Genesis 3:1-24
The False and True Gospels
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Let me begin today by saying that I am pretty disappointed in Opie Taylor, the son of Sheriff Andy Taylor in the classic TV series from the 1960s, **The Andy Griffith Show**. Well, I really need to be a little more precise. My disappointment is not really with the character but with the actor who portrayed him. Opie was played by then child actor Ron Howard, who, as an adult, now directs movies. Ron Howard is directing a new movie scheduled to come out in May of this year (2006). This movie will be the film version of the popular suspense novel **The DaVinci Code**, a book which has already sold over 30 million copies. The problem with this work of fiction is that it is filled with historical inaccuracies which challenge historic Christian teachings. This novel presents a distorted view of the historical Jesus and a false account of early church history. The book is fiction, but people have a tendency to accept the historical allusions in such works as factual. The movie will magnify this confusion even further.

To understand the problem with this movie, we have to understand gnosticism. The greatest heretical challenge to Christianity in the early church was a heresy called gnosticism. When the gospel started to spread to the pagan nations, this reactionary distortion of the gospel message began to develop. Matter of fact, in some of the later books of the New Testament

(Colossians, 1 Timothy, 1 John), the apostles Paul and John taught against some of the basic errors which had already begun to trouble the church in the first century and which developed into the full blown gnostic heresy in the second century.

In 1945, near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi, a cache of early gnostic writings was found. This cache included long lost works with names such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Apocalypse of Peter and so on. Some of these works deny orthodox Christian teachings such as the virgin birth of Jesus and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Some teach that the way to know Christ is not through reading the inscripturated apostolic witness to the historical Jesus found in the New Testament but instead through encountering the risen Christ in the present by means of inner visions.

Gnosticism claims that to know oneself at the deepest level is to know God because the divine is in all of us. This is where the name gnosticism comes from. The Greek word for knowledge is gnosis, and it here refers to this philosophical insight into one's own supposed divinity. Gnosticism teaches that one shouldn't go to Scripture to find truth and morality. One should instead recognize one's own divinity and elevate one's own inner inclinations as divine guides to truth and morality.

One of these gnostic writings is called The Testimony of Truth. The Testimony of Truth turns the story of the fall in Genesis chapter three on its head. According to this gnostic writing, the serpent is the hero of the story, and the villain is the Creator,

whom gnostics called the Demiurge. According to this gnostic distortion, the serpent in the story tells Eve the truth after the tyrannical and jealous Demiurge, the wicked creator god, had deceived her with lies. The Demiurge didn't want Eve to discover that she is a spark of pure divinity which he had entrapped through creation in a prison of lowly human flesh.

One of the messages of the novel **The DaVinci Code** is that the teaching found in these gnostic writings is true, authentic Christianity, and that the teaching found in the New Testament is a historical hoax. This is one of the many dangerous false messages found in this book and movie.

What I want to do this morning is to look at the story of the fall into sin found in Genesis chapter three. And I want to make clear from this examination what is the false gospel which we should reject and what is the true gospel which we should accept. We will look at this text under the three headings, Satan's question, Satan's lie, and God's promise.

First, **Satan's question**. Satan asked Eve, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"

In order to understand Satan's question, we have to understand the world Adam and Eve were living in before their fall into sin. Before the fall, Adam and Eve lived in a very God-centered world. They recognized that God was so high about them that there was no greater privilege in life than serving God and worshipping God and bringing glory and honor to God.

God was high above them in that God is not a part of the created realm. In this sense, God is wholly other. Creation is a finite realm with a beginning, a domain limited by the dimensions of space and time. Creation is dependent upon God for both its existence and its continuance. God had to make it or it would not exist, and God has to uphold it or it would not continue to exist. That is the way it is with the finite world of creation which God make out of nothing in the space of six days. God is different. God has never had a beginning. God has always been. God is not limited by time. God does not have to wait for one event to follow another in chronological sequence to see what will happen next. God lives in the eternal "now" and knows the end from the beginning. God is not limited by space. God is everywhere, and wherever God is, all of God is there. God is independent, not deriving His existence from another nor depending on another to maintain His existence. God's knowledge is not partial but exhaustive. God knows everything inside and out, from beginning to end, and in relation to all other possible knowledge. This is the God Adam and Eve knew there in the garden.

God was so high above Adam and Eve that He was beyond their understanding. Yet they could know this wonderful, incomprehensible God because God had created this world to reflect His glory. God had filled this world with creaturely analogies, with creaturely parallels, with creaturely likenesses to His eternal being so that He could reveal Himself to humanity, whom created in His own image.

Our first parents in their state of innocence recognized God for who God is, and they centered their world around Him. Our first parents thought God's thoughts after Him and viewed that as the highest reach of intellectual endeavor. Our first parents did God's will, and viewed that as the highest form of human freedom. Our first parents obeyed God's command, and viewed that as the greatest of creaturely privileges. Everything revolved around God and God's glory. The chief end of our first parents, their chief purpose in life, their main reason for living before the fall was to glorify and enjoy God.

What Satan wanted to do was to sow the seeds of discontent in Eve’s heart. He wanted her to begin to question the fairness of having to live a life centered around God. He wanted her to begin to question the reliability of God’s word as the most basic foundation of truth. He wanted her to stop regarding God’s word as unquestionably true. He wanted her to start thinking that she could weigh and evaluate the truthfulness of God’s Word for herself. That would be possible only if there were some standard more ultimate than God’s word and more reliable than God’s word. Satan wanted Eve to elevate her own inner inclinations and opinions and intuitions as that more ultimate, more reliable standard.

As you probably noticed, Satan misrepresented Eve’s world by asking if God had forbidden her to eat the fruit from every single tree in the garden. God had not done that. God had forbidden her from eating the fruit from one tree, a tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree represented God’s unique authority as the only one with a right to define

what is good and what is evil. There was no reason not to eat the fruit of that special tree except for the fact that God had said not to. By not eating the fruit of that one forbidden tree, Adam and Eve were respecting God's special and ultimate authority.

Eve told the serpent that God had warned them that if they ever did eat of that forbidden fruit, they would surely die that very day. To eat of that forbidden fruit was to disobey God, and to disobey God is to reject God as one's ultimate authority. To reject God in any sense is to cut oneself off from fellowship with God. And God is not only our ultimate authority. God is also the creator and sustainer of all life. So to reject God is to die. If Eve ate of that fruit, she would immediately die in a spiritual sense, for being out of fellowship with God is spiritual death. She would also begin to die physically. The only reason she would not immediately die in a physical sense is because of God's merciful patience. The book of Genesis emphasizes repeatedly that everyone after the fall eventually died, even Methusaleh.

Satan asked his question in order to sow the seeds of doubt. That is our first point. Our second point is **Satan's lie**. We find Satan's lie in verses four and five:

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.
5 "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan here descends even lower. He irreverently calls the living and true God a liar. Satan tells Eve that God's warning to her simply is not true. She can eat of the fruit of that special tree, and she won't die. Satan said that the reason God told Eve not to eat that fruit was because He wanted to keep her ignorant. God wanted to keep from her some special knowledge, some gnosis. God knows, said Satan, that when she eats of that fruit, her eyes will be opened, and God wants to keep her ignorant.

What is this special knowledge which Satan alluded to, this special gnosis? It is that she is like God, knowing good and evil. It is that she has just as much a right as God to know good and evil definitively. It is, in other words, that she has just as much a right as God to define good and evil, to decide what is good and what is evil, to say what is good and evil. She is like God, she is in the same category as God. In other words, she is divine, and God knows it but He doesn't want her to know it.

God had told Adam and Eve that He had created them in His image. Satan told Eve that she was like God. Those two statements sound a lot alike. What is the difference between what God meant He said that Adam and Eve were created in God's image and what Satan meant when he said she could be like God? The difference is subtle but profound. Let me try to give you an illustration of the difference. Consider the relationship of students to their teacher in a classroom. There are two ways for children in a classroom to try to be like their teacher. One of these two ways is the very essence of education, but the other is a formula for classroom chaos. Consider one student who faithfully absorbs his teacher's knowledge and

skills in respectful submission. The teacher can read, and the student learns to read. The teacher can cipher numbers, and the student learns to cipher numbers. The teacher can spell and write, and the student learns to spell and write. The student is becoming more and more like his teacher in these desirable ways. Contrast this with another student who doesn’t master any of these skills and who doesn’t obtain any of this knowledge. Instead he marches to the front of the classroom, shoves the teacher aside, and proclaims to all that he is now in charge. This second student is imitating his teacher in an improper, inappropriate, unseemly way which destroys proper order. Both students are trying to be like their teacher, yet their approaches differ like night and day. One student masters the teacher's scholarship, and the other usurps his authority.

The first student obtains some of his teacher’s knowledge and abilities but never pretends to be anything other than his teacher’s student. He recognizes that no matter how much he learns in that classroom, he remains a student and remains in a different category from his teacher. No matter who much he learns, his teacher still has certain prerogatives and privileges which he does not have. The second student becomes like his teacher by claiming to be in the same category. He wrongly claims to have all his teacher’s prerogatives and privileges.

Let’s now leave our classroom illustration and return to the garden of Eden. For Adam and Eve to view themselves as created in the image of God meant that they had the privilege of becoming more and more like God in terms of his goodness and holiness and justice and other attributes which we call God’s

communicable attributes. Yet no matter how much they became like God in these ways, they would remain in an altogether different category. They would always be limited, finite creatures, and God would always be the special, unique Creator who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable.

Satan's message to Eve was that being created in God's image is not good enough. Satan told Eve, "You are like God in that you are in the same category as God. You are divine. And you have all of God's prerogatives. You can define good and evil for yourself. If you decide it is good to eat of the fruit of this tree, then you should eat it, and God can't stop you. You won't die."

Satan's lie is becoming very popular today. Many are teaching that God is deep within us because our most essential inner being is a spark of divinity entrapped in a prison of flesh. Many are teaching that God is also a cosmic energy source about us for us to tap into. They teach that the key to empowerment is to use some technique to get the divinity inside us in contact with and in harmony with the divinity round about us. None of this is true. It is all a deceptive lie. It is Satan's false gospel.

Adam and Eve tragically believed Satan's lie and rejected God's word. Satan tempted Adam and Eve with a revolutionary idea. Satan's suggestion was a philosophical and theological Copernican revolution, a revolution which suggested a new center of life. Satan suggested that instead of centering their lives upon God and revolving their lives around God, they should instead put self at the center of life. That is what Adam and Eve did that day when they disobeyed God by eating that forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden.

Satan told Adam and Eve that God knew that their eyes would be opened when they ate that forbidden fruit. Satan told Adam and Eve that when they ate that fruit, they would obtain a new knowledge, a new gnosis. Their eyes were opened when they ate the forbidden fruit, and they did indeed receive a new knowledge, but it wasn't what they were expecting. They ate the forbidden fruit, and then their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. For the first time, they experienced shame. For the first time, they felt compelled to hide from God. They knew that their being in the presence of holy God was now somehow inappropriate. They knew that they had lost their innocence and their fellowship with God. They had died spiritually. By aspiring to be divine, they had lost their special relationship with the divine. By trying to raise themselves inappropriately, they had lowered themselves tragically. By seeking privileges God had forbidden, they had lost privileges God had granted. By grasping what was forbidden to them, they lost what had been granted to them. By elevating themselves in pride, they had lowered themselves in shame. By seeking freedom beyond divinely set limits, they found themselves enslaved to Satan in his world of insane rebellion. By seeking an inappropriate blessing, they received appropriate curses, warranted curses, deserved curses. Satan had come to them promising philosophical enlightenment. He had told them that by eating the forbidden fruit, they would establish a new metaphysical reality which would destroy the categorical distinction between them as finite creatures and their eternal Creator. They followed Satan's counsel, and what they accomplished instead was to break the covenant which was the basis for their fellowship with God.

Adam and Eve were now in a low state. They tried to cover their shame with fig leaves. They tried to hide from God and to avoid Him.

This brings us to our last point, which is **God's promise**. Adam and Eve now had a real problem. It wasn't rooted in the metaphysical. It was rooted in the moral. It didn't involve an alleged inadequacy in God's good creation. It involved God's covenant. Through their disobedience, Adam and Eve had broken covenant and had earned God's just displeasure. In the midst of God's curses upon Adam and Eve and their world, God mercifully gave them a promise, a ray of hope.

God proclaimed a curse upon Satan, and the curse upon Satan was the promise of a coming Redeemer, a Seed of woman who would be at war with Satan and who would overcome him. God said to Satan,

> Genesis 3:15
> 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Here is the first promise of redemption, the first mention of the gospel. As redemptive history progressed, God fleshed out this promise with more and more detail. We now know that the prophesied bruising of the heel of the Seed of woman found fulfillment in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross. We now know that the fatal bruising of Satan's head found

fulfillment in Jesus' victory over sin, death and Satan as manifested in His resurrection from the dead. Jesus defeated Satan by accepting the curses of the covenant upon Himself through His suffering upon the cross. And that suffering had an infinite worth because Jesus was God the Son incarnate. God the Son became flesh and dwelt among us that He might be our Redeemer. Jesus kept God's covenant by living a life of perfect obedience, and Jesus paid the penalty for human sin through His suffering upon the cross. Thus Jesus restored covenant fellowship with God for all those who trust in Him, for all those who receive Him, for all those who rest upon Him alone for salvation.

Jesus did the exact opposite of what Adam and Eve did when they fell into sin. We read about this in Philippians chapter two:

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (ESV)

Adam and Eve grasped what was not rightfully theirs. Jesus did not count His rightful equality with God as a thing to be grasped. Adam and Eve elevated themselves in pride. Jesus humbled himself and took the form of a servant.

After God gave the promise of a coming Redeemer in His curse upon Satan, God illustrated the promise by killing an innocent animal and using its skin to cloth Adam and Eve. With that skin, God covered the shame of their nakedness which was both a manifestation and symbol of their fallen state.

Satan is always opposing this gospel message. A generation ago, much of Satan's opposition was through promoting atheism and agnosticism. That is becoming less and less the case. Now Satan is promoting spirituality as an alternative to religion. By religion, Satan means historic Christianity. By spirituality, Satan means a philosophy of life based upon the lie he told to Eve back at the dawn of history.

Remember that what you need is not a guru to bring you philosophical enlightenment and to teach you techniques for bringing your inner divinity into harmony with an impersonal divine force which surrounds you. What you need is a Redeemer to restore your covenant fellowship with the living and true God. What you need is Jesus Christ, the Jesus of Scripture, the historical Jesus who really lived and died and rose again. What you need is not the gnosis of gnosticism; what you need is faith in Jesus Christ.