

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Genesis 3:1-7, “The Story of God: Fall”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 1/16/2022**

This is the second chapter in our series entitled, “The Story of God.”

The Bible is a story primarily about God  
and God’s activity in the world.

In taking a closer look at God’s story,  
we can better understand how we tell our own stories.

Last week we saw in the Genesis 2 that God created the world  
in such a way that everything is connected,  
that even our very bodies come from the earth.

We noticed that Adam, which is the Hebrew word for person,  
was created from the *adamah*, the Hebrew word for soil or earth.

We saw that humans were given the task of being  
God’s representatives on earth, the care takers  
of the vast and plentiful garden of God.

That helps me tell my own story. The daily tasks of work and chores,  
no matter how profound or mundane, are all connected back to God’s  
original intention for humans to be care-takers of the world.

Because of this I can see my daily routines as avenues  
for fulfilling God’s purpose in my life and in the world.

But there’s a problem with that.

Even when we recognize our daily lives and work  
as a good gift from God, our efforts  
inevitably fall short of our intentions.

We don’t work as well as we wanted to,  
we don’t accomplish the good we hoped to,  
or our good work and accomplishments  
support our family while hurting other parts of creation.

Beyond that, whether we're working or resting,  
we often find ourselves implicated in greed, exploitation,  
selfish ambition, pride, and forgetting about God altogether.

Genesis chapter 3 helps us understand how the plot thickens in this way.

So I want to simply walk through these seven verses  
making some observations,  
and considering the role this scene has  
both in God's story and in our own stories.

### **Chapter 3:1-7**

In verse one we are introduced to the serpent, who is described as more,  
"crafty" or "wise" or "cunning" than all the other  
wild animals God had made.

The serpent says to the woman (who has not yet been named),  
**"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from *any* tree in the garden'?"**  
The fact that an animal is talking doesn't seem to bother Eve,  
and the question itself could be  
an innocent enough theological inquiry.

The woman's reply gets it mostly right.  
She says, **"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.'"**

Now if she had stopped there, she would have answered correctly,  
but then she expands on God's actual prohibition by adding,  
**"and you must not touch it, or you will die."**

In verse 4 the serpent replies, **"You will not certainly die."**  
That, it turns out, was a true statement in terms of physical death.  
The serpent knows as well as God does that physical death  
will not result from their disobedience,  
at least not immediately.

So with this simple phrase, **"You will not certainly die,"**  
the serpent introduces a half-truth which calls into question  
whether God and God's order of creation  
can be fully trusted.

The presence of the serpent may show us that God intended  
for humanity to be vulnerable or susceptible to temptation.

The reason for this is that being vulnerable necessitates  
their identity as creatures.

Not that God intended for us to sin,

but that we humanity has always had a fundamental need for  
trust and dependence on our Creator—even before sin.

Perhaps we have never been as strong as we think we are.

In verse 5 the serpent presses the issue further,

**“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes  
will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**

Again, the crafty serpent’s statement is not completely a lie.

In fact, it is very close to what the Creator said,

aside from the implication that such knowledge is a good thing  
which God is selfishly keeping from humanity.

And that’s the basic temptation in this passage—

to doubt the good intentions of God toward creation.

The temptation of the serpent is to believe  
that the ordering of God’s creation

somehow shortchanges humanity of something.

Verse 6 shows the effect of the serpent’s misdirection—

- **First**, the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food. There’s no way she could have known that, it’s speculation on her part. Speculation that God was keeping something good to eat from them.
- **Second**, the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was pleasing to the eye. The aesthetics of the tree take on more value than trusting the instructions of God.
- **Third**, the woman saw that the fruit was desirable for gaining wisdom. This is based on the serpent’s misinformation that the “knowledge of good and evil” is a knowledge that humans should strive for.

Are speculation, appealing visuals, and the promise of secret information  
sufficient reason to disobey God’s command?

At this point in the story, it's almost like one of those  
bad suspense movies where everyone in the theatre  
knows that it's not a good idea to pull back the shower curtain  
where the killer is hiding.

But despite the advice that we hurl at the screen,  
the stranded and oblivious teen does it anyway.

In the same way, despite our protests to just walk away,  
to eat instead from the tree of life,  
the woman takes the fruit and eats it.

And then (as though it were an afterthought), the narrator tells us that  
**“she also gave some to her husband,  
who was with her, and he ate it.”**

Now we see that this was no one sided lapse,  
that it was not merely the woman who was deceived,  
but that her husband was a witness and willing participant  
in the logic of the serpent.

Verse 7 confirms the true portions of the serpent's statements  
“You will not certainly die,” and “your eyes will be opened.”

They do not die, and their eyes are opened.

The result of this opening is a new awareness of their nakedness.

Some people interpret this as referring  
to the discovery of sexuality for the first time,  
which is completely ridiculous.

Sexuality was part of God's design for humanity from the beginning,  
and no doubt the goodness of sexuality  
was not lost on ancient humans.

Instead, their eyes are opened to the presence of shame  
between them for the first time.

They sew fig leaves together to cover themselves.

And that's it. The great, “original sin” was completed.

Now I don't know about you, but when I look around the world and see  
all the suffering and pain and toil in our work  
and childbirth and all the corruption of the earth  
and strife among humanity,  
I would expect the explanation for all of this to be...a bit more dramatic.

I almost feel apologetic, because while it's a good story  
and there are a lot of insights we get as we enter into it,  
I can't help but feel like this explanation  
for our present condition is less than satisfactory.

But there's one thing that we haven't looked at very closely  
that helps me with this.

The one thing we learn about God in this exchange  
is that he has this characteristic of, "knowing good and evil."  
And it's that knowledge which is the primary desire  
of the woman and her husband. So what exactly is it?

It's not just the recognition that  
"good pleases God and evil doesn't please God."  
And I don't think it can be the knowledge of evil  
that comes from committing an evil act,  
because God wouldn't have that knowledge either.

Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke describes this knowledge  
as the power to make decisions about what is good and what is evil.  
It's the power of making ethical decisions  
of deciding that *this* is good and that *this* is evil.

Waltke also points out that an individual's ability  
to make such decisions is relative to their overall comprehension.  
As commentator Robert Capon puts it, it is,  
"the knowledge of how to manage both good and evil  
at the same time as God manages them."

We can use our minds to try and manage this ecology of good and evil,  
but because our knowledge is limited our ability is also limited.  
But God's knowledge of the world is unlimited,  
and so God's ability to discern what is good  
and what is evil is also unlimited.

Only God is able to truly know the depths of good and evil.  
Humans certainly experience their share of both,  
but we cannot fathom the moral universe in its entirety.

In that sense this thing that humans were told not to do  
is actually something that they were not capable of doing anyway.  
Robert Capon says, “There are no rules against any *real* thing  
Adam and Eve might want to do.  
There is only God’s warning that they should  
not do something *unreal* with the  
tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

That’s deep. Before this man and his wife eat of this tree,  
they had only the life of God to focus on.  
They had no need to discern ethical issues,  
they were naked and unashamed.  
And they did not attempt to wield the power of determining good and evil,  
instead they trusted God and his determinations of such things.

So what’s at stake in the eating of this tree are the basic issues  
of power, identity, and autonomy.  
It’s the basic question of who’s in charge here.  
Who gets to decide what’s right and what’s wrong.

Has this discussion of humans attempting to manage good and evil,  
seeing it as a power grab we were unable to control  
really taken us any further in explaining  
what’s happened since then?  
Does it really make sense of the violence we suffer and contribute to?

The reason this scene doesn’t strike us as particularly horrible,  
the reason it doesn’t seem to be a satisfactory explanation  
is that even though rebellion against God  
has begun in the human spirit,  
nothing has really happened yet.  
It would take time for the virus of human autonomy from their Creator  
to produce the full effects of the sickness we now see in human history.

And this is where this chapter in God's story helps us to tell our own story.  
We all think we know how to determine right from wrong.  
We all think we can impose the right standards  
either through our religion or through our political systems.  
And every time our sets of rules and laws break down,  
every time that people continue to be hurt  
despite our attempts to manage good and evil within families,  
religions and governments, we are amazed.  
Each of us aspire to that perfect religion or that perfect family  
or that perfect government or that perfect individual discipline  
that will be able to control good and evil.  
But this chapter in God's story tells us that these efforts are destined to fail.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul tells of the only way  
around this predicament: **“But now, apart from the law,  
the righteousness of God has been made known.  
This righteousness is given through faith  
in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”**

The virus of human autonomy came through humanity attempting  
to wield the knowledge of good and evil.  
But God has made known to us a vaccine for this sickness  
that comes apart from the Law.  
If we seek to be healed, we must depend  
entirely on the One who created us.  
We must turn away from our drive for power.  
In Jesus Christ, God has opened up a way for us  
to let go of our desire for control, and to return again to God.  
In turning back to dependence on God,  
we remember that we are created beings.  
We remember that we weren't intended  
to run the show to begin with.  
In Jesus Christ, who is sometimes called the second Adam,  
we find a new pathway to the tree of life.  
We find a new pathway back into the garden,  
back into connection with God and with the earth.  
That's a story I need to hear again and again.