# A Lent 1, Genesis 3:1-19, jhd, 2017

“Lead us not into temptation,” we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. This assumes that as long as we are in the wilderness of this world we will be tempted to sin against God and others. How do we *recognize* the devil and how do we *avoid* and *overcome* temptation?

It’s too bad the devil doesn’t dress in red tights with horns and a pitchfork, and a pointy tail. Then we could recognize him and run away. Satan does not slither around secreting the scent of sulfur to alert our senses! He is the master of disguise, wearing an evil grin from ear to ear while prowling the earth seeking whom he may devour. St. Paul tells us that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. You cannot recognize him by outward appearances. The tricky Tempter traffics his own brand of truth, appearing soooo spiritual, incredibly beautiful and wise, and promising pleasure beyond measure.

In Genesis, chapter 3, the devil appears as a serpent, who was craftier than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. Had Satan appeared to Eve in all of his devilish terror, she would have fled from him. He does not bare poisonous fangs or hiss. Eve is not at all repulsed by the sight of this creature. In fact, Hans Holbein--16th Century painter, paints the devil’s face to look almost exactly like Eve’s[[1]](#endnote-1), all the more to flatter and seduce her.

Masquerading as one of God’s good creatures, the devil spoke to the woman. Notice that he does not come right out and attack God. No, he presents himself as a pious seeker after spiritual truth as he ever so gently quizzes Eve: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” The question seems innocent enough, but it is deadly because it leads Eve to question God’s Word. It leads her from listening to God to weighing what she wants and to elevating her feelings above God’s Word.

Sounds familiar doesn’t it? Satan’s tactics have not really changed after all these years. The tempter most often begins with that old question: “Has God really said?” The question change a bit, like, “Of course it is in the Bible, but is it still applicable today?” Or, “Yes God said it, but does he really MEAN that?” Or, “You have your interpretation and I have mine.” But when all is said and done it is still the same deceptive and doubt-inspiring question, “Did God really say…?”

Satan then plants two lethal seeds of temptation into Eve’s ears and into her heart. First, he suggests to Eve, “Don’t take God too seriously.” But, in reality, when you are dealing with God you ARE dealing with life and death. He is the Lord who has the power to heal and kill. Notice how Satan now openly contradicts God’s Word as he says to Eve, “You will not surely die.” In other words, he argues that God is a liar. To us he says, “Go ahead and do what God forbids; you only live once, enjoy yourself, it’s not going to hurt anything.” But, in fact, this fruit that God forbids leads to death—for Adam and Eve, and each of us.

There is a second seed which Satan implants in Eve’s heart. It is a seed of distrust in the *goodness* of the Father, the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth. Adam and Eve had everything they needed and more in Eden. They had the beasts of the forest and field, the birds of the air, the fish of the streams, lakes, and ocean, under their dominion. They had fruit trees of unimaginable variety, berries, and nuts to adorn their table. They had each other to embrace without shame or fear. They lived their whole life under the blessing of the Heavenly Father. It was, after all, Paradise.

In the midst of all that bounty and beauty Satan speaks a word that Eve would believe. Satan says, “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.” In other words, God is holding back something. Would it not be better to be like God rather than simply be His creature? Then notice what happens to Eve. She sees that this fruit that is forbidden by God’s Word is good for food. It is attractive and appealing. And it is a desirable thing to be wise, like God, knowing good and evil. She eats and gives to Adam and he eats. Their eyes are opened to their nakedness. Imagine that! Notice how they deal with their sin. We often react the same way. First comes shame and the cover up; in their case fig leaves. How do you try to hide from God? Is your “covering” as flimsy as theirs?

First shame, then comes blame. The man blamed the woman, and even tried to blame God! “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate!”  It’s never good to blame God for your sins!  But fallen people do this in their arrogance.  “God, you made me this way!”

But God is innocent.  Ps. 51:4 shows who is to blame when God judges: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.”  When God judges sin, He is blameless and just.

Eve blames the serpent, as do we. “The devil made me do it, we say.” Yet, God in His mercy puts the blame back on us through the mirror of His Law.  His Law reveals the full extent of our nakedness by showing our sins and how we deserve nothing but curse from God.

Adam and Eve are judged. Life will be hard. Work will be sweaty and difficult. Adam will struggle against thorns and weeds to reap a harvest from the soil. Eve will desire her husband only to have him rule over her and that which is at the very center of her womanhood, child-bearing, will be a pain. Then there will be death: “Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.”

It is a terrible history, this account of our first parents and their fall into sin. It is a history that we have inherited from Adam—one from which we cannot escape by our own efforts. *See Romans 5:12-19.* But there is help for you. More than help, there is salvation and rescue in THE SEED of Woman. Her seed has with his bruised heel crushed Satan’s head for you. You see, the Seed of the woman in none other than Jesus Christ. He is the One who endured in His body every temptation which we must face, as we heard in the Gospel reading. Satan came into God’s garden and defeated Adam and Eve. But Jesus Christ, the Greater Adam, went into the wilderness, Satan’s turf, and He overcame the Tempter at the very point where Eve failed, trusting the Word of God. Jesus answered each temptation with the words, “It is written…” HE remained the sinless Son of God for you. Only he could answer for your sins by way of a different TREE. On the tree of the cross He placed Himself under the judgement of God for you. It was a tree of death for him, but a tree of life for you. There he defeated sin, death, and the devil. “He who by a tree once overcame, now by a tree has been overcome.”

The victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over Satan is your victory as you receive the fruits of his labor on the tree. Temptations will come. You cannot avoid them. In fact, Luther says, “Whenever faith begins, temptation soon follows.” But our eyes are not to be focused on the temptations as if once we figure them out, we can defeat them. Rather, you do well to focus on the perfect life, which Jesus lived for you and the sinless sacrifice he died for you. Look not at yourself, your will power, your progress, but look to the Holy Things that Jesus gives you to cleanse you from all sin and to strengthen you against the devil’s onslaughts. As the author of Hebrews says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In times of temptation, you are never alone. We have God’s Word that confounds the devil. We have the fruit from the Calvary tree. And this is a fruit, which gives life when it is received in faith. There at this altar Jesus shares His holiness with you as he gives you the kind of fruit that delivers life instead of death.  At His table, under simple bread and wine, Jesus gives you fruit from the TREE of His cross that gives you the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.  Here He feeds you His good food, which strengthens you to overcome temptation in this wilderness called life.  Here is your paradise until you enter heaven. Eve received life from the side of Adam. We receive life from the side of Jesus. From the side of Jesus came water and blood. Water in your Baptism makes you a new creation, Paradise restored. Blood and body in His Holy Supper sustain you to the Last Day when the New and Greater Eden will be revealed. Amen.

1. Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98-1543). *Allegory of the Old and New Testaments.* From Engelbrecht, Edward (editor). *To All Eternity: The Essential Teachings of Christianity.* Concordia Publishing Housed, St Louis, MO: 2002. Page 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)