

“TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY”

Scripture: Genesis 3

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This morning I would like to share with you from Genesis, the third chapter. The title of this message is “Take Sin Seriously”, and I want you to think for a few moments: Do you actually take sin seriously. In Genesis, chapter 3 it says:

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.*

⁸ *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

¹⁰ *He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

¹¹ *And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

¹² *The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

¹³ *Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

¹⁴ *So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,
"Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.*

¹⁵ *And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."*

¹⁶ *To the woman he said,
"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."*

¹⁷ *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I
commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'
"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.*

¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."*

This is what the Bible calls The Fall of Man and is the entry of sin into the world. When I was twenty years old I believe that was about the smartest I've ever been in my life. Don't ask me why; it just seems like at that time I had life figured out real well. I know I'm smarter now but at least in my estimation that's about as smart as I've ever been in my life and I remember going to get my driver's license renewed because I had had a little fender-bender a couple of years before that. I didn't think it was my fault; some car found my fender, but nevertheless, I still had to take the test. So, I went out there, I didn't consult the manual, mind you, I'm smart. I'd been driving for four whole years, no need for that. So I went in there and to my great surprise, the examiner said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Fowler, you didn't pass."

I just couldn't believe that. I'd been driving for four years. What an insult! And so, "Well, can I take it again?"

"No, you're going to have to come back."

I can't remember if it was the next day or a week later, but they make you wait. And so I decided, "Well, uh, can I have one of those manuals?"

And so I got one of those manuals and I realized, well, I don't know as much as I thought I did. Maybe I should take it a little more seriously, being ready for this examination.

Today, I want to remind us all that we need to take seriously coming back to this manual, God's Word, because the Book from Genesis to Revelation, tells us that God takes sin very seriously. He knows how deadly it can be; He knows how it can wreck lives. He also knows that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world. He died upon the Cross and through Him, He not only gives us power to resist sin, but He also gives us the power, if we do sin, to receive His forgiveness and to receive the new life. God certainly takes it seriously. He desires for us to take it seriously as well.

I wanted to share with you three lessons I see about helping us resist temptations to sin that we can learn from in this story, and I also want to finally get to the New Testament, especially the Good News and what a difference it makes to know Jesus Christ in regard to sin.

But first, when you look at this passage, you see that often sins, temptations come with doubting God's word. Keep that in mind. In Genesis chapter 3 it talks about the serpent that came and said to Eve, "Did God really say you must not eat from the tree in the garden?" He begins to get her to cast doubt — I mean, did He really say that? "No you won't die. I mean God just knows that when you eat of that tree you'll be like Him, knowing good and evil."

Who is the serpent? Well, if you look in Revelations you get a clue in there. It says that that serpent, the dragon, Satan was cast out of Heaven to the Earth. Apparently the Devil has taken the form of a serpent in this passage. I believe what happens is we have a sinful tendency and when he comes, it's just like he came to Jesus in the wilderness; he comes at an opportune time. When he comes, he steps up the pressure. He tries to get us to yield to the temptation. Keep in mind, that primarily what he does: He lies. If you've ever known someone that lies really well, you know that you can confront them with a lie; they will come right back with another one because they are good at it. The Devil is very good at lying and one of his best lies is to cast doubt on God's word; it is true.

Andy Lambert, who was here some years ago for a revival — at that time he was writing a book at night called *Fuel for the Journey* — he likened these temptations to a fish nibbling on bait. He said you can imagine the devil being a fisherman and we are the fish. It's like he puts the bait out there, and you know, as long as we stay awake, we are alright, but there is something about certain types of bait he knows how to put out there and we just can't resist. We go over and nibble a little bit. And we might be all right if we nibble a little bit. When I used to fish, the fish just loved the shrimp I put on there because they could nibble, and by the time I caught on it was about gone. But what he is pointing out is that with sin, if you nibble long enough, the hook is going to get you. And sin is habit forming and it will get you in its clutches before you realize it. Sin is deadly. Oftentimes it comes with doubting God's Word.

One of the best ways to doubt God's Word — and that doesn't mean that when you are in Sunday School or Bible School that you don't have some struggles or you don't ask questions about the Scriptures — but oftentimes what will happen is that we neglect God's Word. More and more we don't think like a Christian; we just think like everyone else around and that's why you

will hear me say so often, from Romans, chapter 12:

. . . offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to the world around you, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you will know what the good and acceptable, perfect will of God is.

It is a spiritual battle that we are in. Jesus, when He was in the wilderness, didn't get into debates with Satan. He just simply quoted:

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God.

So oftentimes it begins with doubts being cast. "Is that really true? Can you really trust God? Can't you fudge a little bit?" But it comes to us that way. It came to Eve in that way: Did God really say that?

And the second thing we need to remember is that temptations *are* attractive. If they weren't attractive they wouldn't be temptations. So, what does Eve do? Well, she says, in verse 6:

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 . . .

Eve is troubled a little bit, but Adam, what does he do? Well, he just takes it and gives right in. And then, lo and behold, he said, "Well, Lord, it's that woman you gave me; that's why I sinned."

And of course then he blames it on the Devil. But I'm getting ahead of myself. But temptation will be attractive. What is sin? Well, sin in the Bible, it's missing the mark of God's commandments, like the Ten Commandments. It's a transgression that is deliberately disobeying God. The best way I realize what sin is, is that it separates us from God. Ultimately, it's an act of commission, something we do, or an act omission, something we should have done. Oftentimes it is in the way of attitudes. But what happens is it will separate you from God; it will separate you from other people. And one of the reasons you want to take sin seriously: You don't want it to separate you from God. You don't want to be separated from God's almighty love and power being in your life, and also being in your family, because that's what it will do.

Sin is attractive. It was Pope Gregory, I think in the sixth century, that thought we need to get specific about this and he came up with seven deadly sins. Think about these. When you have a general confession, that's one thing, but when you get to specifics you get a little uneasy.

First of all, there is *pride* as one of the deadly sins. Not a healthy pride in your appearance or something, but we are talking about sinful pride, the kind of pride they had at the tower of Babel. We want to make a name for ourselves and God had to do something about that. He had to step in and stop that building program.

Another one is *sloth* or laziness. We think, well, I know nobody here has that problem, but oftentimes the way it takes the form is: Well, I just don't feel like praying; I don't feel like going to Church. We are lazy; let's just call it what it is. If sloth works for you, that's OK. I don't like that word either. I don't like either one of them, really, but sloth is one of the deadly sins.

Envy. King Saul was so envious of David, and he never got over it. Envy gets a hold of us, the green-eyed monster, as it has been called, and it robs us of all joy.

There is *anger*. Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, killed his brother. He was warned about that. He said, "Cain, sin is couching at your door. It's desire is to have you, and you must master it." He did not master it; it mastered him and he killed his brother.

There is *greed* as one of the deadly sins. There was a rich man in the Gospel of Luke and there was a poor beggar named Lazarus at his gates. This man did not see Lazarus at his gates because of all of his stuff. He just blinded him that there were actually poor people right there at his very gate. It's all right to have things, but when they have us, we become greedy; it becomes deadly.

Gluttony is listed as one of the deadly sins. I made the mistake of preaching on fasting at one church, then went to a family reunion where there was food galore; got teased just terribly about that. But it's fun to eat; it's fun to drink, but it can get out of hand. And that's essentially what sin is: It takes a normal, God-given desire and then it becomes sinful.

Certainly *lust* is the last of the seven deadly sins and Psalm 51, which we have read responsively and sung today, is the prayer of David repenting. One of the great things about the Bible is that you can learn from the examples of people in here. If godly King David can commit adultery, lead deception, have her husband arranged to be murdered in battle and cover all that up, that's pretty big. But David did that and it took him almost a couple of years before he was finally confronted by Nathan the prophet and finally he prayed:

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Put a new and right spirit within me.

The good news is that we don't have to yield. The Apostle Paul said in Corinthians:

No temptation has overtaken you that is uncommon to man. God is faithful and just. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation provide the way of escape so that you may be able to endure.

So, you learn from Genesis that oftentimes the temptation to sin comes about by doubting God's Word, and that temptation is . . . (tape change)

. . . and we do want to walk with him and talk with him. What happened? There was a separation from God. And then you find there are excuses to be made. I have already mentioned about Adam. He says, "Well, why did you do this?"

"Well, it's that woman you gave to me. It was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. I'm so glad

to have her. Now that's all changed."

And then Eve, asked about it, "Well, it's that serpent; he made me do it."

No, he can't make you do anything.

Oftentimes that's what happens. Denial is real prevalent when it comes to sin. Gosh, I don't like confessing sin. Going through some of this study for the sermon, one of the questions is: Write down a sin that you have committed recently. And I thought, Lord have mercy. I don't want to do that. But I thought, well, I need to do this. You know what really came to my mind was *unbelief*. I realize that sometimes I am prone to discouragement and really the heart of that is unbelief. And you know, well, that's not all that terrible, but yes, in the Bible that's a big deal. I mean, in the Bible, what unbelief does is — oftentimes if you don't trust God, God has a faith that He wants you to practice — and when you don't, especially it hurts. You start worrying; you start looking at the problems; you don't look at God, and I realize, you know, that's kind of crept into my life, Lord. I confess that. I need to repent of that.

What happens when we don't deal with it? Well, I think we lose our enthusiasm, our joy for serving Christ. Marietta and I, and a couple of other ministers, were privileged to go down to a spiritual life retreat the first part of this week. The title of it was "Recovering the S Word," which is *Sabbath*, which sometimes Christians aren't all that good at practicing. Just the whole idea that God created the Earth in six days and He kept the Sabbath and celebrated that. Also, down there at Myrtle Beach, 750 college cheerleaders getting ready for the football season, and you know, we would come back from the different sessions that we had — it didn't matter, morning, late at night — some group was out there just cheering their hearts out. You know, I thought, the Church could use a little bit of this. They're getting fired up about football season and we have something greater than that. But oftentimes, that's what happens. One of the consequences of sin getting into our life is that we lose God's enthusiasm, because enthusiasm means *being full of God*.

Well, let me get to the New Testament. There are consequences of sin, but the good news is that there is power to resist sin and there is forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let me tell you four truths that I find about this as you look in the Gospels.

First of all, it begins up here (in your head). If we are getting ready to arm ourselves, it begins with an attitude. Jesus, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, says, "You have heard that it said . . . but I say to you."

For example, He said, "You have heard that is said, 'It is wrong to commit murder,' but I say to you, 'If you are angry with your brother. . .,'"

Then it tells you how important it is to be reconciled. Oftentimes, what Jesus is pointing out, it starts up here (in your head) or it starts in here (in your heart). And that's when we need to deal with it. Don't wait until the act is upon us. When we realize our heart's not right, when our thoughts aren't right, then that's when we want to ask God to step in.

But secondly we need to know that when we do sin, that Christ has the power to forgive sin. We don't need to run away from Him; we need to run to Him.

In Mark, chapter 2, there was a man that was paralyzed. His friends brought him to Jesus, which is a great thing for friends to do, and they lifted out the little portion of the roof; they lowered him down, and He said, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Now they thought, well, his greatest need is that he can't walk. But Jesus could see the heart, and He said, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

They were just taken aback by that, but He said, "That you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins, I say to you, 'Rise up; take up your pallet and walk.'"

And he started walking. That really got their attention, but we need to know that through Christ's death upon the cross, He has the absolute power to forgive, deliver you or anyone else of any kind of sin. That's good news! He can do it. He has the power to do that. What we do is, we just generally repent. We say, "Lord, that attitude, it's wrong." Or, "Lord, I need forgiveness," and He will come. He has the power to do that.

Also we need to realize that whenever we sin, He loves sinners. He loves to ransom sinners. He loves them. In Luke, chapter 15, there was a man who had two sons and the younger son went out and wasted his inheritance. Well, first of all, a lot of times that's the form that sin takes. "I want what I want. I'm going to do what I want to do. God, parents, or I don't care who else, they can't tell me what to do."

But he reaped the consequences of that. When he finally comes to himself and he is coming back home, remorseful, his father runs to him and embraces him. And that is what God is like. He is not like the older brother that says, "I just can't believe what you've done."

But that's good news, that He does love us. And then in John, chapter 8, not only does He love us, but He doesn't condemn us. There was a woman that was caught in the act of adultery. It was a set-up, you know; the man is not there, which is not fair at all, but it's another story. But the woman is caught in the act of adultery. She is brought before Jesus and, "Lord, the word says that we are supposed to stone her. What do you say?"

He doesn't say anything. He just starts writing on the ground. And then he finally says, "He who is without sin can cast the first stone."

Well, that narrowed the candidates down. And they start with the oldest. They drop their stones, and then the youngest drop their stones and they are gone. The woman looks up and Jesus says, "Does no one condemn you?"

"No one, Lord."

"Well, neither do I. Go and sin no more."

He does not condemn us, so we should want to come to Him. But oftentimes it is the very thing that we don't do. Christ takes sin seriously because He loves us and wants us to have that full fellowship with Him and with others.

Let me close with this little classic devotional, "My Heart, Christ's Home." It likens our relationship with Christ, and especially as a new believer, and a growing believer. The rooms in the house, the drawing room, for example, is where they would meet for prayer each morning and Christ would meet with this young man and he would get the Bible and they would read the scriptures together. Well, in that book it tells that one day after they had been together for awhile, Jesus noticed a smell in the house. He said, "What is that?"

"Oh, well, that must be the room upstairs."

"Well, I want to go see it."

"No, Lord, You don't want to go up there."

"Well, why not?"

"Well, Lord, I just keep that room shut. I just really don't want You in there."

"Well, I really do want to go in there." "Well, Lord, I just can't let you go in there."

"All right, but then I am leaving."

"What do You mean, You are leaving?"

"I'm not staying here with that smell."

And sometimes if we have that image, that there are areas of our life where we say, "Lord, I just want You to stay out of that." But we realize what Christ wants to do is come in to cleanse us, to set us free, to make us whole. And when He comes, oh, He does it; He does it well. When we take sin seriously we realize, I don't want anything to separate me from Almighty God. I want Him to come into my life. I want Him to change me. I want the One who died upon the cross to come and make me whole. Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for the good news today that You come into our hearts to set us free from any way that sin would seek to enslave us, to capture us. Lord, we confess at times that we just haven't taken it seriously. We think it is a message for other people, people that are really sinners. Lord, we realize this is a tendency we have, so Lord, we invite You in to cleanse us, to make us whole, to set us free. And Lord, thank you for this good news. We pray this today in Jesus' name. Amen.