

“Calling God a Liar”

Genesis 3:1-7

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Dr. Jerry Nelson

The President of our country presents too obvious an example not to use him this morning.

It seems clear from his own words that he believes in God, he believes in the 10 commandments as a summary of God’s standards for human beings.

I don’t know if he is truly a Christian or not. I am sometimes encouraged by his professions of faith and then greatly discouraged by some of his actions.

But my sermon today is not about the President.

It is about what apparently happens to him that happens to all of us.

For one example, he believes adultery is wrong.

He also apparently has very narrowly defined what “adultery” means.

He contends that anything that falls outside that narrow self-made definition is not adultery.

It is as if he is thinking this way:

“I know God has said not to commit adultery.

“BUT has God REALLY said not to do these other things?”

With amazing self-deception he convinced himself over and over again that what he was doing was not actually wrong.

I, obviously, don’t know what was going on in the President’s mind but I do know my own mind and I’ve heard from enough others to believe it could have been something like this:

“I know what the Bible says but sometimes I have difficulty understanding what it means.”

I know there are things we are not supposed to do but “Has God really said not to do these other things.

“Furthermore I know the Bible says God loves me.
And if he loves me he surely wants the best for me.

“He made me the way I am, with these desires and passions and needs, surely he wants me to satisfy those desires.

God is good, he wouldn’t deny me those things.
Surely God has not REALLY said, don’t do it.

I am not for a moment, in any way, excusing the President.
He just seems to be such a public illustration of the very thinking that goes on in the mind of every human being since the day of Adam and Eve.

Oh, the serpent, the snake, was crafty, wily - he knew exactly how to entice and trap his prey.

And that day he set his gaze on Eve.
(If you remember, there was 50/50 chance she’d get picked)

Slithering up to her he said, “Did God REALLY say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

Back in Chapter 2:8-9 of Genesis we are told that God placed the man He made in the garden-paradise called “Eden”.

And in the garden God caused many trees to grow that were “pleasing to the eye and good for food”.

In the middle of those pleasing/good trees were the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.

In Genesis 2:17 God said to the man, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

From the text it is clear that Eve was just as aware and understanding of God’s word on this matter as Adam was.

Both this text, as we will see next week, and many other places in the Bible make it clear that Satan was behind the snake's words.

The snake was not evil but it was used for evil purposes.

And so Satan, using the snake, begins his work on Eve by posing a very innocent sounding question but a devastating one:

"Has God really said?!"

"Eve, I don't want you to start doubting God, but are you certain you have it right?"

"Eve, I'm not opposed to God, I'm asking if you understood."

"Use a little judgment here, Eve."

What sounded so innocent and so logical was a trap - Eve was being asked to set herself up as the judge of what God "really" meant.

It's the oldest trick in the world - literally.

Eve fell for it - she became the judge of God's word.

We do it today.

God says don't commit adultery and we say well does that include such and such?

Two Christian young people deceive themselves by suggesting that touching each other in certain ways isn't fornication.

Don't steal God says and so we just "fudge" a little on our deductions.

Don't lie God says and so we just don't tell the whole truth.

God says, "Give sacrificially" and we say, "Did God really say?"

God says, "Love your neighbor" and we say, "Did God really mean that person?"

God says, "You will be my witness" and we say, "Did God REALLY mean me?"

The path to sin begins with a questioning of the word of God. Oh, how we equivocate - creating all kinds of ambiguities to conceal the truth.

Again I use the President, and I quote, "It depends on what your definition of "is" is." WHAT?

I wonder if God at times wants to cry “What part of “NO” don’t you understand!”

He is a crafty one - this snake!
Not only does he ask “Did God really say”
but he goes on to mis-quote God by saying ,
“Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”

In those words, Satan plants a seed of doubt that he will water in just a minute.

“Did God really say you must not eat from ANY tree in the garden?”

In her response, Eve will partially correct the serpent but she has already been drawn into his web.

For here he plants the idea that SURELY God wouldn’t do such a thing?

It would be un-Godlike to forbid you to eat from those trees.

Do you think God is so narrow-minded that he would put you in such a desirable place and not let you have it all?

Certainly God is not like that, is he?

The seed of doubt is this:

What IS God doing? Certainly he wouldn’t forbid me any good thing - **or would he?**

That seed of doubt is planted but Eve responds:

“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.’”

If you compare what Eve here says with what God actually said back in chapter 2 you realize Eve added to God’s words. She added the words, “and you must not touch it”.

By the serpent's earlier words, he had very subtly suggested that God might forbid Eve something that was good.

Now he did it by saying "Has God REALLY said, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"

But Eve fell in the trap and began to wonder if God might in fact be too narrow minded, overly strict.

By attributing to God the words, "don't touch it" she has presented God as more restrictive than he is.

Giving herself even more reason to question God's judgment, God's word.

Maybe God doesn't have my best interest in mind.

Eve's lack of clarity on what God has said, left her open to her own imaginations, her own additions, her own interpretations.

How many times has evil played havoc with our minds because we didn't even know what God has said - ignorant of so much of the Scripture, too often misquoting God on what we think we know, and attributing to him things he never said.

Like Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof - we are forever saying, "as the good book says" when it never said anything of the sort.

We don't know the word of God and we begin to doubt the word of God.

Eve's first mistake was sitting in judgment on the word of God.

"Did God really say?"

Her second mistake was not even knowing the word of God with accuracy.

Well she **was right** in one part of her quotation of God - she said, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden...or you will die."

But the wily old snake was ready for her.

He had her judging/deciding what God meant.

And he had her doubting God's judgment.

AND NOW he goes for the kill:

“You will not surely die... For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.”

In the Hebrew bible the word “no” appears first in this sentence:

“No (incredulity), you will not surely die!”

It is as if Satan is saying,

“Come on Eve, God isn’t to be taken that seriously.
You won’t die, that’s an exaggeration.

“Yes, it is good to take God into consideration in your decisions but don’t get carried away by taking too literally the consequences you have heard. God isn’t that cruel.

I’m certainly not suggesting you abolish God from your life - having a little religion is a good thing - but don’t take it too seriously.

Religion is good for weddings and funerals and the sentimental times in life, but in the rough and tumble life of work - don’t get too caught up in religion. (Thielicke)

You won’t die - it’s not that serious.

But the last thing the serpent says, puts the last nail in Eve’s coffin.

“Eve, God doesn’t have **your** best interest in mind.”

Genesis 3:5 “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

As we will see in a minute there is some truth in what Satan here says, but what is the overt implication?

“Eve, God is keeping something from you.

“Eve, God’s motives are not pure.

“Eve, you had better take charge here if you are going to get what will really make your life good, make it better.

“Eve, you can’t trust the goodness of God - because he has his own interests ahead of yours.

He first got her to question **the word of God** and now he has her questioning **the goodness of God**.

And the two concepts feed on each other - If I can’t trust the goodness of God I can’t trust his word. And if I can’t trust his word I can’t trust his goodness.

“Eve, there is more to life than God is allowing you to experience. God in his selfish way would deny you pleasure and would even make you go through all kinds of negative things just so he gets what he wants.

God says, “Christian, don’t marry a non-Christian.”

But we wonder if God knows what he is talking about and if he has our good in mind.

Maybe this is one area of life where I know better than God what is truly good for me.

God says, “Put the kingdom of God **FIRST** in your life and all the things you need will be supplied”.

But we say I don’t trust that my good is what God has in mind here - so I will do it my way.

God says, “If your brother has something against you, go and be reconciled to your brother.”

But we say “I can’t do that, it was them that started it, they are wrong, restitution and reconciliation are too expensive - it wouldn’t be good for ME.

Go ahead, Eve, take a bite - it’ll be good for YOU!

And when you eat it you will be as God.

Derek Kidner says of this verse:

"This climax is a lie big enough to reinterpret life and dynamic enough to redirect the flow of affection and ambition. To be as God, and to achieve it by outwitting him, is an intoxicating program. God will henceforth be regarded, consciously or not, as rival and enemy...

So the tempter pits his bare assertion against the word and works of God, presenting divine love as envy, service as servility, and a suicidal plunge as a leap of faith." (Kidner 68)

Oh the tragedy when we think we know **more** than God and we know **better** than God.

And when we doubt the goodness of God it is a small step to becoming an agnostic - whether we admit it or not.

When we doubt God's goodness we begin to wonder what we can really know about God at all.

We begin to wonder if he is even there.

We begin to wonder if maybe we are alone in the universe.

Helmut Thielicke put it this way, "When we doubt the goodness of God the fatal switch is set for just such a precipitous slide (as doubting the very existence of God)." (Thielicke 141)

When we come to verse 6 we see that Eve's defection of the heart bears fruit in actions:

Genesis 3:6 "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for good 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."

As soon as Satan got her to distrust God, he knew she was finished.

She thinks she is lunging for real life as she reaches out for that fruit but Satan knows she is plunging to death.

Interesting that when her mind and heart no longer trusted God she saw things differently:

All along the fruit had been pleasant to the eye and good for food.

But now she saw it through eyes of covetousness - longing to have what belonged to God alone.

Convinced she was the maker of her own destiny - that she was responsible for her future - that God couldn't be fully trusted - she took charge.

Even the way Moses tells the story indicates what temptation in life is like.

When he tells about the mental/spiritual struggle with temptation, depicted in the conversation between the serpent and the woman - the story moves somewhat slowly.

But when she finally crosses the line it all moves so quickly - she **saw**, she **took**, she **ate**, and she **gave** it her husband.

The battle was lost in the mind before the doing ever began.

Do you know what is missing in this story?

With such a historically momentous occasion as the first sin of a human being - shouldn't this whole scene have had more drama?

Shouldn't we now see Eve clenching her fist in the air, as if in God's face, and shouting a defiant "NO" to God?

But what do we have instead?

Eve reaching out and taking a bite of a piece of fruit.

Such a little thing, so harmless.

How like life - we don't clench our fists in God's face (at least not in so many words and actions) - we just reach out in the little things of life and do the opposite of what God says is good - because we don't believe God, we don't trust him to be good to us.

Thielicke said it this way "Unfaithfulness to God always begins at the periphery..."

When we don't trust him with the little things, how will we ever trust him with the big ones.

I believe God through Moses was saying to the Israelites and to us, sin is rooted in a lack of knowledge and trust in God's word, as God said it and in a basic mistrust of God's goodness toward us.

Don't let evil get a foothold in those ways -

Instead, know that God's word is true as it is written - we don't stand it judgment of it - we must simply obey it.

AND Know that God is good toward you - all the time - trust him.