

The Temptation of Eve.

Augusta, 26 October 2011.

Reading : Gen. 2. 8-9, 16-17; 3. 1-7a.

There can be no doubt about the identity of the one spoken of in Genesis 3 as 'the serpent'. Revelation 12 verse 9 records how, 'the great dragon was cast out, *that old (ancient) serpent*, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world'. And the devil occupies that role of *deceiver* from the very first (with my eye on the confession of the woman, 'the serpent beguiled (*deceived*) me and I did eat'¹) to the last – when, following the final uprising at the very end, on the borderland of eternity, 'the devil that *deceived* them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone'².

We have read many times the account of his success in the Garden. It all seemed so effortless, so very simple – and it was over so quickly. But was it really that easy? I think not – and want therefore to spend a few moments considering the devil's main objective – then to consider the obstacles he faced, and how he went about surmounting these – and, finally, to consider the strategy he adopted so successfully.

Clearly the devil's immediate **objective** was to persuade Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. But we are surely entitled to ask, 'Why?' What was in it for him?

We are not told, but I suggest that we find one clue in a few of the names and titles given to him in scripture. First, almost 50 times³, he is called '*Satan*' – a Greek name derived from the Aramaic, meaning 'adversary' and 'opponent'. Then we find he is called 'the wicked one', or '*the evil one*', some thirteen times in the New Testament – about half of the references occurring in either John's gospel or his first epistle – the word 'wicked' or 'evil' indicating one who is evil, not so much in his *character*, as 'in his *influence and effect*'.⁴ That is, his is a malignant evil, that which causes harm and trouble to others.⁵ And then, finally, he is characterised twice by our Lord Jesus Himself as '*the enemy*' – as one who is hostile.⁶

It is clear from these descriptions – and from the teaching of scripture in general – that the serpent-devil was, and is, opposed to God and to all that which of God ... and that, from the beginning, his purpose and goal has been to ruin and destroy as much of God's handiwork as possible.

Scripture also makes it clear that the devil is under no illusion about his destiny. He knows well that God has prepared hell for his eternal abode. In Isaiah 14, which I am satisfied looks beyond 'the King of Babylon' to his Satanic Majesty, God addresses 'Lucifer' ('the day star'), 'the son of morning' with the words, 'You said in your heart ... I will be like the Most High. Yet you shall be brought down to hell, to the depths of the pit'.⁷ Apart from which, we have the clear statement of our Lord Himself in Matthew 25 to those of the nations on His left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels', v. 41 – and, in passing, it is well worth noting that God has neither prepared hell for men, nor men for it!⁸

Oh yes, if the devil can hear and read, he knows his decreed fate well enough.

And, in this connection, I remember the cry of the two demon-possessed men of Gadara at the end of Matthew 8, 'What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God? *Have you come here to torment us before the time?*'⁹ They, at least, had no doubts about their long-term future! And, concerning Satan himself, we are told explicitly in Revelation 12 that the day will come when the great dragon, the 'deceiver', will be cast down to the earth, and a great voice from heaven will declare, 'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because *he knows that he has a short time*'.¹⁰ And I suspect that the serpent-dragon *knows now* – and indeed *knew back in Genesis 3*, that his doom is sealed – sealed by Almighty God.

Such passages as these portray Satan as a malicious and venomous creature. Justly cast out and banished from God's favour himself, he could now only envy, resent and begrudge man his exalted and privileged position as the one to whom God had entrusted dominion over the earth. And at the same time, no doubt, he wished to spite God Himself by bringing about the downfall of God's masterpiece – the downfall of man, who, by reason of being created both last and in God's very image, stood at the very pinnacle of the physical creation.

But it was going to be an uphill climb for the devil. However could he persuade Adam and Eve to do something (to eat some of the forbidden fruit) when, on the one hand, they had absolutely no reason *to do it*, and on the other, they had one very powerful reason *not to*?

On the one hand, they had no need whatever to eat this particular fruit. God's unstinting generosity and lavish provision for them had made this altogether unnecessary. And on the other hand, the devil faced the seemingly insurmountable barrier of God's unambiguous warning, 'in the day that you eat of it you shall surely (you shall certainly) die'. The Lord God's warning couldn't have been clearer, and it couldn't have been stronger. There was

no room for the first couple to have any doubt either about its meaning or its seriousness. Adam may not have fully understood the meaning of the word 'die', but he knew it was not something to be relished.

Taken these two considerations together meant that the devil faced a formidable task indeed.

If he was to have any hope of success, he would therefore need to accomplish two things at least. First, he would need to convince Adam and Eve that God was *lying* when He warned that death would be the inevitable consequence of eating the forbidden fruit, and, second, that it was indeed very much in their interests to eat it. There was obviously no mileage in him going straight up to Adam (or Eve for that matter), quoting what God had actually said, and then immediately and blatantly denying that it was true.

So that Satan's opening shot was *not*, as is often supposed, to call in question God's word! He would shortly do just that, as he has done on innumerable occasions since, but that was not what he was doing when he asked in verse 1, 'has God said ...?' This was a genuine question – which called for an answer – although, as we will see, the question itself formed part of a sinister and evil scheme aimed at securing a certain answer. The devil knew that, had he *begun* by accusing God of lying or by attempting to cast doubt on God's word, neither Adam nor Eve would have believed him. Why should they? No, *that* certainly was not a winner.¹¹

Then, separately, the enemy would need to come up with a credible explanation and reason for God's warning – other, of course, than that of God's real and genuine concern for their well-being. If he was to persuade Adam and Eve that they wouldn't die if they ate the fruit, then he would have to suggest a very plausible motive indeed for God being so insistent that they would.

It is hard to credit Satan's audacity, but the plan on which he settled was to charge God both with *being driven by his (the devil's) own motive* and with *using his (the devil's) own method*. By way of **motive**, he would accuse God of begrudging Adam and Eve that which was for their highest good. And by way of **method**, he would accuse God of deceit, of his very own sin. I say 'his very own sin' because of our Lord's words in John 8, 'You are of your father, the devil', He said to the Jews, 'he was a murderer from the beginning and *abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it.*¹²

Satan decided therefore to portray God as moved and motivated with selfish jealousy – determined at all costs to defend His own patch. He would paint a picture of a God who was stingy – a God who was fearful, even paranoid, that others would climb up to His level and invade His own prized territory of the knowledge of good and evil.

Yes, it was just about plausible. And, if he played it right, he would be able to take advantage of the fact that, although the Lord God had spoken in unmistakable terms of the consequence and the effect of transgression, He had offered not one word of explanation for the prohibition. And so, 'if **God** will not tell you, **I** will'.

Oh, we can see something of the reason for God's ban on eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I'm not suggesting that we grasp all of it!

When God created man, He deliberately chose *not* to make a creature who would worship and serve Him mechanically and mindlessly. Far from it! For God placed enormous value upon man's free and loving response of obedience and worship. So much so that, though (being who He was) God knew in advance of man's rebellion and sin – and of the tremendous cost to Himself and His Son, our Lord Jesus, of one day launching His great rescue mission ... knowing this, He still gave man the priceless gift of freedom – gave him a will capable of making its own choices.

I remember our oldest grandson, Kieran, who, when he was five, if told to do something he didn't want to, was in the habit of replying: 'I can't; I am a robot' – though neither his mother nor his grandfather were ever particularly impressed with that argument! And God could, of course, had He so willed, have programmed a creature which would have always said 'No' to evil and 'Yes' to good – a creature which would have done God's will, flawlessly and at all times. But what pleasure, I ask, would that possibly have brought either to God or to His puppet?

But if obedience is to be loving, willing and free there must, by definition, be the possibility of *disobedience*.¹³ And so there needed to be, at the very least, some kind of probation – some test, if you like – by which man's love and obedience could be proved. Hence the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – and God's forbidding man to eat from it.

But, if we, with hindsight, can glimpse something of the reason for the ban on eating from the tree, Adam and Eve were in no position to do that. The fact was God had given them no reason for His 'command' – as it is called in chapter 2 verse 16 – that they must not eat its fruit ... and the serpent was only too ready to suggest one for Him.

But the devil still faced a **major hurdle**. Frankly, the Lord God had been so good. Yes, it was true, there was this *one* restriction, but, were truth told, the restriction was minimal – insignificant. For it involved Adam and Eve in no

cost – in no great loss or sacrifice. For the Lord had provided them with the most beautiful of all environments, a Garden which He had designed and planted Himself.¹⁴ As an aside, although I have no reason to suppose that Mary Magdalene ever realised it, the newly risen Lord to whom she spoke in John 20 *had* indeed once been a ‘Gardener’!¹⁵

But the Lord God had not only ‘planted’ the garden – He had also provided the man and the woman with the most ample food supply imaginable. According to the closing section of chapter 1, ‘God said, Behold, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and *every tree* whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food’.¹⁶ And, before He *ever* revealed the restriction which He placed on just the one tree, He had stressed, in chapter 2 verse 16, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’. Every tree was at their disposal. They weren’t limited as to the amount they could eat from any individual tree. Nor were they restricted to eating from only one tree; they could mix and match as they chose. How the devil surmounted this tricky hurdle we shall see in a moment.

The devil decided to target the woman – and to do it, if I understand the passage correctly, when she was alone.

But how was he to go about it?

Clearly the temptation would need to come from *outside* of Eve, for neither she nor Adam then possessed a sinful nature like Malcolm’s. They knew nothing as yet of being tempted by their own desires – as envisaged by James in chapter 1 of his letter, ‘... each is tempted when he is drawn away (‘lured’) and enticed by his own lusts’.¹⁷ Ever since the Fall, man can be relied on to tempt himself – and, from what I can see, he makes a very good job of it!

But here the temptation would have to come from outside. And yet clearly the devil couldn’t assume a human form, because Eve was obviously well aware that she and Adam were the only two human beings alive. Both of them had been fearfully and wonderfully made¹⁸ – and that, I note, from the most unlikely and unpromising materials ... Adam from dust and she from bone. Back at home, we throw out the bones and *have* been known to sweep out the dust – though more often we preserve it – telling visitors they can touch it but asking them not to write in it! Yet the Lord God had used these very materials to make her husband and herself. But He had made them only! Just one male and one female.

And so Satan would need to work through another creature, and, by definition, a *relatively* inferior creature. And, for reasons best known to himself, he chose as his instrument the ‘serpent’ - or ‘snake’ - the Hebrew word used in Genesis 3 being the most common Old Testament Hebrew word for a snake, occurring some 30 times.

Now, let us be clear. The devil didn’t simply *appear* in the form of a snake. This snake was not some apparition or phantom. This was a real snake. Verse 1 clearly implies that the ‘serpent’ of our passage was made of similar stuff to the other beasts of the field,¹⁹ and, according to verse 14, part of God’s judgement on the serpent was that henceforth it should propel itself along on its belly ... which indeed suggests, not only that it was a physical animal, but that, prior to the fall, the snake stood erect.²⁰

And so, when we read in Genesis 3 of ‘the serpent’, we are reading of what I must call **a composite being** – a physical animal, but used as an instrument by the devil. Which is why God’s curse and judgement on the serpent in verses 14 and 15 relate, on the one hand, to the animal’s form and posture – thereafter having to move on its belly²¹ – but, on the other hand, to the Overlord of Evil himself – now with reference, not to his ‘belly’, but to his ‘head’ – destined one day to be bruised (to be crushed) by the Seed of the woman. It has been well said, ‘if you want to know who bruised the head of the serpent, ask the Man with the bruised heel!’

Indeed, however we understand the King James Version rendering of verse 1, ‘the serpent was more subtil’ – whether taking the word ‘subtil’ there in the sense of ‘shrewd’ and ‘prudent’ (as it is used in the book of Proverbs), or ‘crafty’ and ‘cunning’ (as in the book of Job)²² ... however we understand the word ‘subtil’, it is certainly *not* a suitable description for any *ordinary* animal. In some sense, therefore, the devil indwelt or ‘possessed’ the snake, using the snake as his mouthpiece.²³ The scheme and the voice were undoubtedly Satan’s.

But however was the serpent to induce Eve to entertain hard and harsh thoughts about God? Somehow he must take her eyes off the great bounty which God had lavished upon her and her husband, and get her to focus rather on the one thing – the *only* thing – which the Lord God had denied them. Somehow he must get her to think in terms of the forbidden tree – but without her realising that he was doing it.

Yes, there *was* a way ... just *one* way. It would require a carefully thought-out question – a very cleverly crafted question – an apparently innocent and naïve question, seemingly asked out of mere curiosity.

What if he began by putting some outrageous words into God’s mouth – attributing to the Almighty some nonsense statement – which would leave the woman no choice but to correct it ... and, in so doing, lead her to draw attention

to the prohibition herself? What a masterstroke that would be – to prompt – to coerce – *her* to tell *him* about the fruit of the one tree which God had withheld from her and the man.

And, to help her on her way, he would plant the idea in her mind by *himself* using the very words he wanted *her* to feed back²⁴ to him – ‘you shall not eat’!

Of course, his scheme involved *a high degree of risk*. He knew he would get no second chance. For, if his ploy failed, he would be unmasked – if not by Eve, then almost certainly by Adam, and most certainly, and far, far worse, by the Lord God. Eve would never listen to him again.

Indeed, speaking through the mouth of an animal was itself risky – and might well alert the woman to the fact that something mighty odd was going on – and therefore arouse her suspicions.

For, before she ever came on scene, had not Adam failed to find any help (or helper) ‘like’ him – to find any potential companion ‘corresponding to’ him? Had he not stood alone (something which the Lord God saw as ‘not good’²⁵), isolated and without the possibility of fellowship with any of the beasts? Yes, Adam could – and did – name them²⁶ ... but there was no evidence he could hold a conversation with any of them. No ‘living creature’ either thanked him for, or objected to, the name he gave it! And a talking, reasoning snake didn’t really fit into the picture – and the sudden arrival of one could easily alarm Eve. But then she was still in the process of discovering more and more about the fascinating world into which God had placed her.

And, in any case, what choice did he have?

It is interesting to contrast the only other talking animal in the Bible. I refer to Balaam’s ‘ass’ (donkey) in Numbers 22. Here in Genesis 3, as a consequence of acting on the serpent’s words, *our first parents’ eyes were opened* – the damage having been done.²⁷ Whereas in Numbers 22, following the ass speaking, we read that *Balaam’s eyes were opened* – by the Lord²⁸ – though there to avoid any damage. And some damage it would have been. For, at that moment, the Angel of the Lord stood poised to part the prophet’s hair with his sword! And when Balaam said to his donkey, ‘I wish there were a sword in my hand’, I imagine the angel of the Lord replying, ‘O you want a sword do you? Perhaps you would like to connect with mine!’

The actions of the one speaking animal – Balaam’s ass – then saved a man from certain death. Whereas the actions of the other speaking animal – the serpent – now introduced death into the entire human race.

Then, so be it. His strategy decided, his plans drawn, the devil needed only the right moment.

And so to verse 1. Finding Eve alone, and, if I understand the section correctly, *not* then standing near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as is often supposed, the serpent led with his seemingly innocent question. True, his devious question made him look rather foolish, but then there was a lot at stake. In Hebrew, the question opens with an expression of surprise – even disbelief. Something like, ‘Is it *really* true that God has said, You shall not eat of any of the trees (literally ‘of all the trees’) in the garden? Surely there must be some mistake – for there’s nothing else in the garden for you to eat, is there?’²⁹ I guess I must have misheard. I mean, He wouldn’t have said that ... would He?’

Verses 2 and 3. Bull’s-eye! No alarm bells rang when Eve found herself confronted by the talking snake. She took the bait, and fell for his ploy – hook, line and sinker.

And we must note carefully what she said in response.

It is good advice to every reader and student of scripture : ‘*take nothing from God’s word, add nothing to God’s word, and change nothing in God’s word*’. Warnings to this effect sound throughout scripture. The words of Moses in Deuteronomy 4 verse 2, ‘You shall *not add* to the word which I command you, *nor take from it*’, echo through to the last warning in the Bible, Revelation 22 verses 18-19, ‘if anyone *adds* to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone *takes away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life’ and so on.³⁰

‘Take nothing from God’s word, add nothing to God’s word, and change nothing in God’s word’. But, alas for us all, Eve made all three mistakes. When describing the **provision**, she took from what God had said ... when describing the **prohibition**, she added to what God had said ... and, when describing the **penalty**, she significantly altered what God had said.³¹

When describing the **provision** which God had made for her and Adam, she *understated* His goodness and generosity. ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden’, were her words – dropping the two vital words which the Lord God had used back in chapter 2 verse 16, ‘every’ and ‘freely’ ... ‘Of every tree of the garden you may *freely* eat’. And Eve did this, even though *the devil himself* had quoted accurately the expression which God had

then used, 'Has God said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'. Alas, already Eve was beginning to play down God's abundant provision.

But, on the other hand, when describing the **prohibition** which the Lord God had placed on the tree, the woman *exaggerated* its terms – making God seem severe and unduly harsh. For, without any warrant, she added the words, 'nor shall you *touch* it'. But the Lord God had said *nothing* about touching either the tree or its fruit.³²

And I find it interesting that she described the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as being 'in the midst of the garden'. Now, I don't doubt that, in some sense, that was where it was – that in all likelihood it stood next to the Tree of Life. Yet I can't help noting that chapter 2 verse 9 spoke first of *the Tree of Life* as being central.³³ But in Eve's reckoning the tree from which she was forbidden to eat had displaced that tree, and had become the most important tree in the whole of the garden. And how sad that the tree which stood next to *the Tree of Life* would soon become, to her and her husband, *the tree of death*!

And Eve's third mistake came when describing the **penalty** and the consequences which God had said would follow eating. For she now weakened the force of God's word. I am certainly not qualified to decide whether it is true to say that the woman changed *an absolute certainty* ('you shall *surely* die') into *a mere possibility* ('lest you die'), but I do know that she definitely watered down God's warning. He had said, 'in the day that you eat of it you shall surely (shall certainly) die'.³⁴ But *she* mentions neither 'in the day' nor 'surely' ('certainly').

And, yet again, I note that she *generalized* God's word. God had said, 'In the day that *thou* (singular) eatest thereof, *thou* shalt surely die'. But Eve substitutes the *plural* 'ye' for the *singular* 'thou' – 'God hath said', she reported, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die' – thereby evading to some extent the direct and personal application of God's word to herself.

I guess that to some people these may seem rather slight changes,³⁵ but, as I read the passage, when taken together, these changes alter the whole emphasis of what God had said. And, if I am right, the serpent's poison was already doing its deadly work.

Verses 4 and 5. I don't doubt that the serpent listened *most carefully* to every word of Eve's reply. And he must have been delighted to find that everything had gone according to plan – indeed, possibly better than he had even dared hope. And so, like a flash, he sprang the trap, taking full advantage of Eve's growing suspicion that perhaps God had not been as generous as He could have been – or, indeed, as generous as He should have been.

First, and up front, came his bold and outright denial – 'you shall *not* surely die'. Indeed, in Hebrew the very first word the devil thunders out is 'not'. And that is where his emphasis fell – not 'you shall not surely die', or 'you shall not surely die', but 'you shall not surely die' – making out God's warning to be just an idle threat! Here then is a blatant denial of God's truthfulness.³⁶ And what *audacity*, coming, as it does, from 'the father of lies'!

If Eve had been on the alert, she might have spotted that the serpent let slip the fact that he had known all the time *precisely* what God had said. For his claim 'you will not surely die' rests foursquare on God's word to Adam back in chapter 2 verse 17, 'you will surely die', which was not how Eve had reported God's words to him.³⁷ And yet the serpent had opened the conversation by pretending that all he had picked up was a garbled version of what God had said to Adam – and that this was the reason he had posed the silly question of verse 1.

Yes, for the serpent to quote God's exact words about 'surely dying' was a little risky, but then he had done very well so far, and now had nothing to lose. And it is worth noting that the first assault of the devil in the Bible was on the doctrine of God's judgement. Nor is this really surprising. He has every reason not to like it!

But if the serpent's *first* assault was on God's *truthfulness* and the doctrine of God's *judgement*, his *second* assault was on God's *goodness*. And here *the devil*, who envied man that which he (the devil) *did not possess* – namely, man's position of favour and privilege, the devil having once forfeited his own exalted position ... here the devil had the effrontery to accuse *God* of jealously guarding that which He (God) *did possess* (namely, the knowledge of good and evil) – and of therefore keeping back from Eve and her husband that which was for their best.

Up until now, the serpent had concentrated on what God had said – and suggested why He had said it. Now the serpent switched track, to dangle before the woman's mind a hugely tempting bait. 'You³⁸ shall be as God' – not, please, as the King James Version, 'you shall be as gods', for Eve knew, of course, of only one 'God'.

In effect, the devil was attempting to persuade Eve to sing from his own hymn-sheet – to inspire *her* with the very same ambition which had led to *his* own downfall; for had *he* not once aspired, according to Isaiah 14, 'to be like the Most High'?³⁹

To 'be as *God*' indeed! To be as *the 'god of this world'* more like! To be like him, a fallen creature, under the judgement of God.

And as so often, the enemy mingled truth with error. For, yes, if she and Adam ate, their eyes *would* be opened – yet *not* to the knowledge of good and evil, as the serpent promised in verse 5, *but*, as verse 7 reveals, to the awareness of their own nakedness.

Yes, they *would* become ‘as God’, verse 22 tells us, ‘to know good and evil’. But they would *not* know good and evil as God does.

God knows good – and He loves good, because He *is* good, and that which is good is therefore the expression of His nature. God knows evil – and He hates the evil, because that which is evil is contrary to His nature. But *Adam and Eve* would know good and evil *only from the standpoint of fallen creatures*. They would, in themselves, lack the power to do good and lack the power to resist evil.⁴⁰

This is what would *really* happen if the woman and man ate of the tree, but, of course, the serpent didn’t fill Eve in with any of this! Nor, I note, did he at any time *tell* her to eat the fruit – he didn’t *even suggest* that she should. His tactics were, as you might expect, nothing short of brilliant.⁴¹ All he did was to clear the way for her to take and eat the fruit if she so wished.

And, having sown his vile seeds of doubt and distrust, he could now safely withdraw – leaving Eve’s senses and her aroused ambition to do the rest. After all, the tree stood next to the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden. And it was inevitable that she would see it before long – which, as **verse 6** informs us, she did – in all likelihood on that occasion having her husband ‘with her’, which is what the closing part of the verse may well mean – that ‘she gave also to her husband alongside her, and he ate.’⁴²

For the devil knew that, when the woman studied the tree, what she ‘saw’ would serve to reinforce his argument. For the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked ‘good for food’, and it ‘was pleasant to the eyes’ – more or less exactly what chapter 2 verse 9 says of the other trees of the garden – ‘out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food’.⁴³ In appearance it was therefore as attractive as any other tree.

But this particular tree seemed to offer *more* than any of the other trees – for, additionally, it seemed to hold out the promise of wisdom – ‘a tree to be desired to make one wise’.

That is, this tree appealed not only to Eve’s physical appetite (‘good for food’), and to her aesthetic [*esthetic*] sense (a delight to the eyes), but also to her intellect and her ambition. And whether or not we care to line up the description of this tree with what the apostle John says ‘is in the world’ – namely with ‘the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’⁴⁴ – we do know that Eve was now guided by appearance rather than by what God said – that she was walking, not by faith, but by sight.⁴⁵

And the rest, as they say, is history. And, as I understand it, that is *how*, as the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11, ‘the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty (his craftiness)’.⁴⁶

And in so doing, as we have seen, he caused her to question whether the Lord God really was good. And the devil is still in the same business – of tempting us to doubt God’s goodness. And we have to concede that, as in Eve’s case, appearances are often on his side – and that God does not explain all His ways to us either.

But God has given the lie to all the devil’s assertions – having proved His goodness, once and for all, at the cross of our Lord Jesus. While in India some time ago, I dipped into a commentary on Romans – written by Mr. J. M. Davies (who served the Lord there for many years) and entitled ‘The Christian’s Statue of Liberty’. Mr. Davies tells there of visiting an old believer who had been laid up in bed, partially paralysed, for many years. Some Seventh Day Adventists had visited the previous day and suggested that the brother was suffering from paralysis because he had failed to keep the Sabbath. Mr. Davies records part of the brother’s very wise answer : ‘I do not read the love of God in circumstances. God has erected one monument to His love. That was at Calvary’.

In the garden, the serpent insinuated that God was seeking His own welfare at man’s expense. But the cross is the conclusive proof that the very opposite is true – that God has sought man’s welfare at His own expense.

As no doubt you know, the very title ‘Devil’ means ‘an accuser’, ‘a slanderer’ – indeed, in Revelation 12 the apostle John describes him as ‘the accuser of our brethren’. But John would assure us that God has an answer to all Satan’s accusations against us – ‘if any one sins’, he writes at the beginning of chapter 2 of his first letter, ‘we have an advocate (‘a counsel for the defence’) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins’.

So, if the devil ever accuses God to you as One who seeks less than your highest good and blessing, you be sure to point him to the same Person and place to which God points him when he accuses you to God – to the Lord Jesus and His cross.⁴⁷

Endnotes

¹ Gen. 3. 13. See also 2 Cor. 11. 3.

² Rev. 20. 10.

³ 48 to be precise; 14 of which are in the Old Testament, with 11 being in the book of Job. The devil puts in only four public appearances in the Old Testament: to tempt Eve, Gen. 3. 1-5; to obtain permission to attack Job, Job 1-2; to tempt David, 1 Chron. 21. 1; and to accuse Joshua the high priest, Zech. 3. 1.

⁴ W. E. Vine, 'Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words', article 'Evil'.

⁵ 'The πονηρός is not content unless he is corrupting others as well, and drawing them into the same destruction with himself', Trench's 'Synonyms', under πονηρός.

⁶ Matt. 13. 39; Luke 10. 19.

⁷ Isa. 14. 12-15. Five times Lucifer said, 'I will'.

⁸ Yes it is true, Romans 9. 22-23 reads, 'What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering *the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*, that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory'. But Mr. W. E. Vine comments, that the first preparation 'is not imputed to God, as if God had prepared these vessels for wrath in contrast to those He had prepared for mercy. God has not created men with a view to their destruction ... The form of the word rendered "fitted" may be regarded as in the middle voice, which implies action done by oneself with a view to one's own aims and interests. There is a suggestion, therefore, that the persons referred to as "vessels of wrath" have fitted themselves for destruction, and this was actually the case with Pharaoh, as we have seen from Exodus. The apostle could have used a form of expression stating clearly that they had been fitted by an outward agency unto destruction. That form, however, is set aside in order to use one which throws the responsibility upon man for the hardness of his heart. God, then, has restrained His merited wrath ... What he says ... is that God has endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath who have fitted themselves unto destruction', 'Commentary on Romans'. (See too the article 'Fit' in Mr. Vine's 'Expository Dictionary'.) 'Who, then, is the agent by which these vessels of wrath, these unbelieving Jews, are "prepared" for such destruction, whether temporal or eternal? The difference between the term used here in v. 22 and the comparable term in v. 23 ("he prepared in advance") makes it very likely ... that *they prepared themselves* for such destruction (Godet, 361 ...). The verb in v. 23 is active and has the prefix *pro-*, and clearly means that God himself prepared in advance the vessels of mercy for glory. But in v. 22 the verb seems to be deliberately different. It is either passive voice: "they were prepared," or (more likely) middle voice: "they prepared themselves". I.e., they are responsible for their own destruction; by their sin and unbelief and refusal to repent, they sealed their own doom', Jack Cottrell, *College Press NIV Commentary on Romans*.

⁹ Matt. 8. 29.

¹⁰ Rev. 12. 12.

¹¹ And so, he leads with his insidious question. For, if God had said what the devil cleverly suggests, then how can He possibly be good. To distance Eve from God, Satan bores into her heart through doubt – intending to weaken her trust in God.

¹² John 8. 44.

¹³ To do what God desires merely because one cannot do otherwise, has no moral value.

¹⁴ 'The Lord God planted a garden ...', Gen. 2. 8.

¹⁵ John 20. 15. 'In a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn', G K Chesterton.

¹⁶ Gen. 1. 29.

¹⁷ James 1. 14.

¹⁸ Psa. 139. 14.

¹⁹ Gen. 3. 1; cf Gen. 2. 19-20.

²⁰ See JND, Collected writings, volume 6, page 110.

²¹ Perhaps translate 'slither'; see NET Bible.

²² 'Now the snake was more subtil than ...'. Subtil 'is an ambiguous term. On the one hand it is a virtue the wise should cultivate (Prov. 12. 16; 13. 16), but misused it becomes wiliness and guile (Job 5. 12; 15. 5; cf. Exod. 21. 14; Joshua 9. 4)', Gordon J. Wenham, 'Genesis' in the Word Biblical Commentary, on Gen. 3. 1. Both the Hebrew and the Greek word can carry either meaning. 'The choice of the term מִרְעָה 'shrewd' here is one of the more obvious plays on words in the text; for the man and his wife have just been described as נָדָע 'nude' (Gen. 2. 25). That is, they will seek themselves to be shrewd (cf. Gen. 3. 6) but will discover that they are 'nude' (Gen. 3. 7, 10)', *ibid*.

²³ Something like the demons and the swine, Mark 5. 13? Satan then used a snake as his mouthpiece. Since then he has used men; see 2 Cor. 11. 3-4; 1 Tim. 4. 1-2; cf. 2 Tim. 3. 13; Eph. 5. 6; Eph. 4. 14.

²⁴ An unintentional pun!

²⁵ Gen. 2. 18.

²⁶ Gen. 2. 19-20.

²⁷ Gen. 3. 7.

²⁸ Num. 22. 31.

²⁹ Compare Gen. 2. 9 and 16 with 3. 1.

³⁰ Compare Deut. 12. 32; Josh. 1. 7; Prov. 30. 6.

³¹ Sorry about the bunch of sweet peas!

³² For a (rather tenuous) argument that Eve was not adding to what God had said, see: http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Townsend_EvesAnswer_CTJ.htm

³³ Compare the promise of the Lord Jesus, 'To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God', Rev. 2. 7.

³⁴ Gen. 2. 17.

³⁵ And that to such I may seem rather pedantic.

³⁶ It is the devil's constant objective to make men believe that the consequence of sin will not be that which God has said it will be.

³⁷ I observe that the devil knew every last word which God had said to Adam back in chapter 2 – and was able to quote His words exactly : 'eat ... of every tree of the garden', Gen. 3. 1 with Gen. 2. 16; you will ... surely die', Gen. 3. 4 with Gen. 2. 17; and 'in the day that you eat of it', Gen. 3. 5 with Gen. 2. 17. It is sobering to realize that our adversary not only knows all he needs to know about us but that he knows our Bible better than we ever will.

³⁸ Plural. Either deliberately including Adam in the package or simply responding to the plural which she had used in verse 3.

³⁹ Isa. 14. 14. Satan sought to be 'like' the Most High – not to 'be' God, but to be 'as' God – just as he tempted Eve. Incredible as it seems, his heart was lifted up with pride, which led to self-exaltation and rebellion. And 'Lucifer (the Daystar), son of the morning', Isa. 14. 12, became ruler over a kingdom of darkness.

⁴⁰ See Rom. 7. 15, 18-20.

⁴¹ With, as yet, so little to go on, his understanding of human psychology was profound.

⁴² It seems to me that the incident recorded in verse 6 took place subsequently. That is, that Eve ate the fruit when Adam was 'with her' – this expression probably meaning 'alongside her'. (Compare how Joseph refused to listen to Potiphar's wife, 'to lie with her or to be *with her*', Gen. 39. 10 – the same Hebrew word.)

⁴³ Else the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would hardly have provided a fair probation and test by which to prove Adam and Eve's loving obedience.

⁴⁴ 1 John 2. 16.

⁴⁵ Contrast 2 Cor. 5. 7.

⁴⁶ 2 Cor. 11. 3. And in so doing, as we have seen, he caused her to question whether the Lord God really was good. And the devil is still in the same business – of tempting us to doubt God's goodness. And we have to concede that, as in Eve's case, appearances are often on his side – and that God does not explain all His ways to us either.

But God has given the lie to all the devil's assertions – having proved His goodness, once and for all, at the cross of our Lord Jesus. When in India some time ago, I dipped into a commentary on Romans – written by Mr. J. M. Davies and entitled 'The Christian's Statue of Liberty'. Mr. Davies tells there of visiting an old believer who had been laid up in bed, partially paralysed, for many years. Some Seventh Day Adventists had visited the previous day and suggested that the brother was suffering from paralysis because he had failed to keep the Sabbath. Mr. Davies records part of the brother's very wise answer : 'I do not read the love of God in circumstances. *God has erected one monument to His love. That was at Calvary.*

In the garden, the serpent insinuated that God was seeking *His own* welfare at *man's* expense. But the cross is the conclusive proof that the very opposite is true – that God has sought *man's* welfare at *His own* expense.

As no doubt you know, the very title 'Devil' means 'an accuser', 'a slanderer' – indeed, in Revelation 12 the apostle John describes him as 'the accuser of our brethren'. But John would assure us that God has an answer to all Satan's accusations against us – 'if any man sin', he writes at the beginning of chapter 2 of his first letter, 'we have *an advocate* (possibly, 'a counsel for the defence') with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins'.

So, if the devil ever accuses *God to you* as One who seeks less than your highest good and blessing, you be sure to point him to the same Person and place to which God points him when he accuses *you to God* – to the Lord Jesus and His cross.

⁴⁷ 'From her who failed recovery was to spring', JND, Collected Writings, volume 6, page 122.

Adam "tacitly blaming God himself, as accessory to the sin. 'Thou saidst it was not good for me to be alone; but it seems now it had been better for me to have been alone; for if thou hadst either left me without a wife, or given me a better, I should have done well enough' ... The woman's answer to this question is much like her husband's. He followed her example in sinning, and she followed his example in excusing it", Philip Henry, Exposition of the First Eleven Chapters of Genesis, (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1839), page 78.