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How Can A Tree of Knowledge Be Bad?

Dr. T. D. Worthington

What could possibly be wrong with having a knowledge of good? I understand this tree was coupled with the knowledge of evil, but even God acknowledged that in eating of this tree Adam and Eve would have a knowledge more like His own. Wouldn't this be an ideal tree to eat from? Is it wrong to have knowledge, especially if that knowledge is of good? Did God's instruction to Adam and Eve signify He wanted them to remain ignorant?

In an attempt to flatter king David, the woman of Tekoa would praise him for being able to discern good and bad (***II Samuel 14:17***). Likewise, when the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream asking, "*what should I give you,*" the new king requests the ability to discern between good and bad (***I Kings 3:5-9***). Wasn't this a good thing?

Let's Look At The Story.

Before his sin, man lived in a world in which everything was distinguished by two concepts, that which was true and that which was false. After the fall, the concepts of good and evil becomes the defining characteristic of man's world. Good and evil are subjective and relative concepts, while "*truth and falsehood*" are not. Something can be good for me while being bad for you, something can be both good and bad for me, but nothing can be both true and false at the same time. Sometimes I may tell a "*white-lie*" to avoid hurting someone's feelings, but I still know it is a lie. Before sin, the world was one of true and false, and after the sin it became a world of good and evil.

Before Adam sinned, he was entirely free to choose the path he wished to

follow, whether to obey or disobey God. In his pre-fallen state, he was not prompted by evil influences within himself. He was pure and holy in all things, entirely good, without the interference of any internal evil inclination. He had no old nature to battle as you and I do.

But, the powers of evil stood close by, yet apart from him. Therefore, when Satan wished to cause man to sin, the serpent had to come from outside to tempt him. This is no longer the way things work. Although temptation can come from without, often the temptation to sin comes from within, from the old nature. Man, can easily be drawn towards evil behavior with little or no outside influence. Now, the forces of good and evil are combined within a man. Now, good and evil are often mingled together

and the battle is within, not just without. So, man has a hard time distinguishing good and evil, right and wrong, true and false.

Isn't Good, Good?

After the Creation, God proclaimed everything to be **“very good.”** So, isn't good, a good thing? In fact, on the third day of Creation **“good”** is used to indicate the nature of all the fruit trees. **“Evil”** is a word that appeared later. To know good is to know pleasure, and evil is presented as simply its opposite, like something not good. Eve already had a knowledge of what was good, for she had been eating of the delightful fruits of the Garden. She had no knowledge of its opposite. She didn't know what could happen in a world of evil and decay.

What was the attraction of knowing something other than perfection? Eve saw that the fruit was good-to-eat and beautiful, but so was the fruit from the other trees. The additional element was that this tree suggested the gift of knowledge, and the serpent came to point this out. Most members of the animal kingdom are instinctively curious and man shares this trait. Humans seek that greater and deeper knowledge through moving into all realms of experience. Man climbs high mountains, dives deep into the sea, and seeks to explore the darkness of outer space to satisfy his natural curiosity and quest for knowledge.

God programmed man to be curious, but man must learn to discipline his natural human urges, such as hunger, passion, and curiosity. Furthermore, humans can achieve a higher level of knowledge which does not depend on mere natural curiosity. You see, man is also programmed with a curiosity

for the spiritual world. Although this can be perverted, when used properly it gives us a hunger to know God. Perhaps Eve was seeking this greater level of knowledge, however she wanted a quick and effortless way to achieve it.

Why Was This Tree Evil?

Actually, it wasn't. There was not any poisonous or malignant power in the tree. No horrendous physical side effects were felt when the fruit was digested. As with all food, the natural effect is on the body. Until Adam ate from this tree, it was known simply as a **“tree”** just like all the other trees. However, once he ate from it, and transgressed the command of God, it was called **“the tree of knowledge of good and evil”**, because of its ultimate status. Many things are identified by their final status. What makes us think that this tree did not have its dubious title from the beginning? First, from Eve's reply to the serpent. She said to him: **“But, of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, You shall not eat of it...”** (Genesis 3:3) She did not say:

“From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Furthermore, when God asked Adam why he was hiding, He said: **“Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?”** (Genesis 3:11) He did not say: **“... of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”**

Apparently, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not receive its title because of its inherent nature. It could not have been an evil tree from its creation, or God would have been the Creator of evil. Its name arises from its final status, from its outcome, because ultimately it brings about something that is both good and evil. Just as I was Angie's boyfriend in high school, my final state is Sherry's husband and that is the title by which I am identified.

And why is it **“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?”** Because, by eating of it, man gained an experimental awareness of evil. Evil became internalized. Until he transgressed God's command he never knew the consequences of evil, but once he disobeyed, his life was drastically affected by his decision.





Adam and Eve already knew, *intellectually*, the difference between good and evil because of God's command not to eat of the tree's fruit. However, when they chose to disobey, they knew evil *experientially* because they had sinned against God. At that point, they also had a personal acquaintance with good and evil which they did not have in the state of innocence. They became "*like God*" in that they now intellectually understood what evil was really like.

By the fall man had sunk morally, but grown mentally. All those qualities which constitute man's likeness to God - free-will, self-dependence, the exercise of reason and of choice - had been developed by the fall, and Adam was now a very different being from what he had been in the days of innocence. Adam and Eve wanted more knowledge and more experience, and they got it, to their own detriment. Knowing good and evil was not a positive thing for Adam and Eve; because they attained that knowledge in an unlawful way. They learned immediately to feel the guilt that would be produced; and

became aware, in their own person and to their own condemnation, of good and evil, as distinct and opposite qualities.

So the tree was a tree like any other, only acquiring the title "*tree of knowledge of good and evil*" once Adam sinned and gained the promised knowledge of evil. The evil effect of the tree resided in the conduct of man in regard to the tree, as a thing prohibited, not within the tree itself.

Now man gained a new awareness that good and evil would now co-exist along with true and false. It is the serpent who says: "***For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.***" (*Genesis 3:5*) In other words, we see a clear transition from the world Adam knew before.

What Did The Name Really Mean?

Again, we ask the question, why wouldn't God want them to know all about good and evil? Wouldn't you

like to have that knowledge today, to always know what was good? The first problem is that this indicates an experimental knowledge of evil, not just an intellectual knowledge. Secondly, it implies a broader knowledge than man was equipped to handle.

Have you ever heard of a "*merism*?" The Bible is filled with merisms. A merism is an expression of totality, defined by the example of a polarity. In other words, by the mention of two extreme opposites, you imply the spanning of all things in between. The Bible says that if I ascend to heaven God is there, if I descend to hell, God is there also. Does that mean that God is only at these two extremes? No, He is everywhere, and that is the point. Another merism we often use might be "*I have searched high and low.*" People know this doesn't refer to the altitude of your search, but that you have simply looked everywhere you know to look.

Then "*good and evil*" is actually a very common merism. It means "*anything in between the two extremes.*" The knowledge of good and evil is a way of saying "*I want to experience knowledge of everything and then judge for myself if it is good or evil.*" However, there are things God does not want us to know, simply because we can't handle the information. If you read the story, you see that is what Satan says. He says, "*God knows you will become like gods knowing everything. That is what He is trying to keep from you. Don't you want to know everything?*" Knowing everything sounds interesting. And apparently, that's exactly what happened. After the fall, God says: "***Behold, the man***

is become as one of us, to know good and evil...” (Genesis 3:22)

God was simply saying that man had acquired a level of knowledge that he cannot morally or mentally handle. Does that mean they knew everything? Of course not, but the idea is that we now have more knowledge than wisdom. A similar point is emphasized in the story of the tower of Babel (*Genesis 11:6*).

So because of the fall, humans have enormous knowledge of how to do bad things as well as how to do good things. The same human being that knows how to use atomic energy for good makes weapons out of it that can destroy mankind. Americans outlawed alcoholic drink during prohibition while other Americans were exploiting the law to keep it flowing. Human beings, unlike cockroaches, have enormous capacity for choices; taking skills that they could use and should use for good and employing them for evil. We are in a lot of trouble today because we are so good at doing bad.

However, since we don't like to be called bad, we had to eliminate God from our culture and define our own standard of morality. In other words, when man abandons God, he becomes his own judge of what is true and righteous. Man recognizes no higher authority than himself, so man becomes his own god. Trouble is, the god called me, and the god called you, may not always agree. So, we have a quest for power to determine who is right. This is not a quest for truth, since that is not what we want, it only a quest for power. Because the one who has power and influence, in a world without God, defines what is right and what is true.



So, What Have We Learned?

First, we learned that man is now internally ruled by the subjective and relative concepts of good and evil, more than we are by truth and error.

Second, we learned that man has more knowledge than he can responsibly handle. This, coupled with his human curiosity, leads man into constant missteps and blunders. Since man does not have sufficient wisdom to discern good and evil, God has given us His Word and the Holy Spirit to lead us. However, these assets are often ignored.

Third, since man doesn't like his deeds to be judged as untrue or evil, he eliminated God from the equation so he could determine for himself what is good or evil, truth or error.

Fourth, man makes this determination based on power and influence rather than truth. The abortion industry proves this with horrifying clarity.

Finally, when we try to run the world our way, our perverted mentality shows up all too clearly. Every tyrant,

every anarchist, started off by thinking they had the right answers and knew how the world ought to be.

That's why, when the New Testament talks of Jesus' death and what it accomplished, it doesn't just talk about dealing with sin. It talks about God overthrowing the dark powers that have taken over the minds of men.

The powers that have kept humans locked up in their foolish thinking have been overthrown. Now our minds can be renewed through Christ (*Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23*). As God's children we are free to resume our vocation. We are called to be clear headed thinkers, image-bearers, a "royal priesthood", and His agents in the world. Our curiosity and quest for knowledge can now be fulfilled in seeking the knowledge of God, the greatest knowledge of all.

I still have the knowledge of good and evil, that was not taken away. But today, through Christ, I can use that knowledge in a positive way because I can have His mind to judge all things (*I Corinthians 2:15-16*). I must use that resource. Many Christian's today are making foolish choices because they are not using the assets made available to them through Christ. Isn't it interesting that our Lord commanded us to be as "...wise as serpents..."? (*Matthew 10:16*) Eve was not, we must be. We have the wisdom we need to conduct ourselves in this evil world. It has been provided for us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.



Dr. Worthington has been in the ministry over forty years and serves as President of Pathway Ministries.

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A Season of Change

Saying goodbye to good friends is never easy to do, especially when they have been a vital part of your life and you know they will leave a void difficult to fill. Allen Garrett first entered radio broadcasting in the Fall of 1984 after finishing up 3 summers of acting in the outdoor drama “The Lost Colony” on the outer banks of North Carolina, where he met his wife Denise. When **GoMix Christian Radio** expanded its reach to northern North Carolina and southern Virginia in 2008 with the acquisition of **WZRU, 90.1 FM**, in Garysburg, Allen came on board and has been at

home with his family of Christian Broadcasters ever since.

Now, a new season begins for Allen and his family as he is leaving the ministry of **GoMix** to work in the Roanoke Valley where he and his family have lived since 1988.

When asked, Allen said, “*GoMix Christian Radio was the most sincere form of Broadcast radio I’ve ever known. I think that’s because it’s a true ministry, and our listeners know it and they have supported us since the very beginning. I may not be on the air everyday anymore, but I know I can always come home!*”

Although Allen has mostly been known by our listeners as an on-air talent, he has also been an essential part of the daily operations at **GoMix**. Wearing numerous hats as most of our

staff do, Allen has been involved with music scheduling and business underwriting, as well as the occasional cleaning and secretarial work...and let’s not forget his stories! Like a modern-day Paul Harvey, Allen’s always been prepared to entertain with a story!

Brother Allen, you will be greatly missed. We pray this new adventure for you and your family will be blessed and that the Lord will continue to use you for His Glory.

Your GoMix Family



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Over-Commercialized Love

Love is in the air! That's generally the theme around Valentine's Day. Almost before Christmas was even over, heart-shaped boxes of chocolates, teddy bears, cards with poems of love, and other gift suggestions began to line the shelves at stores all around the globe. According to the National Retail Federation, apparently 2019 was a record-breaking year with Valentine's Day sales hitting a high of \$20.7 billion dollars! It was also said that only about 51% of the population planned to celebrate, which means those of us that did celebrate spent on average approximately \$162.00 on the special day.

Many say holidays like Valentine's Day are over-commercialized. It's often argued that you shouldn't need a special day to tell you to make a gesture of love to someone. Although Valentine's Day is a good day to do something special for someone you love, it's true we shouldn't wait for a holiday or other special occasion to have a reason to do it.

What about the love we show to the Lord? Are we spontaneous in our love affair with Him, or do we wait

for some commercialized day or season to express to Him our love and gratitude? The Christmas season ended not too long ago. It's a known fact that many are more charitable to ministries during the "giving" season. During this time of year we are often kinder to others, giving gifts and cards, often inscribed with Scripture, to friends and neighbors. Church donations usually tend to rise around Christmas and other "religious" days like Easter as well. But why? Why do we wait for such appointed days to show our love to Him and the love He has given us to others?

Although the time has passed for New Year's Resolutions, maybe the time is just right to consider your affections towards the Lord and make a renewed commitment to your relationship with Him.

"Hearin is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

I John 4:10



What is the hardest thing in the world? It depends on who you ask. A four-year-old might say learning to read. Some of my students say they would like to be in the kindergarten class again. I remind them they would have to start over and come right back to where they are now. This usually happens when they get to fractions. The most appealing thing about kindergarten to me is the carefree world most of the children live in. Of course, their little problems seem very big to them. That is why teaching them to handle difficulties at a young age is so important. Problems get bigger and more complicated.

Some students say that algebra is the most difficult thing they have experienced, but I think it is their interpersonal relationships. I

observe them and the drama that goes on in their lives. I have read about the difficulties teenagers and even younger children are experiencing through social media. The cyberbullying is rampant and innocence is lost at such a young age. As parents, we need to supervise their internet usage and limit their time on the web. Teaching children to say no and learning to stand alone is also important. Believe me, it is a hard lesson to learn. Most adults have not mastered it.

Losing a loved one is a valley we also go through. It is one of the most difficult things to experience. My father passed away last year, and I loved him very much. I did not want him to suffer, but I did not want to let him go. My mom and dad had been married for 61 years,

so this was the most difficult thing my mom has ever experienced. I would not bring him back, because I know he is in Heaven with Jesus. I still miss him, though. I cannot imagine going through the death of a loved one without Jesus.

There are so many difficult things people go through. The experiences of our lives determine our perspective on difficulty. I never had to experience abuse from my parents, so my childhood was relatively carefree. I had normal ups and downs that I thought were quite serious at the time. But now that I am an adult and hear other people's stories, I know I had it good. Isn't it interesting how we think we have it so bad until we meet someone with much bigger problems?

Being a good Christian is hard! As a Christian, we are supposed to exhibit many attributes. We are to be like Christ. **Galatians 5:22-24** states, *“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”* These characteristics should be apparent in every Christian, but sadly they are not. We all have the capability, but we fail miserably.

Yes, it is very hard to live the Christian life. No, it is impossible. Well, it is impossible to do it in our own power. We are expected to let Christ live through us. We are going to mess up, but being like Christ is the goal. Yes, it is hard to be joyful all the time. It is hard for our faith not to falter. But according to **I Corinthians 13**, love is the most important, and I submit, it is the most difficult.

For us to love others the way God loves us, unconditionally, we must always put the needs of others ahead of our own. Do we realize what true love really means? I am not sure we do.

Love grows as we grow in our Christian walk. When we love someone, we want what is best for them. Many people define love in the way they feel when they are with that special someone. If the person makes them feel good, and they enjoy being around them, they love them. But what happens when that person is not so lovable, they want out of the relationship, or they get mad? Many arguments or fights stem from someone not bowing to

another person’s image. That is not God’s kind of love.

As parents, grandparents, and as children, we are tested in the attributes of love. Love is patient. How hard is it to be patient? Whether we are helping our children with their homework, raising teenagers, or helping an elderly parent, it requires patience. Being patient on the outside is hard enough, but true love is patient on the inside. If not, it will eventually exhibit in our actions.



Love is kind and envieth not. It is not proud nor does it behave itself unseemly. Love seeketh not her own - wants what is best for others. It is not easily angered. Love thinketh no evil - it always thinks the best of others. It is not happy when others fail, and it rejoices in the truth - it doesn’t lie. Love never fails. Wow! When we read all of these attributes of love, we must realize how often we fall short. We don’t love our close family members as we should, let alone a lost and dying world.

I think we could sum it up in one sentence. We need to love others more than ourselves. If we truly die to self,

we will make the difficult choices. We will be patient when we are tired. We will tell the truth even when it hurts. We will swallow our pride and ask for forgiveness when we wrong others. We will say “no” when it is in the person’s best interest. We will be kind in our words and our actions. When correction is necessary, we will discipline the action - not attack the person.

Will we always have all of the attributes of unconditional love? Not hardly! However, it should be our goal. We need to be reminded that God has all of these attributes when He deals with us. He has unconditional love. If not, He would have destroyed mankind a long time ago. Instead, He gave us the way to get to Heaven. He sent His only Son to die on a cross so we might be saved from Hell. He died so we might have abundant life. He is with us daily so we might experience some Heaven on earth.

We talked about hard times earlier. He is with us through those, too. God loves us so much that He never deserts us. It is up to us how much love we allow in. When we put God into a closet in our hearts, we cannot experience all of the love God has to offer us. I must give Him all of me and so should you.

We already have God’s unconditional love before we even get saved. He sent His Son for everyone. As in any gift, we cannot experience the benefits until we accept the gift. If you don’t know Christ, won’t you accept Him today?



Mrs. Worthington has five children and eleven grandchildren. She serves as Principal of Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.



Rev. Michael Williams

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Psalm 103:1-5

To paraphrase the above passage, *“O my soul, bless God. From head to toe, bless His holy name! O my soul, bless God and don’t forget a single blessing! He forgives your sins, every one! He heals your diseases, every one. He redeems you from hell, saves your life! He crowns you with love and mercy,*

a paradise crown. He wraps you in goodness, beauty eternal. He renews your youth. You’re always young in His presence.”

What a wonderful psalm of David! David expresses his desire to bless and praise God for all He does in his life! David recognizes God’s provision in all areas of his life and desires to lift up his thankfulness to God. What an example for Christians today!

Christians, take a moment to think about your life today. First and most importantly, if you are a Christian, bless and praise the Lord for His mercy and grace! When you awakened today, you had an opportunity for a brand new start at life. Bless and praise God for this opportunity! If you awakened to the

security of your home, had clothes to wear, and food to eat, bless and praise God! If you are reading this message, you obviously have eyesight and knowledge to read. Bless and praise God!

If we honestly access our blessings from the Lord, the list can become endless. The point of this is to remember our blessings come from our Heavenly Father who deserves our endless praise. ***Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name!***



Rev. Michael Williams has been in the ministry for twenty years. He currently serves as Youth Pastor at Praise Sanctuary in Princeton, NC.



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And Finally...



Boy Scout Day...

Looking back on my time as a Boy Scout, I am thankful for the confidence it gave me. I know I can handle a gun, shoot an arrow, build a fire, paddle a canoe, build a shelter; use a knife, save a life, and about a million other skills. No, I don't get to show off my sweet whittling skills every day, but the subconscious memory of those capabilities has a way of putting everyday challenges into perspective. The experience I had learning and doing those things and learning to master them has given me the ability to continue to enjoy all the same activities to this day. Whether I'm rafting on the weekend or going kayak camping or spear fishing, an entire world of outdoor recreation is now easily accessible thanks to the skills, confidence, and experience Scouts gave me.

W. S.

When I was younger, my father departed for deployment in Hawaii, and my mother signed me up for the Royal Rangers, the Christian version of Boy Scouts. I started out as a Straight Arrow at the age of six and grew up to become a Buckaroo, Pioneer, Trailblazer, and finally an Air Ranger. It was a great time of camping and praising God. During one of our campfire chapel services, we had a group to perform a skit. It was at that time that I gave my life to Christ, and now I will be doing whatever He wants me to do and going wherever He sends me.

J. K.

I enjoyed the things I learned during my time as a boy scout. Spending time on an adventure in the woods was always exciting to me as a boy. One of the coolest things

I think I learned from scouting was pioneering. If we had spare time on a camp-out, we'd head into a wooded area looking for long straight pieces of wood that hadn't begun to rot yet. Then we'd get our hands on some twine or other rope and we'd try to decide what to build. The Handbook and Field Guide both had fun ideas for things to build. I can remember building a couple different kinds of bridges, a Chippewa kitchen, and a tower. We built a raft at one point, but it didn't support much weight. Another really cool thing was wilderness survival. I learned at least five ways to start a fire and at least four techniques for building one. I can navigate without a compass, tell time without a watch, and figure out lengths without a ruler. I'm so very thankful for the mentors I had to teach me all these skills.

Z. A.

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