

THE TREE OF LIFE

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International Ministries

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

Published by:

Crossroads Publications
10681 Princes Highway
Warrnambool
Victoria 3280
Australia

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THE TREE OF LIFE

Background Reading: Genesis 2:9,17; 3:1-24

In the Book of Genesis, we find the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Life. We will explore one view of this account in the following outline of the creation story.

In the beginning, in a dateless past, God created the heavens and the earth. Then at a further point in time, He established the earth as we know it now, and created man in His own image:

GENESIS 1:26 And God said, “Let Us (God the Father, God the Word and God the Holy Spirit) make man (mankind) in Our image, after Our likeness (the creation of man was preceded by a Divine consultation; as well, the pronouns “Us” and “Our” proclaim the consultation held by the Three Persons of the Divine Trinity, Who were One in the creative work: E.S.B.): and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

GENESIS 1:27 So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

God then placed man in the Garden of Eden and told him that he could eat of all the trees in the garden except for “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*” God told him that if he ate (partook) of this tree, he would surely die.

GENESIS 2:16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat:

GENESIS 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat (partake) of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die (this means spiritual death which is separation from God).”

When God said that man would die the day he ate (partook) of “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*,” God was referring not to physical death “*in the day that you shall eat*,” but to “spiritual death.” This meant that man would become separated from Him, and no longer linked to Him spiritually - for the relationship between God and man would be broken. As we shall see, physical death also resulted though not immediately, the ageing process being a consequence of the Fall.

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THE FALL OF MANKIND

Adam disobeyed God’s command and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Immediately, Adam and Eve were introduced to the knowledge of sin, for their action brought shame, fear and guilt into their lives. More importantly, however, it caused Adam and Eve to become separated from God, which is another way of saying that they entered into a state of spiritual death. Likewise, Adam’s descendants were, as a consequence of his action, all born into this state of spiritual death.

GENESIS 3:6 And when the woman (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, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he (Adam) did eat.

ROMANS 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world (through his disobedience), and death (separation from God) by sin; and so death passed

upon all men, for that all have sinned (are born in a state of sin = death)

Note: “Adam was permitted to eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden but one, which was called ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,’ because it was the test of Adam’s obedience. By it Adam could know good and evil in the divine way through obedience; thus knowing good by experience in resisting temptation and forming a strong and holy character while he knew evil only by observation and inference. Or he could ‘know good and evil,’ in Satan’s way, by experiencing the evil and knowing good only by contrast. - Ed. The prohibition to taste the fruit of this tree was enforced by the menace of death.” ⁱ

(underlines added)

“. . . Adam could know good and evil in the divine way through obedience; thus knowing good by experience in resisting temptation and forming a strong and holy character while he knew evil only by observation and inference. . .”

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve each had a human nature that was energized by God’s Divine Nature. After the Fall, both lost access to the Divine Nature, and acquired in its place the sin nature. The ability to know right from wrong could then only come through their conscience.

Therefore after the Fall, man knew good but could not really experience the good he knew in a Divine way, only at a human level without the Divine Nature. His conscience bore witness to his knowledge of good in certain areas. Sometimes the conscience can be enhanced through receiving righteous input, or alternatively become seared (hardened) so that it is unable to function as it should, being unable to recognize good as good and evil as evil. Factors which influence the development of the conscience include culture, exposure to sin, education on righteous matters and maturity (growing up intellectually). Eve was deceived (which was still no

excuse), but Adam knowingly transgressed his conscience - and Adam, not Eve, was man's federal head.

Adam was created as a perfect man with no sin nature. Rather, he was a partaker of the Divine Nature. Adam was designed by God so that his human nature would be at one with the Divine Nature, giving him the power to both desire and then do as God willed. As a free-willed being, however, he still had to yield to this Nature. He was empowered to do this naturally, having no sin nature to wrestle with, and therefore not needing to exert willpower against it. Nevertheless His will was involved, as it is with us today, as the trigger by which we can live in the grace of God - to do right by God, so that our joy will be full. By Adam's will he could yield to the will of God or, as in the case of the tree, do as he desired which was to yield to sin.

“. . .After the Fall, man knew good but could not really experience the good he knew in a Divine way, only at a human level without the Divine Nature. . .”

The result of Adam's high treason was death to himself, both spiritual and physical, which he, as man's federal head, passed on to all his offspring through the bloodline. While spiritual death came instantly, the nature of death also entered into Adam and Eves' physical bodies. This meant that instead of living forever, as the perfect human beings they were created to be, Adam, Eve and all their descendants would age physically and eventually die. Such was the gravity of Adam's sin in terms of its consequences for both he and every person born after him. Indeed the whole human race would inherit Adam's polluted blood. Therefore all who have been born into the world have been born into this state of (spiritual) death.

ROMANS 3:23 For all have sinned (all are born in a state of sin, also called spiritual death, and are sinners by nature), and come short of the glory of God (are deprived of God's saving presence)

The Fall, its effects on man and the knowledge of it as vital to our understanding of God's saving work is addressed by D.R.W. Wood:

"THE FALL.

I. The biblical account

The story of the Fall of man, given in Genesis 3, describes how mankind's first parents, when tempted by the serpent, disobeyed God's express command by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The essence of all sin is displayed in this first sin: having been tempted to doubt God's word ('Did God say. . .?'), man is led on to disbelieve it ('You will not die'), and then to disobey it (they 'ate'). Sin is man's rebellion against the authority of God, and pride in his own supposed self-adequacy ('You will be like God'). The consequences of sin are twofold: first, awareness of guilt and immediate separation from God (they 'hid themselves'), with whom hitherto there had been unimpaired daily fellowship; and secondly, the sentence of the curse, decreeing toil, sorrow and death for man himself, and in addition inevitably involving the whole of the created order, of which man is the crown.

II. The effect on man

Man henceforth is a perverted creature. In revolting against the purpose of his being, which is to live and act entirely to the glory of his sovereign and beneficent Creator and to fulfil his will, he ceases to be truly man. His true manhood consists in conformity to the image of God in which he was created. This image of God is manifested in man's original capacity for communion with his Creator; in his enjoyment exclusively of what is good; in his rationality which makes it possible for him alone of all creatures to hear and respond to the Word of God; in his knowledge of the truth and in the freedom which that knowledge ensures; and in government, as the head of God's creation, in obedience to the mandate to have dominion over every living thing and to subdue the earth.

Yet, rebel as he will against the image of God with which he has been stamped, man cannot efface it, because it is part of his very constitution as man. It is evident, for example, in his pursuit of scientific knowledge, in his harnessing of the forces of nature and in his development of culture, art and civilization. But at the same time the efforts of fallen man are cursed with frustration. This frustration

is itself a proof of the perversity of the human heart. Thus history shows that the very discoveries and advances which have promised most good to mankind have through misuse brought great evils in their train. The man who does not love God does not love his fellow men. He is driven by selfish motives. The image of Satan, the great hater of God and man, is superimposed upon him. The result of the Fall is that man now knows good and evil.

“ . . Sin is man’s rebellion against the authority of God, and pride in his own supposed self-adequacy. . . ”

The psychological and ethical effects of the Fall are nowhere more graphically described than by Paul in Romans 1:18ff. All men, however ungodly and unrighteous they may be, know the truth about God and themselves; but they wickedly suppress this truth (v. 18). It is, however, an inescapable truth, for the fact of the ‘eternal power and Godhead’ of the Creator is both manifested within them, by their very constitution as God’s creatures made in his image, and also manifested all around them in the whole created order of the universe which bears eloquent testimony to its origin as God’s handiwork (vv. 19f.; cf. Psalm 19:1ff.). Basically, therefore, man’s state is not one of ignorance but of knowledge. His condemnation is that he loves darkness rather than light. His refusal to glorify God as God and his ingratitude lead him into intellectual vanity and futility. Arrogantly professing himself to be wise, he in fact becomes a fool (Romans 1:21f.). Having willfully cut himself adrift from the Creator in whom alone the meaning of his existence is to be found, he must seek that meaning elsewhere, for his creaturely finitude makes it impossible for him to cease from being a religious creature. And his search becomes ever more foolish and degrading. It carries him into the gross irrationality of superstition and idolatry, into vileness and unnatural vice, and into all those evils, social and international, which give rise to the hatreds and miseries that disfigure our world. The Fall has, in brief, overthrown the true dignity of man (Romans 1:23ff.).

“ . . . Man henceforth is a perverted creature. . . his true manhood consists in conformity to the image of God in which he was created. . . ”

III. The biblical doctrine

It will be seen that the scriptural doctrine of the Fall altogether contradicts the popular modern view of man as a being who, by a slow evolutionary development, has succeeded in rising from the primeval fear and groping ignorance of a humble origin to proud heights of religious sensitivity and insight. The Bible does not portray man as risen, but as fallen, and in the most desperate of situations. It is only against this background that God's saving action in Christ takes on its proper significance. Through the grateful appropriation by faith of Christ's atoning work, what was forfeited by the fall is restored to man: his true and intended dignity is recovered, the purpose of life recaptured, the image of God restored, and the way into the paradise of intimate communion with God reopened.” ⁱⁱ

(underlines added)

EXPULSION FROM THE GARDEN

Through his action of sin, Adam, by obeying the devil, disobeyed God. As a result, the devil became Adam's (and all his descendants') master and spiritual father.

ROMANS 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin (the devil's way), which leads to death, or to obedience (God's way), which leads to righteousness?
(N.I.V.)

God then sent man out of the garden as an act of mercy and judgement.

GENESIS 3:22 *And the Lord God said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil (the Lord knew evil, not by personal experience, but rather through Omniscience; man now knows evil by becoming evil, which is the fountainhead of all sorrow in the world; the pronoun “Us” signifies the Godhead, “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit”: E.S.B.): and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever (the Godhead decided the man must not be allowed to do this):*

GENESIS 3:23 *Therefore the Lord God sent him forth (expelled him) from the Garden of Eden, to till (work) the ground from whence he was (had been) taken.*

GENESIS 3:24 *So He (God) drove out the man (and the woman); and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way (in every direction), to keep (guard) the way of (to) the tree of life. (Revelation 2:7; 22:14)*

Now the Lord thought it immensely important that Adam and Eve should not now take of the Tree of Life and live forever. Knowing that the Lord is good, merciful and holy we can conclude that this meant forever in this state of sin. God sent them out of the Garden of Eden and blocked their return with cherubim and a flaming sword, the purpose of which was to bar their way to the Tree of Life, and also to signify that the way to the Tree of Life was no longer open to man. It stands to reason that if Adam and Eve had eaten of the Tree of Life in their fallen state, they would have remained forever in that state, forever separated from God.

So what was the Tree of Life? Notice that before Adam and Eve sinned, God had not told them not to eat of the Tree of Life (Genesis 2:17). This only became an issue of great importance after they sinned, for it was the combination of sin and eating of the Tree of Life which would bring eternal separation from God.

“. . .It stands to reason that if Adam and Eve had eaten of the Tree of Life in their fallen state, they would have remained forever in that state. . .”

We can find the answer to our question by doing a little “spiritual maths.” In the Book of Exodus, we find God talking to Moses:

EXODUS 33:20 And He (the Lord) said, “You can not see My face: for there shall no man (who remains in a state of sin) see Me, and live (forever with Me).”

Moses asked to see God’s glory, but the Lord hid him in the cleft of a rock and covered Moses with His hand while He passed by. Moses was able to see God’s back, but not His face, not His glory.

Thus it is apparent from this account that no man (and man is inherently sinful) can look upon God’s face and live - for God’s glory (at this level or intensity) cannot be looked upon by the sinner. If this were to happen, the person concerned would be immediately judged and would die. Even Moses who was one of God’s servants would have died physically. And those who are in a state of spiritual death and who come face to face with God after physical death, will be judged in this state and remain forever in it. If people in a state of sin look upon God’s glory with sin in their hearts, there is no longer any way of salvation and they will continue in this state of separation eternally.

“. . .If people in a state of sin look upon God’s glory with sin in their hearts, there is no longer any way of salvation and they will continue in this state of separation eternally. . .”

Now as we turn our attention back to the creation story, we can see that the consequence of eating of the Tree of Life with sin in

one's spirit and looking upon the glory of God with sin in one's spirit will be the same - eternal and irrevocable separation from God. It is thus possible to equate eating of the Tree of Life with looking upon God's glory.

So the particular view of the Genesis story presented in this study is that if man had eaten of the Tree of Life (looked upon God's glory) in his fallen state, man would not only have died physically, he would have remained forever in a state of spiritual death. So God, in His love and mercy, sent man out of the Garden of Eden, for no one with sin reigning in their spirit can look upon the glory of God Almighty and live. And as we have learned, even those who are saved, because they have the nature of death still present in their physical bodies, cannot look upon God's glory. They would die as a result, not spiritually of course, only physically.

SATAN'S SEPARATION FROM GOD

Background Reading: Isaiah 14:12-15

Satan's eternal separation from God can also be viewed in terms of the particular interpretation of the Tree of Life found in the college syllabus. It is able to provide one answer as to why Satan and the fallen angels, unlike man, do not appear to have been given a "second chance." (The Word of God tells us that their destiny is the Lake of Fire and Brimstone: Matthew 25:41.)

Satan, or Lucifer as he was then known, and the third of the angels who followed him in his rebellion, were defeated by the heavenly host and cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-9,4). This would have happened after they had entered the presence of God with sin in their hearts. Isaiah 14:13-14 tells us that Lucifer, the anointed cherub, had desired to overthrow the throne of God, and set himself up in God's place. Possessing spiritual knowledge, Lucifer did this without a tempter and so had his eyes wide open. In this action of supreme arrogance and rebellion, Satan and his angels would have entered heaven with sin in their hearts (having died spiritually) and eaten of the Tree of Life (looked on the face of God). As a result they would have condemned themselves to live in this state of separation from God eternally.

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eaten of the Tree of Life (looked on the
face of God). . . ”***

After Adam and Eve sinned, they could have been in the same position of eternal spiritual death if God had allowed them to stay in the garden to eat of the Tree of Life.

GENESIS 3:22 And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever (separated from God).” (N.I.V.)

Notice, as we have said, that God did not tell Adam not to eat of the Tree of Life in Genesis 2:16-17. This was because, at that time, Adam was still perfect and sinless, so it would not have affected him in any way. It would not have hurt him or caused him any loss to eat of the Tree of Life while he was still a perfect, sinless human being. After the Fall, however, if Adam had eaten of the Tree of Life, he would have become like Satan and his angels, eternally and irrevocably separated from God. The other consequence would have been that Adam and Eve would have died physically, and so ended the human race.

It is interesting to note that after the Fall, man, unlike Satan, was not in total darkness. This was due to the fact that there was still some moral light within man's conscience which could in some way guide him, at least, to the knowledge of right and wrong. Satan, on the other hand, had no conscience and therefore no moral light to guide him. He was and is in total darkness. With the moral light contained in his conscience, man can come to acknowledge that there is a God Who created all that he sees.

We have thus outlined an account of the creation story, majoring on the interpretation of the Tree of Life, and God's commitment to His plan of redemption for fallen mankind. Throughout this story we can see God's mercy and grace to be evident, and we can take encouragement from the fact that our God is faithful and good, and loves us with undying love.

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please visit:

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- i Smith's Bible Dictionary.
- ii Wood D.R.W., New Bible Dictionary, pg.360.