

The Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil, part 2

A Tree Can Bear Only Good or Bad Fruit...

As already stated in earlier lessons there are many questions that immediately arise when we begin to read the Bible, especially, for new or would be Christians. I have found it really *does* matter how a person approaches the first three chapters of Genesis, because it will become a foundation for a person's entire relationship with God.

For example: If someone begins to read Genesis and hears preaching that interprets God as being a God who says, "You must obey; Because, I SAID SO!!" This person, even if he or she did become a Christian (which has proven unlikely for many) will often live as a fearful Christian, hearing a, threatening, voice that sounds like an earthly parent rather than the true voice of a pure and loving God. It creates helplessness in the person that says, I can't ask God questions, and often concludes: I'm not allowed to understand. Depression in their walk with God is often the result.

Or another popular approach to Genesis: If a person is taught or comes to an understanding that God was saying, "If you disobey, I will STRIKE you DEAD!!" then some come away thinking the Bible is untrustworthy because Adam and Eve did not die immediately, and it seems as if God is just waiting to strike us when we make a mistake. Though, some do go on to become Christians who hold this view, but at a huge cost. They often worry their whole Christian life if God loves them; because they live in fear, that when they make a mistake, that it could infuriate God to the point that He will strike them too; turning away from them forever!

Sadly, these are often two of the ways that Genesis chapters two and three are approached by many well-meaning ministers of the gospel. However, is this the only way we can possibly read these chapters? Is there something we may have missed or overlooked here that is of importance? Even worse, is it possible, that with these approaches we have completely misrepresented God and done more harm than good? I believe the answer to this question is: yes.

Another stumbling block many will face when reading the first three chapters of Genesis is the often over-simplified explanation of the forbidden tree itself. There seems to be little to no understanding about why this tree was to be avoided. This point is what brings us back to the above, already, mentioned over-simplified statements that the well-meaning human mind comes up with in an attempt to defend God. However, God's word is clear when we read it in its entirety; we see that it needs no defense by humanity at all. The Word of God makes its own defense and stands visually and spiritually clear to those who will see and hear its truth.

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So, with all of this said, let us move into today's lesson and see what the instructions were and what really happened at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on that fateful day in the Garden of Eden.

God tells Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 3:17). This conversation between God and Adam is the **first** warning given in the scriptures.

Often this verse is preached with a connotation that God is using a threatening, frightening or intimidating tone toward Adam. Yet, to get a full understanding of what God is saying to Adam we need to read the entire conversation and in the context that it occurred.

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 3:15-17).

In this passage, the Lord God has placed Adam in the garden and it is a private conversation between Adam and God (at this time Eve does not yet exist). The Lord shared with Adam that he is: "to dress" and "to keep" the garden. Later, when we talk about Adam and his role in the garden we will discuss what this means in more detail. However, for now, let it be known that "to dress it" implied that Adam was to work and serve in the garden and to accomplish the task given to him. He was also "to keep it" implying Adam was to guard, watch over, or to preserve the garden. In short, **Adam was to take the role of a guardian**; not allowing any harm to come to the garden.

Then we are told: "And the Lord God commanded" (Genesis 3:16). The word "commanded" in the Hebrew is צוה and is pronounced [see-va] and means: to send, to instruct, to order, or give a command. The Lord God first instructs Adam on what he can do; instructing that Adam may eat of any tree in the whole garden, *except* one. Certainly, the emphasis is on not eating from the one tree, but why? Is it because God will strike Adam dead for disobeying!!? Or is it because God is giving Adam instruction, counsel, or a warning about what will happen if he chooses not to listen to God's instruction?

Side Note: Think of it this way: If a parent says to a child running around in a kitchen where there is a hot stove. "You can play anywhere in the kitchen, but if you get near the stove and you touch it; you will get burned." The parent is instructing the child, even commanding you can say, but what is the motive of the parent? Is the parent trying to frighten and intimidate the child or is the parent warning the child of the danger of the stove? Of course, it is to instruct the child of the danger; to warn the child. This is exactly what God is doing with Adam in the garden. He is giving guidance to Adam about the one and only danger in the whole garden—that tree.

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Then the Lord goes on to explain to Adam. Beginning with the word: “But”!! By this God is saying, wait, wait there is more. Then the Lord God goes on to say to Adam, *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Genesis 3:17).

What is God saying here? He is saying: that there is a danger in the garden—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

We have no reason to believe that God loved Adam less than He loved the rest of humanity. The Word of God teaches us that Jesus was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19-20, Ephesians 1:3-5, Revelation 13:8). This means that God knew before He reached into the dust of the earth and formed Adam what the cost would be to create Adam and, thus, the cost for creating all humanity. Yet, God was willing to pay this ultimate price for His creation!!

Throughout the scriptures God is referred to as a Father. In the Old Testament Moses asks the question: “...O foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy **father** that hath bought thee?” (Deuteronomy 32:6). The prophet Isaiah wrote: “Doubtless **thou art our father**...O LORD, art our **father**, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isaiah 63:16). Again, Isaiah wrote: “But now, O LORD, **thou art our father**; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8). Even Jeremiah wrote about God as **father** (Jeremiah 3:19).

Though God is referred to as father in the Old Testament a few times; it is in the New Testament that God is overwhelmingly identified as our Father. When Jesus spoke about God He referred to God as Father more than 150 times. In the Gospel of John, 100 times Jesus refers to God as Father. It is Jesus who brings us to our deepest and clearest understanding of God as Father. Since Jesus was the Father, the Creator, robed in flesh; He would have the authority to teach us most accurately on the nature of God. When Jesus spoke about God, He used the term “Father” and often positioned it: “our father” and “your father” when teaching others about God.

Why are we taking the time to remember how those in the Old and New Testament viewed God? Specifically, why is it so important to know that one of the many ways they knew Him was as a Father? It is important because it takes us back to the Garden of Eden. We must ask ourselves: Why then would we see God’s interaction with Adam differently?? Furthermore, if God speaks with fallen humanity as a Father why then would we have any reason to believe His relationship with Adam was less than a Father? If there is still any doubt in your mind if Adam was God’s son let us take a moment to read in the book of Luke “...which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God” (Luke 3:38). This scripture makes this truth plain; Adam was a son of God. Therefore, when Adam was created and walked in the Garden of Eden, he did not know sin, and God was his Father, but once sin occurred; brokenness in the heart of Adam and all of humanity was the highest consequence felt, and it separated Adam and us from God as our

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loving Father. **When Jesus came to Earth He came to restore what had been lost in the Garden of Eden and more** (we will discuss what that “more” was soon in future lessons).

When Jesus walked the earth, He was the Almighty, robed in flesh, and He had come to turn human hearts back to Himself. How? He did so by pointing them to the Father of Heaven. As the crowds listened to Jesus speak about their Father in Heaven they could almost understand, but He (Jesus) who was the Father and who was standing right in front of them, with His splendor hidden behind a veil of, temporary, human flesh they could not see or comprehend (John 1-14). Yet, after His crucifixion the disciples would come to understand fully who He was and the mission He came to accomplish (Acts 1:3, Luke 24:27, 44-45).

Now, that we have established that God is viewed as Father in both the Old and New Testaments it is easier to go back and review the conversation between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden. God is clearly warning Adam about the danger of the tree in the midst [middle] of the Garden as a parent would warn a child (young or old) about any danger they see ahead for them. How can we be sure? We must keep reading and watch as the rest of the events unfold.

Attributes of the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil:

Jesus told us that a tree can bear only *one kind of fruit*, and that every tree is known by its fruit! (Luke 6:44). He also said, *“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit”* (Luke 6:43) and in Mathew it reads: *“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit”* (Matthew 7:17-18).

What does this mean? This means that the tree in the Garden called “the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” cannot be a tree that brings forth both good and bad fruit; or both pure and evil fruit. Why?? Jesus told us that it was impossible for a tree to do this. So, what is the problem with this tree in the Garden of Eden?

We must go back and take another look at what this verse in Genesis actually says: “But of the tree *of* the knowledge *of* good *and* evil, thou shalt not eat of it...” (Genesis 2:17).

So, we must examine this verse closely if we want to fully understand. We must take a look at the word: evil. In Hebrew, the word is: רָע and pronounced Ra. Here is the problem: Ra is more than evil. In the Hebrew, the word: Ra is the opposite of Shalom. We understand that Shalom is tranquility, justice, sufficiency, peace. In short, Shalom is the absence of any negative forces. Yet, “Ra” is a ***state of anarchy or chaos***. Ra is ***total confusion***! Ra is a place where nothing makes sense!! Ra is a place that is opposite Shalom; this means that Ra is a place where chaos is normal. So, where Ra exists: injustice is normal, immorality is normal, corruption is normal, death is normal. Ra is ***a real existence of hopelessness, slavery, and death!***

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Now we need to move on to another word and its translation; the English word: *and*. In the Hebrew this word is translated: ו and pronounced as “vay” or “vav” and it is used a lot in the Hebrew language, but with delicacy to stress relations and shades of meaning. So, in the Hebrew context it can mean “and” just as it is used in English or it can, also, mean “together with” or “that is.”

So, now we return to the Garden of Eden with the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. Is this just a fruit tree? Is God really setting up a tree in the middle of the Garden and forbidding Adam (and later, Eve) to not eat a piece of fruit? Did sin come into the world because the first man and woman ate a piece of fruit?

The short answer is: No, this tree was not what we would think of as a typical fruit tree like an apple, fig, or olive tree. This tree’s fruit was different. We know this by its name. The fruit produced from this tree was: **Knowledge**. Yet, it was a particular kind of knowledge. To know what kind of Knowledge we need to return to the verse of scripture.

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). So, let’s plug into this verse what we have learned this far: But of the tree of **the knowledge** of good [**that is**] **ra** [**chaos, anarchy**], thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

So, as we stand back and read the scripture again and take it in we understand that **the knowledge** was a fruit that produced in the person who ate of it a changed **awareness**, that is, to see **chaos or anarchy** as something that is good, pleasant, or desirable. This tree caused a person to see life backwards; or to pervert the very nature of what God had created as good.

Remember: this tree was “good” as long as it **was not eaten from**. This means its poison would be contained and since we already know that sin had already occurred in Heaven; we know the tree was now a part of reality. Yet, it did not have to be humankind’s reality. As long as Adam and (later) Eve would be faithful to what God had instructed them to do; humanity did not have to taste that bitter fruit of knowledge that would poison their brains and turn them away from God.

In the book of Isaiah we read: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). The word “evil” is the same Hebrew word: **ra**. So, Isaiah is saying, Woe unto them that call chaos and anarchy good, and who call what is actually good chaos and anarchy!! This kind of thinking is a result of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good [that is] evil.

This is where we will stop today. I know, I know, there is still so much to learn about this tree. We have only begun. We still need to learn how it was a part of the ultimate *plan* of God to eradicate sin and how does this Tree still affect us today? We will also learn more about death and why death became part of the human experience because of this tree.

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Keep reading, studying, and coming back for more on Genesis.