

March 13, 2022

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit..."

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"

The woman said the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it, or you will die."

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

Genesis 3:1-5

What would happen if believers lived by the Apostle Paul's simple command, ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit..."***? I am confident that my life, at the very least, would be entirely different. In truth, I find that I do many things that are motivated by my own selfishness and vanity, but I am more and more convinced that my life would be far more righteous if I could learn to be just a bit more selfless; a bit more humble.

Throughout mankind's relationship with God this problem of selfish ambition and vain conceit has been the source of man's downfall over and over again. It has always been, and still is, Satan's favorite strategy for snaring us into sin.

This is born out in the very earliest conflict between Satan and mankind in Genesis 3. Note from this passage how Satan works. First, he puts the woman on the defensive. ***"Did God really say...?"*** The woman is already in trouble even though she does not know it yet. She feels compelled to defend God.

When she explains what God did say to the serpent, motivated by this need to defend, she embellishes 'Scripture'. God did say, ***"...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** God, as far as we know, did not say anything about not touching the tree, but the woman's need to defend God and her loyalty to him leads her to embellish.

Satan, of course, knows exactly what God commanded. He even references God's exact words when he responds to the woman, ***"You will not surely die."*** But notice where the woman is now, because of this interaction. ***"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."***

So, has the nature of the fruit on that tree, which had been there for as long as they had been in the Garden, changed? It hasn't. The fruit is still just the fruit. What has changed? The woman's thought processes have changed. The Word of God, which she has always accepted as true, is now questionable. Her trust in God's love and care has been challenged.

And, she, in turn, now sees how the fruit could be good for her and for her husband. From something that really didn't interest her at all that fruit has now become essential to her very survival. She must have it. And, she does.

When Jesus commanded us to deny ourselves and when the Apostle commanded us to do nothing from selfishness and vanity, they were really challenging us to surrender our very survival to God's care. Overcoming selfish ambition and vain conceit is ultimately a choice of trust. I either

trust that God will really perfectly care for me, or I doubt his care and choose to believe that I must do what I must do to survive. I either trust God or I trust myself. Never both.

