

REVERENTLY HEED GOD'S WORD

3 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that Jehovah God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? ²And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but concerning the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, or else you will die. ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die; ⁵for God knows that in the day you eat the fruit of that tree your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil.

⁶And 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 as a means of making one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸Then they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden from the presence of Jehovah God.

⁹And Jehovah God called to the man, and asked, Where are you? ¹⁰And the man said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; so I hid myself.

¹¹And Jehovah God said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree, the one of which I commanded you not to eat? ¹²And the man said, The woman whom you gave me to be with me, she gave me some of the fruit of that tree, and I ate. ¹³And Jehovah God said to the woman, What is this you have done? And the woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate. ¹⁴And Jehovah God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed beyond all cattle, and beyond every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you crawl, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel. ¹⁶To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing: in pain you shall give birth to children; and your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you.

¹⁷And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, the one of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it; cursed is the ground on account of you; by toil shall you eat the produce of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸Both thorns and thistles shall it produce for you; but you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken; for you are dust, and unto dust shall you return.

²⁰And the man named his wife Eve; because she would become the mother of all living.

²¹And Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife garments made of skins, and so he clothed them. ²²And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, in order that he does not stretch out his hand, and also take the fruit of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—²³therefore Jehovah God banished him from the garden of Eden, causing him to till the ground from which he

was taken. ²⁴So he drove the man out; and he placed the Cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and also a flaming sword which turned in every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:1-24)

Introduction

A T.V. commercial features two men talking together at a poolside party; the other guests are milling around, engaged in their own conversation, ignoring the two men seated beside the pool. Amidst the chatter and laughter of the party, the conversation of these two gentlemen turns to the stock market. The one informs his companion of the latest advice he received from his broker; meanwhile, the party carries on around them, ignoring their interchange and leaving them to their own world of solitude.

When the first speaker has finished reporting on his broker's latest financial counsel, he asks his companion, "And who is your broker?"

The other replies, "My broker is E. F. Hutton, and E. F. Hutton says ..."

As soon as he announces the name of his broker as E. F. Hutton, the whole party comes to an abrupt halt: the band stops playing, ... every other conversation ceases in mid-sentence, ... and every ear is intently tuned in to what E. F. Hutton has to say. The commercial ends with the attention of every guest focused on this one gentleman who is wise enough to have E. F. Hutton as his broker: everybody—guests, waiters, band members—wants to know what E. F. Hutton has to say. The announcer breaks the complete silence of anticipation with the closing remark, "When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen."

The spiritual equivalent of that commercial might be stated as follows: When the LORD God speaks, we had better listen. Our forebears, Adam and Eve, failed to heed the Word of God and consequently forfeited the divine blessing and incurred the divine curse for themselves and the succeeding generations of their descendants.

As we study Genesis 3 let us give careful attention to its message: we must reverently heed the Word of God, because to do otherwise results in dire consequences.

I. Reverently Heed God's Word, rather than Listen to the Devil

The serpent, (as he is employed by the devil,) is described as being "*more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made*" (3:1.) Note the words of Martin Luther in referring to the devil: his craft (i.e., craftiness) and power are great; and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.

The first thing the devil does is seek to disorient Eve and throw her into confusion. The LORD's command is very clear and straightforward: "*From every*

tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17.) But the devil's initial question to Eve is very vague and elusive: "Now the serpent ... said to the woman, *"Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"*" (Gen. 3:1.)

Next the devil seeks to discredit God. He says to the woman, *"You shall not surely die; ⁵for God knows that in the day you eat the fruit of that tree your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Gen. 3:4-5.) The devil implies that man is independent of God our Creator. According to the devil, God may declare that you will surely die as a consequence of disobeying His Word, but such is not the case. You have an existence that is independent from God, and God is not able to carry out His threat, He can't touch you. But in contrast to the devil's lie, note Acts 17:28, *"in him [God] we live and move and have our being,"* (Acts 17:28), here is the inspired testimony of the Apostle Paul.

The devil accuses God of seeking to deny man any personal self-fulfillment out of a divine selfishness and petty jealousy. God does not want you to become like Him: He does not want you to realize your potential, He does not want to share with you what He has—God is like a self-centered parent who does not want his child to ever grow up and have an independent life of his own. But contrast the devil's insinuation with Genesis 2:16-17a,

And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:16-17a)

Having slandered God, having portrayed Him as being both petty and impotent, the devil now invites Eve to indulge her desires: *"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 [or, coveted] as a means of making one wise"* (Gen. 3:6a.) Eve found the forbidden fruit to be desirable, attractive, and promising, holding the potential of introducing her to new vistas of experience and fulfillment and adventure.

The question may be asked, Where was Adam all this while? Genesis 3:6b indicates that Adam was right at his wife's side, allowing her to dialogue with the serpent and following her into sin: *"she took of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband with her [i.e., who was present with her], and he ate it."*

Whereas Eve sinned by commission, Adam had already sinned by omission. He had failed to be the guardian and protector of God's garden (cp. Gen. 2:15); and he had failed to provide godly leadership in his relation with his wife. Adam had failed to discern or defend against the anomaly of an animal speaking, and speaking against the LORD God. According to Genesis 2:19-20, no animal was able to communicate with Adam on his level; but now in Genesis 3:1, here is the serpent communicating on a human level, and doing so in defiance of God.

Adam and Eve had both allowed themselves to be enticed and seduced by the words of the devil. The devil's message: Be your own boss, live your own life, become your own independent self. But they became slaves to sin and to the devil:

... you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you once walked in accord with the course of this world, which is in accord with the ruling prince of the air, that is, the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 2:1b-2)

The devil's message: Think for yourself, live by your own standard, don't submit to the Word of God. But by rejecting the Word of God they were accepting the word of the devil as the standard by which to make their choice and conduct their life, and it led them on the road to perdition.

Reverently heed God's Word, rather than listening to the devil. Your adversary, the devil, may well appear in the form of a bright, beautiful, fascinating serpent. But bear in mind that, no matter how beautiful and fascinating he may appear, you are dealing with a deadly poisonous snake:

... the devil, ... was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature: for he is a liar, and the father of lies. (Jn. 8:44)

II. Reverently Heed God's Word, because the LORD will Enforce His Word

The relationships the LORD intended for the man were tragically destroyed. The horizontal relationship between man and man was now characterized by shame. Compare Genesis 3:7, which describes their condition after their sin, *"the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves,"* with Genesis 2:25, which describes their relationship before their sin, *"they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."* Furthermore, their relationship was now characterized by accusation, *"the man said, 'The woman whom you gave me to be with me, she gave me some of the fruit of the tree, and I ate'"* (Gen. 3:12), and conflict, *"To the woman He said, '... your desire shall be for your husband [i.e., to usurp his position of headship], but he shall rule over you'"* (Gen. 3:16.)

The vertical relationship between man and God was now characterized by alienation, guilt and fear: *"they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden from the presence of Jehovah God"* (Gen. 3:8.) Here is the first recorded instance of man's effort to shield himself from God by hiding behind nature; the last book of the Bible, Revelation, records man's final futile effort to hide behind nature:

Then the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the generals, and the wealthy, and the mighty, and every slave and free man, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17)

Other such efforts on the part of man to shield himself from God by hiding behind nature include *evolution*, the attempt by man to push God out of His creation, putting nature in the place of God, and *pantheism*, the attempt by man to conceal God within nature, viewing God as part of nature.

Verses 8-10 become a preview of the last judgment. The LORD God comes visibly into the midst of His creation (vs. 8.) The LORD summons man to appear before Him (vs. 9), and man is compelled to do so (vs. 10.) The LORD systematically pronounces sentence against each of the offenders. Each one seeks to minimize his sin by passing on the blame to another: Adam to Eve and Eve to the serpent (vs. 12-14.) But each one receives the due penalty for their sin: first the serpent, then Eve, and then Adam (vs. 14-19.)

The sentence of death, which God had forewarned to be the punishment for disobedience, was enacted against the man. The man and his wife were banished from the blessed presence and fellowship of God, the LORD God drove the man out of Eden (vs. 23-24.) Thus, the man was barred from life (vs. 22) and consigned to death (vs. 19.) But not that on the first Judgment Day as it occurred in the garden of Eden, the sequence was banishment (vs. 23-24) followed by eventual death (vs. 19.) Now the sequence is death immediately resulting in eternal banishment: *"it is appointed for men once to die, and after this comes judgment"* (Heb. 9:27.) Note also the words of our Lord Jesus as He describes the judgment:

Then shall he also say to those on the left hand, Depart from me—you who are cursed—into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: ... And they shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life. (Matt.25:41,46)

By means of that first Judgment Day the man was given a model and preview of what hell is like: banishment from the blessing of God and exposure to the righteous curse of God. Furthermore, he was given an opportunity to return to God and escape his final destiny in hell.

Let us reverently heed God's Word, because the LORD will enforce His holy Word. The words of Numbers 23:19 apply to every word that the LORD has spoken: *"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"*

III. Reverently Heed God's Word, because It Reveals the Only Way of Salvation

The fact that the LORD banished Adam from the garden, preventing him from eating of the tree of life, was not only an act of judgment, but also an act of mercy. If Adam, in his state of sin (his knowing evil), had eaten of the tree of life, he would have been locked into that cursed state forever.

The LORD demonstrated His mercy and His desire for man's salvation when He made a covering for Adam and his wife. Earlier, they had futilely sought to make their own covering, *"they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves"* (Gen.3:7.) But now the LORD, in His mercy, gives His divine provision, *"Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife garments made of skins, and so he clothed them"* (Gen. 3:21.) It is a provision that required substitutionary sacrifice, compare Hebrews 9:22b and 1 Peter 1:18-19,

... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22b)

... you were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ. (1 Pet. 1:18-19)

The LORD himself took the initiative to come and seek Adam: *"Jehovah God called to the man, and asked him, 'Where are you?'"* (Gen. 3:9.) In the light of this divine seeking of man in his sin, note the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ describes His divine ministry *"the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Lk. 19:10.)

The sentence of judgment the LORD pronounces upon the serpent contains for Adam the promise of the Savior: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15.) Here is the promise of the incarnation; the Savior will be of the offspring of the woman. Here is the promise of salvation by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the Savior; the serpent shall bruise the Savior's heel. In one sense, that was a deathblow, because a venomous serpent normally strikes his victim in the heel. But in another sense, that was a non-lethal blow, being only a blow to the heel and not to the head. Finally, here is the promise of complete victory and salvation; the Savior shall crush the serpent's head (a fatal blow.)

Adam recognized the LORD's promise and believed it. This becomes evident from the name he now gives his wife. He previously had named her *"woman"* (Gen. 2:23,) now he names her *"Eve."* "Eve" means "life;" *"she would become the mother of all living"* (Gen. 3:20.) This is especially in reference to the divine promise stated in Genesis 3:15, that the Savior would come from the woman to give life to her and Adam and all their believing offspring.

Let us reverently heed God's Word, because it reveals the only way of salvation,

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest attention to the things that were heard, so that ... we do not drift away from them, ²for... ³how shall we escape, if we disregard so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3a)

Conclusion

The message very dramatically conveyed by the T. V. commercial is that "When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen." The spiritual equivalent of that commercial might be stated as follows: When the LORD our God speaks, we had better listen.