

Publishing Editor's column

WHEN THE SERPENT persuaded Eve to disobey God's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it is recorded that it was when Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" that she took and ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6).

It is noteworthy how significant a part what Eve saw played in her yielding to temptation; she "saw that the tree was good for food" and she found it "pleasant to the eyes". What she saw strongly influenced her to disobey God's command, then Adam partook as well, and the whole episode had profound consequences for their descendants.

Many years later a man brought trouble upon his people by similarly allowing the attractiveness of what he saw to lead him into disobeying a command of God. The command to the children of Israel before they besieged Jericho was that they were to take none of the goods of the city for themselves. Yet one man, Achan, disobeyed this command because he was attracted by what he saw.

When his sin was exposed before the people he confessed, "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them" (Josh. 7:21). The result of his sin was that God was no longer with the people when they attacked Ai, and they were driven back, with the loss of thirty-six lives.

Many years later on, King David, established as Israel's king and triumphant over the nations around, allowed what he saw to create in him a desire that led him to commit the grievous sins of adultery and murder. The record says that from the roof of his palace "he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon" (2 Sam. 11:2). The resulting sin of David led to much personal trouble and sorrow and the destruction of the harmony of his kingdom by civil war.

The process that led Eve to sin is given in some detail in Genesis, presumably because it serves as a pattern of how sin occurs. Thus the three elements of Eve's temptation presented in Genesis 3:6 are reflected in the Apostle John's

threefold reference to "the things that are in the world", which includes "the lust of the eyes" (1 Jno. 2:15,16). The temptation of Jesus was likewise a threefold one, and includes Jesus *seeing* "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" and being tempted to seek them without following the path his Father had set before him (Mt. 4:8-10).

We live in an age in which visual imagery is far more powerful than ever before, thanks to modern technology. If rightly used it can be beneficial, showing the wonders of God's creation, for example, or as an aid to learning. Mostly, however, it is not used rightly. Achan sinned because he coveted what he saw; David sinned when his lust was incited by the sight of a beautiful woman.

Today we are constantly exposed to visual images that can lead us to sin in these ways. The media depict the expensive lifestyles of the rich and famous as highly desirable, and advertising uses sophisticated techniques to make us dissatisfied with what we have and covetous of what we do not have. One has only to enter a news-agent's to see an array of publications with lust-provoking images; television programmes sink lower and lower in their standards in the competition to attract audiences; and the Internet has opened up a whole new range of opportunities to stimulate lust.

Jesus gave a drastic remedy for one caused to sin by the sight of the eyes: "And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell" (Mt. 5:29, RV). The context here is that of lustful thoughts brought about by the sight of the eyes, but in Mark 9:47 he says much the same thing in a more general context.

We do not take these words literally; you cannot pluck out an eye, and if you could it wouldn't stop you seeing out of the other one. However, in this day of visual imagery, and in the knowledge of how what we see can cause us to sin, we ought to take our Lord's words seriously and consider whether there are any steps we should be taking to prevent ourselves being led into sin. Otherwise there could be profound consequences for our eternal future.

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