

Satan's Threefold Strategy To Tempt Mankind—Genesis 3:1-7

It's important that we understand satan's strategies so that we know how to resist or counteract them.

2 Corinthians 11:3 AMP

But [now] I am fearful, lest that even as the serpent beguiled Eve by his cunning, so your minds may be corrupted and seduced from wholehearted and sincere and pure devotion to Christ. [Genesis 3:4]

Remember that the aim of every temptation is to cause us to lose that "*wholehearted and sincere and pure devotion to Christ*". As we will see as we read Genesis 3:1-7, satan has a three stage approach to tempt us to give into temptation, and therefore lose our sweet fellowship with God (see 1 John 1:3-7). The three stages are:

1. Discontent
2. Disbelief
3. Deification

Genesis 3:1-7 NKJV

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

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."

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Part A—Satan's masterplan of deception

1. Discontent - Focusing on what you don't have instead of focusing on all the good things that God has already give us—we choose to doubt God's good and loving heart towards us

Genesis 3:1 NKJV

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

Notice that the Serpent was cunning, and he is still out to deceive. He knows our weaknesses. He knows that we can very quickly become discontent and therefore ungrateful and unthankful—"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" Notice how satan begun his beguiling (deception) by pointing out to Eve that she couldn't have everything she wanted.

The devil's first sinister goal is to rob us of our joy, satisfaction, and contentment. Think about it, why would we accept satan's gifts if we are already content with all the good things that God has already given us? Using the illustration of physical food, nobody has an appetite if they are already full. Therefore, satan first has to deceive us into rejecting the good gifts that God has given us, so then we will have an appetite for his destructive gifts.

To do this he identifies something that will hurt us, and then tells us that we need it to be happy. It may or may not be morally wrong, but it is something that God knows will hurt us: For satan to win, all he needs to do is distract us from following Jesus, so we are no longer walking in fellowship with God. Remember how satan's goal or purpose for us is so very different to Jesus'—"The thief's [satan's] purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My [Jesus'] purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10 NLT).

The natural tendency for us fallen humans is to think according to our sinful nature—we want what feels good *now* (instant gratification), and don't tend to think about the long term or eternal effects of our choices. This is why satan's strategy is so effective when used against humans who are still under the control of their sinful nature. This is also why it is so incredibly important for believers to grow quickly in their understanding and application of the word of God. Only mature believers, those who are both grounded in the whole counsel of God and obedient to it, can effectively and habitually and consistently overcome sin.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. ² I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, ³ for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

2. Disbelief - We choose to doubt God's Word regarding the negative consequences of the sin

Genesis 3:2-4 NKJV

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

Once we have fallen into the sin of discontent, the next stage is to fall into sin of disbelief concerning the promised repercussions or consequences of the particular sin. *After all, if we are convinced that we need something, then the next thing we do is convince ourselves that it will be good for us, and satan and his evil world system are all to ready to help convince us.*

God told Adam that the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit would be death. Adam passed on the message to Eve. But Eve, now drooling over the beautiful looking and deliciously smelling fruit, starts to wonder about the truth of God's reason for His prohibition—"will it really kill me", she thinks. Satan then jumps in saying, "*You will not surely die.*" Now Eve *feels* justified in her rejection of God's truth.

In summary, we start to believe that God is holding back something from us that we need to make us happy, and so we begin to doubt that God really wants the best for us. Then the next logical step is to doubt the reason why God didn't give us the thing in the first place—because it will hurt us in the long run. *And so we begin to not only doubt God's heart for us (that He always wants the best for us), but also begin to doubt God's integrity (we call God a liar by convincing ourselves that the thing we want is going to benefit us, and not hurt us as God has said).*

3. Deification - I make myself God when I choose to determine what is good for me, what I consider to be right and wrong

Genesis 3:5-7 NKJV

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.”

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

This last step in our fall into sin is to reject God's authority over us, and make ourselves god instead. We choose to forget or ignore the fact that because God made us, He therefore owns us, and therefore we owe God our obedience. We also choose to forget or ignore the fact that God has proven His infinite and unconditional love towards us by Himself becoming the sacrifice for the sins of all mankind (see Romans 5:8).

The devil's goal is to make us turn away from God and pledge our allegiance to himself instead. *Satan tells us that we can be our own God, but that's not true—we must all serve someone.* “Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living” (Romans 6:16 NLT).

Satan's deception is to encourage us think that we are the masters of our own destiny, that we are wise enough to be able to know what is best for ourselves. Satan offers freedom from slavery to a good God who seeks to bless us, but neglects to tell us that we instead become slaves to sin which will destroy us.

So Eve, after becoming *discontent* by doubting God's heart for her and *disbelieving* God's warning that the sin will hurt her, then removes God from the throne of her heart, and puts herself there. Eve made herself god in her own eyes: Eve deified herself. As a result Eve chose to rebel against God's good and perfect plan for her life. Eve believed satan's lie, “*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.*”

The same is true for every believer every time he sins—he rejects God authority and becomes his own authority (remember that the unbeliever has never had God on the throne of his life—the unbeliever lives his whole life in rebellion against God).

Now we will see how to bear up under temptation and not be deceived.

Part B—How to overcome temptation: Live by faith (truth) and not by sight (feelings and emotions)

1. The opposite of discontent is gratitude and thankfulness

Even though we might feel like we need something that God doesn't want us to have, we can, by faith, choose to praise God for the things that we do have. This returns our focus back to the blessings that are already ours and so we can continue to enjoy them. We will then realise that we don't actually need the thing that satan offers, and will therefore soon stop thinking about it. So what can we be thankful for?

Firstly, there are the physical blessings: “enriching friendships; a loving family; a comfortable home; plenty of clothing; a consistent job; the ability to hear beautiful music, to see God's breathtaking creation, to taste delicious and satisfying food; the capacity to think and reason and communicate; the pleasure of reading, writing, and resting; the enjoyment of art, poetry, and fashion; and so much more.” (Emeal Zwayne)

Secondly there are the spiritual blessings (see Ephesians 1:3): adoption; redemption; forgiveness; an eternal inheritance; sealed by the Spirit; guided by, provided by, and protected by God; part of the body of Christ, the family of God; God's word; and the promise that believers will rule and reign with Christ for 1,000 years on the renovated earth.

Just imagine that whenever those thoughts of discontent pop into our heads, that instead of focusing on what we shouldn't have (and so lose our joy and contentment), we instead by faith choose to praise God for all His wonderful blessings to us. In effect, we can turn the temptation into a reminder to praise God for all His wonderful gifts. How much more joy-filled would our lives be?

Remember God's promises to His children

a) God will provide every thing we need

This means that if I don't have something, it's because I don't need it right now. I need to learn to be content with what I have. Ultimately, if I have Jesus, then I already have the best gift, and therefore don't need anything or anyone else.

Philippians 4:11, 19 NLT

¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.

¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

b) God will not withhold any good thing from those who do what is right

Since God gives me everything that is good for me, then it follows that if I don't have it, then it's not good for me. *I need to trust God's heart for me.*

Psalms 84:11-12 NLT

For the Lord God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

¹² O Lord of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you.

2. The opposite of disbelief is trusting that God's word is true

The problem of delayed consequences

Although God told Adam that the penalty for sin is death, Adam and Eve did not die instantly. Yes, sin had separated them from God—spiritually speaking they died instantly. However, the practical or visual consequence of their sin—physical death—happened a long time in the future. The trap is that there are “passing pleasures” or short term benefits to sinning, but the promised consequence will always be true. Think of Adam and Eve. At 100 years old, they would have still been “young” and fit and healthy, but by the time they got to 800 and then 900 years old, their bodies would have been ravaged by the slow but debilitating effects of old age. I think that in their old age, every day they would have been thinking about how good it would have been if they had never eaten the forbidden fruit. But it was too late, and their physical death was inevitable. The same is true for us. Initially, we seem to be able to get away with sin, but it will always eventually catch up with us and destroy us.

Looking at things from the eternal perspective

Hebrews 11:24-26 NLT

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, **for he was looking ahead to his great reward.**

Think about Moses, he rejected what felt good at the time and willingly chose to suffer instead. Why? Because he knew that all sin will be judged, and all faithful service to God, even though it is difficult, will be rewarded. Moses was living by faith (truth), and not sight (feelings and emotions). Jesus also gave up *all* His rights and privileges while living on this earth. He set the pattern for us to follow (See Philippians 2:1-11).

Hebrews 9:27 NKJV

And as it is appointed for men to die once, **but after this the judgment.**

2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7 AMP

For we walk **by faith [we regulate our lives and conduct ourselves by our conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, with trust and holy fervour;** thus we walk] not by sight or appearance.

3. The opposite of deification or pride is humility

“You must begin with the knowledge that the most destructive force in your existence is your reign over the affairs of your own life” (Emeal Zwayne).

The key to remaining humble is knowing our place in our relationship with God and why it is important. I am the slave, God is the master. Why did God create this kind of relationship? For our own protection! God knows best and we don't! He is all wise and all knowing and we are not! It's that simple. *Compared to God, we humans have the intelligence and common-sense of a jellyfish.* If I choose to live according to my own limited knowledge and intellect, I make myself my own worst enemy—and this is especially exasperated by the fact that all humans are born with a sinful nature, which corrupts most of the limited common-sense that God created in us in the first place.

God created us to need Him. Why? Because it's only when we are humbly depending on Him that we are in fellowship with Him and can really enjoy the depth of relationship and joy that is found in a love relationship with God—and this is what life is all about.

Just imagine a parent who allowed their young six year old child to do anything they wanted in life—“Dad, I want to drive the semitrailer on the road by myself. Dad, I want to use the chainsaw. Dad, I want to sharpen the knife. Dad, I want to get the roast dinner out of the hot oven. Dad, I want to put metal screws into the powerpoint.” If the dad let his six year old do any of those things he would be charged with neglect.

Here are some points that will help us to remember why it is best for us to remain submitted to the God who knows everything, loves us, and is all powerful:

1. Our wicked pride that seeks to dethrone God and take His place will lead to our downfall, just like it did satan—satan went from being God's most powerful and glorious angel to being sentenced to eternity in the Lake of Fire. But remember that satan “doesn't come out and directly lure you into literally saying, “I want to be like God and sit on His throne.” *He disguises the sin he wants you to commit as a necessary pursuit that you're entitled to. It's your right, and God is unjust to keep you from it” (Emeal Zwayne).*
2. Consider the destructive and terrifying effects of sin others experienced when they chose to usurp God's authority and do their own thing: the downfall of king David's family when he killed Uriah and stole his wife; Solomon with his 1,000 wives who turned his heart from following God; Sampson when he rejected his nazarite vow; king Josiah when he got proud and tried to fight the Egyptians and was killed, Nebuchadnezzar whose pride caused him to eat grass like a cow for 7 years; and Herod Agrippa (the first) who died a gruesome death as he was eaten from the inside out by worms when he took God's glory for himself.

Again, let's get things into perspective, “Humans are microscopic beings who have no control over their own respiratory, cardiovascular, or digestive systems; who can't keep their hair from graying and falling out or their skin from wrinkling; and who sometimes can't even stop their own hiccups. Yet we would seriously seek to rule in the place of the infinite God of creation or think that we know better than He does about what's best for us. Really?” (Emeal Zwayne)

An example of satan's strategy in practice

Picture Jimmy, a 5 year old boy who has has rich parents who love him dearly. They have given him so many toys that he will never have the time to play with them all. He is happy and content as he explores all the fun toys that fill the many rooms in his very large house. But then Bill, a nasty older boy who hates Jimmy, but who also pretends to be friends with Jimmy, tells Jimmy that the funnest toy to play with is a box of matches while hiding in a cupboard filled with stuffed toys. Jimmy asks his parents for matches, but they tell him no, and they tell him why—the stuffed toys will catch on fire and Jimmy will either get terribly burned or even die.

Bill hates Jimmy, but he can't hurt Jimmy himself. So he continues to tell Jimmy that playing with matches in the cupboard really is the best game ever, and that his parents must be really mean because they won't give their son the best toy. Jimmy's parents continue to say no, but Jimmy starts to become obsessed with the idea of playing with matches while hiding in his cupboard. It's all he can think about. It's all he wants. He loses interest in all his other toys. He becomes bored, unhappy, and depressed because he can't have the one thing he really wants—matches to light while hiding in his cupboard filled with flammable toys.

Jimmy has become discontent. He has begun to doubt his parent's love for him; he thinks that they are mean because they won't give him what he thinks is the best and most fun toy to play with.

Jimmy then starts to doubt that his parents are telling the truth. He has never been burned before, and has no idea just how painful, destructive, and dangerous fire can be. So Jimmy decides that his parents are lying to him.

Jimmy then decides to rebel against his parents' authority—Jimmy decides that he knows better than his parents what is best for him. So he asks the older boy called Bill, the one who pretends to be Jimmy's friend, to give him some matches. Bill gives Jimmy the matches, shows him how to use them, and then quickly leaves the house. Jimmy hides in his cupboard, lights up some matches, and just like his parents said would happen, sparks from the matches cause the soft toys surrounding him to catch alight. Jimmy managed to get out of the cupboard, but ended up with ugly scars all over his hands and face that will be there for the rest of his life: Jimmy is lucky to be alive after setting fire to the toys in his cupboard while hiding in it and lighting matches.

Maybe Jimmy should have trusted his parents after all?

1. Jimmy should have trusted his parents' heart for him, that "no good toy would they withhold from him".
2. Jimmy should have trusted His parents integrity, that they were not lying to him when they said that he would get burned. "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27).
3. Jimmy should have trusted that his parents were wiser than him, and that true friends are the ones who actually want the best for him in the long run.

For a more in-depth understanding of what I have only briefly covered here, please read Emeal Zwayne's book, *"Fight Like a Man: A Bold, Biblical Battle Plan for Personal Purity"*.