

FINAL Sermon SCRIPT

Name: Christoph Lameter
Date: For the Preaching Practicum (Pannel) on November 3rd, 2nd Sermon.
Title: The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil
Text: Gen 2:7-9.15-17;3:1-11
Theme: The Root of Sin
Purpose: Show that sin is more importantly an attitude problem toward God and expression of unbelief.

I. Text preached

A. *The Clergy Conference*

On the 14th of October I attended the "Annual Clergy" conference in the Pasadena Hilton Hotel. The topic was the "Challenge of Religious Leaders in Crisis". All meetings dealt in some way or the other with **Problems, with Crisis, with Failure that Pastors encounter**. Some well known speakers were there: Jack Hayford from Church on the Way, Dr. Augsburg from Fuller and H.B. London from "Focus on the Family".

We have all heard often on the media news of **Pastors failing** because of marital infidelity or other problematic sexual conduct. The conference was focusing on this issue since it seems to be one of the most frequent problems in Ministry. H.B. London is running the counseling and supporting department for **Pastors in Crisis** at "Focus on the Family". A very unique and needed Ministry since Pastors are often isolated because of their position! H.B. London especially talked about a lot of hairy situations around the **issue of sexual conduct**. As a consequence "Focus on the Family" has introduced **phone-counseling** for Pastors with guaranteed **anonymity** and is trying to connect needy Pastors to other locally available resources to help them.

Pastors are frequently falling into sin! We will be under attack, under pressure, under temptation when we move out into the ministry! I think it will be helpful for us to survey how sin comes about, how can it happen that one falls into sin? What are the strategies used by the enemy?

B. *Scripture: Gen 2:7-9,15-17;3:1-11*

I recently held a Bible Study in the Westminster Presbyterian Church on the **Fall of Adam and Eve** in Genesis Chapter 2 and 3. Here we have a very old, very well known passage, but I never realized what I had **missed of the meaning** of this chapter until I did that Bible-Study. I would like to share that with you today. This passage that has influenced the minds and hearts of the Saints of God for thousands of years. I will read from Gen 2:7 to 3:8 skipping some verses in between. We will focus on the issue of how the situation developed so that Adam and Eve fell into sin.

Hear the word of God from the book of Genesis:

Gen 2:7 [then] the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

- 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
- 9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *[Skipping verses]*
- 15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
- 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;
- 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." *[Skipping verses!]*
- 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'"
- 2 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 middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"
- 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not 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 loincloths for themselves.
- 8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

C. *The two Trees*

Something had always **bugged me** about this passage. **Two trees are** growing in the midst of the Garden and are at the centerpiece of the story. **Two trees are** specially set up in the Garden by God. **Two trees..** What do they mean? They have such strange names the *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*.

1. **The Tree of Life**

The *tree of Life* is a tree bearing a fruit that gives life and renews life. It gives **fullness to life**. Life as God intended it to be. It has **a healing power**, God's power to heal and to give wholeness are present through the fruit of the tree. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden are eating from this tree, **have wholeness**, they have everlasting life.

2. **The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**

The tree of Life gives life when its fruits are eaten. So what happens when someone eats fruit from the tree of "Knowledge of Good and Evil"? *[Pause]*

The tree of "Knowledge of Good and Evil" actually **gave knowledge** of Good and Evil - or better for us today: Knowledge of **Right and Wrong** - like the tree of life gives life. Knowledge like that

is also referred to as wisdom by Eve. The fruit of the tree must give a kind of wisdom. But eating from this tree was forbidden which is at the heart of the meaning of the passage here.

What does the phrase "Knowledge of Good and Evil" exactly mean? That phrase appears repeatedly in the Old Testament and often refers to a persons ability to make moral decisions. Good and Evil, **Right and Wrong** is the capacity to **make moral decisions on ones own**. Dt 1:39 for examples refers to Children who are do not yet have the "Knowledge of Good and Evil".

So forbidding to eat the fruit of the tree of "Knowledge of Good and Evil" means that Adam and Eve were not able to make their **own moral decisions**, not to have the knowledge, the wisdom to do so. Why would God not want humans to be able to know the difference between Good and Evil, **Right and Wrong**? Not to make their own responsible decisions? To understand what is going on here we have to know the whole story first.

D. Steps to Sin

Let us **step by step** follow how Adam and Eve fall into the sin of violating this command of God. The whole story is very instructive also for our personal fight with sin and with temptation.

1. God provides 2:7-9, 15

The situation at the beginning shows **God's goodness** to Adam and Eve. God makes the heaven and the earth. He sets up a beautiful garden for them rich with food. He gave Adam a counterpart Eve. He gave a **harmony between animals and humans**. He provides everything and everything is perfect. Adam and Eve have every reason to be **thankful to God**, who is good and shows that he cares for all their needs. Adam and Eve have every reason to trust God with all their heart and all their minds.

2. God gives a rule to save them from danger

But then God makes one, **only one rule**, one commandment, one directive:

You may freely eat of every tree of the Garden, but of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat, for *in the day that you eat of it you shall die*. 2:16-17

A very simple command, even with an explanation. Eating from the tree is deadly! It is not good for them! God expresses his care by warning them. Now Adam and Eve have to **trust** that the command that he has given to them is true. Faith in the Lord is possible now for Adam and Eve. And it is very simple: Do not eat from that tree! **Only one rule** to keep.

3. Exaggeration of the Word of God

But then the Serpent comes and has a talk with Eve. The serpent is not convinced of God's goodness. Its first suggestion is that God **was unreasonable, he was harsh, he was so hard** that he forbade Adam and Eve to eat any of the fruits of the trees in the Garden. Eve is not fooled but immediately notices the Serpents exaggeration and corrects the snake.

We may eat from of the fruit of the trees in the Garden; but God said "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *nor shall you touch it, or you shall die*". 3:3

Eve does add something to God's command however. God only forbade the eating. She adds to this "... and you shall not touch it". Was Eve expressing her **dissatisfaction with the situation**?

God was not so bad as the Serpent depicts him, but the Serpent still has a point. It was not very nice of God to forbid that fruit for them. She felt that she was not even able to touch it. But that was not what God had said. The serpent succeeded in **placing some doubts** of God's goodness in Eve!

This exaggeration and generalization of what God has said and consequently what God's will is for our lives is constantly going on and can be used **to manipulate** us! In Luke 4:9- Jesus is tempted by the devil and what does the devil use - to finally tempt? Psalm 91! Scripture! The word of God itself is frequently used to argue against the will of God.

I remember one interview for an Internship in which a Pastor wanted to convince me that homosexual behavior was legitimate by referring to the story of David and his friend Jonathan. She suggested that they had a homosexual relationship!

We have to know the word of God and the will of God. We need to be on our guard when these small distortions of Scripture come up because they can quickly develop to something major.

4. Mistrust: God is holding something back.

And so also it develops further here. The serpent has found that Eve is not satisfied with God and it takes advantage of that knowledge. The serpent suggests that God is **not good and not trustworthy**.

He withheld the fruits of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from them! He did not give them the capacity to decide between **Right and Wrong**! Adam and Eve **would miss out** on something if they follow God's command. Something good was missing, something that would make them more like their beloved master. God did not give them all that they needed. God cannot be trusted because **he withheld something good** from them. The serpent argues:

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. 3:5

The Serpent is saying that **God lied to Adam and Eve**! And kept a blessing from them, something good! God is not to be trusted. He knew they could have it but he would not allow it! When they would eat from the fruit then they would be equals with God.

Were there occasions when you have longed for something that you could not have? Are you dissatisfied with **what God has given you**? Longing for some more money to pay for the studies at Fuller? Money that you could get by taking some "shortcuts"? Having sexual fantasies about other women than your wife? Pretty dangerous because you as a pastor there are so many women around who trust you as their leader!

Are we satisfied with the limits that God has placed on us? That what he said and commanded us to do, is good? Or will our thoughts be able to convince us that there is something that we need **money, sex, honor**, something that God is keeping from us?

5. Modification of the belief system

Eve was not that firm in trusting God. She buys into what the Serpent says. She wants that what God explicitly denied them for their own good. Suddenly **she is no longer convinced**, that God is good and caring, that God does what is best for them. She develops a different belief system. She **herself** knows **what is right and what is wrong**. She **rejects God's decision** about what is right and makes her own. She believes in the promise of getting more than God is willing to give if she takes the initiative! Rejection of God's will! What I do is more beneficial for me than God's will. She suddenly does not believe God anymore.

Mistrust of God leads to *a different faith*. Not God is good and God cares, but I can better take care of myself! I need that money that is not rightfully mine, it is good for me. I need that illicit relationship with a woman, it feels so good. I know what is good for me.

6. Committing the sin 3:6

At this point Adam and Eve are ready to disobey God. They have prepared themselves to commit the sin of eating from the *tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. They trust their own judgment - the fruit of the tree looks so good - they distrust God and then they eat. The result is as we all know disaster. They **are afraid** of God. When God seeks them he gets the answer from Adam

I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked and I hid myself. 3:10

The close relationship with God is broken and they have to leave the Garden of Eden. The same thing happens to us when we fall into sin. We feel afraid of God. But do not let us be afraid like Adam and Eve but come back to Him through his Son Jesus Christ, **restore our relationship with him**, confess our sins and start over again.

E. The root of all Sin

1. Our own right and wrong

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve did not have to make these **moral decisions on their own**. They were dependent on God, in close fellowship with God. They could ask him for what they should do. It seems to have been customary for God to converse with his creatures. Chapter 3:8 reads:

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze 3:8

The word used in the original language suggests that this was a common habit of God! Adam and Eve trusted in God, walked daily with God and did not follow their own decision **on what is Right and what is Wrong**, but their relationship with God determined what is Right.

When they ate from the tree they became capable of making their *own decision* of what is Good and Evil, **Right and Wrong**. Eating of the tree was a break of the relationship to God.

With the eating from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they gained their **own morality**. Their morality became independent of God. God did not govern any **more what is Right and what is Wrong**. They had an **autonomous morality!** An **autonomous morality!** They became wise to decide on their own what is **Right and Wrong**. And so they are separated from God. Their notion of **Right and Wrong** competes with God. They are on the same level as God. What did the Serpent promise:

You will be like God, knowing Good and Evil. 3:5

The question for **Right and Wrong** must be **bound to God** for us Christians and not to some humanitarian consensus as now in our society at large. I do not make my own decision whether homosexuality is good or bad and I do not depend on the judgment of others for that. I ask God for his will and follow the will of God as expressed in Scripture. We as people of faith in Jesus Christ do not have our own way of deciding what is **Right and Wrong**. Quite contrary we have to ask God what is **Right and Wrong**. We do not eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil but we walk in faith with God as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

2. Not Trusting God

Whenever we fall into sin, we first have to come so far as to mistrust God. If we would believe and trust God, we would do what he says. If we do not then at some point there must have been *distrust, mistrust, a rejection of God*. **The root of all sin is in mistrust to God**. Do you feel that God is unfair in some respect to you?

Here we have a kind of **Radar System**, that gives us an early warning that problems are ahead. If sin is in our thoughts, *mistrust to God*, then we need to reorient ourselves and take care of our relationship with Christ first before we run into serious trouble. If we long for this money, for power and other things then we have to **tell ourselves** that God will provide, God cares for us. God's will is the best for us, even if we cannot understand it now and today.

3. The attitude problem

I sometimes think that the sin itself is not the **big issue** for God. The big issue for God is the mistrust that is expressed in sin, the rejection of God. **The attitude is the biggest problem**.

If someone is living in sin then he has an attitude problem first of all. His lifestyle expresses rejection of God, distrust that God's commandments are the best guides for our life.

Attitude, not the act of sin itself, is important for God. Attitude is what the Bible often refers to as the heart of people. God says in

Jer 17:10 I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

God is first of all interested in your heart. **Is your heart with God?** Do you trust God? Sin is a result of a disbelieving heart and expression of our inner doubts of God. It is eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, building our own **Right and Wrong**. We need to go back to the Tree of Life, to the healing fellowship, the healing trust of God. We need to go to the Water of Life in Jesus Christ that will forgive our sins and renew our hearts to trust in God.

F. Conclusion

What is the root of sin? How does sin become possible?

Sin begins with dissatisfaction with God

Sin begins with mistrust in God

Sin begins with defining our own Right and Wrong

Sin begins with an *attitude problem* towards God.

Sin is done when we act on this attitude problem.

To prevent sin, test yourself if you got an attitude problem!

II. Commentaries:

Wenham, Gordon M. Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15

Hamilton Victor P. The Book of Genesis 1-17

Laymon, Charles M. The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary on the Bible

III. Ideas

A. *Robinson Analysis*

Subject: The root of Sin

Complement: The root of sin is in our minds, our attitude, our belief. The root of sin is distrust of God.

Have an attitude problem

Attitude

Twisting the Word of God

Mistrust in God's good intentions

Modification of Standards

Desire for more than God gives.

Disbelief

Acting according to our new beliefs.