

6. The Persuasive Corruption of Sin (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, welcome to the Bible class, who I guess are coming downstairs. I kind of forget about you because I can't see you, but you're down there in room 5. I hope that you had a chance to read, before you came in, the readings that we read together here in Genesis 3, also in 2 Corinthians 11.

And we'll be referring to both of those, but really I'd like you to open your Bibles at Genesis chapter 3 and verses 1 to 8. Now, we've already looked at Genesis chapter 2 and 3, but we're coming back to this little passage at the beginning because it's so important.

And we've already seen in our approach to the early chapters of Genesis that the writer of these words is more than just a historian. He's the leader of God's people, and therefore, above all, he's a passionate preacher of God's Word.

Moses is the prophet in the Bible. There is no other like him. He speaks to God face to face. And he brings God's covenant Word to God's people.

That Word of grace and demands, that Word of promise and of warnings. And therefore, his Word to them is a personal gospel for their ears.

[1 : 1 9] It's a word that creates a response in the heart to God. And therefore, it's a word that demands a response in the heart to God. We've already seen that Moses' message in Genesis 2 and 3 can really be summarized neatly as he does it, in his very last words, almost, to the people of Israel before he dies.

Do you remember in Deuteronomy 30, he says, See, I have set before you this day life, that's Genesis 2, and death, that's Genesis 3, blessing and curse.

Therefore, he says, choose life that you and your offspring may live. But of course, Moses knows, doesn't he, that he's preaching to a people who are naturally rebellious and wayward, and prone to disobedience and to sin.

And so he's always warning, all through his life, he's always warning God's people not to be led astray, not to forsake the path of life and of safety, and go down the path of judgment and disaster.

And if you think about it, that's also what the New Testament apostles are always doing, isn't it? And that's because the true gospel always warns about sin, as well as urging us to grasp the grace that is in the gospel of Christ.

[2 : 4 3] So, as we read at the very beginning of our service from Deuteronomy 10 and 11, Moses says, Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, be no longer stubborn, love the Lord your God, keep his charge, his statutes, his commandments always.

That's the way of blessing, says Moses. That's the way of bounty or the way of life. But he adds that warning, doesn't he? Take care, lest your hearts be deceived, and you turn aside from other gods and worship them.

Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you. That's a word, isn't it, of merciful warning, urging them to avoid disaster.

So, Moses says, Lay up these words of mine in your heart and your soul as a protection. And that's why at the end of his life, he says, Write this law and give it to the priests.

And he says, You shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing, so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and be careful to do all the words of this law and their children also.

[3 : 49] You see, that's why Moses wrote all the words of this law, including Genesis 3. It's for God's covenant people.

It's for his church, so that they will not be led astray by deceivers. We want to turn them from the truth of God to idolatry, to false gods, to corrupt religion.

And it's not just for God's people of old, either under Moses. That's why these things are still in our Bibles, for New Testament Christians. Paul says that very plainly, doesn't he, in 1 Corinthians 10.

These things happen to them, he said, as an example, but they are written for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, says Paul, let anyone who thinks he stands firm take heed, lest he fall.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. Therefore, he goes on to say, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

[4 : 51] You see, it's a warning for Christians. And as we saw in our reading, Paul repeats that warning to the Corinthians again in his second letter, as we read with explicit reference to Genesis chapter 3.

He says, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, so our thoughts can also be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ, says Paul. We can be led astray by the persuasive corruption of sin.

And that's why he says, believers are in constant danger. Let me read it again. Who from? From deceitful workmen disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder, he says, for even Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light. It's no surprise that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

And notice those words, I'm sure you did. Our thoughts being led astray by deceit, by disguise. So you see, as we come to this passage in Genesis 3, the Bible itself demands that we do so not just as past history.

[6 : 06] Not just something that explains the origin of human sin and death in our world, although of course it does. But we must also see it as a present word, as a personal gospel to all of us today in the Church of Jesus Christ.

And it is a powerful and relevant and desperately needed message to us about the persuasive corruption of sin and its power to lead us astray, to ruin, to our hurt.

It's a warning, therefore, for every one of us, but it is a gracious warning. It's there to protect us so that we don't fall prey to the deceitful flattery of the serpent's gospel.

Which today, as right from the beginning, masquerades as a message of truth from angels of light. But in reality, must be exposed by us for the sheer deceit that it is from the devil himself.

So with that, by way of introduction, I want us to look at the twin focus of these few verses in Genesis 3. The focus on the tempter, on his character and his craft, and also then on the transgression, on its crux, what is really at the very heart of sin, and also very briefly on its consequences.

[7 : 28] So first then, the character of the tempter. And the key word here, surely, is disguise. Look at verse 1, the first half of it. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field the Lord God had made.

Now, as soon as we start talking about a story that involves a talking snake, some people are going to say, well, this is all just myth. Like Rudyard Kipling, it's a story about, you know, how the leopard got its spots.

Just here to tell us why human beings don't like snakes. So they look at verse 14. And look at the curse. On your belly you shall go and eat dust all your life. Well, there it is.

Just a myth like that. But in fact, if you think just for a moment, as far as I know, I don't think snakes actually eat dust, do they? Actually, I'd feel a lot safer if they did, wouldn't you?

I'm going to India week on Monday, I'd feel a lot safer if snakes only ate dust. In fact, I've seen snakes quite often going on their tail and going up trees and all sorts of things too. Now you see, if we look at these words in that kind of way, just as a myth, well, we're just not taking the Bible seriously.

[8 : 39] We only have to read on in the Bible, read in the prophets, for example, to see that eating the dust is a common biblical way of expressing humiliation and judgment. So just one example, Micah 7, verse 17, says that God's enemies will lick the dust like a serpent and like the crawling things of the earth.

Well, we use exactly the same expression, don't we? Another one bites the dust. It means somebody's brought down and humble. That's the kind of language that's being put in. It's nothing to do with snakes losing their legs or mythology or that kind of thing.

Nothing at all. Now that fails to take the Bible seriously. But anyone who says that also fails, I think, to take ancient myths seriously.

I've read most of them and they're absolutely nothing like the book of Genesis at all. If you don't believe me, you can just go into the internet and look them up, the ancient Babylonian and Sumerian myths.

So even a very liberal, critical Bible scholar like the German, Klaus Westermann, can say this, the whole of the Genesis primeval story is completely freed from the realm of myth.

[9 : 46] But the most important thing of all to say is this. Mythology exists to explain things away. They say, well, this is just how the world has always been.

This is what humanity has always been like. And the ancient myths, you see, speak about good and evil as always existing, ever opposing forces and that kind of thing.

And they just, therefore, make evil excusable. It's just human nature. It's just the way the world's always been. There's always been good and evil in human heart. But no, says the Bible, the Bible says the exact opposite.

All through Scripture, sin and guilt and human wrongdoing is absolutely inexcusable. And that's because it's not of the essence of true humanity.

It's inhuman. It's subhuman. And therefore, it has to be repented for and mourned for and rejected and turned away from. By the way, that's the very antithesis, isn't it, of our modern understanding of crime and punishment and penal theory.

[10 : 56] Crime no longer is a wrong to be punished. It's a disease that receives therapy. That's why we're in such chaos, isn't it, as a society. But the Bible, you see, expresses the scandal of wickedness.

Because it's something that should not be there and was not always there in the human heart. Henri Blashe quotes somebody as saying this, Evil becomes scandalous at the same time as it becomes historical.

Because it's not the way the world was meant to be. And the whole Bible assumes and indeed requires the historicity of the fall. Sin has an origin.

This is not just a myth to explain away the world. Romans 5 tells us, sin came into the world through one man. Of course, that too is why there can be hope, isn't it?

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

[12 : 11] It's of course presupposed, isn't it, by the apostles and by Jesus himself. But to come back again to the serpent, to say that it's history is not to demand that it's therefore only a certain kind of history.

And Derek Kidner is a very careful conservative Bible scholar and he says this, it may still be an open question whether the account transcribes the facts or translates them.

It seems to me that the really important question for us is not so much is this a literal account of the fall, but rather is this an account of whatever kind of a literal historical fall?

And the Bible demands that we must say yes to the second of those questions. But not necessarily, I think, the first. And in fact, I would suggest the Bible itself teaches us to say no to the first for several reasons.

Precisely because it's not at all like the other mythological tales. We shouldn't be taken up with literally talking snakes. I think it should be clear to us that Moses knew that snakes don't talk and so did his readers.

[13 : 28] We can't think for a moment that they were so primitive and foolish to think that they really did. Of course not. But secondly, because the serpent was a figure known to Moses and all his readers as a universal symbol of evil and of the dark powers of magic and of paganism.

The very word serpent in the Hebrew, nechash, is almost identical to the word that is used in the Bible for divination, for sorcery. It's the magical animal, par excellence and therefore it's the perfect symbol of evil for Moses to use as embodying and personifying evil.

But thirdly and even more importantly, all the way through the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Bible speaks of the serpent as a clearly recognizable character representing all the forces of evil and darkness.

The serpent is a title and it's a title for the devil himself. So, Isaiah 27, 1 speaks that on judgment day God will, quote, punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, Leviathan, the twisting serpent.

He will slay the dragon that is in the sea. See, the serpent is the great enemy of God's people. In the book of Job, that book that begins with the devil himself in those first two chapters, it speaks in several places about this demonic Leviathan figure, the serpent.

[15 : 00] You see, to ask Bob File, Bob wrote a whole PhD about Leviathan in Job. He'll answer all your questions on that. But of course, in the book of Revelation, we have absolute clarity, don't we? Listen to Revelation 12, verse 7.

The great dragon, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He'll be destroyed through the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you see, in the Bible, the serpent is clearly the devil himself. It is Satan. That's the character that we meet in Genesis 3.

But who is he? Well, Paul calls him the God of this world and the prince of the power of the air. Jesus himself calls him the ruler of this world.

He's some kind of angelic being created by God and therefore no kind of rival to God himself. Verse 1 of Genesis 3 makes that clear. He's created by God.

[16 : 03] Yet clearly, the whole Bible does see him as the enemy of God and above all, the enemy of God's people. So what's his story? How did one, apparently given such great power by God, come to be God's sworn enemy?

Well, the answer is that the Bible only really hints at that. Clearly, it's not something God has fully revealed to us. So mystery remains. We must be content with that.

But both Jude and Peter in their letters in the New Testament speak of angelic beings who sinned and who abandoned their proper authority from God. And there are various passages in the prophets that do seem to allude to such a rebellion as well.

And it seems certain that however exactly this came about, there was a revolt in the spiritual heavenly realm that gave rise to what Jesus himself called the devil and all his angels.

But you see, we must be clear in looking at Genesis 3 that what's emphasized here is not the devil's origin, but actually the fact and the reality that there is a terrible and a dark malevolent power and influence in humanity.

[17 : 20] Something that comes from outside our physical realm and something that really does present to us a real and terrible danger. And the danger lies precisely in the fact that he comes in disguise.

Not that Satan comes and disguises himself as a snake, that's hardly an image of harmless innocence. no, but that that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan disguises himself then, as he always does, as Paul says, as an angel of light.

That's the point. He didn't come to Eve with a trumpet blast saying, well, I'm the enemy of God, I've come to lead you to disaster and death. Of course not. Paul tells us plainly in 2 Corinthians 11, he deceived her by his cunning.

He led her thoughts astray because he disguised himself as an angel of light. One commentator says, he came as a winsome angelic theologian.

He came talking about God, do you see? And God's word. He talks about God and spirituality and spiritual experience and knowledge, but really, he's the devil.

[18 : 38] And that's why this passage is so sobering for us, isn't it? So important. Because Paul says, it can happen to us. To New Testament Christians with the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

He says, we are in danger from false apostles, deceitful workmen disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. You see what he's saying?

The biggest danger to the church today, the biggest danger to believers today, as it was in the New Testament, is from those who seem to be angels of light. those who offer what sounds like gospel words, winsome, attractive ways.

But in fact, they fool people by their disguise. They fool people and they ruin people by the deceitful flattery of what is actually a serpent's gospel.

And that's how the persuasiveness of the corruption of sin gets into Christ's church today. And that's why we need these verses, so that we can see behind the disguise and see the real character, the character of the tempter himself.

[19 : 52] Well, how are we to see through the disguise? Well, let's look next at the craft of the tempter, in the second half of verse one through to verse five. And the key word here surely is deceit or deception.

Look how it begins, not with a conversation about the devil, but with a conversation about God. Let's discuss theology, he says. What did God say? Let's have a chat about God. Let's get to grips with the real truth about God.

And let me lead you on beyond just the basics that you've got. You see, it's very subtle, isn't it? There's no outright attack, but there's 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 false prophets and the false teachers, the false apostles, the false Christian leaders.

And in the history of Israel and in the church, it's always the same pattern. God's people are led astray and seduced by what seems at first to be quite compatible with the true worship of God.

[21 : 01] Let's just branch out a bit. Let's just adapt a little bit to the culture around us. A little bit of golden calf worship, a little bit of veil worship, a little bit of interfaith worship, or whatever it is.

It seems very reasonable. Just making things plain. But look where it leads. You see, in these verses, in three short verses, we move from a conversation about God to a total contradiction of God and his word.

So common that, isn't it, in our hearts and our minds, in churches, in theological colleges, and classrooms, what begins with seeming so innocent, in fact, so right, so commendable even, thinking and discerning about the Bible, ends up in total contradiction of the plain truth of God's word.

Well, how on earth can that happen? Dietrich Bonhoeffer has a very helpful comment. He says, it happens when you talk about God, but there's no talking to God.

You notice the difference between verses 1 to 5 here in chapter 3 and what goes before it and after it, before and after both times. God is speaking directly to men and women and they're speaking to him.

[22 : 14] Here, the tempter and the woman are just speaking about God. It's all abstract. And that's why so many generations of trainees in theological colleges have been led astray.

All sorts of talk about God, but alas, precious little talking to God. Precious little listening to God. That's the way it was when I was at college.

But there's a same danger for all of us, isn't there? Every one of us here. However often we come to church, however often we might speak about God, so it includes preachers too, doesn't it? You see, God is not an interesting topic for our discussion.

God is our creator and Lord to be listened to, to be obeyed. And it's when we lose touch with God's voice to us and when we lose our voice to him in prayer.

That's when we become so vulnerable to the craft of the tempter. The scholars argue a bit about Eve here and whether she's right or wrong, whether she's at fault.

[23 : 19] She doesn't quite quote God's words correctly, does she? Maybe that she is just defending God against the tempter. Maybe there's some fault, who knows?

I'm not sure it's clear, I'm not sure it's a huge issue. But she does seem to be vulnerable, doesn't she, to his aspersions. And certainly that is so, when we are not absolutely rock solid clear about what God has said and what God does mean.

Well, we are very vulnerable, aren't we? I'll never forget when I was living in Aberdeen and one evening somebody came to the door and she said, well, I'm a Jehovah's witness and began speaking to me. We got talking and I said, well, I'm the assistant minister at such and such a church nearby.

Oh, she said, I used to go to that church many years ago, but I left. I said, why did you leave? Well, we never heard anything about the Bible, she said. And somebody I knew who was a Jehovah's witness said, well, we can teach you about the Bible.

And so off she went. And she was led astray. She had no knowledge, she wasn't sure, she wasn't certain. And something that looked so attractive, everything she'd been looking for.

[24 : 24] But notice the tempestuous craft here, do you see? He sows doubt, doesn't he? What about? Well, about God's goodness and his love, to erode her trust in God's love, to lead to discontent in God's provision.

See, in verse 1 it's faint surprise. Did God really say that? Surely not. Putting all those lovely trees there in the garden and saying you can't eat any of them. No, no, no, says Eve, we can eat most of them, but God wants to protect us.

There's only one we can't eat of. Oh, such innocence. Such naivety. So well-meaning. Let me help you to move on a little bit in your journey of faith.

Do you see how verses 4 and 5 imply there that the serpent has a much superior, a much more mature and profound knowledge of God than Eve has?

He can really understand God. He's really able to get to what God really means, but God himself, well, God can't really express himself all that well in mere words.

[25 : 34] And that's the great distinguishing mark of serpent gospels, isn't it? They know what God really means, and it's something different from what God actually says. You can't take God too literally.

When God says you'll surely die, he doesn't really mean that. Don't be so fundamentalist in your outlook. You'll see with much more mature reflection, well, new light will begin to dawn.

In fact, you'll see that he means the exact opposite. You won't die, you'll find total fulfillment. You'll be like God. That's very familiar, isn't it?

People claim to know God's mind better, to interpret God more clearly than God can himself in his own words about all kinds of things. The uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior and Lord.

God. No, the Bible can't really mean that. Or the authority of God and his commands for holiness and purity. For example, in sexual conduct. Many, many other things. He doesn't actually mean what he says.

[26 : 36] Nobody, nobody in the church today is coming up and setting up a banner and saying, let's go and worship Satan. At least I've not heard them. Paul says, no, in 2 Corinthians 11.

In their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. That's their claim. But no, he says, they're false apostles, deceitful workmen disguising themselves as servants of righteousness, angels of light.

So there's all sorts of talk about seeking to understand God and finding God's will and discovering what God's Spirit is really saying to the church today. Lots of talk about enlightenment and spirituality and conversations and spiritual journeys, but very, very little about actually listening to God and obeying God's plain and unambiguous word.

But Moses says, in Deuteronomy 29, the secret things are God's. They belong to him. We're not to speculate on all kinds of things God has not revealed. But the things that are revealed, plain and certain and clear in Scripture, they do belong to us.

that we may do all the words of this law, that we might obey what God has said. And you see, God's people all through history have been led astray by the deceit and the subtlety of that deception, of a serpent gospel that distorts God's true word.

[28 : 05] Either saying there's more behind God's word that you haven't yet grasped and you need to receive more than God has already given you if you really want a life of fulfillment. Or, in fact, saying actually there's less than things really seem to mean in God's word.

And therefore you don't have to take seriously God's warnings. You can please yourself. The serpent gospel always either adds to the true gospel of God or subtracts from it.

The first, you see, does cast doubt on God's goodness and his love. God isn't really being fair with your life, it says. Look what he's denying you. So is discontent with his provision for us.

And we feel there's more that we must have, that we can have. And along comes an angel of light and says, well, come to us. Come to our full gospel. We'll open your eyes.

You'll be truly God-like. You'll know a fullness of the spirit of God that you've never known and can't know with your basic version of the truth. The second, cast doubt about God's real seriousness.

[29 : 13] You shall not surely die. God will never punish anyone. Don't be silly. God's not going to judge. It's his business to bless. It leads us to disbelief in the reality of his punishment for sin.

And along comes an angel of light and says, well, come and join our enlightened fellowship. We won't judge you. We'll affirm you in your behavior. We are mature. We've moved on.

We understand what God's really like. Don't take his plain word too seriously. God's got a bit of a problem expressing himself to 21st century man. But we'll help you get to the spirit of the thing.

And it's so liberating. You'll find your true identity. Disguise and deception. Winsome, angelic theology.

That's always there in the church. But God wants us to recognize the character and the craft of the tempter.

[30 : 13] Because that's how the desire is planted in us that leads to disobedience and eventually leads only to disaster. And that brings us from the tempter to the transgression.

Because you see, in this passage, although there's no question of a real satanic deception that lies behind this event, there is also no question that man is fully responsible for the result.

The fall is clearly a human act. And man is blamed. In verse 11 down there, God immediately says to them, Have you disobeyed my command not to eat? So we must think about verses 5 and 6, which reveal the crux of the transgression.

And the key word here is surely disobedience. The Bible actually doesn't use the word fall at all, anywhere, for this. Rather, in Romans 5, Paul speaks about Adam's transgression, his trespass, his disobedience.

In 1 Timothy 2, he says the same of Eve, she transgressed. Therefore, it is a rebellion. It's a rebellion against God's sovereign ordering of his relationship and lordship with man.

[31 : 24] It's a rebellion against God's covenant with man. Adam and Eve transgressed. They broke God's gracious covenant of life. And that's what the crux of sin really is.

It's not bad language. It's not sex and drugs and rock and roll. It's not even adultery or theft or murder. It's revolt against God and his sovereign rule over our lives.

And if you look at verse 6, it dissects, doesn't it, the anatomy of it. It's contemplation that leads to completion of sin.

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

James tells us in James 1, desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. And what is it that's at the heart of that desire?

[32 : 24] Well, two things really. Verse 6, first of all, describes, doesn't it, the desire for self-fulfillment. The tree was good and delightful. And there's nothing wrong with seeking wisdom and insight and success and indeed fulfillment.

But not that way that goes against God's command. Of course, God wants human beings to be fulfilled and blessed. But his way, not our way, by obedience, not by disobedience.

He wants us to find goodness through seeking God. But sin's desire, you see, is that we make good things into God. And we seek them ourselves. We quote again from Henri Blasier.

The 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.

Sin, then, perverts the excitement which these objects quite rightly cause within us. It was by doubting God and desiring in a wrong way something good in creation that the first couple sinned.

[33 : 40] And that's what sin does. It totally inverts the true order and makes the good things of this world into our gods. It inverts us, you see, from a consuming love for God himself and therefore a right rejoicing in the good things of this world.

It transforms us rather into a consuming love of the good things of this world, which therefore leads us to a totally wrong rejection of God himself. And that's the crux of sin.

It's idolatry. It's anti-worship. You see, our desire for self-fulfillment says, well, why should you wait for the good things that God has promised you to do it his way?

Have it now. That's the heart of the serpent's gospel, isn't it? Think about it just with the example of sexual fulfillment. Don't wait. Why should you wait for God's place for that great blessing within lifelong union of marriage?

Have it now. And a thousand other things as well. Sometimes very subtle, often very spiritual things. That's what Paul's talking about in 2 Corinthians. They were saying, well, why should we suffer now?

[34 : 50] Why should we be frustrated now? Why should we have illnesses now? We want glory now. And the false apostle said, yes, you can. But no, says Paul, that might be a message that seems angelic, but it's another Jesus.

It's a different spirit. It's a different gospel from the truth of God. And Paul says, I will be content with God's order. I will be happy to rejoice in weakness now, in hardships now, in calamities now.

Just as Jesus also, as we sang in that hymn, in the temptation in the wilderness, was offered glory now by the tempter. But Jesus said, the way to the crown for me is through the cross of suffering now.

But you see, friends, the gospel of self-fulfillment is very, very powerful. I was on holiday the other week. I was watching on the television an interview with a leader of one of America's largest churches based on the prosperity gospel.

He just published a book called Be a Better You. Seven Steps to Total Life Fulfillment. It's very attractive. 98% of the things he was saying were absolutely true.

[36 : 08] But the message he was giving was absolutely false. A serpent gospel of self-fulfillment. But the second aspect really is the crux of it all.

In verse 5, isn't it? The desire, not just for self-fulfillment, but for self-rule. You will be like God's, knowing good and evil. To know good and evil is to decide good and evil for ourselves.

But that belongs to God alone. He alone decides and declares what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. But sin, you see, at its very heart has an intensely powerful desire to be our own God.

We decide what's right and wrong. We rule ourselves. We choose. And that's the very crux of sin. It's a rejection of being dependent creatures.

We want to be independent, autonomous creators of our own destiny. So the deceitful flattery of the serpent gospel says, well, why should you be dependent on God's authority?

[37 : 15] Be independent. You decide. Do it your way with Frank Sinatra. And that desire, friends, is deep, deep within your heart. I know it is because it's deep within my heart.

It's true, not just of Moses' people in the desert and in Canaan. It's true of every one of us here in St. George's Tron this morning. It's true all around us in the voices of the world today.

Be the one who decides your own destiny. And it's contemplation of that gospel that leads to the completion of the rebellion that we see here.

And that's why somebody has said the real battleground of evil is in the thought life. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11 that the serpent gospel gets at your thoughts to lead them astray from a sincere devotion to Christ.

That's why he says in the same place in the previous chapter, instead, we are to take every thought captive to obey Christ. Our minds really matter.

[38 : 27] That's the battleground. That's why we must give our minds to serious study of God's word, not just lip service. Because it's the truth and the truth alone in our minds that sets us free.

Only that can protect us from the deceitful flattery of every kind of serpent gospel there is. And the blindness and the bondage and the disaster that every such gospel leads to.

Desire for self-fulfillment through self-rule. That is the crux of the transgression. The heart of sin. And the consequence?

Well, it's disaster, isn't it? We looked last time in detail at the whole of chapter 3, but verses 7 and 8 just sum it up, don't they? Yes, their eyes were open, but what were they open to?

Well, how deep is the irony? It's open to shame. Immediately there's total alienation from one another. They have to hide themselves from one another. There's immediate alienation and separation from God himself.

[39 : 33] They hear his voice and what did he do? Instinctively, they run away from him. It's been the same ever since, hasn't it? People can be experts in knowing all about God.

But all that knowledge does is to make them do anything to avoid God's actual voice in his own real words when he asks questions of them and makes demands of them.

That's very sobering, isn't it? That means you can know all about God. It means you can be very advanced in that knowledge, very apparently religious, very spiritual, very devoted.

And yet, when God comes actually speaking to you, to guide and direct you, to call you to obedience, to rule you, if in fact then, actually you run away and hide, well, you're ruling yourself, aren't you?

You're not really worshipping God. Actually, you're demonstrating you don't belong to God. You belong to another ruler, to God's enemy.

[40 : 42] And that's why, friends, Genesis 3 is in our Bibles. Moses wrote it down. He says, take care lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and worship other gods and follow them.

He said it to his congregation. It's for the Lord's people. It's for the church. It's why Paul said the same to the church in Corinth. Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

It's a real warning. And we must take it absolutely seriously, whoever we are. That's me and that's you. But there's also a promise of hope along with the warning, isn't there?

Moses also said, grasp the hope, choose life. He said, this command isn't too hard for you. This word is very near you, so you can do it. And Paul also says to the Corinthians, God is faithful.

He will provide a way of escape. The end of Romans, he says that all these things are written for us so that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we may have hope.

[41 : 47] And in that wonderful letter, he tells us of the great encouragement that we have in the new Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose great act of obedience brings not condemnation and death, but justification and life.

He came to destroy the works of the devil. And it tells us, doesn't it, of the great and the certain hope that because of him, Paul says, God, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

And the Lord Jesus comes again to reign. And therefore, you see, there is, isn't there a way of escape for us now? His grace, as Paul, is sufficient for us. The command isn't beyond us.

Even in the face of the persuasiveness of the corruption of sin, even in the face of the deceitful flattery and the perennial serpent gospels, which will surround us right till the very end, if we confess and go on day by day confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ alone, seeking not self-fulfillment, but our fullness only in him, seeking not self-rule, but rejoicing, rather, in his gracious rule over us.

If we do that, says Paul, then we shall be safe. For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. See, the way of real freedom, the way of real release and fulfillment comes not in self-rule, but in submission.

[43 : 25] Submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. in whose service is perfect freedom, as the old prayer says. And that's the great paradox of the gospel of truth.

Take his easy yoke and wear it. Love will make obedience sweet. And that's the only way, as the hymn says, safe to glory where his ransomed captives meet.

not the serpent's gospel, but the saviour's gospel. Not the one who offers lordship to us, but the one who is lord of us and demands obedience and worship from us.

But that's the way to everything that the world offers but can never give, but to everything that God wants for us and does give and has given in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, let's pray. Take heed lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside to serve other gods and worship them.

[44 : 40] Lord, help us in your wisdom that we might have that wisdom to expose the tempest character and his craft as he comes to us still today.

And so protect us also from the great transgression and keep us rather looking to Jesus and finding in him the mercy and the grace and the future and the hope that is the desire of our hearts.

Keep us in your love to the very end we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.