lost right after the first sentence, when the Devil raised the question, “Did God say...?” When she accepted mentally the idea that God was not fully to be trusted, from that moment on she was whipped, she had lost. Notice that immediately after that the Devil becomes bold and comes right out in the open to lie to her blatantly, openly, boldly. And she believes him from then on.

Have you experienced this kind of thing? This is the process that is followed when the Tempter tries to get you to have an affair with another man’s wife or another woman’s husband. This is the process he follows when he wants to get you involved in a shady business deal, or to cheat in an examination, or simply to tell a lie in your relationships with others, or whatever else it may be in the manifold ways by which temptation comes.

The interesting thing about this is that there was nothing wrong in arousing desire in this woman’s heart, because God does that too. God is at work also to arouse our desires, to make us want things, to stimulate us and activate us, to move us out. The difference lies in the way he does it. If we don’t get anything else out of this story we will have learned a tremendous lesson if we learn the difference between the way God and the Devil arouse desire in the heart of man.

How does God do it? Well, it is always the same way. Let me quickly give it to you. It is a threefold process again:

- First, he demonstrates his love to us. That is always God’s first approach. He comes and touches us somehow, blesses us, pours out upon us his sunshine and his rain, all the blessings of our lives. He comes in Christ and moves in among us and lives with us, touching us, blessing us. He gives himself. He demonstrates his love. That is the first step.

## The Enticement of Evil

- Second, he declares a promised result. He gives his word to us. He declares what will happen. He opens to us a new and vast vista of what life can be like.
- Third, he offers us his presence to bring us to that promise, to bring about its fulfillment. Jesus said, “Come unto me,” {Matt 11:28a KJV}. “If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him,” {Rev 3:20b KJV}. God offers to enter life personally and to be with us. This leads on to fulfillment, to blessing, to joy and oneness.

Do you see the contrast between the way God works and the way the Devil works?

- The Devil first implants a distrust of God’s love. The Lord demonstrates his love.
- God declares a promise to us. The Devil declares a countering lie.
- God strengthens it by offering himself, the truth itself to us. The Devil distorts that truth and makes it look like something else, makes it vague, hazy and undefined.

That is the way you can tell the difference.

Let me ask you a question as we close this message. You are being tempted, some of you, right now. Young and old alike, you are being tempted to do wrong, take a course that is wrong, make a decision that will lead to death or disaster down the line. How do you know whether it is from God or Satan? It all looks so good, doesn’t it? It always looks like it will offer you something worthwhile. Well, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I feel cheated, deprived, or limited right now? Do I feel as though God is somehow holding out on me, that I am not being given all that I ought to have, that my rights are being violated, that I am being cheated of something life should give me? Well, then you are listening to the voice of the Tempter. That is his first approach. “Did God say this? Would a God who loves you say a thing like that?

Would he hold out on you? Would he postpone the blessing he wants you to have?”

- Then ask yourself, does what you want contradict the truth that God has revealed? Can you find in the Scriptures that what you are after, what you are seeking, is wrong, yet all the world is telling you that it is right and that it will bring you blessing? Does the Word of God stand in opposition to what you are after? Then you are listening again to the Tempter’s voice for he lies, outrightly, blatantly, lies. He says that it will all turn out differently than the revealed word says.
- Finally, ask yourself, “Is the promised result rather vague, rather uncertain, unspecific? Is it just a general promise of blessing or happiness; or is it specific, is it clear, is it precisely defined?” If it is unspecific and vague, you are listening again to the voice of the Tempter. This is why the Scripture comes back again and again to this simple thing, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding,” {cf, Prov 3:5 KJV}.

You are but men. You are human. You don’t know all there is to know about life. You can’t know. There isn’t anyone who knows. You desperately need the revelation of truth which can come from God alone. No one else can supply it. No other book will give you the answers. There is no other place where you can find out what life is all about except in the Word of God. Therefore,

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. {cf, Prov 3:5-6 KJV}**

### Prayer:

How long it has taken us, Father, to learn the truths that are declared to us in this passage. How ignorant we have been. What dupes, what stupid victims we have been of the Devil’s lies, so many times in our lives. How foolish we have been to distrust your love, to believe that you who love us could tell us a lie, how foolish we

## The Enticement of Evil

have been to be impatient, to want everything now, to insist that all your blessings be given to us now, to fall victim to the delusion that it all must come in this life, life is short and we must grab what we can while we can. Father, open our eyes,

help us to see that the only place of fulfillment, the only place of happiness, the only place of joy, is in a heart that trusts and completely rests with quiet acceptance upon your love and grace. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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