

Reading: Genesis 2:8-3:5

Theme: Reasoning With Wisdom and Error!

Sadly in the Garden of Eden there were strange things going on as we've seen from v1 we saw: **1. The Strange Events in Paradise** - as a lower order creature spoke to the Eve, one of the rulers, caretakers of Creation. **2. The Strange Interview in Paradise** - the snake questioned the woman and cast doubt on God's word. **3. The Strange Presence in Paradise** - evil and wickedness were there where it should not have been and we noted the snake was used by the devil, the enemy of God, as the devil attacked the pinnacle, the highest and best part of God's Creation. Alarm bells should have gone off for Eve at the strange events and she should have got away from that situation ASAP, but she stayed to reason with this snake: I want us to note 3 things about her reasoning with the snake from v2-3:

1. The Folly in Her Reasoning.

Not only did Eve fail to hear the alarm bells, but failed to see there was something not just strange or interesting, but something that was out and out wrong in the Garden of Eden! She should have got away ASAP - as soon as she heard this lower order creature speaking and doing that which it was not meant or intended to do. The devil, using the snake, had questioned God's provision, goodness and especially what God had said. The devil used a saying that Eve knew to be wrong and so she would put this creature right, would put it in its place.

Eve was foolish to hang about to reason with the snake. She should have got away at once. She was blind to the danger, the reality that this snake was now in the control of an enemy; she failed to recognise she had an enemy and so failed to see his intentions towards her. Perhaps it was surprise that caused her to hang about, or curiosity at this new event of an animal speaking,

or maybe the snake's words had sown a seed of doubt and she wanted to reason it out and put her mind and it straight. Yet it was folly.

We need to be careful as many would encourage us to enter into dialogue, to talk and to reason our and their position and beliefs. Yes as believers we are to be ready and be able to give a reason for the hope that is within us. Yet in public debate this may not be appropriate for most of us - as we need to be uniquely gifted and these be obvious gifts. We are to be careful in our discussions with those of other faiths, or those who will hold a different view and wrong positions on essentials in the Christian faith. We are not to consider all points of view, positions and beliefs as of equal weight and value. We are to go back to the clear teaching of Scripture and argue "*The Bible says...*" We are to do so wisely and gently; humbly pointing out what the Bible says and do so without arrogance as we speak to those who teach contrary to what the Bible says. Many will use the Bible, will misinterpret, will detract from it or add to it and some will set up other writings on a par with it, or just dismiss it completely. Such ones are not to be heeded or entered into dialogue with.

Some invite in ones who call around the doors and seek to reason with them; they give them literature; others say "*No thank you*". I'm still not sure which is the best approach; I can see arguments for all. Realise if they are JW's that they are not allowed to read any literature you give them, they have to hand it to the elders, who will usually not read it either! We will need much wisdom and grace to reason and debate with such ones. It can be dangerous to do so as they can be so subtle in their reasoning - agreeing with so much then adding "*but have you considered or thought of...?*"

Sometimes we need to get away and avoid such reasoning as it may not be helpful to us personally and can open us up to questioning our own beliefs by the devil. The apostle Paul told Timothy and Titus – two young men who he had trained and mentored - to avoid, not to have anything to do with certain matters 2 Timothy 2:23 *“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.”*; Titus 3:9 *“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.”* Eve was in a dangerous situation; she should have got away from and not remained to reason - in this case it was folly to stay and reason. We need to pray for wisdom to recognise when we are to give a reason for the hope within us and when we are not to have anything with certain matters and so end up casting our pearls before swine. That said we move on and see:

2. The Wisdom in Her Reasoning.

Eve corrected the statement by the snake - basically saying *“Hold on a minute, you’ve got that wrong!”* The snake questioned if God said *“You must not eat from any tree in the garden”*. Eve’s answer was *“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,”* and then she went on to explain the exception, but here she spoke of the wonderful liberty which God had granted to Adam and Eve. The snake had cast doubt on God’s generosity, but here Eve wisely said they could eat fruit off the trees of the garden. There was such a rich variety, a rich provision of trees all around them and they could have fruit off these.

Sometimes we as Christians can feel hard done by. We feel events are not as they should or could be, that we are restricted in what we do and don’t do and we get a bit annoyed for we couldn’t in all conscience sake say, take, do, get involved with...

and we may want to - as it seems so good, nice, appealing, pleasant or the easiest thing to do! Yet we feel we are hamstrung by our beliefs, our morals, our Christian conscience and reputation. At times like this, the devil would have us cast doubt on God's goodness. What we need to do is to be as wise as Eve was here and remind ourselves of God's goodness to us and all the liberty and comforts we have as Christians. In clear terms it is counting our blessings, it is focusing on the goodness of God to us and focusing our eyes on what we have and turning them away from the world's seductive temptations and sights (sites). It is not easy to do, as we are so cleverly tempted to wish and desire things were different; also how much better, exciting it would be if... Then we feel sorry for ourselves, feel hard done by and the devil gets in and causes us to wallow in self-pity and we can easily spiral into a depressed, grudging state - the extent of which depends on our temperament, our health and the like.

When we feel like that, we are to do as Charles Bancroft wrote in his hymn (MP 975:2) *"When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free; for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me."* We are to remind ourselves of the blessings, honour and privileges we have physically, especially spiritually and apply the truth of God's goodness being a reality in our lives and it is not just an imaginary solution. Eve was wise in her reasoning in that she spoke of the Lord's goodness and generosity, but see:

3. The Errors in Her Reasoning.

There are 2 errors in her reasoning - can you see the 2 errors? Eve left something out and she added something in (*subtraction from and addition to God's word*). She left out the freedom God

gave to eat of the trees of the garden - take a look back to 2:16 where God said that mankind was free to eat (freely eat says AV) literally “*eating you may eat*”, which is a Hebraism stressing the freedom to eat whatever and whenever they chose. Adam and Eve could abundantly and freely help themselves to the fruit of all the garden’s trees except one. Eve downplayed this blessing, this freedom and does not mention it. Sadly we are like Eve and we are prone to minimise God’s promises and magnify His prohibitions and we easily get an unbalanced view of God, His love and care of us! Eve was doing this - whether consciously or subconsciously and she minimised God’s gracious provision for her and Adam.

It is so easy to do, to quote part of verse or a promise to encourage someone or ourselves e.g. Romans 8:28 “*God works all things for good*” - but it says a lot more than that “*And we know (by experience and observation) that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*” Then Paul goes on to speak of God knowing, predestinating, calling, justifying and glorifying believers. It is not just “good” in the here and now, for it is the eternal good and not necessarily the temporal good, but we can miss that out and misrepresent God and wrongfully expect a “*happy ever after*” ending in our situations of life. We are to watch out for that, leaving out parts of God’s words and promises. It is like trying to use the sword with a loose handle, or no handle or a wobbly blade!

Yet Eve not only left out, minimised their freedom, but also the punishment that was warned of. God had said that if they ate of it they would “*surely die*” - literally “*dying you will die*”; yet Eve quoted “*you will die*”. Maybe the awesome and awful consequences were not understood, not liked, not dwelt on, were

not in the mind of Eve as what she said contained within it and nothing of the horror and fear of “*dying you will die*” nor was it in her heart and mind.

Sadly we can be like that as believers and preachers. One minister was preaching and spoke of “*the place it is not nice to mention in pleasant company*”; others speak of *a place of nothingness*; others speak of “*the alternative to heaven*” when they refer to hell. Even as evangelicals it is possible to lapse into minimising hell as a “*lost eternity*” or “*a Christless eternity*”. Unbelievers do not lose eternity, for they still exist throughout it. What is so threatening about having a Christless eternity to those who are unbelievers? They couldn’t care less about Christ now and it does not bother them about eternity. The Lord Jesus spoke graphically of hell and its horrors. He spoke much more of hell than He did heaven. We are to remember and realise there is a real agonising hell that can only be escaped by believing on the Lord Jesus now in this life. People are to be reminded that now is the day of salvation and that they need to believe on Him. Do we sound that message out, not harshly, but because we are caring and concerned for people? This is what Christ came to save us from and no one can escape hell unless they trust the Lord Jesus as their own Saviour.

Regrettably Eve also went to the opposite error of **adding to the word of God**. She not only left something out and minimised it, but she added to it. Have you seen it in v3 - the first part is fine, but then she added “*you must not touch it*”? God never said that! Why did Eve say such? Some say she had thought about the command by God and concluded that even to touch it meant death and she wanted to so keep it that it took on more than God had said. The word “*touch*” has the force of taking and making one’s own and she was dealing with her own feelings and desires

as she adds you must not touch it! Yet God's command was clear "*you must not eat...*"

Sadly people add to the word of God and so distort it. It may be a lovely verse like "Where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them to bless" (Matthew 18:20) - the words "to bless" are not in Scripture! You may feel I am a bit picky - sorry if you do, but what if the Lord came to judge in the meeting, to break hearts by convicting of sin or division? The context of that verse is in the matter of church discipline and restoration and it gives a new meaning to the Lord being present then!

Sadly many add things to Scripture - church traditions and I do not just mean the RC or C of E churches where man's traditions and additions take precedence over the word of God in some cases, but even in independent churches we can do the same - as we feel ours is the right way, or we have always done it that way and no changes are allowed. It can mean that the contemporary life and vitality of Biblical worship can be stifled by good tradition that originated as our forefathers thought through issues and applied the word of God to their times as they made biblical worship contemporary and relevant then!

There are sects who say yes to the Bible, but it must be interpreted through the writings of their founder - Joseph Smith, or Mary Baker Eddy or...

The word of God i.e. the Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice. In our doctrinal basis, based on the FIEC doctrinal basis we read: "**2. The Bible:** *God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was*

inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.”

We are not to go to men’s thoughts and ideas and accept them in an unthinking manner; God has said all that is necessary for life and the way of salvation. We do not add human thought to or alongside it as equal to Scripture. God has spoken in history and that has been recorded for us by God moving upon the writers He chose and moved upon by His Spirit. That means we can rely on the word of God and not add to it. One of the founding principles of the Reformation was “*Sola Scriptura*” – *by Scripture alone*. We look to the Scriptures, but we do not add or take away from them.

I pray that we as a church and as individuals will get to know, use and apply the word of God - the Bible - correctly and fully in our lives and we find out what Paul wrote to Timothy is true in our own lives - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” Here is the solid foundation we build our lives on.