

"Being Like God"

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11

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Many words have been spoken and written over the centuries to describe God. Some very deep and reverent; others much more callous and even blasphemous. How many of you would agree with this familiar statement: **"God is love"**? I didn't figure I'd get too much disagreement with that one. How about this one: **"God is power"**? A much different focus on a quality trait of our Triune God, but pretty undeniable. Kind of goes hand-in-hand with that common adjective often used, 'ALMIGHTY God.'

I would suggest to you that in both of today's readings, our attention is much more focused on the POWER of God rather than His LOVE. In the *Genesis* passage, Eve was convinced by the voice of evil and temptation (aka the serpent in the Garden of Eden) that she (and Adam) could put God's **power** to work for themselves. In the reading from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus demonstrates, in the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness, how God's power was at work in HIM.

And in transposing their stories into our own, you could say that this is a contrast of how **We**, mere mortals that we are, might attempt to **use God's power**. And, conversely, how **God's power** might **use US**. These two stories are both examples to us, for good or bad, of what it can mean, borrowing from the serpent's words, **"Being Like God."**

The Genesis passage certainly plays on the human EGO of Eve and Adam... inflated senses of self. The word 'ego' itself comes from the Latin for "I", which tells you something right there. Whenever we might hear a conversation in which one of the people makes frequent use of that first-person personal pronoun, we KNOW that there is 'ego-centric' nature to the 'eccentric' individual. It was Satan who put the 'I' concerns at odds with the 'other-focus' toward God. The evil one put in their heads the notion of all that God was doing to take away from their sense of 'self-esteem' and worth. That being said, having a reasonable sense of your own worth is no sin. Life's little everyday victories are good—in fact, necessary—for a healthy ego. It is when our own self-worth short-circuits that of God that, in those immortal words of Apollo 13, "Houston, we have a problem!"

Satan tempted the first humans by emphasizing God **prohibitions** instead of his **provision**; by reducing God's **command** to a **question**; by casting **doubt** on God's **sincerity**; by **defaming** God's **motives**; and by **denying** the veracity of God's **threat**. Eve gradually yielded to Satan's denials and half-truths that disparaged her privileges and minimized the threat... leading her... and Adam... to bring a new concept into the nature of mankind: SIN. As one commentary defined it, sin is essentially humanity's **breach of TRUST in God, disbelief in God's word**, an assertion of **autonomy**. True FAITH consists of communion with God based on TRUST, leading to OBEDIENCE.

And lest we get caught up in the weakness of a single individual... and in truth, TWO human beings... let us remember that, like Pogo said, 'We have met the enemy, and he is US!' We are no different than those 'prototypes.' How many people want to reduce God's Word merely to a 'NOT-to-do list' of 'mis-behaviors?' Focusing on what God does not want us to do rather than all that He has DONE for us? Reducing God's commandments to 'suggestions?' Taking lightly his power not only to forgive, but to judge. Making God in our own image, rather than acknowledging HIS creative power... imposing our own imperfect human tendencies on His perfect love and character. Irregardless of all the evil that we see at work in the world today, that is NOT God's making! But the very same one who spoke such lies to Eve... the same lies that can cause us to sin: breaking trust in God, not believing in His work, asserting our own autonomy. True FAITH consists of communion with God based on TRUST, leading to OBEDIENCE. When we disobey God, trusting only in ourselves... becoming 'like God'... we will soon find out that we really don't want the job... and are ill-prepared for it to begin with...

One more thing we might learn from Adam and Eve in their 'eye-opening' experience as they learned the hard way what folly it was to think that they could really 'be like God.' How many of you have heard before what happened when they ate of the forbidden fruit. ***"The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were..."*** (Gen. 3:7)

"...naked" – Hebrew term describes one who is "stripped of protective clothing in the sense of being **defenseless, weak or humiliated**. Hebrew for 'naked' sounds like word 'crafty' (Hmmm); ironically, Adam & Eve sought to be 'shrewd,' and instead found themselves 'nude'... 😊 In later providing "garments" from animal skins (v. 21), God does what they cannot do for themselves; just as humans cannot deal with their shame, but God CAN, WILL and DOES. For

'A&E,' Such 'covering' involved the 'sacrifice' of living, breathing part of creation. SO TOO DOES IT FOR US. The sacrifice of the living, breathing, only begotten Son of God, through whom that sin which leaves us 'defenseless, weak and humiliated' is COVERED. 'Covered' by the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus.

Which brings us to our second story, from Matthew's Gospel, the Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness. (Much in the same way that the ancient Israelites under Moses also wandered in the wilderness, experiencing great trials and temptations.

The temptations that Jesus faced represent the kinds of temptations every human being experiences: those generated by **physical drives**, those that appeal to **pride**, and those that stem from a **desire to possess**. (*"Everything that belongs to the world—what the sinful self desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are so proud of—none of this comes from the Father; it all comes from the world."* (1 John 2:16))

It is interesting to me to think that the very same tactics that *"the tempter"* used against Eve he also employed against Jesus. (I guess he figured that if you have a good thing, stick with it...) He appealed to Christ's EGO. *"IF you are the Son of God..."* (Mt. 4:3) AND, you could say that Satan, in effect, does the same to us: 'IF you are a CHILD of God'... 'IF you are a Christian'... then give in to those physical desires... succumb to your human pride... continue to satisfy your desire to possess more and more 'stuff.' Satan's attacks on Jesus should challenge us to consider what WE desire... what WE are proud of... what WE 'see and want.'

Does it come from the Father? Or from the world?

For me the biggest takeaway is the role of Scripture in Jesus' battle against temptation by the Deceiver. Jesus did not rely on his oratorical skills to combat Satan's ploys. **He relied on the power of God's Word.** And if it's good enough for Jesus... it's good enough for ME! That is why those first words of Jesus are SO important for us: *"One does not live by bread alone... but by every WORD that comes from the mouth of God."* (Mt. 4:4) It is that sustaining, fulfilling, nutritional Word of God that will make us strong in the fight. NO weapon fashioned against us by the evil one shall be able to stand. In Paul's words,

In this 'spiritual warfare' we find ourselves in, we are to ***"put on the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which IS the Word of God."*** (Eph. 6:17)

And in speaking of that Word, let us not forget that our adversary is also pretty well-versed' in Scripture as well. He tried to use it against the very Son of God, who surely would have won his share of 'sword drills' growing up... 😊 Satan also supports my encouragement to always read the CONTEXT of a passage. When he quotes one of the core verses for the church favorite, "On Eagle's Wings" ... ***On their hands they will bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone***" (Ps. 91:11-12)... He definitely avoids the very next verse: ***"they will tread upon the cobra, and trample the serpent."*** But Satan KNOWS that his time is coming...

The bottom line is that Jesus' triumph over temptation uniquely qualifies Jesus to represent us before God as our "merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb. 2:17) The Son knows personally and experientially what it is like to endure temptation. AND shows us how to stand strong in 'suffering the slings and arrows' of the outrageous attacks of the evil one. As we follow His example, We can know, in the best meaning of 'the Word,' what it's like **being like God**.

Satan's craftiness seen in his cunning distortion of **God's words**. With subtle guise, the adversary speaks as a 'winsome angelic theologian.' 😊 Both to Eve and to Jesus, the evil one spoke not at the top of his lungs, but in quiet, convincing, disarming tones. Much as He does with us everyday. And the truth is that we stand naked before His charming power... defenseless, weak, humiliated. He can be withstood only by putting on God's 'armor'... which one commentator likened both to Matt. 4:1-11, as well as to the familiar 'handbook for warfare preparation, Eph 2:10-20.... The latter of which reads in part...

"Put on all the armor that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. ... ¹⁴So stand ready, with truth... righteousness ... the readiness to announce the Good News of peace. ¹⁶At all times carry faith as a shield... to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. ¹⁷And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives you. ¹⁸Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads ... (Eph 6:10, 14-18, GNT)

As you and I stand ready to proclaim the Good News of God's peace and truth, let us carry faith as our shield and God's Word as our sword... doing all of this in prayer, asking for God's help... praying in every occasion as the Spirit leads.

And THAT, my friends... IS 'Being like God!'

CHARGE: As I looked at that word that is so central to today's consideration of temptation... E-G-O... I thought about those letters in reverse order – O-G-E. And what they might stand for in 'oppositon' to the emphasis on 'I' that we struggle with. An acronym that came to mind as "Old Guys Energize!" 😊 And while I like that one, this one is definitely better, and more universal: **Our God Empowers.** That as we grapple, like Adam and Eve did, 'Being LIKE God'... instead we should consider the power of 'Being WITH God.' As we live in the confidence that in any trial or temptation, "Our God Empowers," let us go out into a world that needs to know this truth as well. And as we do, we know that we do NOT go alone. But that the Spirit of the Living God...

Question for Reflection: How might you grow in faith and draw near to Jesus through the forty days of Lent? Let Jesus' three responses to the devil be your guide: (1) study Scripture (live by the Word of God; Matt. 4:4); (2) seek reconciliation with God and others (do not put God to the test; Matt. 4:7); and (3) be active and intentional about participating in the worship of your congregation (worship the Lord your God; Matt. 4:10).