

EATING THE CONSEQUENCES

Read Genesis 2:15-17 and Genesis 3

Amidst a clash of cymbals, blare of horns, plucking of stringed instruments, and much hoopla, Ezra the scribe marched through throngs of people, with scrolls, to a courtyard at the Watergate in Jerusalem. The Jewish nation, just returned home from the Babylonian captivity, was anticipating a reading of the Law by the aged one. Then, after standing for hours and listening to the Word given by God to Moses, they responded in remorse and repentance. It could be that special writing techniques in that Word kept the crowd attentive and captivated, so that God's Spirit had an opportunity to act (Nehemiah 8).

The account of Adam and Eve's fall has an example of one of these techniques: repetition. There is a word duplicated three times in the command to Adam. See if you can locate it in the following quote: "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17). The word echoed in God's command is "eat" (Actually, the phrase "freely *eat*" in the Hebrew is "*eat eat*" making the count of the word "eat" jump to four).

Now, our instinct as twentieth century intellectuals is to disdain repetition. We presume that repeating a word or a phrase is redundant. Even our high school English teacher would circle words used again and again on our term paper, suggesting that we invest in a Thesaurus. This was not so with the Hebrew writers of Scripture. Repetition was used to grab the attention of the listener, hold their attention, and deliver the punch line. Furthermore, a word often used this way could connect a sin with its consequences. Hence, observing terms that crop up three, four, or more times in a text is the first key to a dynamic Bible study.

The word "eat" which was used in the command in Genesis 2 is also seen in the temptation account in Genesis 3:1-5. The serpent inquires of Eve, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not *eat* from any tree of the garden'?" Eve also incorporated the word twice when she replied to him, "We may *eat* from the fruit . . . , but from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not *eat* from it or touch it, or you will die.'" Her response, however, does not dissuade Satan. He seduces her to "*eat* from the tree" for "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (v. 5). Once the author connects God's command to the temptation with the term "eat," the author proceeds from the temptation to the sin.

Their sin occurs in Genesis 3:6, after the woman has coveted what is God's possession. She "took from its fruit and *ate*; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he *ate*." This sin is rephrased a number of times in the next few verses using the term "eat." God said, "Have you *eaten* from the tree of which I commanded you not to *eat*?" (v.11). And Adam said, "The woman...gave me from the tree and I *ate*" (v. 12). On the other hand, the woman accused the serpent saying, "The serpent deceived me, and I *ate*" (v. 13). The punch line, though, is at the climax; the word "eat," which functions to connect the command, the temptation, and the sin, is also used for the consequences.

This crucial moment begins when the serpent is informed by God, "On your belly you will go, and dust you will *eat*" (3:14). Not only is the serpent to eat, but Adam is also advised that he will eat: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will *eat* of it all the days of your life. . .and you will *eat* of the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will *eat* bread" (3:17-19). You might say they had to eat their consequences. Or, you may alter a familiar verse to read, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also *eat*."