

THE TWO TREES

For reasons which we have been discussing in the previous chapters of this book, God desired to share His own life with man from the very beginning. This is evidenced by the tree of life planted in the midst of the Garden of Eden. But there was also another tree growing there, a very sinister tree—the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9). We have surmised that the first tree was symbolic of God’s life but what about this other one? What does it represent? Why did God allow a tree with such devastating capabilities to grow there, freely available to His new race? Of course, He did give them warning concerning it. His solemn word was spoken clearly so that there could be no chance of a mistake. However, it is equally plain that God was allowing them to make their own decisions concerning their ultimate destiny. In His infinite wisdom He allowed them to have free will. If they were ever going to enter into the marvelous plan for which He had made them, it would be because they willingly chose to do so, not because they were forced into it.

So from the beginning Adam and Eve were presented with a choice. They found themselves between two opposing possibilities. On one hand was the tree of which they could freely eat and on the other the one of which they were commanded not to partake. While it certainly must have been permissible for them not to choose either, these two trees with all that they represented were always before them. Their location, “in the midst of the garden,” must have made them the focal point of attention. Consequently, the decision to eat or to refrain from eating was probably never very far from their thoughts. Interestingly enough, these same two alternatives are available to men today. Christians and non-Christians alike are daily exposed to these two options and all that they entail. Even though there are not two physical trees in front of us, what they represent is abundantly available. Therefore it seems important for us to take some time here and discuss together exactly what these two trees signify.

Since we, just as this first couple are actually confronted daily with this choice, it is essential that we understand what it is. Although Adam and Eve may have been innocent and not fully aware of all that their decision involved, we cannot claim the same excuse. Their own example, combined with all God’s revelation since that time provide us with ample evidence of what God’s way is and also of what these trees produce. Unfortunately, many of God’s children are ignorant of these things. Far too many believers are completely unaware of the significance of these spiritual realities. Thus they easily fall prey to the wiles of the enemy in the same way that Eve was seduced (II Cor 11:3). Truly the scripture says: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Pr 29:18). I am afraid that the way into all that God has for us is strewn with the hurt, wounded and “slain” believers who stumbled into the ditch in the

darkness. Somehow they failed to see in the light of God how to stay on His narrow way and were taken captive by the foe.

We already have discussed what was represented by the tree of life but for many readers some of its consequences may not be immediately clear. As we have been seeing, it is possible to receive into our being the life of Another. Since this Other is supremely superior to ourselves in every way, what does this imply? How will such a thing effect us? To start with it seems logical to suppose that this other Life, being so much greater than our own, will tend to predominate. In fact, it will want to take over. This of course is exactly what God wishes to do. Once His life is within us, He intends to become the boss ("Lord" is the scriptural term). His will is that we increasingly submit every aspect of our living to His authority. We read in the scriptures that in everything He is to have the preeminence (Col 1:18). All of a sudden we find that independence and "doing our own thing" are no longer acceptable. By opening our heart to Him, we have also gotten ourselves into a situation where we are no longer our own.

Unfortunately many people are "brought to Christ" without this most basic understanding. They are told about a Savior but not about a Lord who is to have dominion over them. They are encouraged to accept the benefits which God gives without any warnings about the commitment it involves. Far too many men and women are urged to "come to Jesus" without even a hint that it means such a radical change in the rulership of their lives. However, as we shall be seeing in the remainder of this book, this change is not only available but essential. This Life into which we have been called is not just a Sunday School story. We have become involved with the God of the Universe and then implications of this fact are truly great.

If, then, full submission to this new Life is the central premise of God's tree, what are the consequences of the other? In order to properly understand the answer to this, we first must look at another being who was created before the fall of man. Lucifer, once perhaps the highest, holiest angel is the one of whom we must speak. All that is symbolized in the tree that brings death can be traced to this one being. Consequently, to fully comprehend this tree and its disastrous effects, we must also have a good grasp on who the devil is and how he got to be where he is today.

In the book of Isaiah we discover that this now-fallen angel is referred to as the "son of the morning" (Is 14:12). Such a title probably indicates that he was formed during the earliest stages of God's creative work. Quite possibly, he was the first being ever created. Still another passage teaches that he was "perfect" and beautiful when he was made (Ezek 28:12). It is probable that this angel was the most powerful, supremely attractive creature fashioned by God and that as such he was also second only to God in the chain of command of the universe. Now most of us would probably think that this would be a pretty good position to hold but for him there was one slight irritation. This lofty place, in the very presence of the Almighty, brought with it one requirement. He had to be in every detail completely submitted to God.

THE SIN OF LUCIFER

One day Lucifer began to notice his own beauty. No doubt the other angels really admired him too. He fully realized that his power and intelligence were unparalleled among them. Concerning his many abilities he knew no one greater, outside of God Himself. His desire to really magnify himself and fully exhibit his grandeur slowly began to grow. As time went by, the constraint of being completely obedient to the Father and using his energy to serve only Him began to wear on his

nerves. Here there was just no room for self-expression. All his many talents and tremendous creativity were being wasted by just being a servant. How could he really gain the full appreciation of the others, which he so rightly deserved, under such terrible bondage?

So as we all know, with some such thoughts flowing through his mind, the creature we today refer to as Satan fell into sin. I believe that it should be quite enlightening for us to understand how this happened. Lucifer did not begin by committing adultery with his secretary. He did not initially kill someone or rob an old lady down the street. No, none of these things which seem “so bad” to us initiated his demise. Instead his first sinful act was something which to many people seems quite natural. He made a decision—a decision to become independent. He said: “I will ascend” . . . “I will exalt my throne” . . . “I will be like the Most High” (Is 14: 13,14). Here he cast off all restraint and began to assert his own will, rebelling against God Almighty. This was his premier sin. He left his position of total dependence upon and submission to God and began to exercise his own will in pursuit of his own pleasure. Of course pride was very much a part of this. Lying, spiritual adultery, theft and murder all followed close behind. In fact, all that is contrary to the righteousness of God became his in this single act—re-bellion against the one true authority.

With all this in mind, we can now begin to examine the second tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Evidently when Adam and Eve were created, they were lacking something. They did not possess the ability to discern between good and evil. This then placed them in a position where they had to depend upon God. As we have previously discussed, in many respects they were made like their Creator, but in this one area of making moral decisions they were forced to rely upon His guidance and direction. However, there was a knowledge-imparting tree not too far away. There was another “source,” another “way,” operating in the universe and it was available to them. Although it had been forbidden, it had its representation in the Garden of Eden. By tasting of this tree, the first men could gain something which they did not have—independence. One bite of this fruit and they no longer needed to be in a subservient, dependent position. They could be as God.

THREE SIMPLE LURES

This then is exactly the temptation which deceived Eve and then corrupted Adam. When the serpent came to lure them into his web, he did so with great subtlety. There can be no question that he fully understood the consequences of eating the wrong tree. Evidently he had already been in the business of inducing other beings to follow him in his rebellion and so had plenty of experience. As he spoke to Eve he appealed to three elements of weakness which are still prevalent in the human race today. Somehow, he revealed to her three things: number one, this tree is delicious (the lust of the flesh); number two, it is extremely attractive to look at (the lust of the eyes); and the clincher—number three, just one taste of it will make you wise enough so that you can be independent from God (the pride of life) (I Jn 2:16). Just one little bite would end all this uncomfortable submission to Another and provide her with what she needed to run her own life.

Interestingly, it is these same three attractions that he used to tempt our Lord in the wilderness. No new tactics were used here. First, since Jesus was hungry, the devil tried to get Him to satisfy His own needs by turning stones into bread. (Please remember that it was the Holy Spirit who had driven Him here and therefore it was the

Father who was responsible for His welfare.) Next, he works on His eyes by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory in a moment of time. Riches, honor and earthly power are freely available to anyone who will really assert themselves and go after it. Many people in the world today and even in the Church are discovering the power of self-assertion. Of course if this is your inclination falling down to worship God's enemy is also helpful. However, I'm confident that he will allow any Christians who are interested to skip this formality (at least outwardly). If they will only use their energies to promote themselves and thereby build up the devil's dark, self-centered kingdom that will certainly suffice.

Lastly, Satan appealed to ego. He said something like: "If you are really someone great as you claim to be, prove it by making a big scene requiring angelic intervention. Show everyone who you really are. Display yourself fully so that we can all admire you. Never mind this dependence on God business, if you are really the Son of God (a King's kid?) you must have some of your own authority. Do something really extraordinary to assert your independence and establish your own personhood" (Lk 4:9-12). How thankful we should be that Jesus had the strength to withstand this temptation. He was one who was truly submitted to the Father. Every aspect of His life was lived in subjection to the Father's will. The life that He lived, the works which He accomplished and even the words which He spoke were all in perfect harmony with the directions from Above (Jn 14:10). He came to this earth not to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him (Jn 6:38).

Unfortunately Adam and Eve did not possess the same strength of character. Their innocence was not equal to Christ's holiness and so proved to be no match for the enemy. When confronted with the prospect of becoming their own masters they jumped at the opportunity. Apparently it did not take long years of wooing by the serpent to convince Eve. One short session on self-expression was all that was necessary to persuade her to violate God's clear commandment and turn her back on Him. She saw before her, easily within her grasp, the possibility of becoming "complete," independent and self-reliant. Little did she realize what other "benefits" also came in the same package. God, with good reason, had warned them not to partake.

At the moment in which Lucifer decided to assert himself, darkness plunged in upon him. By setting himself in opposition to God, his nature was changed to be everything the Almighty was not. God's gracious character, His truth, justice, mercy, righteousness, love, beauty, majesty, etc. had to be withstood in a being who was in rebellion against Him. So Satan's character became the antithesis of all these things. Cruelty, hatred, violence, lying, deception, vanity and far more became the hallmarks of his kingdom. This one decision to disobey changed forever his nature from the glory and beauty with which he was created to one full of darkness and sin.

Sadly, our first forefathers entered into a similar experience. Their one decision to rebel also cost them dearly. Many people do not realize the extent to which these first two fell. Some, while admitting that people today do sin once in a while feel that man is basically good. Actually the problem is far deeper than that. At the bottom of it lies not what we do but what we are. When Adam and Eve partook of this fruit their very natures were changed. They were no longer innocent. The devil's prediction had come true. They no longer needed to depend upon God for instruction concerning moral issues. They had become independent—their own masters. Consequently, they too plunged into darkness and corruption.

THE KNOWLEDGE TREE

I believe it is important for us here to take some time and analyze the tree from which this tremendous deception came. First we might notice that it is a tree of both good and evil. Most people probably imagine that it is a tree of evil only and the other tree, the tree of life, must be the tree of good. However, such is not the case. Here we see that the knowledge of good is also on the tree of which God commanded the first men not to eat. To partake of it is sin. How can we understand such a thing?

To begin we must understand that the tree which causes death is principally a tree of knowledge. This is not simply a tree of "good and evil" but also a tree which imparts knowledge to those who taste it. Its fruit has the effect of conferring the ability to distinguish between what was right and what was wrong. Those who partake of it can know for themselves the difference between good and evil. This "knowledge" enables the possessors thereof to be their own masters. They can then determine their own course in life. It is precisely here that Adam and Eve gained their independence. With this wisdom and discernment, they could analyze their situations and predicaments, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the available options and make a decision. Well, you might ask, what is wrong with that? The problem is just what we saw in the beginning of this chapter. All this can be accomplished in complete independence from God. Such decisions can be taken without submission to and reliance upon the Most High.

When we act in this way, we are being our own gods. We are taking the course of our lives in our own hands. We are acting according to our own wisdom and understanding. This of course is only natural. Everyone does it. In fact, since the fall of Adam and Eve, this is way in which all mere worldlings conduct their lives. But God is looking for those who will return to His original intention. He is searching for those who will not "lean on their own understanding" (Pr 3:5). His desire is for those who will be guided, not through their own intelligence and wisdom, not through their own ability to decide for themselves, but through their communion with Himself.

Adam and Eve were intended to become, as Jesus was, a living expression of the Father. This goal was to be accomplished through communion with and submission to the Father. Eating of the tree of life would have brought His life right inside of them. Thusly the manifestation of God in their lives would be the result of their intimate relationship with Him. By living in fellowship with the Father, all His thoughts, attitudes and character could be infused into them. This relationship of dependence would cause them to then express His godliness to the universe. It would be a kind of "imputed" righteousness which was exhibited through them but did not initiate in them. Instead of this glorious possibility however, they acquired a kind of knowledge which enabled them to exist without God, simultaneously receiving all that this entailed.

Although the independent way is open still to any who choose it, believers in Jesus are called to partake of another tree. They are called to enter into a relationship with their king who will guide them. In fact, He will enter into them and lead them from the inside. He will provide them with a wisdom which does not originate on this earth. He may lead them to do things which from a human point of view are foolish. He will cause them to live in a way which makes tremendous sense from an eternal point of view but may seem ridiculous to those who guide their own paths according to this world's views. You see, the wisdom of this world, provided by the death tree, is foolishness to God (I Cor 3:19). It may seem perfectly logical, but it does not take into account the Divine point of view. Peter, using his own intellect and wisdom urged Jesus not to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross (Mt 16:21-23). How natural, and right from a

human perspective this seems! Yet from an heavenly view it was the work and wisdom of Satan.

Can you see how dangerous human wisdom is? Can you grasp how rebellious our own use of the knowledge which we gain can be? Eve and Adam did not. To them it seemed good and desirable. It appeared liberating. It provided them with a means to be independent and self-sufficient. How does it appear to you today? Are you drawn by the thought of being something and somebody? Or are you attracted to the thought of complete dependence upon Another.

HOW WE USE GOD'S WORD

While we are discussing the knowledge of good and evil, the ability to know right and wrong, we must also touch upon the use of the scriptures. The Bible was given to us by God. Every word was breathed from His mouth (II Tim 3:16). It is profitable for correction, reproof and training in righteousness. We cannot, and in fact we would never wish to dispute this fact. However, it is also true that the scriptures can be used wrongly. For example, Satan in his temptation of Jesus quoted the word of God. Many, many people down through the centuries, including some people of God, have used and twisted the scriptures to their own destruction (II Pet 3:16). The pharisees are a good example of this fallacy. They knew from God's text exactly where the Messiah was to be born, yet they did not go to worship Him. They understood that the price of blood could not be accepted for an offering when Judas returned his money (Mt 27:6). Yet they were the ones who paid it! They daily searched the scriptures (Jn 5:39) to know what was right and what was wrong, yet they would not come and submit themselves to Jesus.

How easy it is to eat of the wrong tree. It is all too possible to use even the Bible to discover what is right and what is wrong; what is good and what is evil and then use this knowledge to run our own lives. The hypocrites of Jesus' day are not unique. Today also we encounter many who use the scriptures frequently, yet they are not really submitted to God. Once we discover for ourselves the correct and the incorrect way, we are then empowered by this knowledge to act in an independent manner. We can run our own life according to "scriptural" principles. We can know good and evil for ourselves and make our own decisions accordingly. This kind of activity is not only possible, it is common. Many Christians imagine that they can pattern their life according to biblical laws or New Testament principles and thus be pleasing to God. They dutifully study the scriptures, discover what is right and wrong, good and evil and try to live by this knowledge. In this way we fulfill the scripture "going about to establish their (our) own righteousness, they (we) did not submit to the righteousness of God" (Rm 10:3).

Hopefully, from the foregoing discussion you can begin to see the error of this strategy. The question here is not "right and wrong." They are both on the same tree—the one that causes death. Instead the question is to learn to live in communion with and dependence upon God. He is the one who is to lead us. He is the one to solve our moral dilemmas. He is the one who will give us understanding of how and what we should do. A true intimate walk with God entails a great degree of childlike innocence, not knowing so much how to deal with life and all its problems but trusting moment by moment in the Father. Certainly the Bible is one of the chief vehicles through which God will communicate His will to us. Our concern is that we should be daily becoming more dependent upon Him and less self-sufficient.

Did you know that the Bible can cause spiritual death? In its pages it says exactly that! Paul teaches us that the “letter” of the Bible kills (II Cor 3:6). This means that it is possible to use the scriptures in a wrong way which ministers spiritual death. If we take Bible knowledge into our own hands and act with it independently from God, we become ministers of death and bondage. Like Eve we can eat from the death tree and share its fruit with others. We can become people full of knowledge, knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, knowledge of what we should and shouldn't do, knowledge of what is “scriptural” and what is in error. Then armed with this knowledge we may go about to lay this information on others, expecting them to begin to act as we do. This is the ministry of death.

THE MINISTRY OF DEATH

I believe that you can confirm this from your own experience. Have you ever met Christians who thought they knew it all? They were more right than anyone else about almost everything. From the pages of God's book they had synthesized a whole scheme of doctrine to govern their (and others') behavior. While there may be little of their teaching which seems in error there is a “flavor” about the whole experience which does not seem right. The sweetness of Christ is missing. The attitudes and character of Jesus is not dominating. Instead what is conveyed is a sense of demand, conformity and self-effort to try to reach some standard. This is the ministry of death. It is eating from the tree of right and wrong; good and evil. It is using the word of God, yet not being truly submitted to Him. Obedience to the demands of the law is not the same thing as intimate communion with our Lord. Under the New Covenant, lack of intimacy with God is really rebellion against Him.

The Apostle Paul explains that it is the Spirit that gives life. The same biblical words which could cause death ministered by the natural man, when used while operating under the authority and control of the Holy Spirit, give life. Paul said he was a minister of life (II Cor 3:6). His use of the Holy Scriptures was not something derived from his own intelligence. It did not come from study and memorization. Although I am confident that he meditated daily in the scripture, he knew how to submit himself to God. He understood that he was not qualified to act independently, interpreting and expounding the things of Christ by himself. He knew how to be a vessel under the control of Jesus. He knew how to eat of the tree of life. Those who understand this secret convey a different impression. This fruit also has a distinctive flavor. Underlying the personality of those walking in life is the unmistakable sense of the divine. There is something about them which conveys the sweetness of the One whom we love.

THE LAST MINUTE

Perhaps the foregoing understanding of God's can help us understand why so many times we must wait until the last minute for Supernatural deliverance. How many times have we cried out to God, waited and waited and then taken matters into our own hands just like King Saul in the Old Testament? We must learn to be dependent completely upon God. Time and again He will test us to help us see how we still rely upon our own strength. As we have seen, this subject is very close to His heart. It is at the center of His will concerning man. True Christianity is a life lived in complete dependence upon the Father. This requires a daily, close relationship with Him. Without this, the only choice is to eat of the forbidden tree and with the help of its fruit steer our

own course.

How we need to cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus. Only in this way will we be partaking daily of His life. It is this life which will fill us and guide us throughout the day. And it is this life which will pour out of us to others in a truly spiritual ministry. Jesus is the fountain of life. He explains that if we come to Him, He will be in us a fountain of life (Jn 7:38. 39), bubbling up, spilling over and transmitting this life to others all around. In relationship to spiritual things there are two kinds of "knowledge." One could be called a knowledge about God. The other is the knowledge of God. The first comes from mental study of available information, the second from intimacy with Him. These, dear friends, are the two trees. They are both available today. Which of them are you choosing?