Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Origin of Evil
Scripture: Genesis 3:1-7
Code: 90-235

Our world is certainly preoccupied with the issue of origins. We hear about it, read about it all the time. Almost every edition of the newspaper, every edition of the major magazines of our nation discusses origins, how things came to be the way they are, either in terms of the physical universe, or in terms of the spiritual universe, terms of human sociology or human anatomy. To know the truth about origins, we have to go back to the Bible. God has given us the story of origins in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1 and 2 is the origin of the physical universe, as we know it. In Genesis 3 is the origin of evil.

Turn in your Bible to Genesis chapter 3. I want to read this passage just so it's set in your mind. After the six days of God's creation, He rested. Everything He had made, according to chapter 1 verse 31, was very good and God rested. He had created a perfect universe. But we live in anything but the perfect universe. And there's a reason. When you come to chapter 3, a dramatic scene takes place and this is the reason why the world is the way it is. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made and he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said you shall not eat from it or touch it lest you die.' And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die for God knows in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' And 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate. She gave also to her husband with her and he ate. Then, the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."

The true diagnosis of the human condition stems from that event. God, the creator of the universe, is all good and only good. And His original creation was all good and only good. The goodness of His creation was a reflection of the goodness of His nature. Now, let me get a little philosophical with you here. God is not the author of evil. If God created evil, then God would be both good and evil. And if God were both good and evil, there would be no hope for the ultimate triumph of good which the Bible promises. If God were Himself evil, He could not therefore triumph over evil, so good could not triumph. If God were the source of evil, He would have to be evil Himself. And if He were evil Himself, then there could be no basis for salvation, for God could not save us from evil if evil was in His nature.

So, the biblical revelation of the original goodness of creation protects the goodness of God. And it makes the source of evil outside of God. Only if the source of evil is outside of God can God conquer evil and can God save sinners from evil. And just as a footnote to that, if God used any kind of evolution to create, evolution is dependent on decay and death, all effects or reflections of evil. So, if God used any kind of evolution to create, then God authored evil. He created decay and He created death. And if God used any form of evolution, then His creation was not all good, it was not perfect when He created it, and it is what it is now because of decay and death, which He must have used in His creation which are evidences of evil, then God must Himself be evil. Our God is not evil. God is all good and only good.

The question then is: where did evil come from? And the answer to that is that we only know what we know from the Bible. It is really useless to speculate about that. Nobody would argue that there is evil in the world. Everybody admits that. Not everybody admits that we are totally depraved and that we have original sin in us. Not everybody admits that we are evil and wretched to the core. But everyone admits there is evil in the world to some degree.

And, in fact, the problem of evil in the world has really occupied the best minds of history. Certainly, we would agree in our own country, in the history of our own country, there has never been a greater brain, a greater mental capacity than that enjoyed by Albert Einstein. Not just the greatest scientist of this century, but maybe the greatest intellect we've known in modern times. And for Albert Einstein, just for an illustration, the great scientist that he was, the great mind that he was, the toughest intellectual barrier to the Christian faith was not the question of God creating the world. Simple reason, the reason of cause and effect, was not hard for Einstein to grasp. He saw that the universe was an effect and it had to have a source. He saw that the universe was designed and it had to have a designer. He saw that it was ordered and it had to come out of an orderly mind. And so, Einstein concluded that there must be a mind behind the universe. He rejected the idea of matter simply bumping around endlessly in space until by random it formed itself into the universe that now exists. As he put it, quote: "The universe reveals an intelligence of such superiority that it overshadows all human intelligence."

No, Einstein was not stumped by God as a creator. What really stymied Einstein was something far tougher than the doctrine of creation. It was the problem of evil and suffering. He knew there had to be a designer; he agonized over the character of that designer. How could God be good and yet allow terrible things to happen to people? Einstein couldn't resolve the problem of evil and suffering with a good God and so he turned completely away from the God of the Bible, the God he had been raised in Judaism to believe in.

What really tripped up Einstein was that he was a determinist. That is, he viewed human beings as complicated machines. He saw them doing simply what they were programmed to do by natural,

irresistible forces. In fact, Einstein concluded that human beings were like wind-up toys, you wind them up and they do what they're manufactured to do. If that is so, he concluded, there can be no such thing as morality. There can be no such thing as right or wrong. There can be no such thing as sin. There can be no such thing as guilt. If a person's actions are determined, if he's just a wind-up toy, wound up by a cosmic mind to do what it was designed for him to do, then he cannot be responsible for what he does before God. He, said Einstein, is no more responsible for what he does than a stone is responsible for where it goes when someone throws it.

Who is responsible? Well, God has to be responsible, Einstein concluded. But if God is responsible, then He cannot be a good God or He's responsible for evil. And if God is responsible, the God of Judaism, or the God of Christianity, then He makes us do bad things as well as good. If, Einstein said, God was like this, He would be constantly passing judgment on Himself as evil. Well, he couldn't accept that. Could not accept that God could be both good and evil. And so, he determined that there was no personal God at all. And he rejected the God of Judaism, and he rejected the God of Christianity, rejected the God of the Bible, and he concluded that God exists as an impersonal cosmic mind. Simply a rational force that gave the world its rational structure. Those of you who studied philosophy would conclude that he believed in Spinoza's god. And Einstein's premise that human beings were just robots was based upon the fact that an impersonal, rational mind created those robots. But he could not be a personal God with any personal nature.

Einstein was wrong. And as I told you a few weeks ago when I was talking about Einstein in another context, he never got it. He didn't even come to the place where he fully understood God as the force in creation, that's why he was never satisfied and died never having really identified the true power in the universe. But Einstein was wrong about God; God is a personal God. And God is not responsible for evil. And the problem with Einstein is he would not believe his own Scriptures, the Scriptures of Judaism.

Now, when it comes to the origin of evil, you have several options. And these are the common options. You can take Einstein's option, first of all, that there is a cosmic power: unknowable, impersonal, some kind of rational power out there with no personality, no relationship, no ability to connect to us, but some cosmic eternal power, rational power that launched everything in our universe. You can take that view. He is not personal; he cannot know or be known. Or you can take a second view. You can take the view that God does not even exist. That is the view of the intellectual atheist who says, no, there is no force, there is no power, there is no rational mind, there's absolutely nothing there. And reality made itself. And since there is no God, there is no evil and there is no good in reality. Those are only subjected determinations that human beings invent, but there is no true good or evil.

Or you could take another view. You can take the view that suffering, and evil, and death don't really exist. God is good, and therefore everything is good, you just think it's not good. That is to say that

evil is an illusion, suffering is an illusion, and death is an illusion. You say, “Who in the world believes that?” Christian Science believes that. Christian Science, folks, is not Christian or scientific. It’s like Grape Nuts, ever eat that? It’s not grapes or nuts. Christian Science is neither Christian nor scientific. It is misnamed. By the way, Hindus also say the entire universe is an illusion. So, you can take some kind of esoteric mystical approach to the reality of evil and agree with those people.

Fourthly, you could say God is beyond good and evil. God is transcendent and He cannot be defined by any human concept. That gets very close to Einstein’s perspective, that God doesn’t even dabble in this stuff down here. He’s way beyond that. Maybe the God of the Deists, he is the God who winds it all up but is unmoved, untouched by any of it.

Or, you can take the view that is rising in popularity today that God has limited power. This is a new theology that is emerging very rapidly, and it’s hard to believe this, but in the framework of evangelical Christianity. And this is called “process theology.” This is the idea that God is in process. That God is trying to get where He wants to get, just like we’re trying to get where we want to get. That bad things happen because God can’t stop them. This is the struggling God of Rabbi Kushner who wrote “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” Remember that famous book? Well, Rabbi Kushner’s God was a God who hadn’t arrived at being what He really wanted to be, like to be a fully good God and a fully sovereign God and have absolute control over everything, but he wasn’t quite there yet. He was in process. That has now invaded evangelicalism. And we now have quote-unquote evangelical scholars advocating this about God, that God doesn’t know. I just read through some material put out from an evangelical seminary from a man who is saying that God doesn’t know what’s going to happen in the future. The reason he doesn’t know what’s going to happen is because nothing has happened and you can’t know nothing. He gets all caught up in the imaginations of that kind of reasoning.

So, you either believe that God isn’t God, there’s just a cosmic power out there; you believe that God doesn’t exist at all and it’s all just nobody times nothing equals everything; or you believe that suffering sin and death don’t really exist, they’re just an illusion; or you believe that God so transcends all of that stuff that he’s unaffected by it and therefore you protect him responsibility for evil; or you believe that God is in process and that’s the new and popular view, that God really has good desires, but he really is not sovereign enough to get where he wants to get as soon as he would like to get there.

One other view you can throw in the mix is that just plain old: God made evil. And there are people who teach that. I was reading some of it this week that God made evil, he created evil for good purposes. He wanted to affect some good purposes and he needed to do evil to do it, so he created evil for good purposes.

None of those is true. None of them. In spite of what Einstein thought, God is personal, and God is relational, and God is good. God does exist. So does sin, and so does suffering, and so does death, and only a fool sees that as an illusion. God is not beyond good and evil. He is not so transcendent that He is not fully cognizant of good and evil and deals with both. God does not have limited power so that He can't do what He wants and He's like the rest of us struggling to get somewhere, but He's not there yet. And finally, God did not create evil.

Let me put it to you simply. God is not responsible for evil; His creatures are. God is not responsible for evil; His creatures are. Everything, listen to this carefully, that God created was very what? Good. Everything. This is affirmed throughout the Scripture. In Habakkuk chapter 1, "God is of purer eyes than to approve evil or behold evil. He cannot look on wickedness." Habakkuk chapter 1 verse 13. First Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not the author of confusion." Confusion is a product of sin. First John 1:5 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." James 1:13 says, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man." First John 2:16 says, "All that is in the world," all evil categorically, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life is not of the Father." Psalm 5:4, "You are not of God who has pleasure in wickedness, neither will evil dwell with you," Psalm 5:4. In fact, on a positive note, Isaiah 6, the antiphonal cry of the angels was that God was holy, holy, holy.

You see a glimpse of that, of course, when Jesus came into the world, God in human flesh. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. God is not evil. God does not do evil. He cannot be tempted to do evil. He never tempts anybody else to do evil. God is not responsible for evil. The source of evil, the source of sin is outside God. When God created angels and God created humans, He gave them intelligence, He gave them reason, and He gave them choice. And there is a sequence. I put those words in that order for a purpose.

Intelligence gave them the ability to understand things. Reason gave them the ability to process that understanding toward behavior. And choice gave them the freedom to determine that behavior. Intelligence, reason, and choice. Bottom line: with what they knew, and with the ability they had to process that information, they would be brought to a choice. And whether angels or men, they would have the choice either to obey God or not to obey God.

Listen to this, to disobey God was to initiate evil. Evil is not the presence of something, evil is the absence of righteousness. You can't create evil because evil doesn't exist as a created entity. It doesn't exist as a created reality. Evil is a negative. Evil is the absence of perfection. It's the absence of holiness. It's the absence of goodness. It's the absence of righteousness. Evil became a reality only when creatures chose to do disobey. Evil came into existence initially then in the fall of angels and then next, in the fall of Adam and Eve.

Just put it this way in your mind. Evil is not a created thing. Evil is not a substance. Evil is not an entity. Evil is not a being. Evil is not a force. Evil is not some floating spirit. Evil is a lack of moral perfection. God created absolute perfection. Wherever a lack of that exists, sin exists. And that cannot exist in the nature of God or in anything that God makes. Evil comes into existence when God's creatures fall short of the standard of moral perfection.

Now, let me take it a step further. God did not create evil, He did not author evil, He did not make evil. But listen carefully, very important, God did decree to use evil as a part of His eternal plan, okay? He will not be culpable for it. He did not bring it into existence. That would be impossible because God is good, all good, and only good. Therefore, whatever comes out of Him is all good and only good. God can therefore produce only good. And what is evil but the absence of that good, which is a choice made by the reasonings, based upon the information revealed through His creatures. But, God was not caught off guard. In fact, God decreed that evil would be part of His plan. He is not the creator of evil and He is not the cause of evil. He did not bring evil into existence in a cosmic sense, and He did not and does not bring evil into existence in a personal sense. He is not the cause of sin, nor is He the cause of sins in the lives of people. But He does use it for His purposes.

And that's why in Isaiah 45:7, write this down, you may run across it, it says, "God creates calamity." Some older translations say He creates evil. That is a really poor translation and not true. God does create calamity. If you read the context of Isaiah 45:7 it is clear that judgment is the issue. God does not create evil, but God does bring judgment on evil, creating therefore the calamity by which evil is judged.

Now, listen carefully. Scripture written by God always assigns the guilt and responsibility for all sin to creatures, never to God, never to God. Folks, that's all we know. Okay? I've taken you as deep as I can go. There's nowhere else to go. That's all we know. Beyond that, we operate in faith.

We do know some things. We know God is holy, right? We know He's too pure to look on iniquity, can't tolerate evil. We know He tempts no man, neither is tempted by any man. We know He's holy, holy, holy. All the things we went through. No evil dwells in Him. He is all light and no darkness. We know that, we believe that. God is not the author of confusion. He is not the source of sin. We know that, we believe that. Sin comes into existence when the standard of moral perfection is not met and that is an act based upon intellect, reason and choice made by His creatures.

Now, the question then comes up: why would God allow sin? Come on now. I can only speculate. There's no specific statement, but I think you can make a fairly reasonable speculation beyond which I cannot go and don't find any value in tempting to go. And it is this, what did sin coming into the world bring about? Well, it brought about, I would say, three things. And these are the three reasons why I believe God allowed evil.

Number one, it brought about the salvation of sinners, right? God had to allow sin; God had to decree sin in the plan though never the author of it, in order that He might save sinners. Well, why did God want to save sinners? To put on display attributes that otherwise never would have been manifest, right? How is God going to show grace if there aren't any sinners? How is God going to show mercy if there aren't any sinners? That was a part of God's nature that God wanted to display for His own glory throughout all eternity. So, God provided a means by which He could demonstrate grace, demonstrate mercy. He also wanted to show love, love that is so far reaching that it can reach even His own enemies who hate Him. How is He going to show that if He doesn't have any enemies?

So, God allows evil in order that He might demonstrate grace and mercy and forgiveness and salvation. Secondly, He allows evil in order that He might display His wrath, in order that He might put His wrath on display, His anger on display, His judgment on display. How would God ever reveal that part of His true and eternal nature if there were not an opportunity to judge sinners? And so, all you can do is look at redemptive history and you see the salvation of sinners and the damnation of sinners and that is what goes on and you see ultimately a place prepared for those who are damned and a place prepared for those who are saved and you must conclude then that the eternal purpose of God was to save some and judge some in order that He might demonstrate both His grace and His wrath.

And then, I like to throw a third thought in there. I believe that God allowed sin in order that He might forever destroy it. As long as His creatures have any measure of freedom, as long as His creatures have intelligence, that is they can know and reason, that is they can process that knowledge toward behavior, and choice, that is they can choose what to do, as long as they have that capacity there is a potential for them to fall short of the standard. Right? To make the wrong choice. Well, it didn't take long for them to do it. We don't know how long it was before Lucifer made the wrong choice before God. We don't know how long it was even in the Garden before Adam and Eve made the wrong choice, but it was certainly before they had any children. They had their children probably around the age of 100 or a little more.

So, there is choice and the potential of a wrong choice is there. A measure of freedom is given to the creatures by which they can choose to honor God, by which they can choose to dishonor. As long as that is there, then the reality, the potential reality of evil exists when the wrong choice is made. And I believe that once the wrong choice is made, then God goes into action and one, He can demonstrate His grace and salvation; two, He can demonstrate His wrath in judgment; and three, He can then finally destroy evil.

It's almost as if God wanted evil to come to the surface so that He could excise it. That's what's going to happen when the whole of redemptive history is complete, when all the saved are saved and all the lost are cast into the lake of fire, then death and hell are thrown into the lake of fire. What does that

mean? No more death and no more hell and no more judgment. Why? Because there won't be any more sin. And when you go to heaven, there's nothing there that smacks of a sinful world, right? There's no more sorrow, no more sadness, no more sin, no more dying, no more death. So, I think God decreed evil within His plan without creating it for those three reasons: to save sinners, to judge sinners and to once and for all and forever destroy evil. It was always potentiated. As long as it was possible, it would need to come to the surface so God could excise it.

Now, listen, based upon that explanation, and I know that sounds simple to you, but it's taken me a long time to clarify in my own mind through the years. I mean, in recent years I've certainly understood it. But as a young man, you grapple with a lot of that. Summing it up: there is no external cause of sin. Okay? Outside the creature. There's no force floating out there that God created. It is the absence of perfection. There is no deterministic cause and effect. That is to say some fatalism. It's just choice. Within God's decree, He allowed for that choice, knew those choices would be made the way they were made, planned that in to the decree in order to display both His grace and His wrath, and to put a final and eternal end to sin. But always, now mark this, the one who chose evil was the source of it.

In the case of Lucifer, he was the source of evil initially in the angelic realm and as we will see, he got a third of the other angels to get along with him and join. Now, since angels don't procreate, Lucifer didn't sin and pass on sin because angels don't marry are not given in marriage, as Jesus said. They don't procreate. They were all created at one time. But when Satan made a bad choice, he managed to seduce a third of the rest of the angels. There are ten-thousand times ten-thousand thousands of thousands, so you can multiply all of that and you're probably not there yet. So, there are twice as many holy angels as demons since one third fell, two thirds didn't. But they fell, by choice. We'll see that choice when we get into the prophets.

The same happened with Adam and Eve, only it had a different effect. With angels they all sinned their own sin and nobody sin passed to anybody else 'cause they don't procreate. In the case of Adam and Eve, when Adam and Eve made the wrong choice, all humanity went with them because we all come out of the loins of Adam and Eve. So, the source of evil is outside of God. The source of evil is the creature.

Now, let's go back to Genesis chapter 3. At least we can cover the first three words, maybe in part. This is big subjects. Serpent, big subject. "Now, the serpent," we'll stop at that point. It reminds me when I was teaching Romans and I went to start the Book of Romans in my first message I said, "Let's read our text." The first word in Romans, "Paul." And I said, "Okay, let's stop there." And we spent I don't know how long talking about Paul. Well, this is kind of like that. You can't just read "serpent" and go on. What is this serpent? What is this?

You’re in the Garden, everything is good. All kinds of creatures are there that had been made by God. There are animals of various kinds. There are birds and cattle. And there are creeping kind of animals, that is, animals that walk low to the ground. It doesn’t mean they slither. It just means they were are low to the ground. It could mean animals with short legs, as I pointed out. It could be insects, and so forth. There are those that are taller, and there are those that are up in the sky, namely birds. And there are those that are in the water. And God made all these creatures.

Well, here we meet a serpent, *nachash* in Hebrew. And it’s a name for reptile. We don’t know what this reptile was like. I think most people assume that this animal was a slithering snake. You see little pictures of a snake wound around a tree or hanging off a branch, whatever, slithering up and kind of propped up like a cobra. But we don’t really know that that’s the case. You would notice later in chapter 3 verse 14 that part of the curse on this serpent was that he was going to go on his belly and eat dust. So, if that was the curse, we can assume that at this particular time when the serpent first appeared in the Garden, he’s not slithering around on his belly eating dirt yet. That was part of the curse. So, in some measure this appears as an upright animal. The word *nachash* in Hebrew relates to the verb “to hiss,” which is associated with sounds that reptiles make.

There’s another Old Testament word used to speak of reptiles, *tannin* and they are used interchangeably. There’s a section of Exodus chapter 7 verses 9 to 15 where Moses is interacting with the magicians in Pharaoh’s court, remember that? And they throw down their sticks and they become *tannin.* But Moses’ stick becomes a serpent called *nachash*. So, from that text we can conclude that they’re used interchangeably, although *tannin* is the word that appears for dragon, or sea monster. *Nachash* then, is some kind of reptile, some kind of reptile like *tannin*. It could be a snake. Of course, after the curse, after that, and even after the Flood, we don’t know what form reptiles took, we don’t know what reptiles got on the ark and therefore got off and what other ones were destroyed. But some kind of reptile, some kind of dragon, some kind of serpent.

When you come in to the New Testament, very interestingly, Satan is called in Revelation 12, we’ll look at it later, Revelation 12, Revelation 20, he is called the serpent and the dragon both. So, in the Hebrew he would be called the *nachash* and the *tannin*. So, sometimes it’s a dragon; sometimes it’s a serpent. So, we have to conclude we don’t know what it was. This is some kind of reptile dragon, something that maybe we would, maybe you feel comfortable calling it a raptor, if you know what that means, some kind of dinosaur type creature. That’s really all we know about the creature.

But the serpent is compared to other animals. Look at verse 1, “It was more crafty than any beast of the field,” which indicates that this animal belongs in the animal kingdom. This isn’t some singular kind of creation. This isn’t just some unique animal. This is part of what God made back in chapter 1 verse 24 to 28, referred to again in chapter 2 verses 19 and 20, all the various beasts of the field that God made. This is one of them. This is an actual physical animal. This is a real animal. But it wouldn’t be an animal that we would know, it’s a pre-cursed reptile. Whatever this animal was, it wound up on

its belly eating dirt after the curse. So, some kind of a talking reptile, higher and different than we might suppose a snake to be.

Now, this is not just any other reptile because this one talks. This one talks. Now, I read a commentator who said, you know, there may have been a lot of talking animals in the Garden. And I thought, what? That isn't in the Bible. He went on for about three paragraphs. There's nothing in the Bible about that. He's got a Dr. Doolittle complex or something, nothing in the Bible about talking animals. He brought up, well, what about Balaam's ass? Well, Balaam's ass never said a word until God spoke through him on one occasion. No, there aren't talking animals in the Garden. But there are wonders in the Garden, and then I think Adam and Eve are still discovering the wonders and so Eve doesn't appear, we don't have any real information about it. She doesn't appear to be overly shocked when this reptile walks up and starts a conversation.

But there's something different about this particular serpent because he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the Garden?" This particular animal knows about God. This particular animal has a personality. This particular animal speaks with intelligence. This particular animal has a devious, malevolent, evil mind. Let me tell you, people, this is not a fable. Nothing in here says, Let me tell you, let me make up a story to illustrate how sin came. It doesn't say that. It's not a fable. This is not a legend with a moral. There is no moral. And if this is a fable, then how do you curse a fable in verse 14? God cursed the serpent. This is not a fable. This is not a legend. This is not a parable. People say, "It's a parable with a moral." What's the moral? There's no moral. Jewish rabbis said, and I read several of these, they said the serpent wasn't really talking to Eve but the writer, Moses, uses a serpent as a symbol of evil impulses rising in Eve's heart. Really? So this is just a sort of symbolic way to refer to stuff that was going on in Eve's mind? Really? Then, why did God curse the reptile? And where does it say that? Why can't people just take the Bible for what it says? She was in the garden one day, a reptile walked up to her and said, "Hi. Do you really think God said you shall not eat from the trees of the Garden?" And he was so compelling, she didn't even seem to step back, she just entered right into the conversation and said, "Well, from the fruit of the trees in the Garden we may eat," and they were off in a conversation.

You know what I think? I think that's exactly the way it happened. And if it didn't happen that way, then we can't trust God's Word. But don't come and tell me you believe God's Word if you don't believe that.

Now, this creature wasn't just like any creature. Notice back in verse 1, "The serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." Now, you've got a reptile. We're not talking about, this isn't like snakes are sneakier than other animals. No, no, no. Snakes aren't any sneakier than any other animals. Crafty means subtle, cunning, intelligent, wise. I don't think snakes are that smart. Ever meet a smart snake? Smart reptile? Subtle, cunning? They're no more subtle or cunning than any other predator, any other animal that hunts.

The crafty, cunning is not a reference to the characteristic of snakes. He's not comparing snakes to cows, for example, or snakes to lions, or snakes to anything else. He is comparing this reptile to all other animals and saying this one is more wise than any other animal.

Snakes, in fact, are wonderful creatures. I mean, they're really amazing creatures. You read Proverbs chapter 30 verses 18 and 19, and you have the wonder of a snake on a rock. But this is a crafty, subtle, malevolent, evil, wicked individual animal because it is being used by a superhuman intelligence to lead Eve and Adam into a choice for evil, a choice that this personality already made. And listen carefully, this personality inside that animal knew the effect of the choice Adam and Eve were going to make. Adam and Eve had no clue. They had no idea what would happen when they made this choice.

You see, when Lucifer first made that choice, he made it because he said, "I want to be like God." And he found out that immediately he became as much unlike God as it is possible to be. God is holy; he became wretched. And he says to Eve, see, the reason God doesn't want you to eat is because if you eat you'll become like God. He's just taking them through the same exact scenario, only he knows exactly what the effect of it is going to be. He doesn't understand the procreative aspect, but he does understand if they sin, they're going to experience exactly what he experienced, the desire to be like God becomes the reality of being as much unlike God as is conceivable, and what Eve found out is she thought she could be like God, and ended up in the same situation as much unlike God as possible to be.

This is a subtle snake. This is a snake who hates God. This is a snake who is angry about the circumstance in which he has found himself, this Satan, this dragon, this serpent. He wants to pull this wondrous new creation, he must have, Satan must have looked at the creation of Adam and Eve: this isn't anything like I've known. Angels don't procreate, thus multiply and fill the earth, replenish the earth and the sovereignty over these wondrous creatures. You know, it's amazing for you and I to go to a zoo, but just imagine angelic beings wandering around in the first few days of Eden. What wondrous things God has made. And the malevolent and wicked Satan and his other dominions wanting to pull it all down into iniquity, and this is what leads to this scenario.

This personality had more natural knowledge. He knew about the prohibition. He knew that God had said, don't eat of that tree. He claimed not only to know what God said. He claimed, listen, to know more than Eve. He claims to know more than Eve does. In verse 4 the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die." I know more than you, you think you're going to die? No, I know more than you. He claims to know more than Eve knows. His thoughts are morally wretched. Snakes don't have moral thoughts, reptiles don't have moral thoughts, they can't make moral judgments. This is a creature who is evil in purpose, evil opposed of God, evil opposed to man. And he offers to Eve the promise of unequalled blessing. I mean, what could be better than being like God? But he knows that

when you seek to be like God, the end result is shame, degradation, misery and damnation. He knows already because that's what he's experienced. The fact that he was cursed indicates that he was a responsible, moral being.

Now, who was this creature? Who was this? Go all the way to the end of the Bible. This is why you have to take the whole counsel of God because you really don't get the clear identification of Him. Nothing is said, by the way, in Genesis 3 about Satan. Satan's never mentioned in Genesis 3. So, we go to the end of the Bible to find out who he is. The book of Revelation, verse 9 chapter 12. Revelation chapter 12 verse 9, there's a lot here but we'll just jump to verse 9 for time's sake. And here you find again these two terms sort of borrowing from the Hebrew where in the Old Testament he's called *nachash* and *tannin* which is both serpent or reptile and dragon. And verse 9, "And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan." Now, there is a very clear designation. Who is that serpent? Who is that dragon? Who is that original one of old who deceives the whole world? It is none other than the devil and Satan. There he is clearly identified.

Now, turn to the 20th chapter of Revelation and verse 2, verse 1 actually can start it. "An angel," this is the time of the Millennial kingdom, after Christ's Second Coming and judgment described in chapter 19, "and angel coming down from heaven having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand and he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan."

So really, there's no problem identifying who this is, because he is identified at the very end when it's time for God to take over and put an end to his enterprises. He is a serpent or the dragon. And I think the combination of those two words being used in the New Testament, along with the two Hebrew words being used somewhat interchangeably indicate that you don't just have a snake here; you have some kind of reptile who could be called a serpent on the one hand and a dragon on the other. The difference being as we think of a serpent, we think of a legless creature; as we think of a dragon, we think of a creature with legs, some kind of amazing and wondrous creature that perhaps we have no indication of in the created world today.

Now, you have a New Testament commentary. I'm going to close with this. We have a New Testament commentary on Genesis 3 in two places. Second Corinthians 11, this continues to help us to understand who this serpent is. And also to demonstrate the veracity of this account. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, "I'm afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness." There's that same idea of craftiness, there is that serpent and there is Eve again. The bottom line, this is a New Testament affirmation to the reality of the Old Testament account. This is not, again, a legend, this is not a fable, this is not a parable, this is a real account. The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness. And that simply affirms and gives commentary to what we see in Genesis chapter 3.

It is also true in 1 Timothy 2. I want you to look at verses 13 and 14, that the pattern of what happened in the Garden is sustained by the New Testament. Verse 13 of 1 Timothy 2. First Timothy

2:13, “It was not Adam who was deceived,” okay, you want to remember that, it was not Adam who was deceived. Adam wasn’t deceived, who was deceived? Eve. She was there, she was deceived, and Adam just says, hey, yeah, if you’re going to do that I’m going to do that too, and jumped in. There was no deception. That affirms the story exactly the way it lays out in Genesis. Is this important? Of course it’s important, because the very fact that that is accurate historic representation supports the fact that the man is the head of the woman, because a woman out from under the authority of her husband, acting independently, is more susceptible to deception. And so, it was Adam first created, then Eve. It was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. So, there we have in the New Testament the clear identity as to who the serpent was, and the affirmation of this temptation by the devil.

Now, what can we say in summarizing all of this? The personality, let’s say, in the reptile, is not identified in Genesis 3. But we can know this: there is a real personality there. There is a personality there opposed to God, calling God’s Word into question, calling God’s character into question, impugning God, and saying God just doesn’t want you to know everything He knows because He’s selfish, in effect. So, here is a personality, a malevolent, wicked, evil, vicious personality opposed to God, opposed to man, because he wants to plunge humanity into the same misery that he has. He’s not going to Eve and saying, “Whatever you do, Eve, don’t disobey God. Whatever you do, Eve, don’t seek to be like God, I’m living testimony it is a bad choice.” There is no element of that in Satan. He is wretched and malevolent from the top to the bottom inside out, if you can use those terms of a spiritual being. He seeks only evil.

And so, he rushes to destroy man. He is deceptive. He is lying. He is hostile. He is wicked. He is a killer. He wants to bring about the death not only of all those angels who went with him, but the death of the whole human race. As powerful as he is, as wicked as he is, as evil as he is, listen to this, he is subject to God’s sovereign control. Now listen, his temptation of Eve does not involve any compulsion on his part. He can’t make her sin. He doesn’t have that power.

Now, let me tell you something, folks. The devil still can’t make you sin. You hear that? He cannot make you sin. When you sin, you bear the responsibility. He does not have the power to make you sin. He didn’t have the power to make Eve sin. She sinned by her own choice. And Adam and Eve are fully guilty for their sin. He is a malevolent power, but he is subject to God’s sovereign control. We’ll see that when we look at the story of Job next week. And his power has its limits. God says you have so much room beyond which you cannot go. And one of the things that he’s limited in is his power.

Think of it this way, he thought he could be like God. But guess what? He’s not omniscient, he’s not omnipotent, and he’s not omnipresent. And he’s not immutable. And he’s not sovereign. He’s not like God at all. He’s utterly as much unlike God as a creature could be. He didn’t get what he wanted. And as Martin Luther said, “The devil is the Lord’s devil.” He functions within the sovereign purposes of

God to achieve the things that are in the eternal decree of God for the salvation of sinners, the damnation of sinners and the ultimate triumph and destruction over evil.

Now, the primary word for him, the primary name is Satan. Satan. He is called that, as I just read you in Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20 verse 2, but he's also called that in the Old Testament. That's right. Three times in three passages, he is identified by the name Satan. Satan, to give you a little preview of next week, Satan is a word that means adversary, or opponent. He is the adversary of God, and he's the adversary of man. He could be called "the adversary" with a definite article, the adversary. And he is the first couple of times. The third time he's mentioned, 1 Chronicles 21, he's called adversary and the adversary simply meaning a term to identifying him becomes a proper name and he's no longer the adversary, he is adversary, with a capital "S", Satan. From then on, he is Satan. He is the adversary of God and the adversary of men.

Second Corinthians 11:2 says, "We don't want to be ignorant of his devices." So, what we're going to do next time is I'm going to take you through the Old Testament and show you how Satan is presented in the Old Testament. I'm going to show you also how he fell, why he fell. And once we understand the serpent, then we'll launch into his approach to Eve with greater understanding and it will help us in our own struggle as well. All right, enough. Let's pray.

Father, Your Word again gives light as the truth is open to us. We thank You for the power that is in us in Christ that allows us to do exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think. We thank You that Satan has been placed under our feet, as the Book of Romans tells us. We thank You that he is a defeated enemy. Thank You that we can resist him and he will literally flee from us in fear. What a great confidence. Thank You for the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We thank You for the sword of the Spirit, the wielding of the truth which causes us to triumph. We thank You that You've shown us that You are a good God, and only good, and always good, and all good, and that evil You have not made. Though You have within Your decree a place for evil, that You might put Your glory on display. And that in the end You might bring the potential of evil to reality that it can be destroyed forever. We long for that day when we live in the perfect world where there is no sin, is no sorrow, there is no suffering, and there is no dying because sin is no more. Until that day, may we continue to be triumphant in overcoming the wicked one by the power of Your Word. We'll thank You in the Savior's name. Amen.

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