

Two Trees

In **Genesis 2:4-3:24** we read how God placed Adam and then Eve in the Garden of Eden. He gave them every tree in the garden which was pleasing to look at and good to eat, and there were two special trees right in the centre of the garden. One was the tree of life, the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam that he could eat freely from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam passed this information on to Eve.

It is good for us to consider Adam and Eve for a moment. They were quite unlike anyone that we know today, because they were both mature and innocent, far ahead of our present day abilities in terms of intellect, physical strength and personal ability, and their relationship with God and each other was clear and uncluttered. And yet, in terms of right and wrong, they were totally unaware – they had no concept of it! An amazing life of dependence with capability! We only need to look at Adam's organisational and managerial prowess in naming the animals, cultivating the (enormous) garden, filling and subduing the earth, all without weariness and sorrow, and a relationship with God in which they expected to walk and talk easily with him in the cool of the day.

All this would have gone on for ever if it had not been for their bid for independence, instigated by the enemy. He wanted to snap the bond of dependence on God, the 'hand-to-mouth' reliance on his provision. By getting Adam and Eve to set up their own knowledge of right and wrong, their own self-awareness, the enemy achieved his aim. The open relationship with God was broken, fear entered in, mankind and the whole earth came under a curse from God, and from now on man would have perpetual toil and struggle

to feed himself. There was no way that mankind in this condition could be allowed to go on eating from the tree of life and live for ever. **Living from the knowledge of good and evil is not compatible with eternal life.** We will do well to learn this lesson.

In **1 Corinthians 14:20**, Paul exhorts the Christians in Corinth to live very much like Adam and Eve lived, in innocence and maturity. “Don’t be schoolchildren” he says, “be mature in your thinking, but act like speechless babies as far as evil goes.” There are three different Greek words here: “paidion” means a child, one who is being trained for adult life. “Teleios” means adult, complete, mature. “Nepios” means a little baby, unable to talk properly. So Paul tells them and us to be mature but innocent.

Much of our lives can be dominated by a concern over right and wrong, but we are in real danger of ‘eating from the wrong tree’. The alternative to depending on the grace of God is to devise rules and formulae for our Christian living, exactly the same as the **Galatians** did. Because we do not think it is easy to live in daily dependence, we prefer to give ourselves (and others) guidelines to live by. This is not Christianity, it is legalism. We only need to look at the Lord Jesus and Paul to see that our life is meant to be very different!

In **John 6:26-59**, Jesus answers people who were asking him very much the same question: “What should we do to do the works of God?” They wanted guidelines, principles, patterns. Jesus’s answer must have been frustrating “*Trust in the one whom God has sent.*” “Show us a miracle, then, so that we can trust you! Our forefathers had manna in the wilderness!” “*I am the bread of life. You need to go on eating from me in order to have eternal life, just like the Israelites had to go on eating the manna.*” Read it for yourself; this is obviously just my very condensed version!

Think about the manna in the wilderness for a few moments. Read about it in **Exodus 16**. It was very small

(verses 14 & 31). A coriander seed is about 4mm. (less than ¼ inch) in diameter. They had to gather about 2¼ litres (half a gallon) for each person every day, and 4½ litres (1 gallon) each every Friday, and they had to get out and get it quickly, before the sun melted it. Imagine Friday morning for a family with four children – 27 litres (6 gallons) of tiny grains to gather before the sun got too hot! One of the most amazing things about manna was its keeping qualities. Six days a week, its shelf life was less than 24 hours; on Fridays, it would keep for two days; one measure of it was intended to be kept for ever (verse 33)! Manna was designed for dependence. Forty years of depending on daily food like this should have taught the Israelites to depend on God.

Jesus's own life was one of dependence. If anyone would have known what was right or wrong, surely he would? He did not need to look anywhere else to find out what he should do, he knew. But still he chose to live in total dependence on his Father. See **John 5:19, 30; John 8:28-29.** (I hope you are actually looking up these references!)

Apart from referring to himself as the living bread in **John 6**, Jesus also says that we need to keep coming and drinking from him and refers to the Holy Spirit as 'rivers of living water' (**John 7:37,38**). More pictures of dependence! He reminds us that it is the Spirit who gives life, that our natural ability is worthless (**John 6:63**) and that we can do nothing if not in close living contact with him (**John 15:5**).

The question is, which source are we living from? Are we going to be content with following an acceptable pattern of Christian behaviour, worked out by ourselves or others, even based closely on the Bible, or are we determined, by God's grace, to learn to live from the source of God's life, the tree of life, the living manna? As we go through our lives, instead of asking the question "Is this right or wrong?", will we learn to ask "Is this from you, Father? Is it coming out of your life?" The difference is the gulf between law and grace, between soul and spirit.

This is the same battle that Paul fought as he wrote to the **Galatians**. The whole letter speaks strongly against the idea of good works, rules and regulations, as a way of pleasing God. See **Galatians 3:2-3** for example – better still, read the whole letter! See also **Romans 8:1-11**, **1 Corinthians 3:18**, **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**. This is not just about other people going through the routine of religion; this is about you and me not being in close dependence on the grace of God. It is easier to follow rules and guidelines, but that is not how we are designed to live – that's the wrong tree again! **Hebrews 12:15** tells us of the dire results of missing out on the grace of God in Jesus.

In closing, let's look at the tree of life again, this time with the river of life flowing next to it, bearing fruit constantly for those who have the right to eat from it and live for ever – and there is no knowledge of good and evil anywhere in sight! Look in **Revelation 22:1-5**, **14**, and **2:7** for the fruit of the tree of life and who is entitled to eat from it. **Revelation 21:3-4** and **22:3** show that the knowledge of good and evil is irrelevant here, in the realisation of the Kingdom of God.

There is much more that could be said. Perhaps it is best summed up in Jesus's own words in **John 15:4** :

***“Abide in me, and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,
unless it abides in the vine,
so neither can you,
unless you abide in me.”***

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