

Foundations: The Fall
By Jason Huff
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Psalm 90; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; Genesis 3:1-9

Our final Scripture reading today is Genesis 3:1-9. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 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 you will die.'" "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." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 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. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"”

Sin is not a word we hear much today. It’s probably because the word has lost meaning in a post-modern society that may occasionally pay lip service to God but doesn’t think about God much. We talk about breaking the law, about crime and punishment. We hear about those things a lot. They make news all the time, even the silly things.

For example, actress Lori Laughlin and her husband recently served stints in prison for trying to buy their children entry into the University of Southern California. Her husband argued that because he spent two months in solitary confinement due to a COVID scare, he should be released to house arrest for his last four months. The judge disagreed, maybe because their house is worth \$8 million. Don’t we wish we could be “imprisoned” in that kind of luxury! But the question is, how is what they did through a shady consultant a crime when many people with money use their power and donations to influence schools? It’s bribery either way – it’s just that some ways of doing it break the law, and others don’t. It’s not about morality but the law.

Laws change all the time based on who is in charge. Once marijuana was considered immoral and illegal. Now we’re not sure if it’s immoral, since it has medical uses. It’s illegal at the federal level, but legal in many states. Yet we have people serving long prison sentences merely for owning some. Good or evil, right or wrong? We don’t know. One president signs an executive order to stop something; another president signs an executive order to start it back up again. Most of us break laws we don’t even know are on the books. And all of us break the law in our cars, usually on a daily basis, whether we speed, forget a turn signal, or have a tail light out. Most of us break the law without ever even thinking about the morality of it, whether what we’ve done is good or bad. Our thinking about morality, law, and our responsibility before God have gotten all twisted up.

Our deep confusion about ethics and morality comes from an even deeper problem we have: sin. Today's passage is the first time sin enters creation. Sin is not the same as breaking a human law. Sin is the defiance of God and His commands and His ways. Sin is against God first and foremost. When we learn the power of sin and how our ancestors fell into it, we can see the warning signs to avoid it. We can begin to understand why our first problem is not breaking human laws but our rebellion against God.

Genesis 3 begins with an introduction to the serpent. At first, we might consider this to be a sign of mythology, since obviously serpents don't speak. But in the New Testament era, writers like Paul talk about this as an actual event. Late in the book of Revelation, we learn that the serpent and Satan and the devil are one and the same – the tempter and accuser who deceives the world. We don't know if Satan takes the form of a serpent or possesses one. What we do know is that this did not seem wildly out of place to Adam and Eve in their state of innocence.

The serpent was “more crafty” than any of the wild animals YHWH had made. This wording suggests that the serpent is not an animal at all but something else entirely. This word “crafty” is also unique. The word in Hebrew – *arum* – is rare and ambiguous. Sometimes it means wise and resourceful, other times cunning and devious, about 50/50. The serpent came off as deeply intelligent to Adam and Eve.

Here we spot our first lesson on how to spot sin: *expect sin to be disguised as “the smart move.”* We think of serpents as hideous now, most of us hate snakes, but it wasn't always so. In next week's passage, the serpent is cursed to slither the ground, but not before that. There is nothing inherent in creation that would make the serpent into the bad guy. In fact, it showed more intelligence than the beasts Adam had named.

When we encounter sin, we shouldn't expect it to look like a “dumb” move. People do dumb things all the time that are sins, right? But plenty of immoral things that people do are crafty. They seem wise. I'm not cheating on my taxes, I'm outsmarting the system. What you call a bribe, I call money well spent. I outmaneuver my competition though slick dealing – it looks smart. Thomas Edison didn't invent the light bulb and Ray Croc wasn't the founder of McDonalds, but many history books will tell you so because of the crafty way they did business. But the point is, the “smart” way to do things may not be the godly way. Often, sin comes disguised in a cloak of seeming intelligence.

Let's move to what the serpent says to Eve. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" Eve replies that they cannot eat from the tree in the center of the garden, even going beyond what God had said previously to say that they can't even touch it or face death. Then the serpent says, “You will not die!”

Here's the next truth we learn: *expect sin to be disguised within questions about God's instructions and goodness!* The serpent starts the conversation with a blatant misrepresentation about what God had commanded. The serpent acts flabbergasted. He says, “God forbids you to eat from any of the trees in the garden?” Of course this isn't true. All the trees are good for Adam and Eve except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the serpent plants the seed of doubt to lead them down the wrong path.

Surely God didn't say that, did He? Oh, well, He didn't say quite what I said, but He still put a restriction on you; He still put a leash on you. Oh, that's too bad. Wow, that's not what I expected from a God who's supposed to be all perfect and all good. You see where this is leading, right? We see it constantly. The church even falls into it hook line and sinker sometimes, creating restrictions God never set. Then hapless people reject the real limits God put in place for their benefit. It's a devilish trap.

Think about the versions of this trap we've heard. Christians are supposed to hate sex? No? Oh, but it's only supposed to be in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman for life. Hmm, seems awfully restrictive to me, awfully bigoted. Christians can't drink alcohol at all? No? Oh, but not to excess. Hmm, seems like God's a killjoy. Christians can't listen to music? No? Oh, but Christians are supposed to focus on what is right, pure, good, and holy. I guess rock and roll is right out, then. The list goes on and on.

The trap is set when we hear that God's instructions can't be trusted because God is not actually good. We learned last week that God sets limits for our own good and flourishing. The devil gets us to thinking that the limits prove God is not good, when God sets them in place for our well-being. This doesn't mean that there aren't appropriate times and places to question God – Job certainly questioned why he suffered so massively. The psalms cry out, wondering why great evil and calamities happen. And yet the Bible affirms that God is good despite our sufferings. Questions aren't the problem – it's questions that lead us to doubt God's goodness.

Now we launch into the heart of the devil's scheme. What does he say to the woman? "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The woman sees the fruit has three properties: good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom. She eats and has Adam eat too.

Yet another truth we learn here: *expect sin to look attractive*. The serpent was smart, so he made sin look like the wise decision, he also makes sin look attractive. Sin looks fun! Sin looks like it will bring happiness. Looks good, tastes good, brings benefits. Never expect sin to look like the awful rebellion against God it is. It looks like the best option available at the time.

Some sins, we understand that attractiveness. Others, we don't. For example, we might think, "How does violence look attractive?" In the moment we get angry, we have a choice – get our weapons ready and dig a trench, or swallow our pride and walk away. One means indulging feelings; the other means holding back. Violence looks like it will get us what we want, so we let the anger consume us.

Or another example: how does theft look attractive? For most of us, it's not the sin that stops us; it's the fear of getting caught, of jail. But having something for free that would cost us money? Very attractive. I've used this example before, but it's worth mentioning. JCPenney's floundered when they introduced "everyday pricing" to their lineup. Rather than constantly running massive sales, they reduced their prices to good deals all the time – less expensive than when the sales were running. People didn't want that. We like the feeling of getting something for nothing. JCPenney righted itself by bringing back sales, even though shoppers were paying more for the same thing. We are attracted to the idea of sin even when we don't commit it!

Disobedience to God is attractive to us for another reason that the serpent brings up to Eve: *sin, for a moment, makes us our own gods and gives us the illusion of control.* When we sin, we're saying, "My will be done, God, not Thine." Part of the temptation is that Adam and Eve could become like God. And in fact, they do become like God in knowing good and evil. But they also believe that in that moment, they know what is best for them, not God. They believe the lie that God doesn't have their best interests at heart, and only *they* do.

Especially in the last year when a lot of things are out of our control, sin gives us the idea that we can be in control of *something*, that this something is mine. We medicate our pain with various sins because God isn't fixing that pain at the speed or in the ways we'd like Him to. That desire to be in control, to have our destiny in our own hands, is very alluring. Even if we know we're disobeying God, that desire for control can get to us if we don't remain vigilant.

Now here is where things get nasty. What we don't often understand is that the knowledge of good and evil isn't a sin. Eating fruit isn't a sin. The sin is Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's command. And this is a truly grievous, grave, dangerous sin. There is literally no other way Adam and Eve could have sinned at this point – not one. The only way that Adam and Eve could rebel, they do so.

And so they are stuck with the knowledge of good and evil. They think they're ready for it, but it is a complete and total disaster. It is like handing the keys to a Porsche to a five-year-old, just old enough to work the pedals, not tall enough to see the devastation he'll leave when he hits the gas. They have the knowledge of good and evil, but they don't know what to do with that knowledge. In fact, all those issues of ethics and morality I brought up at the beginning of the sermon, how what some of us find morally despicable other people find morally honorable? It's happened for centuries. That's the result of humanity receiving the knowledge of good and evil. We have all the information and none of the godly wisdom to know what to do with it.

The results are catastrophic in other ways too. There's wordplay going on here in Hebrew that's memorable. Remember how we said the serpent was crafty, that he was *arum*? That's what Adam and Eve thought they would be after eating the fruit from the tree – smart, intelligent, shrewd, *arum*. Instead, they found themselves *arōm*. That is, naked. Only one vowel sound different, but a huge difference! Instead of being clothed in God's wisdom, they realize they are completely unclothed.

The first thing Adam and Eve experience is not awe at their knowledge but shame and embarrassment. Their experience is radically different from their expectation. In this we can see another truth to remember: *sin has consequences far beyond our expectations.* Adam and Eve did not see their shame coming. In their innocence, they didn't understand what nakedness meant until they experienced it from their new point of view. Their viewpoint changes instantaneously; what is important suddenly shifts course. One minute, they are caretakers of a garden, with a worthwhile goal and purpose; next minute, they are hiding from God and trying to sew fig leaves together to hide from each other. None of the appeal of the fruit means anything now.

No young man looks at graphic videos on the Internet and thinks he'll form an addiction and stunt his ability to have real relationships. No teen getting drunk on the weekends thinks about how a DUI will affect her ability to get a job. No one having an affair thinks they could lose their whole family and their home and their circle of friends. Everybody goes into sin at least partially blind to the consequences.

We sometimes see someone "get away" with something and assume that our actions will also be similarly consequence free. But we don't see all the consequences that we're so very good at hiding. We expect *arum* and we get *arom*. We expect wonderful pleasure and we get a fleeting glimpse of pleasure with a whole bunch of pain. Even in those circumstances where we experience happiness from our sin, it's not the joy God intends for us to have.

Perhaps the biggest unexpected consequence of all our sinning is moral confusion. We weren't meant to be in constant opposition to God. And so we have to come up with emotional pressure valves to deal with our guilt. We start believing that truth is relative or irrelevant. We find ways to tell ourselves that what we did isn't really that bad, that we deserved it, we owed it to ourselves, that despite the consequences, it was worth it. We might even start to believe that despite all the negatives, all the problems we bring upon ourselves by rebelling against God, that we do know better than God. We don't need Him.

That's very sad because the last phrase in today's passage brings us hope in the darkness. Adam and Eve hide because YHWH is walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and YHWH calls out to Adam, "Where are you?" God is omniscient. He knows everything. He knew this would come about. He knows where Adam and Eve are. God is unsurprised by all of this. He could have immediately shown up, knocked the fruit out of their hands, zapped Adam and Eve and the serpent into non-existence, and been done with it. He doesn't do that. Instead, He intentionally goes looking for Adam and Eve. He calls out to them – "where did you go?"

Here's the beautiful, bittersweet truth we'll end with today: *in the midst of our sin, God still looks for us*. God did not end His relationship with Adam and Eve when they rebelled against Him, when they sided with the serpent over Him. He had every right to, but He didn't. He looked for them. He looks for them to illustrate to them (and to us) that they are lost. They have now set themselves on a path far different from the one laid out for them. At the same time, God looks for them because all is not lost. There will be severe consequences that we'll look at next week; the relationship between God and humanity has been broken. But we matter to Him. Adam and Eve are the ones hiding, not Him. They and their offspring far, far after them – even down to us – we are so important to Him that Jesus will come to rescue us, to seek and save the lost, even at the cost of His own life.

We can hide from God – hide forever, if we'd like. But God seeks the lost. Scripture tells us that God will find those He has called His own. And so, we should be careful of all the lures of sin we've learned today – to watch out for the seemingly wise path, the easy and attractive path, the path that questions God's goodness to us, the path that seems to give us control over God. We as Christians, of all people, should want to follow God's instructions that lead us to good, true, and eternal life. But know this – even when we stumble and fall, all is not lost, for God has a rescue plan for sinners like you and me.