**MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM**

**PART IV**

**DOUBT DISORDERS. TRUST REORDERS.**

**Genesis 3:1-24**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Genesis 3. We’re in the middle of a series called “Male and Female He Created Them”, where we explore what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality. Over the past couple Sundays, we have been looking at the book of Genesis. We started off with Genesis 1, where we saw that God’s act of creation was a process of creating order out of disorder: God distinguishes, separates, and defines the works of his hands, until he crowns the world with the creation of mankind. Like the rest of creation, God then separates male and female and caps it all off with the declaration that “it is very good”.

Last Sunday we looked at Genesis 2, where we looked at what makes us male and female and the reason why God made two genders and not one. We saw that human beings are inherently *physical* beings – that our bodies are not just shells for our true selves but essential parts of our true selves. Our physical identity determines our gender identity. If you’re born male, you are a man. If you’re born female, you are a female. And the reason why God made us male and female is so that men and women could live side by side in beautiful complementarity – equal in dignity, but distinct in roles.

Today, we look at Genesis 3, the tragic but true story of mankind’s fall into sin, where the goodness of God’s ordered creation begins to unravel.

One of the great privileges I have as a father is the opportunity and responsibility of teaching my children the truths of the Bible. My children are all five and under, so they’re still quite young, but there are an abundance of resources available to use even for this age group. One of my favourite resources is *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones. Although the book is written for children, I often find her narration of biblical stories to be wonderfully insightful. Perhaps the most striking example is from her narration of Satan’s temptation of Eve in Genesis 3:

As soon as the snake saw his chance, he slithered silently up to Eve. ‘Does God really love you?’ the serpent whispered. ‘If he does, why won’t he let you eat the nice, juicy, delicious fruit? Poor you, perhaps God doesn’t want you to be happy.’

The snake’s words hissed into her ears and sunk down deep into her heart, like poison. *Does God love me?* Eve wondered. Suddenly she didn’t know anymore.

‘Just trust me,’ the serpent whispered. ‘You don’t need God. One small taste, that’s all, and you’ll be happier than you could ever dream…’

Eve picked the fruit and ate some. And Adam ate some, too.

And a terrible lie came into the world. It would never leave. It would live on in every human heart, whispering to every one of God’s children: “God doesn’t love me.”

Does God love me? As we will see, this question is at the heart of why we live the way we do, why we make the decisions we make. And it is this question, “Does God love me?” that lies at the heart of what we believe about gender and sexuality.

The title of this message is **Doubt Disorders. Trust Reorders.** We will have four points today:

1. Questioning God’s Goodness
2. Doubting God’s Goodness
3. Rejecting God’s Goodness
4. Trusting God’s Goodness

(1) **QUESTIONING GOD’S GOODNESS**

Our text begins ominously in verse 1: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.”

Christians have historically interpreted the “serpent” in Genesis 3 to be Satan, not in the sense that Satan personally appeared to Eve, but in the sense that Satan inhabited a serpent and spoke to Eve through it. It’s true that Genesis itself does not tell us that the serpent is Satan. But both Jesus in the Gospel of John and the Apostle John in Revelation tell us that the serpent’s words were Satan’s words.

In John 8:44, Jesus describes Satan as “a murderer from the beginning”. Jesus is talking about the beginning of creation. He’s talking about Genesis 3. And it was Satan who was a murderer, because through his lies came sin, and through sin came death, physical and spiritual, to Adam, to Eve, and to all mankind. Satan was “a murderer from the beginning”.

The Apostle John also identifies Satan with “the ancient serpent” in a vision of Satan’s downfall in Revelation 12:9:

“And the great dragon was thrown down, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Satan is “the ancient serpent” in Genesis 3, the tempter of the mother of humanity at the very beginning of time. And so when we read about the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3, we can read about how he tempts us as well. The devices Satan used against her are the devices that he uses against us. They do not comprehensively describe his tactics, for the crafty serpent is as crafty as ever, formulating new strategies and schemes all the time to tempt us and make us sin. But in Genesis 3, we see some of his most devious tricks at work.

Up until this point, the focus of Genesis has been on the goodness of God’s creation. Everything is very good, everything is functioning as it should be, everything is revealing the pure and beautiful goodness of God. But here comes a serpent, the craftiest of all creatures that the Lord had made. The implication here is that this crafty snake has a scheme up its sleeves. His plan was simple: to undo what God had done, to bring disorder to God’s order. Even in the execution of that plan, he brings disorder: Satan takes the form of a snake to disrupt the role that God had given mankind to have dominion over the animals; Satan speaks not to Adam, the leader, but to Eve, the helper, bypassing God’s intended order for leadership in the family. This is a crafty snake. All his actions and words are measured precisely to rebel against God and the goodness of his creation.

So how does he begin this grand deception? He begins with a question: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” It’s an innocent enough beginning. Satan doesn’t tell Eve anything. He doesn’t outright question anything God said. He’s much too subtle for that. Instead, he begins with an expression of mild surprise: “Did God *actually* say…?”

It’s amazing how the opinions of others can so easily shake beliefs that we thought were strongly held beliefs. Imagine an unbelieving friend asking you, “what do you believe about the origins of the earth?” You reply confidently, “I believe that God created all things according to the Bible.” Your friend looks at you like you’re from another planet and asks, “Did you *actually* just say that God created the world?” “Well”, you begin to reply with a nervousness not in your voice earlier, “The Bible’s creation account is open to interpretation…” It doesn’t take much for a question to make us question what we thought we knew or believed.

That’s how Satan begins. “Come on, really? God didn’t actually say that did he?” The subtle implication lurking underneath this question is that, if God did say that, there’s something not right about it. There’s an uneasiness here, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty. God must be hiding something. Perhaps he’s not so good and loving after all. But Satan says all this without actually saying it.

I wonder how many of us would be shaken by a simple, surprised question about what we believe about gender and sexuality. “Do you really believe that gay people can’t get married? You’re not one of *those* people are you?” We all want approval from others. We want to get along with everyone. We don’t like conflict. We do whatever we can to avoid it. But taking a stand on something like gay marriage or the wrongfulness of homosexual behaviour or transgenderism is going to create conflict. People may not only dislike what you believe. They may dislike *you*.

This is one of the main reasons we’re going through this series on gender and sexuality. I want to show you not only what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality, but *why* the Bible teaches what it does about gender and sexuality. Ultimately, the question of gender and sexuality isn’t just a moral question. If it were, I would just take you to Leviticus 18 and Romans 1, where the Bible clearly teaches that homosexuality and gender confusion are wrong. But it’s not just a moral question. It’s a worldview question.

The position we take on gender and sexuality will depend on the worldview that we use to understand and live in this world. If we are to remain steadfast in reply to the question, “Do you *actually* believe that?” we need to see the world as the Bible sees the world. That’s why we’ve been looking at the core doctrines of our faith: the authority of Scripture, the creation of the world, and now the doctrine of sin. These are the building blocks we need to answer the question, “You don’t really believe that do you?” with a confident, “Yes, I do. And here’s why.”

(2) **DOUBTING GOD’S GOODNESS**

Making us question God’s goodness, however, is only the first of Satan’s tactics. The ancient serpent doesn’t stop there. He moves on to make Eve doubt God’s goodness. He begins by deliberately misquoting God’s command: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’”? Recall from 2:16-17 that God said, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” God said “Eat of all the trees except one”, but Satan asks if God said “Don’t eat of any of the trees”.

What is Satan doing here? The point here is not the misquotation *per se*. Satan isn’t just trying to make Eve believe that God said she can’t eat from any of the trees. Indeed, the misquotation is obvious to Eve, as she corrects the serpent’s error in verses 2-3: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

So what is Satan getting at? Was his deception so easily uncovered? No, it was not. He had a far more devious objective in mind. Satan’s goal was to make Eve focus on what God forbids, and to forget what God allows. He wants her focus to be on the *prohibition*, not on the *provision*. And he wants that to be her focus so that she will begin to doubt the goodness and love of God.

It’s true that God said “you shall not eat” of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. But it’s also true that God said “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden”! The scope of what Eve was allowed to do was vastly greater than what she was not allowed to do. But Satan’s single, crafty question made Eve forget the world of “yes”, and to focus on the little island of “no”: “Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”

And guess what? It worked. Suddenly the “yes” doesn’t look so good to Eve. Look at the subtle change in language between God’s original command in 2:16-17 and Eve’s recitation of the command in 3:2-3:

* God said “you may surely eat” (2:16), but Eve says merely that “we may eat” (3:2)
* God said eat of “every tree of the garden” (2:16), but Eve says merely “the trees in the garden” (3:2)

The focus of the command in 2:16 is on God’s abundant allowance. “Surely” you may eat of “every tree of the garden”! “Look at the endless variety”, God says. “There are big trees, little trees, trees bearing sweet fruit, trees bearing tart fruit, trees with crunchy flesh, trees with soft flesh. And guess what? They’re all yours!” What an amazing gift. But how does Eve recall this abundant allowance? “Yeah, God did say we could eat from some of the trees over there. That was nice of him, I guess.” God’s abundant allowance now seems meager and insufficient to her.

We see this again in 3:2, where Eve calls the forbidden tree “the tree that is in the midst of the garden”, meaning that it is in the middle of the garden. She speaks of it as if it’s the only tree in the middle of the garden, but it’s not. Look at 2:9,

“And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden too! And what a wondrous tree it was! Eat of this tree and you will never die. It was the original holy grail, the food of immortality. It protected mankind from the sorrow and pain of death. And it granted us eternal life in the presence of God. It was the greatest gift that God could give to mankind, and he gave it to them with open hands and a glad heart.

But Eve forgot all about the tree of life. To her, there was only one tree that mattered: *the* tree in the midst of the garden. And to her, the only thing that mattered was that she wasn’t allowed to eat of it.

Suddenly, God’s prohibition sounds less and less reasonable and more and more unjust. Eve is beginning to listen to the lie that God is not good, that God is not loving, that God is holding back. Indeed, her perception of God’s command as unreasonable changes her recollection of what God actually said. God had only said “you shall not eat”, but now she says in verse 3, “you shall not eat, neither shall you touch it.” Eve was beginning to believe that God was so harsh, so unjust, that merely touching the fruit would lead to certain death.

Do we not see this precise tactic being used today? The world has been led to focus completely on the “no” and has completely ignored the “yes”. People all over hear Satan whisper, “Doesn’t the Bible teach that your gay friend can never know the happiness of marriage?” And they reply, “Yes, yes it does. That’s not fair. If the Bible is God’s word, then God isn’t fair either.”

There. Simple as that. With one deadly question, Satan has completely closed them off to the world of God’s goodness revealed to us in the Bible. They miss God’s promises to fulfill their deepest longings for love and meaning. They miss God’s desire for them to enjoy the beauty of creation as a reflection of his glory. They miss God’s plan for them to experience the best of human companionship in the home and in the church. And most tragically, they miss God’s good news that he has sent his own Son to die for our sins so that we can be given a new identity as children of God who will enjoy fellowship with God and his vast family of adopted children forever.

I’m not just talking about non-Christians. Christians are not free from this temptation either. The same sin abides in all of us, and the same Satan tempts all of us. It would not surprise me if there are Christians here who have doubted God’s goodness because of what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and transgenderism. You feel the cultural pull to be tolerant and accepting of diverse lifestyles. You feel the emotional pull of wanting to support your family members or friends. Or you may even feel the deeper pull of wanting to be in a same-sex relationship yourself or of changing your gender.

If this describes you, let me just say this to you: don’t forget the world of “yes” just because there is also some “no”. Don’t forget God’s promises to care for you and provide for you. Don’t forget the gifts that God has given you, your family, your church, your Christian brothers and sisters. Don’t forget that God has given you a joy that the world could never offer you. And most importantly, don’t forget the other tree in the midst of the garden, the tree of life: the gift of eternal life through Christ, so that you can live forever in the joy of God’s presence.

(3) **REJECTING GOD’S GOODNESS**

Having caused us to question and doubt God’s goodness, Satan now takes the last step to make us reject God’s goodness. The time for questions is over. Now, it’s finally time for him to unveil the great lie of verses 4-5: “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Do you see what Satan is saying? “God told you not to eat from that tree, not because he knew it would be bad for you, but because he knew it would be good for you! God doesn’t want what’s best for you. He doesn’t want you to flourish. He wants you to wilt and shrivel. He’s holding back from you to hold you back from your full potential. He is not good. He is not loving.”

This is the great lie: God isn’t good to us. God doesn’t love us. Instead, he’s holding back. The garden is nothing but a gigantic ploy to hold back the fullness of human potential. The father of lies tells us that God is a liar.

But this fruit, this fruit changes everything. It frees us from his oppression, his rules, his prohibitions. It frees us from him. With this fruit, we can become our own gods, making our own rules, answering to no one but ourselves. This is the great lie, and Adam and Eve believed it. And in believing it, they rejected the goodness and love of God. They ate the fruit, and in eating it, they rejected God’s authority over what is right and wrong and seized that role for themselves. Now a whole world of moral judgments was open to them. Their eyes were opened.

With this, the whole of ordered creation begins to spiral into disorder. There are too many to name now, but here are just a few:

* Verse 7 tells us about their first act of moral judgment: the judgment of their bodies. What God had judged to be *very good*, man judged to be *not good*. And so they cover themselves up in shame with pitiful little loincloths sewed from fig leaves, trying to provide for themselves when God had always provided everything they needed.
* Verse 8 tells us about the disruption of God’s relationship with mankind. Adam and Eve used to walk with God in the garden in loving friendship, surrounded by the abundant goodness of God’s creation. Now they hide themselves from him in fear, seeking shelter away from him in the very trees they used to enjoy together with him.
* And finally, verse 19 tells us about God’s sentence of death on mankind: “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The disordered dust that God ordered into man would now return to its disordered state.

Satan’s plan had worked. He had undone what God had done, bringing chaos and disorder where there should have been peace and order. And it was all done through the simple lie that God does not love us, that God is not good.

This is at the heart of why so many have embraced same-sex relationships and transgenderism. People have chosen sin instead of God because they believe that God is wrongfully holding back what will finally bring them happiness. They don’t believe that God’s will is good for them, because they don’t believe that God loves them. They just don’t trust him anymore. And so they displace God as the ultimate authority in their lives and put themselves in his place. From now on, they will judge what is right and wrong, what is good and what is bad, and not him. And the result is the descent of God’s good creation into chaos and disorder.

(4) **TRUSTING GOD’S GOODNESS**

We have just read the most tragic chapter in the Bible, the origins of all the pain, suffering, and sin in the world. Every verse is dripping with sorrow, pain, and tears. And yet, if we look closely, there is hope, even in the darkness of the fall. This leads us to the last point: trusting God’s goodness.

God promises the day when all the works of the ancient serpent will be crushed under the feet of the woman’s offspring in verse 15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Satan may have brought a disordering of creation, but God was going to bring a reordering of creation. A Son of Man would come, a descendant of Adam and Eve, who would fix what sin and Satan had broken and restore it to its original goodness. This Son of Man would be the Son of God himself, Jesus Christ, the snake-crusher and the Saviour of mankind. As the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:8,

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

We are called to respond to the gospel with faith: to trust in Christ’s work on our behalf, and to believe God’s promise that our sins will be forgiven and that he will declare us righteous. The same was true of Adam. He was called to respond with faith to this proto-gospel, this gospel-seed contained in the promise that Eve’s offspring would one day reverse the effects of the fall. And he did.

In verse 20, Adam reassumes his mantle of leadership and names his wife yet again. He had named her “woman”, because she was taken out of man. And now, he renames her “Eve”. What does Eve mean? Could it mean “death-giver”? He could easily have given her this name, for it was her decision that brought death not only to themselves, and not only to their offspring, but to all of creation. She was, in a very real sense, the “death-giver”. But that’s not what he called her. He called her Eve, which means “life-giver”. And in naming her the “life-giver”, Adam trusted God’s promise that her offspring would bring an end to death and bring life to creation once more.

And so we begin already to see a reordering of creation. Here, even here, in the immediate aftermath of the fall, we begin to see redemption. Adam re-establishes his leadership by renaming his wife, and whereas he blamed her in the past, he now shows his care for her in giving her a hope-giving name.

But as good as this is, it is nothing compared to the joy of verse 21: “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.” Once again, God would provide all that Adam and Eve needed, not just the clothes they desperately felt they needed, but the atoning sacrifice for their sins. The skins for their clothes were from animals slaughtered on their behalf, the first sacrifice in human history that points us to the greater sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who would be slaughtered on our behalf, so that we could be clothed not just with garments of skins, but with the garments of his righteousness.

**CONCLUSION**

So have you doubted God’s goodness recently? When you think about what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality, do you question whether the God who spoke those words to us can actually be good? Like Eve, have you been tempted to reject what God says about what is right and wrong and to come to your own conclusions? I respect that if you feel this way, you’re likely largely motivated by mercy. You want those who have same-sex attraction or those who want to change their gender to be happy. You don’t want to say that what they say makes them happy is wrong. You feel mercy towards them.

But as merciful as you may be, you cannot be more merciful than God. This God, who could have justly destroyed Adam and Eve on the spot for their rebellion, chose instead to gently clothe them in their shame. This God, who could have abandoned this now fallen creation to fend for itself, chose instead to provide an atoning sacrifice for our sin through his Son to redeem fallen creation and make it new again. You cannot be more merciful than the God of the Bible.

Adam, the father of humanity, understood God’s mercy. He knew what God could have done, and he saw what God did instead. And so he turned from his questions and doubts about God’s goodness and chose to trust him again. He trusted God’s promise that a descendant of Eve would destroy the works of the devil. He trusted God’s promise that Eve would not ultimately be known in history as the death giver, but the life giver. God was worthy of Adam’s trust, and God is worthy of your trust. May the Lord help us all to believe that he is the most merciful of all.