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Genesis
Chapter 3 - God's Grace Questioned
The Subtlety of Sin (vs. 1-3)

As we come to Genesis 3, we come into a realm in which it's just really hard to believe, if in fact you understand what has been said up to this point. We've given a title to the Book of Genesis this go round which is "The Beginning of Grace and Reconciliation." It is really the story of Genesis. In fact, as you look at the very beginning in Genesis 1, you see God's grace in creation. Everything about creation is telling us His story, and the way that He creates is telling us this. It's not only telling us that, but it's actually revealing God's nature. In many respects, we're using a passage in Colossians to define for us what Genesis is really about. If you look with me in Colossians 1. It will begin to declare Him, that is Christ, as the image of the invisible God.

(Colossians 1:15) "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

(Colossians 1:16) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."

I mean, clearly, we understand that Christ is the Savior of the world, and His very name, Jesus, declares this. It is the character and the nature of God to demonstrate His lovingkindness through His Son. So, literally, what it's telling us is that because all things were created by Him and for Him, all things were created according to His lovingkindness and to save. As it goes on, it says this in verse 18,

"He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

(Colossians 1:19) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

(Colossians 1:20) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself..."

The beginning of Genesis is telling us about the grace of God and His kindness and the nature of God that is revealed in Creation. You look at John 1 and you understand that it is His Word that creates all things. The word that he uses, "*logos*," is making reference not only to the fact that He's speaking, but it's making reference to His purpose. "*Logos*" is different than other words that He could have used to describe a "word." "*Logos*" really describes a plan, a purpose, an intent. So, when you have this, you begin to realize that God had an intent in creating

everything and that intent is really personified in the person of Jesus Christ. So, as we go through the beginning, in Chapter 1, we see the grace of God in literally everything that He's creating, whether He's calling light out of darkness, or whether His spirit is going over the face of the deep. All of these things are really describing His desire for us.

As you go into Genesis 2, we see God's grace toward man specifically. Chapter 2 is really emphasizing that not only is God gracious in all that He creates, but God is gracious towards man in His creation. So, you see God preparing the way, planning the way, and not only that, but His intimacy in the creation of man and the intimacy in just forming him, as we oftentimes read in Psalm 139. So, you can't walk away from the text thinking that the Earth was created for the animals, or the trees, or anything else; it was all for man, and ultimately you see it culminating in God placing him in the crown of the garden, and all things were given for him. There's no mistake that He's doing all of this for man, and it is the grace of God toward man. Chapter 2 is going to be emphasizing that not only in the creation of man, but even the concern for man not to be alone, even in the concern of having somebody that would help him, and even in the concern of helping him learn to cultivate relationships; whether he's cultivating the garden or whether he's naming the animals, it's God preparing him for relationships. It's not just the relationship with his wife, it'll be the relationship for his children to come. So, as we've oftentimes quoted out of that great text in the Book of Isaiah, you realize that as parents, there's just some that you have to beat to death and others that you just kind of speak to. I remember somebody who was really good at plants, and I said, "How do you get them to grow?" "Well, I come and talk to them." And I go, "I've not tried that yet." I was listening to some guy, he was saying how to plant something, I even forgot what it was, but he said, "You have to pull that thing out, get the roots, start chopping the roots. In order for it to grow, it needs to have that. If you leave it dormant and you don't do that, it won't really grow." And I thought, "Well, that's pretty interesting that you've got these plants that really need that kind of attention."

So, all of this in Chapter 1, you can see the involvement in man's life and all of creation; even the fact that God has placed, and He tells man, "You're in charge. I've created this whole world and you're the one in charge." It's a magnificent text that begins to show you the grace of God toward man specifically.

When we come to Genesis 3, it is almost shocking in the sense of we have God's grace questioned. Genesis 3 is really about the questioning of God, "Is He good? Has He said? Does He really mean it? Can you trust Him?" And you're going, "Wait a minute. All things that He's done, not one good thing will He withhold, and He has not withheld." And the passage says, God created everything, it was good, and then He finally ends, "And it was very good." So, there's absolutely no mistake that God is just giving good. I mean, every good and perfect gift

comes from above, from the Father of lights. There's no variance or shifting shadow. He's good, He's doing good, and we see the grace of God, But now we see such a strange thing, that the grace of God is being questioned.

As this chapter is introduced to us, it immediately presupposes certain things, and I think that in and of itself is interesting, because it just starts off with the serpent, and you're going, "Ok, where did he come from?" Now, we know that God created the beast and obviously the crawling things, but I don't think he was crawling at this particular juncture, and we don't know where he was in the economy and the specifics of him. Of course, a lot of the animals were specified as was being mentioned of the creation of the animals. So, that we had this serpent and the first time we really hear the name brought up is in Genesis 3, "the serpent," but it presupposes that we have some understanding of this serpent and quite frankly, God's not really concerned that we have a lot of knowledge about the serpent. It's very unusual in the text, that what He does want us to know about the serpent are basically two things; he's very crafty and God created him. Now, that's a very interesting point when you consider that immediately when we hear the word serpent, we're thinking, "Ok, that's the bad guy." But what Scripture is wanting us to know is that the serpent is created by God and all things that God has created is good. In fact, very good. So, we can't think in our minds that this is this evil, malevolent, wicked source that has come in. He is telling us that the wickedness of both man and beast is not something that was created but something that came through rebelliousness in both the beast and man, so that we're actually visited with the own rebellious within. We're going to visit that in the Book of Ezekiel as well.

If you pick up with me in Genesis 3, we'll start off with the phrase,

(Genesis 3:1) "Now the serpent..."

The very name "serpent" actually comes from a word that almost sounds like hissing, and it has that connotation of whispering, "*nāḥāš*". You have a sense of, "Ok, there's something sneaky about this guy." And you go, "Who made him sneaky?" God says, "I did. I made him sneaky. I made him that way."

It is to be noted that in Matthew 10, Jesus turns to His disciples, and He goes, "I want you to be as crafty as a serpent. So clearly, He's not telling us that the craftiness in and of itself is a sin. In fact, Paul will actually say, "Crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit." Now, his point was that he tricked them into love, but the interesting thing is, as Hebrew says, we're to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Sometimes you have to be pretty crafty about that. Of course, every parent understands that in order to get kids to eat their peas, they have got to look like an airplane. Once it looks like an airplane, the kid actually thinks that he's somehow flying an airplane. Then he'll open his mouth, and he might spit him out again, but

you're at least going to get him open up. That's parents being a little crafty. So, the aspect of craftiness is not a sin. God's word is perfect. God's word is going to be in question within the text. All that God does is going to be done out of love. Nevertheless, all of this is going to be in question within the passage.

It starts off,

(Genesis 3:1) "Now the serpent was more crafty..."

Underline the word "crafty" because it really is dealing with a sense of trickery, almost. In fact, when you look in Proverbs 12, you'll see it in a different light which is strange. He actually uses the same word in the text.

(Proverbs 12:23) "A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly."

The word "prudent" is the word "crafty." So, we wouldn't naturally perceive that being the same word.

He uses the same thing in Proverbs 14:8, Proverbs 14:15, Proverbs 27:12. It's the same word. The same word that's really defined as "crafty" within the text is now "prudent" within this particular passage. I do think that the description here in Proverbs 12:23, "a prudent man conceals knowledge" is saying that sometimes it's better to say nothing and let the other guy do the talking. I remember somebody telling me, "When you're talking, you're not learning anything new." So, there's something crafty about keeping quiet and letting the other person reveal things. Hopefully, you're learning how to talk and to deal with that particular person.

So, it goes back to the passage in which "the serpent was more crafty." Now, that word "crafty" has a root word to it, and it really ties into this. I'm not going to tell you what that is yet, because that's going to tie in all the way around as far as the question that I think bugs a lot of people, "Why in the world would God make a serpent anyway?" I mean, I'm just asking the question that you guys have already thought yourself 1,001 times, but go, "I'm not asking. You want to ask?" "I'm not asking." So, I'm asking, and really when you consider this passage as well, we're dealing with the beginning of all things, right? So, it's the beginning of sin, but it's the beginning of temptation. Where does temptation come from? I mean, what's the role of something subtle and crafty? Why would God put something like that in the garden? Probably the best way to put the serpent and the whole crafty thing is you have this enchanter that comes in. You see the Egyptians and of course, much of their symbolism is with the serpent. They even have them on headgear, which has a sense of being wise and crafty and prudent, as well as maybe a little bit sneaky but god-like, because they have the powers of death within its ability. So, why would God bring this serpent in the mix, and why do we even need this in the

garden? Wouldn't the garden have been a lot nicer if the serpent never would have stuck up his ugly head? I would think so, but we're actually going to be talking about that. We're going to see the role of this crafty malevolent being and initially not malevolent. I mean, the passage is saying, read it with me,

(Genesis 3:1) "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made..."

I don't want to anthropomorphize God, but if I were God, I'd go, "I'm not telling him I made that." You almost feel like that was the big mistake, but no, no, no, there's no mistake. This is part of God's plan, and He has a purpose in this.

We then begin to see within the passage what this serpent is going to do, and it begins to raise questions, and it is the raising of questions that really brings us into this realm of sin. Where does temptation come from? Where does sin come from? I know we like to say, "The devil made me do it. It was the snake's fault," or whatever. It's not true. That's why Scripture will begin by saying it was a serpent that God made. He was crafty. You go, "Why did You make him crafty?" "You'll see, there's a reason for it."

So, it goes on and says this,

"... And he (the serpent) said to the woman..."

Now, that phrase alone just says a lot because you have to ask yourself, "First of all, why didn't he talk to the man? Where is the man? Why is she alone?" The very fact that she's alone makes her more vulnerable. I mean, we know according to Ecclesiastes, two is better than one, and the necessity of having that partnership. In fact, Jesus sent out His disciples two-by-two. I wonder why He'd do that? There's a vulnerability in just being alone and sorry, I'm not chauvinistic, but he's picking the weaker vessel. I think of the passage in 1 Peter, and it says Satan goes around like a roaring lion, looking for whom he may devour. The question is, how do lions hunt? They look for the weak one and that's the one they go after. He's doing a good job. All these things are part of the pattern, part of being crafty. You want to find somebody vulnerable. You want to find the weaker of the two. You want to find, really, if I can put it this way, the novice of the two. I mean, she's the latecomer and he was the guy who's been around a little bit longer. So, she's not going to have as much insider information. "Ok, easy prey." Basically, it's what he's doing within the passage. The subtlety of sin within all of this, and when I use the word "sin," we're talking about falling short of the glory of God. More specifically, sin is anything that doesn't look like God. To be more specific from that, sin is when you're not thinking like God. When you and I began to think selfishly, self-centered, only in terms of our greed and our avarice; when we begin to think in terms of "me, alone," then that's nothing like God. God is love and He doesn't think that way. So, when we declare Him as holy, we're talking

about holy in thought, holy in action and everything that He does, and sin is just literally missing the mark of His holiness. So, the subtlety of sin in this is pretty interesting as you see one crafty coming into the scene and he just throws out, I would guess, a question to the woman. The phrase is just very simple. Seemingly to the point, "Indeed, has God said...?" The questioning of God's word. If you can twist, if you can distort, if you can make it say something that doesn't; as Peter so aptly puts it, the unstable and the untaught distort Scripture to their own desires, and we see people doing that all the time. I see people quoting out of Scripture and telling me what it says, and I'm going, "That's not what it says at all." But it's not that they have a desire for truth, they just have a desire to twist.

We see the same thing in Matthew 4, where Christ is being tested by the serpent, if we can put it this way. And when you think about the testing, it basically is in the three areas (1 John 2:16) which is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. When you think about the lust of flesh, what you're really dealing with is the sensory cravings. Really, when you look in Matthew 4, first of all, you have the bread. "You're hungry, aren't you?" So, we're going to pull on your hunger and the desires as far as that goes. If you look in the passage here in Chapter 3 and drop on down to the woman where she's looking at the tree.

(Genesis 3:6) "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food..."

See, that's the flesh; the desire of the flesh. So, that's the sensory that's being drawn. Then, the lust of the eyes is really the greed and the avarice. So, you see these great things and you want more, but what's that phrase? "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach."

"... and that it was a delight to the eyes..."

That's the lust of the eyes.

Then, the boastful pride of life,

"... and that the tree was desirable to make one wise..."

Smarter than anybody else. As Satan takes Christ on the mount, he says, "You can have all these kingdoms." So, you see the subtlety of it, and we're not going to get that far today.

If you back up, "Indeed, has God said...?" is just the simple question of questioning what God said. Now, I want you to see the sneakiness of this, and I'm not saying this because I want you to be sneaky. I'm not saying this because we're trying to train you into craftiness or shrewdness, but it is, to me, extremely interesting how complicated his thinking is in the simplicity of what he says. Read it with me.

(Genesis 3:1) "...Indeed, has God said..."

He just kind of stirs up the possibility, "Maybe God could be wrong."

“... “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’””

Now, what he does is he generalizes. It's sinister because now, you're not ready for this one, he wants her to correct him. Now, this is what you have to remember, and sometimes we forget when we're reading it, the serpent is a subordinate to her. So, he's appealing to her pride. “You know, I think I might have heard this, but you're the expert.” And she comes back, and she corrects him. Read the text with me.

(Genesis 3:2) “The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat.’”

If she just would have stopped there, it would have been ok, really, but see, he's already triggered it, “You're the expert. Correct me. I'm sorry, I was wrong.” But he's already planted the idea, and the idea that he wants to plant is that “Maybe you're smarter than God; maybe He doesn't want you to be; maybe He's holding back somewhere. You don't have to believe the whole thing that, oh, God's depriving you of all the trees. No, no, no, He's not depriving us of any, just this one. I wonder why He's depriving is of that one?” Isn't that subtle? It's pretty sharp. You have to admit.

So, “The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;

(Genesis 3:3) but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden...”

This is the crown; it's the in the midst of everything. You can just see the glory coming up. Of course, we know that it's probably one of the most beautiful trees at least, and the very fact that you can't eat of it, it becomes the most beautiful just by virtue of that.

“... God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it...’”

God never said that, but she's already on ticket. She's already come into the realm of, “I'm the expert. She's already come into the realm of, “I know a little bit better than God.” It's like the serpent's sitting, going, “You teach me. You're in charge.” It is very subtle too, and you might want to take note of this, that him being the subordinate keeps her from being under duress. You know, when you're forced to make a decision, then pride doesn't come in, but if you think you're free to make the decision, it's easier to be exalted when you're the expert. There was never a sense of the serpent pressuring her or anything. The subordinate goes, “You teach me. You have a better idea” and it strengthens the appeal of pride in all of the setting. “You know better.” The exaggeration, the misquote makes her the expert. “No, let me tell you a detail you don't know. We can't even touch it” and you can hear in this as she corrects. But now, as she is thinking a little bit deeper, that she expands God's word to almost accentuate a sense of law in this where it's all been about grace, all the way. But “Maybe He's just trying to deprive us of things. He doesn't even want me to touch it. I can't even touch it.”

Now, what's going on here? How did this all begin? Well, if you go back, it starts with the serpent, right? He's the crafty guy. It says that he's "more crafty than any beast," and I told you we would define this word crafty in a deeper way. So, the root of the word crafty is to lay bare; to actually be naked. Which is interesting because what's going to happen is they're going to both look at each other after they sin, and they're going to feel as if they're naked. It's like Titus will say, to the pure all things the pure, to the defiled, nothing is pure because everything is seen differently. The question is, why is this guy allowed to ask these questions? Why would God create one to ask these questions? What is happening within the passage, and what is clear in all of this is that God has already demonstrated His love to man. The question really is, "Will you love Me back?" Isn't that basically the question? First of all, what are you going to give God? Well, you're not going to give Him anything, but you can trust Him. The gift is trust. The question is, "Will you trust Me? Will you trust Me no matter what?" Let's maybe probe a little deeper. What's actually in your heart? What are you thinking? Now, you can say something, as Scripture says that many a man proclaims his loyalty, but a faithful man who can find. Which this is telling us that a lot of people say things that they really don't mean; that there are people that even feign obedience. So, obviously, they don't even really love God or want to obey Him, but because of His great power, they don't question. The question is, what's really in your heart? Why does God bring things into our lives?

There's a psalm in Psalm 83. This particular Psalm is dealing with all kinds of nations that have surrounded God's people, and the cry is, "God, don't be silent. The enemies are surrounding me. They make an uproar." And in many respects, they begin to actually list the enemies within the text. It starts off this way in Psalm 83,

(Psalm 83:1) "O God, do not remain quiet;
Do not be silent and, O God, do not be still.

Psalm 83:2) For behold, Your enemies make an uproar,
And those who hate You have exalted themselves.

(Psalm 83:3) They make shrewd ("crafty") plans against Your people,
And conspire together against Your treasured ones."

Now, I've got to stop here. Why would God have crafty people surrounding us? Why would He let them exist? He doesn't have to unless they have a purpose.

(Psalm 83:4) "They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation,
That the name of Israel be remembered no more."

(Psalm 83:5) For they have conspired together with one mind;
Against You they make a covenant."

And then he begins to list them,

(Psalm 83:6) “The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites;

(Psalm 83:7) Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre.”

What's the list? Well, if you put little Jerusalem on the map, it's just all the nations that are surrounding them, and the passage is saying, “You surrounded me with crafty people.”

It's like you're in the garden, and “I'm surrounded by serpents that want to kill me” and they conspired. It's almost impossible to fight crafty people, isn't it? They're too crafty. I've oftentimes thought about the animal world, and there are certain animals that are a lot smarter than us in certain areas, whether it be the eagle or the lion. You think you're smart, let me put you in the middle of nowhere and just let these animals come after you. They're going to outsmart you. They're going to outsmart you. So, they have abilities in areas that we don't. Why would God surround us with those that have greater ability than we do in these kinds of areas? Why would God place us with people that are craftier than we are? See, that's an interesting question, and the answer really is in the word “crafty,” because the purpose of crafty is to lay bare and that really is the issue. We can say that we love God. We can say that we trust Him. We can say that we're happy where God has placed us, but God puts things in our lives to reveal what's real. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 4 everything is laid bare before God. How does He do that? Well, you know, I found that He puts crafty people in my life. I mean, there are times that I've told God, “I trust You. I trust You implicitly. No problem. I'm with You 100%.” And He puts people in my life, and I go, “What are You doing? And He goes, “You don't trust Me, do you?” I mean, we lie to ourselves, and Scripture is wanting to reveal to us that sin didn't come from the serpent, it came from us. The serpent was there to reveal, to lay bare what's on our hearts. I wonder how many times she passed by that tree and thought, “I wonder why this one?” I don't think she just came up with the idea, “Of all the trees, I can't even touch this.” I think she's been thinking, “I can't even touch that, can I?” I mean, how many times has she been looking at it? The very fact that she's right by it. We know that she's right by it because she takes from it at this time. “What are you hanging around it for?” So, everything about this is telling us that she has a weakness. She has a problem. She's been eyeballing this. I mean, she goes, “Wow, this has got to be the most beautiful tree I've ever seen.” It's not like anything else. I mean, you get fixated on a particular thing and it's like you can't even see the sunrise. Nothing in the whole world is important, except that one thing that you want, and somehow that's gotten in her heart. God is gracious to bring things and people into our life that will reveal the untruth of our lives.

If you look with me in James 1. In case you're ever in question about where that whole thing of temptation comes from and once again, in case you want to blame the serpent for everything which I'm sure he wasn't in the greatest of encouragements.

(James 1:12) "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

That's an interesting key. How do you know you love God? Trials. What do crafty people do? They throw out trials. They throw out questions. I mean, if you really love somebody, somebody really, really sneaky and crafty could never get you not to love somebody, I don't care how smart they are; if you really loved them. When you look at the testing of Christ in Matthew 4, oftentimes it's referred to as the temptation of Christ. It's not the "temptation of Christ," it's the testing of Christ, and the very fact that He wasn't tempted. It's very clear within the passage that none of that tempted Him because of His love for His Father. "I'm just not going to not love My Father more than anything you promised me." It's like walking up to a guy that loves his wife all his life and they say, "How much are you giving me for her?" "I don't care how much you offer; I'm not going to take anything for her." "Why?" "Because I love her." Come on. There's no money in the world. "Oh, come on." Then, he waves a couple of \$20s in front of my nose. Are you kidding me? There's no temptation there, maybe \$100s. No.

If you look at the passage, it goes on and says,

(James 1:13) "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God' ..."

"It's God's fault. He put that old serpent in the garden." Now, the serpent was there only to reveal what was already in your heart.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."

(James 1:14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

(James 1:15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

How did that happen? It's your fault. You had it in your heart. The very fact that God gives us a choice and here again, I think one of the bizarre things in all of this is, how did this this come into being? I mean, what was it that cultivated her thinking this way? There are number of passages that I could have you turn to, but I may have you turn to just a couple.

If you look in Deuteronomy 32. Great passage. Once again, we've read it before in which it begins to describe just how loving God had been to His people. You have Moses teaching like

rain dropping from the sky how God has been faithful to His people, but they've acted corruptly towards Him. (Deuteronomy 32:5) They've done perverse things.

“Do you repay God for His graciousness to you this way?” (Deuteronomy 32:6)

(Deuteronomy 32:7) “Remember the days of old...”

“Remember how God took care of you. He separated. He gave you boundaries. He gave you an inheritance. He protected you in the desert. He encircled you. He cared for you. (Verse 10) He guarded you as the pupil of his eye.”

(Deuteronomy 32:11) “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
That hovers over its young...”

Everything that he's saying is that God was gracious towards you.

Nevertheless,

(Deuteronomy 32:11) “But Jeshurun (Israel) grew fat and kicked—
You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—
Then he forsook God who made him...”

What cultivates the thinking of, “I should have that tree too.” You know, the sense of having a lot and abundance of blessing and given so much. Our thought is, “Why didn't God just give us everything right now? Why doesn't He just give me everything? I mean, He says it's all mine anyway, and my inheritance. Do you know how much that would destroy us? I mean, how many times have we seen people win a lottery or something like that and it just destroys households when they have something like this? There's something about it that just stirs up a sense of entitlement, and strangely enough, even more, they want more. You see this within the passage.

As you were to back up into Deuteronomy 31:20, you would see that God was going to bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which he swore to the forefathers. He says, “This is what's going to happen when they're satisfied, and they become prosperous.”

What will happen?

(Deuteronomy 31:20) “... then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.”

When does it happen? When they become prosperous, when they have all these things.

Moses will say in verse 29,

“For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”

“I know what you're going to do. You're going to go into the promised land. You're going to have plenty and you're going to leave Him. You're going to ditch Him.” They're in the garden of Eden. Everything is screaming entitlement. “I deserve this. I didn't do anything to earn it, but the very fact that I have it all must mean that I'm very, very important.” And it's a bizarre thought process.

If you look at Ezekiel 16, you kind of see the same thing coming out within the passage. Once again, we're dealing with a familiar passage in which at first, Israel or Jerusalem was seen as something that everybody passed by. It was an infant that was in need and in its blood, and naked, and God passed by, and He says, “I took care of you. I bathed you.”

(Ezekiel 16:10) “I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen...”

(Ezekiel 16:11) “I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck.

(Ezekiel 16:12) “I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

(Ezekiel 16:13) “Thus you were adorned with gold and silver...”

Obviously, nothing is withheld from His people.

(Ezekiel 16:14) “Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you,” declares the Lord GOD.

(Ezekiel 16:15) “But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame...”

We just can't seem to handle it, and it really, in some respects, becomes the theme of Ezekiel.

If you look in Ezekiel 28, it goes back to Lucifer, and what made Lucifer fall?

(Ezekiel 28:12) “You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

(Ezekiel 28:13) “You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering...”

Can you imagine how, perhaps alluring he was? You go, “Well, it does say “serpent;” it doesn't say “Lucifer.”” Well, I understand that, but as Paul will write in Corinthians, “as the serpent

deceived Eve,” and then it goes into Revelation, and it ties the serpent directly to Satan which is pretty interesting.

(Ezekiel 28:15) “You were blameless in your ways...”

Did God create Lucifer perfect and blameless? Absolutely, but it was the abundance that made him fall.

(Ezekiel 28:16) “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence...”

Well, let's put it in the context of Eve, “By the abundance of everything you had and everything you were given, you still thought you deserved more. Instead of caring about the relationship with God, you were violent toward Him and thinking that He was holding back from you.” I mean, think about that, how treacherous that thought is, that the person who gave you everything is holding back on you. Yeah, it's just so horrific to think that somebody would be thinking that way. Obviously, she's not thinking about relationship. She's not thinking about worship. She's not thinking about a love for God. She's not thinking about, as Romans 1 would say, giving thanks. Why is God upset? Though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, nor did they give one “thank you.” The only thing she can say is, “He won't let me touch that tree.” And it begins to show you the cultivation of our hearts, and one of the reasons why Jesus will say it's very hard for a rich man to get into heaven. You go, “Why?” Well, I don't know. You tell me. See how these things begin to creep in, and man begins to think, “I need more. I need something different. I need something new.” You know, when I hear people say things like that, I'm going, “Ok, they're out of touch. They've become the center of their world.” I mean, it's no wonder people are so miserable. You sit around thinking about you, then before long, you're thinking about what you don't have that somebody else has. Before long, you're critical and jealous and envious and strife. “What's the reason for your quarrels?” James says. You lost and you don't have, and you want to kill somebody because you don't have it. What's also bizarre is, is that what God wants out of man is a relationship. I think one of the most difficult things of a parent is if they have the wherewithal to give their kids whatever they can, I think that's probably one of the hardest things, because when you don't have that much, your kid goes, “Dad, can I...?” “I don't have it.” It's no problem, but you know you have it, and you go, “I don't want to hold back anything. I want to give them everything.” I mean, it's just the nature of a parent; it's the nature of love to want to give. There's liberality where the Spirit of God is, which means that you want to give, you want to be generous but you also realize how destructive that is in the midst of this. I think one of the reasons for Proverbs is to begin to reveal just how destructive it is.

This an interesting verse, and here again, these are verses we've quoted before, but in Isaiah 8, if you look here with me. I just like the wording of it because I think of it when I think of the rivers within the garden and the way that God had so placed everything. I mean, "Eden" itself refers to great beauty and paradise.

(Isaiah 8:5) "Again the LORD spoke to me further, saying,

(Isaiah 8:6) "Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah..."

We would think of it as Shiloh, but it's not. There is a Shiloh in which the Ark of the Covenant was placed, but this is an interesting spring. From what I understand, this is the only perennial spring in Jerusalem. When I say "perennial," it means that it's the only lasting and enduring spring in Jerusalem. The name itself means "sent." I don't know if you remember the story and John? In John 9 there's a blind man and God goes, "Put clay in your eyes. Go wash your eyes in the pool of Siloam." That's that word in the Greek. So, God had placed a spring to constantly feed, to constantly be a source of help to Jerusalem.

The way that it's put in Jeremiah 2, if you'd just kind of compare it. In fact, here in Jeremiah 8, he actually goes on and he says, "You say it's a conspiracy and that God is basically doing bad and that this is going to be a rock of stumbling to you, that you're perceiving that God is giving you less." But if you look with me in Jeremiah 2, you have this same feeling in Jeremiah 2:12,

"Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD.

(Jeremiah 2:13) "For My people have committed two evils:

They have forsaken Me,

The fountain of living waters,

To hew for themselves cisterns,

Broken cisterns

That can hold no water."

You kind of get that interesting picture of the woman at the well, when she keeps coming back to this place and He goes, "You still feel empty? How would you like some living water, and you never have to be thirsty again?"

It goes on, and says,

(Jeremiah 2:17) "Have you not done this to yourself

By your forsaking the LORD your God..."

Man just can't seem to be satisfied if in fact he's only seeking things for himself. It's just an insatiable desire. I don't care if you're in the heaven of heavens, you're never going to be

content. You'll always want and think that you deserve more. I mean, that's proof positive with Lucifer, isn't it? I mean, he was in the holiest of holy places in heaven.

As you look at this passage,

"Have you not done this to yourself
By your forsaking the LORD your God
When He led you in the way?

(Jeremiah 2:18) "But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt,
To drink the waters of the Nile?
Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria,
To drink the waters of the Euphrates?"

"But I already gave you the gently flowing waters."

So, you read in Isaiah 52, and you go, "Who has believed our message?" And you can see the wisdom of God that takes us beyond even the craftiness of man and takes us into the realm of a power that is greater than the craftiness of man, which is the love of God.

(Isaiah 52:13) "Behold, My servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

(Isaiah 52:14) Just as many were astonished at you, My people,
So His appearance was marred more than any man
And His form more than the sons of men.

(Isaiah 52:15) Thus He will sprinkle many nations,
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;
For what had not been told them they will see,
And what they had not heard they will understand.

(Isaiah 53:1) Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

(Isaiah 53:2) For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty..."

Why wouldn't God try to allure us with a stately form of majesty? Because it's the very thing that man, if he focuses on, takes him away from a genuine relationship. I mean, once you begin to focus on the external and the desires for the flesh, the desires of the eyes, of the boastful pride of life, you've just thrown relationship out the window. So, what do you do? You don't give any stately form of majesty. You let people come from the heart.

“... Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

(Isaiah 53:3) He was despised and forsaken of men...”

If He's despised and forsaken of men, He can't be famous, He can't be grand, He can't be glorious; He can't have great esteem of the people. I mean, why would you follow somebody like that? Well, the only reason you'd follow them is that you love them. That would have to be the only reason.

Paul writes this, if you look with me in 2 Corinthians 11,

(2 Corinthians 11:1) “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.

(2 Corinthians 11:2) For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”

There's something very simple and very basic in that initial relationship. As Proverbs will say, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth.” There's that sense of romantic love, and it's the only person. If you talk to a young couple that's in love, you go, “Where are you going to live?” “We'll live in a tent if we have to.” “How are you going to support yourself?” “I don't know. We'll do whatever it takes.” They're not trying to get everything. They just want to be together. In a way, he's kind of starting off with that, he says, “Isn't that the way it's supposed to be?”

(2 Corinthians 11:3) “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

It's not complicated, is it? We complicate things by wanting more. This whole book of 2 Corinthians is really, in many respects, about the pride and the arrogance that comes in and destroys relationships.

In fact, let me show you something in 2 Corinthians 2. Do you remember the guy that was disciplined by the church?

(2 Corinthians 2:5) “But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.

(2 Corinthians 2:6) Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.”

It goes on and says that you need to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Corinthians 2:8)

Paul's wanting to make sure that that they're not holding on to bitterness or anything against him.

(2 Corinthians 2:11) “so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

I don't know if you get what he's saying here within the passage, but he's talking about Satan taking advantage of us.

Now, the Greek word that he uses for “advantage would be taken of us” is actually “overreach” (*pleonekteō*). In other words, you would think that one of the safest places that you could be, would be in the Holy of Holies, right? You would think that one of the safest and closest that you could be, would be in the very center of the garden of Eden, wouldn't you? You would also think that one of the places that you would never be tempted to sin would be in the middle of church, doing the right thing. Listen how subtle it is, before long, we can overreach; we can go in the realms. You know, there's certain things that God tells us to do and certain things He tells us not to do. We don't work too well with barriers. So, when God says, for instance, that you need to take a stand, perhaps on something; you need to proclaim something; you need to refuse foolish and ignorant speculation. You know, if somebody starts arguing or debating with you about something, what does Scripture say? “Sorry, not going to talk about it.” But you know, we can't just leave it there. What we have to do now is going into correction. Does it say correct? But we go into overreach. If you think about it, the temptation of the garden was overreach. The whole thing was overreach. “God said...?” “Oh, no, God didn't say of the trees, but of the one in the center, He told me not to touch.” It was the overreach that then brings in the pride, because now I begin to put words in God's mouth, and now I begin to take on positions that God never told me to take on. This is where Satan comes in. It's the subtlety, and it's usually strangely enough, through this subordinate. You would think that it would come from high up. No, no, that's not sneaky. You want to know why God turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan”? Because he was a subordinate, and he knew that's how Satan worked. He works through subordinate, because through the subordinate you're not threatened. In fact, you're emboldened. You feel, “Now, I am the expert.” “Well, tell me what you think.” Yeah. Pretty subtle, isn't it? I mean, you wouldn't think that by doing the right thing, we would be taken advantage of by Satan. We were doing the right thing. Isn't there a verse somewhere like in Corinthians that says if you think you stand, take heed lest you fall? How subtle pride is, and this is the reason why if you look in 2 Corinthians 4, he says that our gospel is veiled. (2 Corinthians 4:3)

(2 Corinthians 4:4) “... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light...”

You go, “How does he do that?” Well, all he has to do is cause us to preach ourselves. Then, before long, we're not only telling God, “I can take it from here,” but also, “I'm going to add some things that maybe You missed, and I'm going to correct people that maybe You should

have corrected by now. You know, God's a little slow about that. Did you notice, about correcting people? He's pretty slow. So, if God let it go, I'm not going to let it go." What gave you the right? "Well, I just know what to do. Don't ask me how I know."

(2 Corinthians 4:5) "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake."

"I'm not going to overreach."

This is very interesting, and here again, I won't go into it, but if you look with me in 2 Corinthians 10 and we'll end with this.

(2 Corinthians 10:3) "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,

(2 Corinthians 10:4) for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

(2 Corinthians 10:5) We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing..."

That's even me, when I overreach. Even though it might be a good thing, if I overreached, I'm a tool of Satan. It's just that subtle. I mean, if I'm taking that position of authority that I've not been given; if I'm saying things that are not said; if I'm doing things that He didn't tell me to do. It doesn't take much, does it?

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

(2 Corinthians 10:6) and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

(2 Corinthians 10:7) You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we."

And some boast in the external, but he says, "Don't do that." It's interesting how subtle sin is. Let me just say this, it begins with you thinking that you're somebody, and it doesn't take much for you to think that.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we just ask You to deal with our hearts. Lord, may we walk humbly with our God. Lord, You tell us to do certain things. You tell us because You love us. You tell us because these are true. They're right. They're good for us. You're not putting boundaries to withhold things from

us, You're putting boundaries to protect us because You do love us. For us to go beyond those boundaries or to reinterpret them in any way, is just opening the door to all kinds of pride in our own lives. Lord, we begin to see how subtle it is. Help us to remember this in Your name. Amen.