



Anatomy of Deception

Genesis 3:1-6

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Nov. 2, 2025

*** This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We are continuing in our Genesis series, “The Beginning,” walking through just the first four chapters of Genesis. We’ve come to chapter 3:1-6. This is the story of the deception.

Adam and Eve are living together in the Garden of Eden. This is a garden paradise planted by God for both Adam and Eve to care for. They were exactly where God intended them to be, and as we think about the deception, I think that’s important to remember. Adam and Eve were in the place they were supposed to be. In the very center of their garden was a tree with forbidden fruit.

If you remember, back in chapter 2:16, God commanded Adam, “you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” The tree was a real tree, but we don’t know if God made the tree with magical powers or if this is only meant to be a metaphor, but we do know that the tree and its fruit took on significant meaning from God as forbidden territory for both Adam and Eve. Its location at the center of the garden makes it appear as the focal point or the crowning natural feature of the garden. I’ll come back to that.

The tree bore fruit that unlocked the knowledge of good and evil. Again, was this some kind of magical fruit or is it simply a metaphor? I don’t think we should hold too tight to the physical properties of the fruit as if it was made of some kind of mystical, physical matter that enabled the knowledge of good and evil. Also, don’t echo the common belief that the fruit was an apple. The type of fruit is not specified, but what gave the fruit its properties was simply the command of God. God commanded to not eat from this tree.

So, in effect, God said, “don’t go to this tree seeking to find wisdom in good and evil from it.” And the very fact that God said don’t look to this physical tree as your source of what is right and wrong is exactly what turned the tree into forbidden territory. Whether it might have been a fig tree, apple tree, orange, plum, or nut tree is irrelevant. The type of tree or fruit isn’t the point, what matters is that God labeled it the knowledge of good and evil and said, “don’t eat from this one.”

As well, lurking in the garden was a crafty, talking snake. Like the tree, was this a real, talking snake or was it a metaphor? Like the tree, I don’t think we should try to turn this snake into an actual breed of snakes that used to walk and talk on the earth until God cursed it to crawl on its belly. I’ll talk about the serpent quite a bit more in a minute, but right now let’s get to the story. I invite you to open to Gen. 3:1-6.

Gen. 3:1-6 (NIV)

3 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 certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from 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.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ge 3:1–6.

The Word of God for the people of God.

Let’s pray.

The story describes the serpent as one of the more crafty wild animals the Lord God had made. Now, the Genesis narrative does not identify this serpent with the devil. The historical evidence suggests that the Hebrews never explicitly identified the serpent with Satan, it wasn’t until around the time Jesus came that the connection was made. Rev. 12:9 refers to the devil as “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world,” referring to the serpent in Genesis. As Christians, we interpret the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament—we interpret the OT through Jesus. Interpreting the OT apart from the NT is called Judaism. Interpreting the OT through the lens of the NT is Christianity. We will never have a clear picture of the OT without the NT. So, the New Testament reveals to us that this crafty, talking serpent is actually the devil in disguise.

2 Cor. 11:14 warns us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. In other words, Satan approaches in forms that seem interesting, tantalizing, and in ways that seem good and right to us. His intent in doing so is always to deceive, to blind to God’s goodness, to lead toward a different path away from God’s Word.

Satan is a created being and a fallen angel who was originally created perfect and blameless. The OT prophet Ezekiel describes the King of Tyre, which many Christian scholars interpret as a description of the angelic devil. Ezekiel 28:11-15 says, “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God...” and it describes his beauty shining like the most precious stones. Vs. 14 says, “you were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you.” A cherub is like a spiritual gatekeeper. The verse goes on, “You were on the holy mount of God...” Satan had direct access to God. Vs. 15, “you were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.” Further down, vs. 17 says, “your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth...”

Satan’s temptation of Eve in the garden may have been the angelic devil’s first sin. This story could very well be not only the introduction of sin in humanity but also the introduction of sin in the angelic realm. It is possible that God created the angelic Satan to be a spiritual gatekeeper for the Garden of Eden. As such, his divine job may have been to help the first humans abstain from foolish acts. People often ask, why would God place Adam and Eve in a garden with the devil? Well, I think the serpent was in the garden to teach wisdom to Adam and Eve, and to be an

example of perfection and beauty to them. Instead, the devil, in the form of the serpent, used his God-given craftiness to exploit the woman and trick her into disobeying God's Word. I would argue that from this moment, the devil became a sinner and a deceiver.

So, if somebody asks you why God put the serpent in the garden with Adam and Eve, you can tell them he was put there to guard them, but he rebelled and tricked them instead. Eve was where she was supposed to be in the garden, and the serpent was where it was supposed to be. In fact, Eve probably wouldn't have been surprised at all to see this serpent in the garden. There is nothing suspicious about a snake in a garden, right? Perfectly normal. What isn't normal and what should have made Eve suspicious was that it was a talking snake! ;)

In all seriousness, the serpent was exactly where God made him to be— in the garden of Eden. I believe the devil rebelled against his divine purpose the moment he deceived Eve, and his rebellion led to a war in heaven. Rev. 12:7-9, part of the passage I referenced earlier, describes the heavenly war in which Satan was defeated and cast out of heaven to the earth. His defeat happened when Christ was resurrected on the third day. Before his defeat, the devil was free to roam both heaven and earth. He was cast out of the garden of Eden and went to and fro to tempt and accuse people of sin so that he might kill, steal, and destroy all that stands for God. Since Christ's resurrection, the devil's direct access to God has been revoked, but he is still just as active on the earth as he has ever been, though with severely diminished power.

Back to Genesis. This devil in disguise approached Eve and said, "Did God really say, 'you must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" and the woman responded, "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.'"

This is the deceptive approach of the devil, and this is how spiritual deception in our own lives begins— the serpent caused Eve to question God's Word. "Is this what God really said?" The tone is along the lines of saying, "Did God really mean that?" It is a question that opens the door to mistrust.

Now, remember, the devil looks like an angel of light. God created him to tantalize the eyes like the sparkle of diamonds and gold. So, the question the devil puts forth looks tantalizing to ponder, it sparkles, it feels good and right. This is how the devil gets his foot in the door of your life. He gets you to question the accuracy of God's Word.

Eve responded to the devil's question by mostly echoing God's Word, but she omitted one important detail and added one little detail that God didn't actually say in his command. So, back in 2:16, God's original command says, "The Lord God commanded the man, 'you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree *of the knowledge of good and evil*, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'"

Contrast that with Eve's rendition of the command, "but God did say, 'You must not eat from the tree *that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it*, or you will die.'" There are a couple indicators in Eve's response of where her heart was when this deception began to unfold. First, in God's original command, the tree was identified by name. God called it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Eve's response, she called it the tree that is in the middle of the garden. She failed to acknowledge the name of the tree. There were actually two trees in the middle of the garden.

That little detail might seem insignificant, but I think it is one indication of Eve's attitude toward God's Word leading up to the fall. It shows a lack of attention to his command. When God speaks, every little detail, every word, every letter matters. In Matt. 5:18 Jesus said, "for truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven..."

Eve's failure to accurately recite *God's one and only command* to humans showed her budding disregard for God's Word. One commandment! We had just one commandment from God in the beginning. Eve could not accurately recite the one commandment. And the second indicator of her attitude toward God's word is what she added to the command. She added, "and you must not touch it..."

So, not only does Eve have a budding ignorance of God's Word, but she is also adding her own misinterpretation that paints God as a stringent, unfair God. Her inattention to God's Word led her to further misinterpret God's Word. Her misinterpretation of God's Word led her to mistrust God's intention—she thought God was holding something from her unjustly. So, where was Eve's heart when the serpent came to her? She had a budding disregard for God's Word, and she was beginning to see God as stringent and unjustified in his command.

My friends, the devil plays on this attitude over and over again. As soon as he sees someone with a disregard for any part of God's Word, he is going to pounce. He will use his crafty deception to lead further into a misinterpretation of God's heart. If Satan gets you to question God's Word, he will make you feel as if God is unjustly holding you back from something that you feel is rightfully yours.

Think about this. God made the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a forbidden tree, and he planted it right next to the Tree of Life right smack in the middle of the garden. Now, God did not initially forbid Adam and Eve from eating from the Tree of Life. That came after the fall. Originally, God made the two trees, side-by-side, and placed them in the center of the garden, and he put an invisible barrier around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil while leaving the way open to the Tree of Life. Two trees in the middle of the garden. One forbidden but providing the knowledge, or the ability, to do both good and evil. The other, open and with the promise of eternal life. I'll call the Tree of Life the Jesus tree. Why was the forbidden tree more appealing than the Jesus tree?

The Jesus tree represented freedom and life, eternal relationship with the Lord. The forbidden tree represented a command that seemed unjust to Adam and Eve. It grates against the human heart that seeks independence and self-expression. It puts limitations on the free spirit but in reality the only way to true freedom is through the Jesus tree.

My friends, it is no accident that these two trees were placed as the centerpiece of Paradise. We can say that the knowledge of good and evil is God's law, and the tree of life is Jesus. Jesus has fulfilled the law on our behalf, and he has given us the gift of eternal life through his sacrifice on the tree. Amen!

About the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I am going to put this forward to you. I think it was God's intention from the beginning that Jesus, his Son, would be the One who would fulfill the law of God on our behalf and provide us with eternal life. In that sense, the law of God was never ever going to be something we could digest on our own. From the beginning, it was always going to be Christ, the Son of God, fulfilling the law for us and within us.

Alright, in verse 4, the Serpent played on Eve's budding mistrust of God's Word and told her, "You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." This was a blatant lie. God forbid Adam and Eve to seek the knowledge of good and evil from this tree because the only source of the knowledge of good and evil is God. The knowledge of good and evil must come from knowing God—from God and his Word. When we try to create definitions of good and evil outside of God's Word, we are pretending to be God. The definitions of what is right and wrong must derive from God's command, from his Word.

Verse 6, Eve saw the fruit was good and pleasing, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took it and ate and also gave some to her husband. In essence, both Adam and Eve decided for themselves what they believed would be right and wrong. For them, it was right to disregard God's Word and wrong for God to impose a command on them. Adam and Eve decided for themselves what was good and evil instead of trusting in God's Word and his command.

My friends, we commit the same sin when we allow our own definitions of good and evil to supersede God's Word. The fall into sin brings death but there is hope. Hope came to Adam and Eve and hope has come to us through the sacrifice of Christ on the tree. He will unravel the lies and plant his truth within you, if you open your heart to him. Amen.

Here are three quick applications points for you to consider:

1. Guard Your Heart Against Subtle Doubt of God's Word.

—Be alert to the small ways the enemy tempts you to reinterpret or soften Scripture to fit your preferences. Stay rooted in God's Word — read it carefully, trust it completely, and obey it fully. Spiritual deception starts where biblical attention fades.

2. Don't Let Misunderstanding Lead to Mistrust.

—When you encounter commands in Scripture that challenge you, remember that every "no" from God protects a greater "yes." Trust that God's heart is good, and His Word leads to freedom, not restriction.

3. Let God Define Good and Evil — Not Your Feelings or Culture.

—Anchor your understanding of right and wrong in God's revealed truth, not in personal opinion, cultural trends, or convenience. True wisdom and life flow from the "Jesus tree," not from self-made standards.

Amen.

Let's pray.

Observation

1. Where were Adam and Eve when the serpent approached them, and why is their location significant in the story?
2. How did Eve respond to the serpent's question? What did she add or change from God's original command?
3. According to the passage, what reasons did Eve see for eating the fruit?

Interpretation

1. Why might spiritual deception begin even when someone is in the center of God's will or surrounded by His blessings?
2. What does the serpent's tactic of questioning ("Did God really say...?") reveal about how doubt can enter our hearts?
3. How does misunderstanding or misquoting God's Word affect our trust in Him, based on Eve's response and the sermon's explanation?
4. In what ways does the desire to define good and evil for ourselves show up in our lives today, and why is this so dangerous?

Application

1. The sermon pointed out that Adam and Eve were exactly where God wanted them, yet they were still vulnerable to deception. Are there "comfortable" or "safe" places in your life where you might be letting your guard down spiritually? What would it look like to stay vigilant in those areas?
2. The enemy's first move was to get Eve to question God's Word. Can you think of a time when you felt tempted to reinterpret or soften what God says in Scripture to fit your preferences or feelings? How did that affect your choices?
3. Eve added to God's command, making God seem more restrictive than He actually was. Are there ways you might be adding to or subtracting from God's Word in your own life—maybe by making God seem harsher or more permissive than He is? How does this impact your relationship with Him?
4. The sermon said the heart of sin is trying to define good and evil apart from God. Where do you see this tendency in your own life—maybe in decisions, opinions, or attitudes shaped more by culture or feelings than by God's truth?
5. God's commands are described as invitations to trust His heart and receive life, not just as restrictions. Is there a specific "no" from God in your life right now that you struggle to trust? How might believing that God's "no" protects a greater "yes" change your perspective or actions?
6. The two trees in the garden represented a choice between self-reliance and dependence on God. In what areas of your life are you tempted to "grasp for knowledge on your own terms" instead of trusting God's wisdom? What would it look like to choose dependence on Christ in those areas this week?
7. The sermon ended with hope in Christ, who offers true life and wisdom. How can you practically anchor your understanding of right and wrong in God's Word this week, especially when faced with confusing or tempting situations?