

DEPENDENCE

A tale of two trees

By

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In Eden there were two trees. The destiny of all men is determined under the boughs of these trees. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was prohibited to Adam and Eve, with death as the penalty for eating from it. But Eve was told by Satan that to eat of that tree meant that she would be “as God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5).

At face value this would appear to be a good thing, especially to a Christian. Aren't we responsible to know good and evil and to choose the good? Isn't this the object of God's commandments, to make us know good and evil that we may not sin? How then can Eve be blamed for wanting to partake of such a tree? If this is the approach we take to the narrative, we miss the point of it all.

The promise was not that they should simply know the difference between what was good and bad, but that they might become independent of God's rules, and make the laws themselves as if each were God; thus they would “know good and evil” without even consulting God. This was what made the lust to eat of the fruit an evil desire. Prior to this time they had walked in perfect obedience to God and in close fellowship with Him. There was no effort to disobey Him, to change the way He had ordained, and thus no loss of His fellowship, no problems, no breach of peace, no sorrow and no death.

Nothing was lacking. The rules God made were perfect. There could be no improving them. To this day there is nothing lacking to the Christian. God gives what is good, and supplies every need, according to His riches. If we cannot see this, the fault is our own vision (spiritually) and it is ours to accept that it is true by faith and pray that we may be faithful and content in our state. In spite of the fact that Eden was destroyed in the flood, and that we are “in the world” of which Satan is called the prince, the rules of God still apply, and He still exercises His sovereignty over the universe. He has not abandoned His children to the workings of Satan, but rather takes particular care to see that “all things work together for good to them that are called according to His purpose.” Jesus carefully explained that the saints are under constant surveillance and that “their angels always behold the face of their Father in Heaven.” He said that “the hairs of your head are numbered.”

A Christian of true faith is known as one who accepts God's laws and God's provision, with thanksgiving. On the contrary, the world is obsessed with a passion to “know good and evil”, that is, to become as God, making up their own rules and thus continuing the sin of Adam in search for a knowledge which competes with God. As we shall see, further on, the end of this pursuit is death.

The other tree in Eden was the Tree of Life. Adam and Eve had free access to this tree up until the time they disobeyed God. Then they were driven from the garden for the specific purpose of being deprived of this tree, ‘lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever’ (Gen. 3:22). This indicates that they had no self-sustaining power of life; they did not possess an inherent immortality; life was continued as long as they ate of the tree of life which God provided.

Their sin was in the fact that they failed to recognize their dependence upon God. When Satan tempted them, Eve immediately remembered the word of God, that to eat of the forbidden tree would bring death, and repeated the warning to Satan. The serpent, in character, countered with a lie, "Thou shall not surely die." Forgetting the tree of life, forgetting the power of God, forgetting that all was contingent upon His will and his grace by which life was maintained, Eve gave in. She could think of nothing but the prospect of independence, living her own life and making her own rules, independent of both Adam and God, and being able to say, "I did it my way." She believed Satan's lie because she desperately wanted to believe it. All the evidence was against it. All her life she had been provided for by God, by eating of the tree of life, and by depending on Him. But now a new thought broke through — the possibility of an entirely new kind of independence and a new life. Why be afraid of change?

This is the simple pattern of man's downward progress through the ages. Every new thought, every invention which God reveals and every discovery He allows is soon turned to exploring the possibilities of independence from him and His laws. The more knowledge increases the greater the sorrows of the race. Daniel spoke of the last days as being marked by great increase in knowledge, but Jesus reminded us that these would also be days such as in the time of Noah, when the earth was filled with wickedness and violence.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the root of man's temptation, and the pursuit of it brings alienation from God, and ultimately the loss of life — "lest he take of the tree of life and eat, and live forever." God pronounced a curse on sin and sinful man. Man cannot live as a sinner forever.

But there is hope, we are not to stop after the first three chapters of Genesis. Let us go on through the Word until we come to the last three chapters of Revelation. There we come once again to the Tree of Life. First John reveals that there is a new creation, a new heaven and earth. It is that new earth "wherein dwells righteousness" which Peter said we look for because the present one is to be dissolved (II Peter 3). And there, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb., is a river of the water of life, "and on either side of the river was the tree of life" (Rev. 22:2). It's healing fruit is available to all who are privileged to enter that new creation.

Life, even in the new creation, is still to be conditional. No one is granted an inherent immortality, a private quality of eternality whereby he might live apart from and independent of God. It is clear from the apostle Paul's writing that immortality belongs to Deity only, the "only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords, who only has immortality" (I Tim. 6:16). The immortality which we are promised (please note that it is promised only to Christians) is a quality of life that is forever sustained by the Life giver, in whose presence we shall live where we take of the tree of life.

All who inherit eternal life will continue to depend on God, because that is the basis of attaining life — by faith, and commitment to God through Christ Jesus. When we become Christian we commit ourselves to Christ; and such a commitment means humble dependence. To believe on Jesus is not merely to acknowledge that He lives. It is to believe that all of life must be lived according to His will. No longer do we go seeking the knowledge of good and evil, to decide for ourselves what is right, but we depend on the rules He has already made, and trust that they are good, as David sang, "For all thy commandments are righteousness" (Psa. 119:172). Surely if we trust Christ to give us the

means of walking with Him in this earthly life, we shall delight in the means He gives for the heavenly. Therefore the tree of life is set in the New Jerusalem, the New Creation, that we might partake, and live forever.

Noticeably absent in the new creation is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Lovers of God have no desire to compete with God for the rules. “He that comes to God must believe that he is and he is a rewarder of them that seek after him” (Heb. 11:6). The saints will pursue His will, with no thought of establishing their own.

And what of those who refuse to depend on Him? They are “outside”, excluded from the tree of life. As Adam and Eve were cast from the garden, lest they eat of the tree of life and continue living, so it is said of the unbelievers, that they are outside the gates of the city, and thus out of reach of life. They refuse to trust Christ in this world, and will not have the opportunity in the next. They reject God’s rules and make their own laws of good and evil. They must also make their own provision for life. But alas, “He that has not the Son has not the life” (I John 5:1;2). There is therefore no alternative but the suffering and punishment of death, for God does not change the rules: “thou shall surely die.”

These two trees stand opposed to each other. To partake of the first, precludes partaking of the second. This fact does not seem to be noticed by many who profess faith, but whose ears are tuned to the promoters of the popular philosophy that times have changed, and God’s laws no longer apply. The bitter frustration that permeates most churches of our day is due to just this fact, that their eyes are not on the tree of life, but the tree of knowledge and they are panting, grasping and fighting for the temporal things which must pass away with a dying world. Even so-called fundamentalists are actually holding out the false hope that if enough people will believe in Christ they can turn things around and save the world from God’s righteous judgment and enjoy both trees.

Just as the two trees stand opposed, so those who partake of them stand on different foundations and have different views of the world. On the one hand are all they who hear Satan, “Thou shall not surely die, but shall become as God...” They view the world as permanent, as ever evolving with new and greater horizons of possibilities; if only they can find some new meaning, some new method! Madly they engage in piling up scientific data and the discovery and invention of things, methods and ideas in contrast to the purpose of God. The greater the knowledge increases, the deeper the crisis, and the more violent the reaction and painful the hurt.

The believer has abandoned that tree. Instead he looks to the tree of life, knowing that this life is temporal and all the world is passing away. Wars are fought, nations rise and fall, fortunes come and go and vanity increases. But, he sees the trouble as only temporary. He sees it from eternity, knowing the outcome. Yet, not as one unconcerned. For having such a vantage point, Christians have a message to the world. It reminds all who hover around the tree of knowledge: “Thou shall surely die”, unless — unless they receive life through Christ. For there is a third tree — the tree of the cross on which Christ met the penalty for sin by His own death. And all who depend on him, he will some day plant once more by the Tree of Life, where we may eat, and live forever.

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