

The grace, mercy, and peace of Jesus Christ be yours this day. The title for today’s sermon is, “Did God really say...?” and is based on the first reading from Genesis chapter 3, including the first seven verses of the chapter which read: **“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”** ² **And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,** ³ **but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”** ⁴ **But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.** 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 **So 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 to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.** ⁷ **Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”**(Genesis 3:1-7) Let us pray...Amen.

I have to confess, there are a few passages of Scripture that I really don’t like. There are a few more that make me feel very uncomfortable, to the point I don’t even like to read them. When Satan whispers his question in my ear; “Did God really say...?” regarding these few passages of Scripture, I would love to say ‘no’. I would love to have the freedom to grab a pair of scissors and decide what I want to include in the Bible and remove what I don’t like. God’s Law hammers me hard. Satan and my old Adam are in cahoots and together they love to point out my sins and failing and rub my nose in them. They also love to point out the failing and sins of those around me.

They love to attack and target our hearts. Sometimes we can identify these attacks to what they are, but most often they are very subtle but equally devastating.

Satan loves to attack our faith in God’s Word. Ever since the Garden of Eden, or since the beginning of Creation, Satan has been hell bent to destroy the faith of those who trust in God. Satan has attacked, and continues to attack, faith in God and His goodness and loving kindness. Today’s Old Testament reading shows the fallout from his first attack on people. While Satan’s attack on God’s Word was subtle, it was lethal.

In the Garden of Eden, where God declared everything to be ‘very good’, Satan directly attacked God’s Word by simply asking Eve: “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Satan knew exactly what he was doing and was trying to raise doubt in Eve’s mind and not trust God’s Word and His goodness. Satan’s attack was to get Eve to look away from God’s clearly revealed Word and to look to herself for answers. So Eve answered Satan: **“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,** ³ **but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”**(Genesis 3:3)

Upon Eve’s answer Satan went from questioning God’s Word to outright denying and rejecting it. Satan said: “**You will not surely die.**” When Satan saw the beginning of Eve’s temptation he attacked God’s Word and goodness. “**For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” Satan never challenged Eve’s understanding of God’s Word; instead he called God’s integrity into doubt. He suggested the real reason God didn’t want them to eat the fruit was to keep them from becoming like God. It is as if Satan were saying; ‘Why would God hold out on you in this way. Really? Eat the fruit and your eyes will be opened and you will know what God knows, no even better, you will be like God!’”

Notice Satan’s progression: First it was to doubt God’s Word; then he moved to completely reject it; and finally Satan offered Eve the power to establish her own standard of right and wrong, in short to define truth for herself.

What an offer! To decide what is good and what is evil. To decide what is truth for oneself. Satan told Eve, ‘You can be god.’ It is almost as if Satan were talking to Eve in our postmodern world. Truth is what you want it to be, so decide for yourself what you like, what you don’t like, and what best works for you. Did God really say... Scripture reliable? Is God’s Word still as important and relevant today as it was in the Garden of Eden? Is God’s Word as binding today as it was when proclaimed by Moses at Mt Sinai? Is it as real as when Jesus spoke it some 2000 years ago? Can we really trust a book written so long ago? Did God really say... anything?

Satan’s attack has not changed. He may be an old toothless dog, but his tricks still work on us. He continues to raise questions and cause doubt to cloud our minds. Satan continues to seek ways to deceive creation and distort the God’s Word. We are often faced with Satan’s question: “Did God really say...?” When confronted with it we can go in one of two directions: First we can discard what God has said in Scripture and instead look to ourselves or God’s hidden word for answers, or we can look to God’s revealed Word for answers.

When we look to ourselves, to our own understanding, or to God Unrevealed word we only find Satan. When we look away from what God clearly has said we are no better off than Adam and Eve eating the fruit in the garden. By relying on our own understanding we try to make ourselves the ones who decide what is good and evil. Rejecting God’s Word leaves us spiritually naked and ashamed and looking for somewhere to hide from God. Consider the fallout from Adam and Eve’s sin of rejecting God’s Word. They quickly realized their sin, shame, and nakedness. On top of that, when confronted by God and His Word, Adam was willing to throw his wife under the proverbial bus for his sins and inactions. Adam told God, ‘Lord it is not my fault, it’s **“the woman You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.**”(Genesis 3:12) Adam tried to tell God it was God’s fault Adam sinned.

Unfortunately we are no smarter than our first parents. We laugh at how they could have fallen for such a simple deception, until we see we fall for the same deception in our lives. Yes, Eve should have simply held fast to God’s Word. Yes, Adam should have stepped up and corrected his wife’s pharisaical error of adding to God’s Word, and if that didn’t work, Adam could have nailed that worthless serpent to a tree. But they didn’t trust God Word; instead they trusted in themselves. We are no better.

Now the second way to deal with Satan’s question: “Did God really say...?” is to actually open the Bible and look to God’s Word to see what God has clearly said and to trust and follow it. Too often, we don’t like what it says. We would like to be like Thomas Jefferson, one of the American founding fathers. While he knew God’s Word well he didn’t like everything God said. His solution was to simply adjust God’s Word to make it fit better with his worldview. When Jefferson found something he didn’t like, mainly in the New Testament, he simply used his penknife to physically remove those sections of Scripture. He made himself god over Scripture.

Do you ever do the same thing? Do you ever struggle with what God really did say? Are there times in your life when you make yourself god over Scripture and cut out those pesky passages from the Bible which make you uncomfortable by answering ‘no, God didn’t say that’? Do you find it easier to avoid or ignore those passages of Scripture than to have to sit down, read, and struggle with them? Do you, by your lifestyle or by your choice of words or your silence, try to ignore God’s Word and thereby treat God’s Word like Thomas Jefferson? Now everyone struggles with parts of God’s Word, but how do you deal with God’s Word when it accuses you, or someone you care for?

To answer ‘no, God didn’t say something’ when God’s Word clearly reveals the opposite leaves us with Adam and Eve, spiritually naked, blind, dead, and in great risk of being eternal separated from God. For as Adam and Eve found out, “**the wages of sin really is death**”. This is clear since God created a world in which they were to never die, but since they did sin, they also died. When God’s Word accuses us of our sins, we have no place to add to God’s Word or take away from it to try and make it more comfortable: instead, we are called to confess our sins and to trust in the One who has defeated crushed the head of Satan and defeated him. Instead of making excuses for our sinfulness, we are called to repent and turn from our sins to the One who has already taken our punishment on Himself, who has bled and died in our place for our forgiveness. Repentance means to try and stop our sinful actions and to *re*-turn to Christ. It means to call sin ‘sin’. It means letting God’s Word shape our lives, rather than trying to shape God’s Word with our lives. This conflict and these temptations will only be complete in death.

The good news is, in the middle of this conflict, God promised Jesus, who has already come and has already crushed Satan and defeated his power. While we may not like everything Scripture has to say, it is not God’s fault, it is our sinfulness which is the problem. To ignore, to skip over, or to cut out those parts of God’s Word we don’t like, also causes us to lose the forgiveness, comfort, and peace of the Gospel. While we languish in our sinful nature; yet,

through Christ, we are renewed day by day by returning to our Baptism and all of God’s promises He made to you there, that: you are His child, you are forgiven, loved, and redeemed.

While we may not like everything of what God Word does say, it's only because it hits too close to our sinful pride rebelling against God’s revealed word. Yet Christ came for us rebels, took on Himself all of our doubts, all of our questioning, and all of all our sins. Jesus took them to the cross and answered Satan's question: Did God really say...? with a resounding YES! Yes, all of the Bible is God’s revealed Word, trustworthy and true for you. Yes, Jesus has crushed Satan as promised for you. Yes, Jesus came for you and to save you. Yes, you are God’s own child. Yes, your sins are forgiven. Yes, Jesus does love you and comes to you with His forgiveness, His grace, and His comfort at all times. Yes, you are Jesus’ brothers and sisters and heirs with Him. Yes, there is nothing under heaven, not Satan, not angels, not demons, not anything in all creation which can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus(*Romans 8:38-39*). Amen.

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