

Evil 9-17-06

Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV)

¹ 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'?"² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ 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.'"⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ 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.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.

In the previous chapters, we saw that God placed Adam and Eve in Eden. It was a paradise in which all their needs were met. They were God's vice-regents in the earth, ruling over all animal life and caring for the garden in which they lived. (Psalm 8:5,6) The trees and plants of the garden provided all their dietary needs. The climate was such that they needed no clothing. Everything in the garden was very good. They even had the choice to disobey should they choose to. The only prohibition that God gave them was not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Genesis 2:16-17)

¹ 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'?" Where did this serpent come from? Wasn't everything in the garden good? Philosophically speaking, where did evil come from? The Bible doesn't give us the exact details, but we can piece together from prophecy and Biblical accounts what happened and why. In one of Isaiah's prophecies about the king of Babylon, Isaiah seems to jump from speaking about that king to the power that moved the king. Isaiah calls him Lucifer, or light bearer. He goes on to tell of the five "I wills" of Lucifer. They speak of his desire to take over the very throne of God. (Isaiah 14:13,14) From this prophecy, theologians have speculated that Satan (adversary) was once an archangel of God. Some even believe that he led the angels in the worship of God. Being one of the most beautiful angels in heaven, pride filled his heart. He led a third of the angels in rebellion against God. (Revelation 12:3,4)

Jesus called him the prince of this world. (John 12:31) In the struggle between Satan and Jesus in the wilderness, we see that he could offer the kingdoms of this world to Jesus if Jesus would just worship him. (Matthew 4:8,9) The Apostle Paul calls him the ruler of the power of the air and the god of this world. (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4) John the Beloved called him the ancient serpent, and the dragon. (Revelation 20:2, 12:9)

Commented [notes1]: 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: Psalms 8:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Gen 2:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." Isaiah 14:13-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. Rev 12:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. John 12:31 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Matt 4:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Eph 2:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor 4:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. Rev 20:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 9 The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Rev 12:9 (NIV)

Apparently, just as man was able to choose to rebel, some of the angels were also given that same freedom. The fact that they did does not mean that God created evil. I will share with you the conclusion that I have come to, and I have since read of others that share the same view, but it is certainly not the final word. You can find a number of different viewpoints in the theological world. I do not think it possible that a holy God that abhors evil would create something like evil. (Zech 8:17) If He did, would He not then be the source of all the destructiveness that evil causes? The Bible teaches us that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1John 1:5) The prophet Habakkuk says God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. (Habakkuk 1:13a) So where did it come from?

First, is evil a thing? What is evil? We know that evil exists. You cannot honestly look at the events in our world and say there is no evil. When people use others as if they were animals, when adults would abuse children, when someone would blow them self up in a crowd of women and children or lob a hand grenade into a school yard, the existence of evil is manifestly evident. It seems to begin in the heart of people. (Matthew 15:19) What is it in their heart that would cause them to commit such acts?

I can best wrap my mind around it when I think of it in terms of light and dark. Darkness is not a thing, but the absence of light. Throughout the Bible, light and dark is used to compare good and evil. (1Thessalonians 5:4,5) If the analogy is such a strong one, then is evil anything other than a turning away from the goodness of God's will and ways? In other words, it is deliberately choosing to shut the light out of an area of one's life. It is not a created thing at all, but a rejection or perversion of God's goodness. It didn't have to be created. When Lucifer rebelled against God, he didn't grab hold of something God made. He intentionally chose to do something contrary to what He was created to do. If our understanding is correct, he had one of the highest callings of any of the angels. He would choose not be satisfied with what should have satisfied him. He wanted more. (Hebrews 13:5) Watch how this seduction to want it all plays into the way he tempts Eve.

It seems that Lucifer used the serpent and spoke through it using its natural gifts in a perverted way. Did other animals talk? Eve doesn't seem shocked to hear a snake talk, but we really don't know. Perhaps Eden was a bit like C.S .Lewis' *Narnia*. *He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* The first temptation was to question what God had said to Adam. Adam must have told Eve. I hear this question as something like, "I can't believe God limited you like that!" The serpent is implying that he knows something Eve doesn't, some secret knowledge. He is hinting that God's motives are not entirely pure. Did God really say you should not commit adultery? Did He really say that Jesus is the only way to God? Did He really say I must forgive others? The temptation is the same today. It is a temptation to look at the very clear expressions of Scripture and try to reinterpret them with wiggle room to fit in what I want. The boundaries of the Word of God are there for our protection. (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

² *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the*

Commented [notes11]: 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.
Zech 8:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.
Hab 1:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.
Matt 15:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.
5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.
1 Thess 5:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
Heb 13:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
13 and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?
Deut 10:12-13 (NIV)

garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die." She should have turned and walked away from a creature that would question its Creator. She should have known not to have a conversation with anything that would question what God said. Contemplating evil is often our first mistake. (Psalm 141:4) If we will use the fruit of the Spirit, self-control, we can refuse to carry on the conversation. Our response can be that of Jesus to Satan, "Get behind me!" (Matthew 16:23)

Commented [notes18]: 4 Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies. Psalms 141:4 (NIV)

Her defense of God actually revealed her own weaknesses. When she pointed out that she could eat from the trees, she neglected the use of the word "every". She was downplaying the generosity of God. She didn't mention that there were two trees in the middle of the Garden. She isn't thinking about The Tree of Life which means she is setting aside the goodness of God. She has used the simplified name for God, Elohim, instead of YHWH Elohim of the last chapter. She drops the name of the personal covenant God for something less personal, Creator God. She was following Lucifer's lead, for that is the simplified name that he used for God. That was ignoring God's desire to be in communion with man. She also added that you must not touch it. Adding to God's commands can get you in trouble. In doing so she changed what God said and making it more likely that the rebellious act would be committed. And she left off the word "surely" before die. This downplayed the certainty of justice. Satan had struck a chord in her, and her response proved it.

Commented [notes19]: 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Matt 16:23 (NIV)

She downplayed the generosity of God, neglected His desire to be in communion with her, added to His word, and minimized the certainty of justice. This encouraged the serpent to defiantly contradict God.

⁴ "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Lucifer now shows his true colors. He is saying God is a liar. He is impugning God's character. He is implying that God is withholding something from them because God wants it all for himself. He is saying that his word is better than the word of the One that spoke him into existence! He took Eve's neglect of the word "surely" and pounced on it. "You are right Eve, he said, You won't surely die!"

It is an often observed reality that people tend to accuse others of the things they are guilty of themselves. Satan is the father of lies, but he accuses God of lying. (John 8:44) He is the one whose character has become flawed, but he accuses God of having flawed character. He is withholding the truth from Eve while accusing God of withholding the truth. Watch out when accusing others to be sure that you are not guilty of the same. The Apostle Paul warned us of this. (Romans 2:21-23)

Commented [notes20]: 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

He is also dangling his own bait before Eve, the bait of knowledge apart from God's Word. There is the allure of darkness. What is it like to experience what we are forbidden to do? Satan gives a pleasure that is very temporal and yet very seductive. It is the allure of pornography, of every kind of vice, of unfaithfulness. It is the Sirens' song on the rocky shore that lures us to untimely death. (John 10:10) Drug statistics tell us that older adults today are dying at an alarming rate from drug abuse. The baby boomers who liked to experiment in the realm of the forbidden are

Commented [notes21]: 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? Romans 2:21-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

getting too old for their bodies to handle the pressures that drugs put on their systems. Giving in to that seduction is killing them.

Satan was telling her, "You will be like God!" What a line! People are falling for that one hook, line and sinker today. Who needs a god when you can be your own, call your own shots, declare whatever you want is right for you. "Has God said? Who cares? This is what I say!" How seductive. Postmodern culture is defiantly throwing out the Word of God and deciding for itself that there are no absolutes. What they don't realize is that what they do doesn't change the fact that God still means what He says. He is the unchanging God whose very nature declares the absolutes of eternity.

Did you notice the subtlety at which Lucifer went about getting Eve to focus on the forbidden instead of the abundance of blessing? There was a fully stocked Garden of Paradise and Satan got her to focus on the single prohibition. He does the same with us. If she would have remembered the word "every" and started listing off all the good trees she could eat from, things would have come into perspective. Count your blessings!

Forgive me for telling this story again, but it perfectly illustrates what I'm trying to convey! I was sitting in a classroom with two rows of ceiling lights, each row on a separate switch. The teacher pointed up to one burned out bulb and said that this passage was like Satan pointing at the one burned out bulb instead of all the ones that were working. At that very instant, the burned out light came on and a hush came over the classroom. I don't know how many people got the point. God was demonstrating that He has withheld no good thing from us. (Psalm 84:11) He asked Eve not to eat of that tree because she was better off not doing so. She really would die. The father of lies wanted to destroy her just like he wants to destroy us.

⁶ *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.* He got her! He saw an opening into her heart through the way she edited God's word. Notice the way that the invitation to turn toward evil captures the imagination of man. She looked at it and saw that it could be satisfying. No one denies that sin is satisfying for a time. (Hebrews 11:25) The catch is that the price is not worth the satisfaction you receive. It looked good aesthetically. Many forbidden things appeal to the eye. Finally, it was knowledge apart from God's word that closed the deal. She wanted forbidden knowledge. She wanted what God had not provided for her to know. She wanted to taste it, see it, experience it. (John 2:15-17)

She took it. There was the touch without death, contrary to the change she had made to God's word. Maybe God was being stingy. She didn't die after all! And she ate it. I imagine a great angelic gasp. All this beautiful creation climaxing in the creation of a creature in God's image that would walk and talk with God, now deliberately choosing to rebel against the God who gave it all to her. It will result in untold suffering and death through the ages. Because of this fall, we are all born in sin. We don't have to learn to turn from God; we do it by nature. No one has to

Commented [notes23]: 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.
Psalms 84:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.
Heb 11:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.
17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.
1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

teach us to be selfish, we just are. Such rebellion deserves death. Now she would not only physically die one day, but at that moment her spirit died. The intimacy she had with God ended. She now knows good and evil. She can now imagine more evil, more rebellion. She turned to her husband and committed her second evil act. "Look, I'm not dead. Join me." Sin loves company.

The Apostle Paul wrote that Adam was not deceived like Eve was. (1Timothy 2:14) Did the glory that clothed her fade or did Adam just see a transformation in her countenance? Adam knew that he would be alone again if he did not eat that fruit with her. In order to remain with her, he deliberately chose to fall with her. It still happens today. One spouse will choose to turn from their faith and the other follows to be in unity with them. One spouse chooses drugs and the other joins them. One chooses to be lukewarm, and the other gives up the battle and gives up following hard after God.

Did you notice Adam was with her and said nothing? The pattern of God was turned upside down. God spoke to Adam, Adam relayed it to Eve, and they both obeyed God. Now the serpent speaks to Eve, Eve relays it to Adam and they both disobey God. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this pattern and warns us to not fall into it. (2Corinthians 11:3)

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. Now they know good and evil because their hearts can readily turn from God. Now when they look upon one another there is lust, the taking of another like an object to use for self-gratification.

This is the first mention of religion. Religion is trying to cover the sin and shortcomings of man with something that man does. They wanted to short-circuit their lust by covering themselves with fig leaves. How temporal! Instead of running to God and repenting and pleading for forgiveness, they tried to find a way to deal with it on their own. This was the first lesson in self-help. You can fix it on your own. They could have written a book, *Lust Covering Leaves* or *Be Naked No More!* Thankfully, God had His own solution, a solution not only for Adam and Eve but for everyone of their descendents including you and me. The sentence could not be changed, so He came to receive the sentence in our place. (Romans 5:17)

Why would God do such a thing? Why would He put us on a mutable footing, knowing we would eventually give in and fall, knowing that He would have to pay the price in our place? My guess is that we would never have known how much He loves us. We would never have understood the extent of His mercy and grace. It was the only route that free choice could ever have taken, and it is the only way we could learn to love while having freedom to rebel. We walk through it on a daily basis. Christianity is the only faith that matches with the reality I see around me. We live in a fallen world. We can choose evil. All the while, God is constantly at work to teach that His way is the good way. He is teaching us that the joy of abundant life is in focusing on all He has already given us instead of lusting after the forbidden that results in death. (Ephesians 5:20) What is your focus today?

Commented [notes26]: 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.
1 Tim 2:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
2 Cor 11:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.
Romans 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Eph 5:20 (NIV)