

Fish Bait Theology

Genesis 3:1-7

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Growing up in the country, one of my favorite times of the summer occurred when the catalpa (kə-'tal-pə) sphinx moth laid eggs on the leaves of the catalpa trees.

My grandfather had two catalpa trees in the cow pasture. I kept an eye on the leaves and as soon as I saw that some of them were being eaten, I knew that the caterpillars had arrived.

The caterpillars are the larval stage of the catalpa sphinx moth. To the fisherman, that's fish bait.

These black and yellow striped worms bleed a green gooey substance that stains your fingers and hands but it's well worth it if you want to catch big brim.

My grandfather would freeze the catalpas so we would have them far into the summer or fall. A thawed catalpa to a fish is no big deal any more than a thawed steak is to us.

When catalpas were not available, I could usually count on wigglers (worms), which I dug from the area where the water emptied onto the ground from the washing machine. The ground stayed moist all year and provided fertile ground for worms.

My favorite bait to fish with were crickets. When my grandfather felt like going to town, we would stop at Mr. Dan Snead's store to buy crickets.

I was always wide-eyed when we went into the room where the crickets were kept. Inside his huge cool box were thousands of crickets crawling over cardboard tubes that Mr. Snead would pick up, shake into a funnel, which he placed over a glass container that he said would hold 100 crickets.

He placed his big thumb over the tube and dumped the crickets into our homemade cricket box.

My grandfather always cut a piece of potato and put in the bottom of the cricket box to give the crickets some nourishment so they would live longer. It was their last meal before they became the fish's last meal.

My grandfather also farmed his own fish bait.

He took ground up cow feed and added some water to make a mush. He put it in an old paint bucket and hung it up near the cow pen. The material rotted and attracted flies.

The flies laid eggs in that rotting, stinking mess and the larval from the flies, which my grandfather called "squid," became fish bait. They looked like maggots. They were nasty but they caught fish.

Of course, we also had lures for bass. And my uncle was on the cutting edge of technology back in the 1970's. He was making his own plastic worms, but Tom Mann over in Eufaula, Alabama was the one that became a millionaire doing it.

Through the years, technology has greatly enhanced the fishing world, but bait is still bait. Lures are still lures.

They are just made to look more realistic these days.

The goal is to fool and entice the fish.

Fishermen have no shame in our attempt to fool fish. We are after some fun, a good meal, and sometimes both.

Jesus once told Peter and Andrew, two brothers who fished in the Sea of Galilee, "Come, follow me, and I will teach you how to fish for people." However, Jesus' techniques for catching people didn't involve trickery and lies. Those techniques belong to the world of Satan.

You see, since the beginning, God made us with the ability to choose whether we wanted Him to remain as our God.

From the beginning we were given the ability to choose to go a different way. The temptation to go a different way came to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent.

Where did this serpent come from?

The book of Revelation tells us that a war broke out in heaven. Because of this, Michael the archangel and his angels prevailed against the age-old serpent. This serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, was thrown down to earth along with his angels. He continually deceives and seduces the entire inhabited world. (Revelation 12:7-8)

This seduction began with the first people God made. In case you haven't noticed, it has not stopped.

It pays to notice how the seduction and temptation took place in the Garden of Eden, because these tactics, while very old, have not changed.

Remember, bait is bait.

There has been a refining of the lures, but because human nature is the same, the nature of temptations has remained unchanged.

Let's talk a look at some of the elements of Satan's bait.

1. Deception

Genesis says that the serpent was cunning, crafty, and shrewd.

Evil comes to us disguised. The Apostle Paul said that "Satan masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14).

Evil went to Eve and Adam in the form of a serpent. Most of us are frightened by serpents, but Eve and Adam were not threatened by this creature.

Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has used deception to get us to bite into things that look good. It's only after we have taken the bait that we discover that we have made a huge mistake.

When I am fishing, my job is to deceive fish. I am not the fish's friend. I am not there to give the fish a free meal. I am there to make fish think it's their lucky day. I am there to lure fish to my hook.

Satan wants to rob us of our souls, of joy, peace, happiness, and love. He wants to rob us of family, friends, financial security, and health, but he knows to do that he must deceive us. Few people consciously sell their soul to the devil.

2. Pleasure

Another element of Satan's bait is pleasure.

The scripture says that the fruit was "pleasing to the eye." The fruit brought Eve pleasure, just looking at it. And apparently, it tasted good.

Bait companies go to great lengths to make their lures look realistic. They know if you cannot get live bait, you need a lure that looks and acts as close to the real thing as possible to attract the most fish.

There is nothing wrong with pleasure and beauty because God created both. But some things that are pleasurable are sinful or can lead to brokenness. Satan uses that pleasure to tempt us. Eve reminds us that we cannot trust our own senses, desires, or passions to lead us to abundant life. Instead, we must listen to God.

Jesus has said that He is the one that came to give us abundant life. If we want it, we must follow him and his ways.

The evil one knows that if he can dangle pleasurable things in front of us and get us to bite once, we almost always go back for more. Eventually, he sets the hook.

When Eve took a bite of the fruit, she liked it enough that she gave some to her husband.

The serpent waited until after Adam took his bite before he set the hook.

If the physical drives that we have are not mastered and placed under control of the Holy Spirit, they can lead us to ruined marriages, physical addictions and other health issues, broken friendships, lost opportunities, financial difficulties, separation from family, and despair.

3. Habits

Satan uses our habits against us.

Fishermen study the habits of fish. They know when they have the best opportunities to entice fish to bite.

Fish, like people, are creatures of habit. They feed at certain times. They hang around certain places. They are prone to be at certain depths depending on the time of day. They like structure, like a stump or a log. The more about the habits of the fish you know, the better chance you have of catching one.

In the Garden of Eden, God made all kinds of trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the Garden was the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree, but they were forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

They could have been anywhere in the garden, so why were they hanging out around the one tree they knew they could not eat from?

While it is not a sin to be tempted, we need to know where our weak areas are? We don't need to put ourselves in situations where we are likely to fail.

Satan is a liar and he will convince us that going to a certain website or to or some parties or hanging out with a particular group will not affect us morally.

This is not to say that we are not ever to be in worldly places. Jesus was certainly criticized for being among sinners and was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard because of some of the people he associated with.

The difference has to do with our motives and whether we know we are protected with the armor of Christ. We cannot be in denial about our weakness or our proneness to temptation.

Satan is an expert at studying our habits. As soon as he notices what they are, he will find our weak spot. He will be subtle and crafty at first. Then he will find an opening. Then he will likely appeal to something pleasurable.

Then the temptation will come.

When it does, we should flee from it immediately. If we rationalize why we should have it, why we need it, why we deserve it, whatever IT is, we are on a fast track to failure.

The Bible says, "There is pleasure in sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24).

That season might be ten minutes. It might be one night. It might be a weekend, a week, or a month. It's not long.

We realize the season is over when we feel Satan's hook sink deep into our lives and the pain begins.

For Eve, this happened after she involved her husband Adam.

The text says that "he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings."

The evil one is busy placing before us bait that will entice us. Satan doesn't mind getting stained hands or digging in the muck for something to entice us.

The evil one will grow his own bait. It can be some of the most foul-smelling stuff imaginable, but when he presents it to us, it looks like a steak on a platter.

If we don't recognize temptation for what it is, we will be hooked into a world of trouble and despair.

Our defense is to do as James said in 4:7-8. "Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." James 4:7- 8 (NKJV)

Some of the most encouraging words the Apostle Paul wrote were written to the church at Corinth, a church that was dealing with a lot of unhealthy issues.

He said to them, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." 1 Cor 10:13 (NKJV)

We need to build a defense against Satan's efforts to claim us and destroy us.

Here's how we do it.

1. Trust in God and not in our own judgment. Eve and Adam knew right from wrong but they trusted their senses and not God's word. Realize Satan is a liar. His job is to deceive.

2. When tempted, take the escape route God provides. It's not a sin to be tempted, but do not remain in the temptation. Leave it behind. Put it in the rearview mirror. Take God's escape route.

3. Change your habits. Know yourself. Stop putting yourself in tempting situations. This is how you resist the devil. Find ways to draw closer to God. Pray. Memorize a scripture. Think of the pain that submitting to the temptation will eventually cause, not the temporary pleasure it will give.

Do you know Fishermen do when they catch nothing? They will either change bait or move on to another spot. Satan will eventually try something else. When Jesus would not give in to temptation in the wilderness, it said that Satan "left him until an opportune time." But he did leave him. Satan will leave you. He will move on to fish elsewhere if he keeps fishing in your pond and discovers that you are not biting. He will move on to tempt others, fishing in waters where he finds greater success.

Of course, all of us have taken the bait. We are all sinners and need the grace and forgiveness of Jesus.

This is the reason Jesus came, to help us find our way back into his graces. He wants to reclaim all of us. It's the reason he told Peter and Andrew he wanted to show them how to fish for people. Perhaps you can help others overcome their temptations by the life that you live.

Be the example others need.

If you are here today and you know you have been deceived, if you know you've taken the bait, then seek God's forgiveness.

Make a commitment today to change your habits that are placing you in tempting situations.

It's time to submit to God. It's time to resist the devil and watch your life change because he will flee from you.

Draw near to God today and He will draw near to you.

As we sing our concluding song, lift a prayer up to God. Ask the Holy Spirit for the strength you need to overcome your temptations.

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