

These are familiar stories in the Bible. We have all heard them. Adam and the woman are such a part of our culture that you could probably stop anyone on the streets of Gainesville and they would know something of the story.

So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

It would seem that the serpent was telling the truth. They had been warned that they would die if they ate, and they did not die.... at least not immediately, after all Adam lived to be nine-hundred thirty years old. The serpent told them that their eyes would be opened, and indeed the narrator tells us that their eyes were opened.

Later, when they are discovered by God, the woman complains that the serpent deceived her. But in fact he did not. He told her that she would not die, and she did not die. He told her that her eyes would be opened, and her eyes were opened. What neither she nor Adam realized was the full extent of the consequences. They did not die, but they experienced shame. They did not die, but they experienced brokenness; they lost their innocence. They wanted to cover themselves from either others' sight.

Earlier in Genesis, God commands Adam not to eat from that tree immediately before God creates the woman. When God confronts Adam and asks if he has eaten from the tree, Adam blames it on the woman. Worse than that, he says to God, “the woman YOU (God) put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

The woman was created after God gave the command, and yet it is clear from her conversation with the serpent that she knew that God had commanded them not to eat from the tree. When God confronts the woman, she ignores what Adam said, and blames the serpent.

Their actions result in broken relationships. God tells the woman that her husband will rule over her. Ironically for years Christians used that verse to oppress women under the guise that God had made men the ruler over women. They seem to have missed the fact that this was part of the curse and not a part of the original design of the way the world should be.

One of the amazing things about the Bible is that there is always more to learn from it. Reading this story again I realized that the woman is not named Eve until after they are expelled from the garden of Eden. Adam names her, much like he did for all the animals. God had told Adam that he was to rule over all the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. Adam named all of

these creatures that he was to rule over. After they were expelled from the garden, Adam names Eve as well, perhaps showing the first unfortunate sign that he was going to rule over her as well.

Adam and Eve were tempted. They gave in to their own desires rather than the desires of God. They were tempted to ignore what God had said and do what they wanted.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus is sent out. He spends 40 days in the wilderness before being tempted three times. The devil comes at Him quoting from the very same Scriptures. His temptation was different than what we saw in the garden of Eden. He was tempted to interpret the Scriptures to suit His own purposes, and He refused.

In all the years since, the temptations that we face are much the same. Will we live our lives guided by the word of God, or will we go our own way? Will we be changed by the Word of God, and find ourselves being molded and shaped by God's will, or will we mold and shape the Word of God to suit our own desires?

I was tempted (no pun intended) to end this sermon right here. It would have been easy to leave you with that simplistic message. But it is not that easy. Listen to Paul's words from his letter to the church in Rome:

“I have the desire to do what is good,

but I cannot carry it out.  
For what I do is not the good I want to do;  
no, the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do,  
it is no longer I who do it,  
but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work:  
When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being I delight in God's law;  
but I see another law at work in the members of my body,  
waging war against the law of my mind  
and making me a prisoner of the law of sin  
at work within my members.

This was Paul's struggle, and it is a struggle which many Christians can understand completely. I want to do this, I do not want to do that; so why do I do that and not this? It is dangerous ground, because it is easy to cast ourselves as helpless.

"It's not my fault, I couldn't help myself."

"I didn't mean to do it, it just happened."

"The devil made me do it."

Observers of our society have commented on how much victim mentality is out there. We place blame easily and seldom take responsibility. Of course there are such things as accidents,

unexpected results, and times when things simply do not turn out the way we thought or hoped or intended that they would. But there are also times when what we want outweighs what we ought to do, and we know it, and we do it anyway. Call it stumbling, call it a momentary lapse of reason, call it a mistake, but call it what it is: sin.

Sin is a word fast disappearing from our vocabulary because it is seen as being too judgmental. There was a time when the language of sin was used as a weapon against others, where anything which went against my personal understanding of the Bible must be sin. We have experienced the backlash against that. We have learned that there are such things as addictions, who cannot simply decide to change their behavior. The Protestant ethic of setting your mind to do something and then do it was also too simplistic, it ignores some simple facts of life. Some of these changes have been for the good. But some of these changes have left us unable to talk about sin, or accountability, or discipline.

What can we do? We can start with ourselves. We can strive to do good and resist the evil. We can admit those things in us which are not Godly, not Christ-like, and we can talk with someone about our desire to live differently. If we decide only in our own minds to change and do not tell anyone, we have put ourselves at a disadvantage for two reasons. The first is that there is no one there to check up on us and see how we are doing. The second is that there is no one there to help us. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Carry each other's burdens. That is our calling this day. Find one thing — however large or small it may be — find one thing which burdens you and find a trustworthy friend who can bear it with you. Pray together as to how you might be relieved of it, and be disciplined enough to keep at it when success is not as easy as you hoped.

Temptation has been with us since the beginning, only 3 chapters into the book of our common history. We may not be able to rid ourselves from it entirely, but we are called to try. We are called to pray for God's help but not stop there. God is not a garbage collector, who comes by and picks up all the trash of our lives. God has given us the freedom and the responsibility to take action on our own, with the promise of the Spirit to be with us to the end of the age.