

The Persuasive Corruption of Sin

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[0:00] Good, well we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning and we're working through these early chapters of Genesis. So please do turn in your Bibles. If you don't have a Bible with you, we've got plenty available in the transepts on both sides, also at the back.

Please do grab a Bible if you'd like one. We're at Genesis chapter 3 and then if you keep a finger in Genesis 3, we're going to be reading also from 2 Corinthians in the New Testament.

So once you've got Genesis 3, just flip over also to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and we'll read that in a moment. So have that ready to go.

We're going to begin with Genesis chapter 3 and reading the first eight verses of Genesis 3. 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? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat 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 midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

[1:19] But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.

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. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden.

Okay, turn over to 2 Corinthians and chapter 11. I'm going to read verses 1 to 6, and then verses 12 to 15. So 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 1.

[2:26] The Apostle Paul writes, I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me, for I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as pure virgin to Christ.

But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge.

Indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you all in all things. Verse 12. And what I do, I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguised himself as an angel of light.

[3:52] So it's no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Amen. Well, may God bless to us this word this morning. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 3, or look at the sheet which you may have been given at the door or brought back from last week that has these two chapters on them.

We've looked at the chapter as a whole. This week we're going to focus in on verses 1 to 8, because we want to give some attention to what this teaches us about the persuasive corruption of

sin.

Now, like the apostles of Christ, Moses wrote words of gracious warning to God's people not to be deceived and led astray by forsaking the path of life, the path of safety, for the way of disaster and judgment.

Deuteronomy 11, he says this, Take care lest your hearts be deceived, and you turn aside to worship other gods and serve them, and the anger of the Lord is kindled against you.

[5 : 10] Now, that is why he wrote Genesis 3. That's why it's preserved in our Bibles for us. Apostle Paul says that this chapter, like all the Old Testament, is written for our instruction.

For, he says, no temptation has overtaken us that is not common to man. And we too, he says, must therefore flee from idolatry.

So this chapter is a powerful warning for all Christians. In fact, as we read in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul repeats that warning explicitly, referring to Genesis 3.

And he said, remember, Just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, so also our thoughts may be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Led astray by that persuasive corruption of sin. And the danger, Paul says, is from those who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.

[6 : 15] But he says that should not surprise us. Why? Because Satan himself disguised himself as an angel, as an angel of light. And he and his servants always lead people astray through disguise and through deceit.

So as we think about Genesis chapter 3, the Bible itself tells us that this is not just past history. Of course, it does explain the origin of human sin and death in our world, but it's a present word.

It's a personal gospel to every one of us today within the church of Jesus Christ. And it brings a powerful and a relevant and a very much needed message about this persuasive corruption of sin and its power to lead people astray, to lead them into ruin and into disaster.

And so it's a warning to every one of us. It's a gracious warning from God to protect us so we don't fall prey to the deceitful flattery of the serpent's gospel, which today, as from the very beginning, masquerades as a message of truth that comes from angels of light.

But in reality, it must be exposed for the sheer deceit of the devil himself. So I want to focus on verses 1 to 8 this morning and have a look at the twin focus that these verses give us on the tempter and on his character and craft and then on the transgression itself, the crux of what sin really is at its heart and its consequences.

[7 : 55] So first of all, then the character of the tempter and the key word here is disguise. Look at verse 1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field the Lord had made.

Now, I understand as soon as we come to a story that looks as if it seems to be about a talking snake, well, people may well say, well, this is all just myth.

This is like Roger Kipling, isn't it? It's a story about how the leopard got to his spot, so that sort of thing. It's just a story to tell us why human beings don't like snakes. Look at verse 14. On your belly you shall go dust, you shall eat all your life.

But actually, of course, snakes don't eat dust, do they? I certainly would feel a lot happier myself if they did eat dust. And snakes don't always go on their belly. Often they go on their tail.

Often they climb trees. I've seen a black mamba, a very deadly snake, high up in a tree. Really put me off tree climbing for a long time. Now that kind of thinking, I'm afraid, just fails to take the Bible seriously.

[8 : 59] You just have to read through the Bible, for example, in the prophets, and you'll find that this phrase, eat the dust, is a very common image of God's judgment, of humiliation. Micah chapter 7 speaks about God's enemies licking the dust like a serpent.

We use the same expression, don't we? Another one bites the dust. Another prime minister bit the dust just recently. This is a passage that's got nothing whatsoever to do with mythology of that kind.

That just fails to take the Bible seriously. And also, by the way, it fails to take ancient myths seriously. I've read most of them. And they're absolutely nothing at all like the book of Genesis.

You can go online and read them if you want to. Even a very liberal, critical scholar like Klaus Westermann says the whole of the primeval story in Genesis is completely freed from the realm of myth.

The most important thing to say about that, you see, is that mythology actually is there to explain things away. Mythology says to us, oh, this is how the world has always been. This is what

humanity has always been like.

[10:12] And the ancient myths from the ancient world that speak about good and evil as ever-abiding forces in the universe, you see, what they actually do is they make evil excusable.

They make evil, so that's just human nature. It's just the way the world is. It's always been like that, always will be. But the Bible here in Genesis says precisely the opposite to that.

All through the Bible story, we are told that sin and guilt is absolutely inexcusable. And it is not the essence of true humanity.

In fact, it is inhuman, it is subhuman. And it's to be mourned of, it's to be repented of, it's to be rejected and turned away from. Now that is the very antithesis, isn't it?

Just for one thing, of our modern penal theory where crime and so on is a disease that needs therapy and rehabilitation, not a wrong to be punished.

[11:16] You see, the Bible expresses the scandal of wickedness because it is something that should not be there and indeed was not always there. Evil becomes scandalous at the same time as it becomes historical, says one writer.

Because it is not the way the world is meant to be. And the whole Bible assumes and indeed requires the historicity of the fall of man.

Sin has an origin. It came into the world, says Paul the Apostle, through one man. But of course, that also is why there is hope.

Because there was a real historical rebellion in Adam, there can also be a real and historical redemption through Christ. So the historicity of what we have here in Genesis chapter 3 is essential to the whole of the New Testament gospel revelation.

It's presupposed by the apostles, it's presupposed by Jesus himself. But to come back to the serpent, to say it is history, is not to demand that it is a certain kind of history.

[12:40] Derek Kidner, the very conservative scholar, says it may still be an open question whether the account transcribes the facts or translates them. So the really important question is not so much is this a literal historical account of the fall, but rather is this an account of whatever kind of a literal historical fall?

Now the Bible demands that we say yes to the second of those things, but not necessarily to the first. In fact, I would suggest the Bible itself says no to the first for several reasons.

Precisely because it's not at all like other mythological tales. We shouldn't be taken up with literally talking snakes. Moses knew animals didn't talk, his readers knew animals didn't talk.

It's arrogant of us in the extreme to assume that they were so primitive that they thought they did. They understood symbolism. The Bible's absolutely full of symbolism.

And secondly, the serpent, the serpent, was known to Moses and all his readers. It was a universal symbol of evil and of dark powers, of paganism, right throughout the ancient world.

[14:00] They knew that. The word translated here, serpent, in the Hebrew, nechash, is almost identical to the word that the Bible uses for sorcery, for divination. It was the most obvious symbol for evil to use, to embody evil.

But above all, the whole Bible, in fact, the Old Testament and the New Testament, speaks of the serpent as a clearly recognizable character, representing all the forces of evil and of darkness. The serpent, in the Bible, is a title for the devil himself. So Isaiah 27, God, in his day of judgment, he says, will bring punishment to Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, to Leviathan, the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

The serpent, all through the Bible, is the great enemy of God's people. So in the book of Job, that begins with the devil, with the Satan and his work in the first two chapters, frequently through the book, refers to this Leviathan figure.

Asked Bob File, Bob File wrote his whole PhD on the serpent, the Leviathan figure in Job. Come to the book of Revelation at the very end of the Bible, we have absolute clarity.

[15:21] Revelation 12, verse 7, speaks of the great dragon, that ancient serpent, called the devil, and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

And his final destruction at the hands of the victorious Christ. The serpent is the devil himself.

It is Satan himself that we meet here in Genesis chapter 3. But who is he? Well, the apostle Paul calls him the god of this world.

He calls him the prince of the power of the air. He calls him the ruler of this world. That's what Jesus calls him in John 12. He is some kind of angelic being created by God, therefore no kind of rival to

God himself.

But verse 1 makes clear, he is a creature that the Lord has made. And yet, clearly the whole Bible shows him as the enemy of God and the enemy of God's people. What's his story then?

[16:23] How did one who was apparently given such great power, great authority by God come to be his sworn enemy? Well, the Bible really only hints at it.

Clearly, it's not something that God has fully and clearly revealed to us, so there's a degree of mystery that remains, and we have to be content with that. But in the New Testament, both Jude and Peter speak of angelic beings who sinned and who abandoned their proper God-given authority.

And various passages in the prophets in the Old Testament seem to allude to that rebellion as well, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and other places. So it seems certain that however exactly it came about, there was a revolt in the spiritual heavenly realm that gave rise to those that Jesus himself calls the devil and his angels.

But we've got to be clear that what's being emphasized here in Genesis 3 is not the devil's origin, but the emphasis is simply on the fact of the reality that there is a terrible, dark, malevolent power and influence on humanity.

And it comes from outside the physical realm. And it presents human beings with the deadliest danger. danger. And the danger lies precisely in the fact that the devil comes in disguise.

[17:55] Not that Satan somehow disguised himself as a deadly snake. That would hardly be an image of harmless innocence, would it? You'll never see me run so fast in your life as if I see a snake.

No, but the ancient serpent called the devil or Satan disguises himself as Paul says then and always, still today, as an angel of light. That's the point.

He didn't come to Eve with a trumpet blast saying, I am God's enemy, come to bring you into disaster and death. Of course not. Paul says very plainly in 2 Corinthians 11, he deceived her by his cunning.

He led her thoughts astray because he disguised himself the serpent as an angel of light. He came, as the scholar Bruce Walk, he says, as a winsome angelic theologian.

He came talking about God, talking about God's word. He talked about God and spirituality and spiritual experience and knowledge, but really, he is the devil.

[19:10] And that's why this passage is so sobering for us and so important, because Paul says this can happen to us, to New Testament Christians, to those with the Holy Spirit himself in our hearts.

We are in danger, he says. False apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, can lead you astray.

You see, the biggest danger, he's saying, to the Christian church today, the biggest danger to believers, today, is from those who seem to be angels of light.

Those who offer what sounds like God's gospel words in winsome ways, attractive ways, but in fact, they are fooling people by their disguise.

And they fool people and they ruin people by the deceitful flattery of what really at its heart is a serpent's gospel. people. And that's how the persuasive corruption of sin is so often at work in the church of Jesus Christ today.

[20:17] And that's why we need these verses, so that we can see behind that disguise to the real character that we are dealing with, which is the tempter himself. Well, how then do we see through that disguise?

Well, let's look at the next thing, the craft of the tempter. Look at the next paragraph from the second half of verse one. And the key word here is deceit or deception. Look how it begins.

And it's with a conversation, isn't it? Not about the devil, but about God. Hello, Eve. Let's discuss theology. Let's have a chat about God. And let's get to grips with a deeper truth about God.

Let me lead you into more than just these basics. See, it's very subtle, isn't it? It's not an outright attack, but a subtle perversion of the real truth. That is the craft of the tempter.

Now, remember, Moses wants to educate God's people to warn them against the ways of the false prophet, the false teacher. So does Paul, the false apostle, the false Christian leader.

[21:22] And in the history of Israel and throughout the history of the church, we see always the same pattern. God's people are led astray by seduction, by what seems at first to be quite

compatible alongside their worship of God.

Let's just branch out a bit. Let's just add a bit of adaptation to the culture around about us. Just a little bit of that golden calf worship.

Just a little bit of that bail worship of your neighbors. Just a little bit of interfaith worship. You know, multicultural society. Just whatever seems very reasonable. But look where it leads.

in three short verses, we move from a conversation about God to a total contradiction of God's word. And that's so common, isn't it?

In our own hearts and minds, in churches, in theological classrooms. What begins with what seems very innocent and right and commendable, discovering the Bible, can so easily end up in contradiction.

[22 : 27] How does that happen? Well, it happens, you see, when there's a lot of talk about God, but no talking to God or listening to God.

See the difference between these verses and the verses that go before and after. Before and after, we have God speaking to man and woman and them speaking to God. But here, it's just talk about God.

That's why so many generations of trainees in theological colleges, have gone astray. Lots of talk about God, but precious little talk to God or listening to God.

There's a danger there, isn't there, for every one of us, even for people who come to church all the time. But you see, God is not an interesting topic to be discussed.

God is the creator and Lord of the universe to be listened to and to obey. God is the people who come to God. And it's when we lose touch with God's voice to us and our voice to him in prayer, that's when we're so vulnerable.

[23 : 38] The scholars argue here about Eve and whether she's deficient because you'll note that quoting God's words to the serpent are not exactly accurate. Perhaps she was mistaking things.

Or was she, in fact, actually goodheartedly defending God and not twisting his words? I don't think it's very clear. I don't think it's a big issue at all.

But certainly she does seem to be vulnerable, doesn't she, to the aspersions of the evil one? And certainly that's so. You see, when we're not rock solid clear on what God does say and what God has said, then we are vulnerable.

I remember once years back, a Jehovah's witness came to my door and we got talking and she said to me, well, I used to go to my parish church, but I was keen to understand and learn about the Bible.

But I just never heard anything about the Bible. And then a friend of mine who was Jehovah's witness said, well, we talk about the Bible all the time in our church. Come along to me. And so I did. And they did talk about the Bible. He was unsure and she was led astray by something that looked true, but wasn't.

[24 : 46] But notice attempt his craft. You see, he sows doubt, doesn't he, about God's goodness, about God's love, to erode Eve's trust in God's love and to make her discontent with God's provision.

So verse one there, it's feigned surprise, isn't it? Did God really say that? Surely not. Putting all those lovely trees there and then forbidding you from eating their fruit. I can't believe it. God would never say that.

No, no, says Eve, we can eat most of them. It's just that one that God doesn't want us to eat from to protect us from harm. Oh, dear me. Such innocence. Such naivety.

So well-meaning. Let me move you on a little bit in your journey of faith. You see, look at verses four and five. Do you see how it implies that the serpent has a more mature and profound understanding of God than Eve has?

He can really understand God. In fact, he knows God better than God himself is able to express himself in his own mere words. That's such a distinguishing mark of serpent gossamers.

[25 : 55] We can tell you what God really means beyond just these simplistic words on the page. You can't take God too literally is what he's saying to Eve. You will not surely die.

When God says that, he doesn't really mean that. Don't be so fundamentalist Eve. You see, with more mature reflection, well, greater light will dawn, won't it?

And you'll see actually that what God really means is the exact opposite of that. He won't die. In fact, you'll find total fulfillment. Verse five, you'll be like God.

Well, it's very familiar, isn't it, today? You can know God's mind better. You can interpret God more clearly than God can himself in plain words on the page about all sorts of things.

And we hear that in the professing church today. Oh, the uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior and all, but it doesn't really mean that. Or the authority of God's commands for holiness and purity and sexual conduct, for example, and many other things.

[27 : 07] That doesn't really mean that. I don't know of anybody in the Christian church today who is raising a banner and saying, come, let's worship Satan together, not Christ. Of course not.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians, in their mission, they use all the same terminology as we do, but they're false apostles, they're deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. So there's all the talk about seeking to understand God, to find God's will. We want to discover what God is really saying to the church today. There's lots of talk of enlightenment, of spirituality, of conversations, of spiritual journeys, but very little about listening to and obeying God's clear, unambiguous word in his own words in scripture.

But Moses says at the end of Deuteronomy 29, the secret things are God's and his alone. We're not to speculate on God's mind, but the things that are revealed plainly, clearly in scripture that we can read and understand, they belong to us.

So we must do all these things that God teaches us, obey God's word. God's word. You see, all through history, God's people have been led astray by such deceptions from a serpent gospel that distorts the true word of God and says either, oh, there's more behind God's word than you've yet grasped and you've got to receive more than God's already given you in his promises if you really want to find fulfillment, or the opposite.

[28 : 58] Well, actually, God's word means much less than they seem to mean about all sorts of things, so you don't have to take so seriously all God's warnings about things, and you can please yourself.

The serpent's gospel always, always either adds to God's word or subtracts from it. If it adds, it sows doubt about God's real goodness and his love.

God isn't being fair with your life, is he? Look what he's denying you. That leads to discontent what God has provided for us. And so we feel that there's more that we can have and that we must have. And an angel of light says, well, come to us. And our fuller understanding of the gospel will open your eyes and you'll be truly God-like. You'll know the fullness of the Spirit of God like never before. You're only halfway there in your Christian life. God will and the other is to subtract from the gospel to make us doubt God's real seriousness.

[30 : 03] You will not surely die. God will never punish people. Don't be silly. God is never going to judge. God's job is to bless people. And that leads it, doesn't it, into a disbelief about God's punishment for sin.

An angel of light says, come and join us in our enlightened fellowship because we won't judge what you do. We'll affirm you in who you are.

We're mature, you see. We've moved on. We've understood what God's really like behind these words. Don't take his plain word too seriously. God has a problem anyway expressing himself plainly.

We'll help you see the real spirit of the thing. And it's so liberating for that you will find your true identity. disguise and deception.

Winsome, angelic theology. It's always in the church. But God is saying to us, recognize the character and the craft of the tempter.

[31 : 12] Because that's how desire is planted in our hearts that lead to disobedience. And that always, in the end, leads to disaster. And that brings us, you see, from the tempter to the transgression.

Because although there's no question that satanic deception lies behind this event, there is also no question that God holds human beings entirely responsible for the result.

The fall is clearly a human act for which man is blamed. verse 11. Have you disobeyed my command not to eat? So we've got to think about what verses 5 and 6 reveal about the crux of the transgression.

And the key word here is disobedience. The Bible actually never uses anywhere the word fall, the fall of man. In Romans chapter 5, Paul speaks of Adam's transgression, of his trespass, of his disobedience.

In 1 Timothy 2, he speaks about Eve's transgression. That is, it is rebellion. It is rebellion against God's sovereign command. His covenant with man as covenant Lord.

[32 : 29] Adam and Eve transgressed. They broke God's gracious covenant of life. Hosea chapter 6, verse 7 says that explicitly. And that is what the crux of sin really is.

You see, sin is not just bad language and sex and drugs and rock and roll or adultery or theft or murder or any of these things. Sin at its heart is rebellion.

It is revolt against God's sovereign rule over our lives. sin. And verse 6 there dissects the anatomy of it for us. It's contemplation that leads to completion.

It's desire that leads to disobedience. She saw, she desired, she took and she ate. And that's always the pattern of sin.

James, the apostle, says desire when it's conceived gives birth to sin. And sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. And what's that heart of that desire?

[33 : 30] Well, it's two things. First, verse 6 describes, doesn't it, the desire for self-fulfillment. The tree was good. It was delightful. There's nothing wrong in seeking wisdom, in seeking insight, in seeking success and fulfillment.

But not that way. God wants human beings to be fulfilled and blessed to have a wonderful life. But his way, not our way.

By obedience, not by disobedience. He wants us to find goodness in seeking God. But sin's desire, you see, is that we make good things themselves into God.

Listen to Henry Blochet. Evil, he says, is not in the good that God has created, but in the rejection of the order that God has instituted for the enjoyment of this world.

Temptation plays with the facets of things that are good and highlights the attractions of the beauties in creation. But sin then perverts the excitement which these objects quite rightly cause within us.

[34 : 39] It was by doubting God and by desiring in a wrong way something good in creation that the first couple sinned. And that's what sin does.

It inverts the true order. It makes good things that God has given us into God for us. From a consuming love of God himself and a right rejoicing in the good things of this world, we are transformed into a consuming love of the good things of this world and therefore into a rejection of God himself.

That is the essence of idolatry, of sin. So our desire for self-fulfillment says, well, why should we wait for the full glory that God has planned for us?

Let's have it now. That's the serpent's gospel. Sexual fulfillment. Don't wait to have it God's way in lifelong marriage. Have it now the way you want.

And a thousand other things. Maybe very subtle things. Maybe even spiritual things. That's what Paul's talking about in 2 Corinthians. Why should we suffer now?

[35 : 51] Why should we be frustrated now? Why should we have illness now? No, no, no. We want glory now. That's what God wants. No, says Paul. That's a message that seems angelic.

But it's another Jesus. That's a different spirit. That's a different gospel from the truth that I preach to you. I will be content with God's order, he says. I'll be content now with weakness, with hardships, with calamities.

Just as Jesus himself refused to invert the father's order in his wilderness temptations. He would not have the crown without first the cross. It's his self-fulfillment.

That desire within us is very, very powerful. Seductive. I remember seeing a prosperity gospel Christian book called Be a Better You and seeing that within months it had sold millions of copies. And there were so many things in that book which were near the truth and yet it was utterly perverse. It was a serpent gospel of self-fulfillment.

[36 : 59] The second aspect, the real crux of all it is there in verse 5. Do you see? It's actually the desire for self-rule. You will be like God. You will know good and evil.

Well, to know good and evil is to decide good and evil. And that belongs to God alone. God decides what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's evil. You see, sin at its very heart is a powerful desire to want to be our own God.

We decide what's right and wrong for me and for you and for anybody else. It's my life. It's my body. It's my choice.

I decide. The very crux of human sin is a rejection of us being dependent creatures. We want to be independent creatures, autonomous, in control of our own destiny.

And you see, the deceitful flattery of a servant's gospel says, well, why should you be dependent on God's authority? You're of age. Be independent.

[38 : 06] You decide. Do it your way. Like Frank Sinatra. You see, that desire is very deep, isn't it, in all of our hearts. Certainly there in my heart.

That desire was in Moses' people in the desert, in the land of Canaan. It's in our lives this morning. It's all around us in the voices of the world today. And the contemplation of these things leads, in end, to the completion of the rebellion.

That's why somebody has put it, the real battleground of evil is in our thought life. That's why Paul warns the Corinthians about a serpent gospel by which your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

And in the same place, he says, that's why we take every thought captive to obey Christ. Because our minds matter.

It's where it begins. That's why we've got to give our minds to serious study of God's word, not just superficial lip service to the Bible. Because it's the truth, the real truth of God that does set us free.

[39 : 27] Only that can protect us from the deep flattery and the deceit of every kind of serpent's gospel. That leads to blindness. That leads to bondage and disaster. That desire for self-fulfillment through self-rule.

That is the crux of the transgression. That is the heart of what human sin really is. And finally, the consequence of the transgression.

Well, you can read it, can't you? It's disaster. So at last time in the whole of the chapter, but verses 7 and 8 really encapsulate it all, don't they? It's heavy with irony. Yes, their eyes are open, verse 7, but to what great knowledge?

To shame. To immediate alienation from one another. Hiding from one another. An immediate alienation and separation from God.

They immediately, instinctively hide from him. And it's been so ever since. It's very sobering. Very sobering, isn't it?

[40 : 29] To think you can know all about God. You can be very advanced in that knowledge. You can be apparently very religious, even very spiritual. And yet, if actually God is speaking to you to direct you, to call you to obedience, to rule you, in fact, the truth is you're hiding from him.

Because you want to rule yourself. And then you're not worshipping at all, are you? You're demonstrating that you belong not to God, but to God's enemy, to the serpent.

That's why Genesis 3 is in our Bibles. You see, that's why Moses wrote it down. And why God preserved it. Later on, Moses says, take care, lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside to serve other gods and worship them.

It's the same message that Paul gave to the church in Corinth. Lest anyone thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall. It's a real warning, isn't it?

We've got to take it absolutely seriously today, whoever we are, if we profess Christ. But there is also a real promise of hope, isn't there?

[41 : 44] Because Moses also constantly said to his people, grasp this hope, choose life. God's command is not too hard for you. It's near to you so you can do it.

Paul says the same thing. God is faithful. He will provide a way of escape. He says to us, all these things are written for us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we may have hope.

And in that wonderful letter where he says that, the letter to the Romans, he gives us that great and wonderful encouragement, doesn't he, of the new Adam, Jesus Christ, whose great act of obedience brings not condemnation and death, but brings justification and life for all who are his. He came to destroy the works of the devil, says the apostle John. He tells us of a great and certain hope. Paul says, because of him, Christ, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. When at last, the Lord Jesus returns in power and glory. And therefore, he says, there is a way of escape for us now today. His grace is sufficient for us.

[43 : 05] The command is not beyond us. Even in the face of the persuasive corruption of sin, the deceitful flattery of this perennial serpent's gospel. And that will surround us in the church till the very end.

If we confess, and if we go on day by day confessing the true lordship of Jesus Christ alone, seeking not self-fulfillment, but seeking our fullness only in him, and cherishing not self-rule and autonomy, but rejoicing in his gracious rule over our lives, then we will be safe, says the apostle. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. They will be safe in the hands of God. See, the way to real freedom, to true release, to true fulfillment, is not in self-rule, but it's in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ in whose service is perfect freedom. That's the great paradox of gospel truth. Everything we are seeking our own way, we will never find. But everything we sought and more than we can ever ask or imagine, we will find his way. Take his easy yoke and wear it. Love will make obedience sweet. That's the only way safe to glory where his ransom captives meet.

[44 : 48] Amen. Let's pray. Take heed. Lest your hearts be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. Amen. Lord, help us through your wisdom to expose constantly in our lives, in our own hearts, the tempter's character and his craft and so that we are protected from the great transgression.

Keep us, we pray, looking to Jesus and finding in him mercy and life. For we ask it in his name. Amen.