

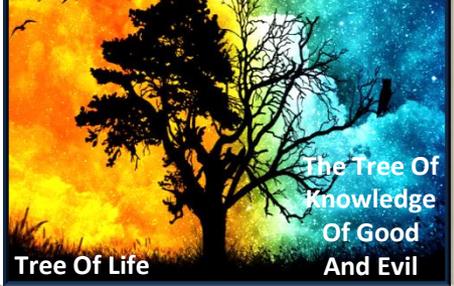
In 2 Timothy 3:1-4, Paul writes of a sign in the last days: **"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."** Again, since human beings have always been all of these things, we must assume that these traits will occur at an unprecedented level—more brutal, more heartless, and more greedy and proud than ever. The fall from God-inspired morality to relativity is a mark of the postmodern age. Ours is a society that has become suspicious of anything labeled "truth," and this may very well be the beginning of this sign. Moral relativism allows for the creation of personal codes of morality, of personal interpretations of truth—everything is up to the individual. **"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them."** (Romans 1:26-32)

**"Do Not Despair!"**



The good news is that, in spite of the wickedness which fills the world, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue saving sinners! Yes, evil is powerful, but Jesus is more powerful! Yes, Satan prowls about like a roaring lion, but Jesus is the great lion slayer. Jesus encouraged Peter that the church would not be overcome, and would even stand against **"hell shall not**

**prevail against it"**. (Matthew 16:18) In His great love, God provided One Who would redeem fallen mankind. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world, but through another Man, Jesus Christ, redemption through the forgiveness of sin is available to all (Romans 5:17). Those who avail themselves of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross will be resurrected to see the Tree Of Life again, for it stands in the middle of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, where it bears **"Twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations"** (Revelation 22:2). In the eternal state, the curse will be no more and access to the tree of life will be reinstated, and Eden will be restored.



(Genesis 2:16-17) And the LORD God commanded the man, **"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."** God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden to give Adam and Eve a choice to obey Him or disobey

Him. Adam and Eve were free to do anything they wanted, except eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:16-17, **"And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"** If God had not given Adam and Eve the choice, they would have essentially been robots, simply doing what they were programmed to do. God created Adam and Eve to be "free" beings, able to make decisions, able to choose between good and evil. In order for Adam and Eve to truly be free, they had to have a choice.

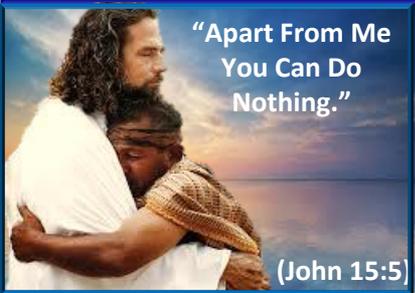
**"The Act Of Disobedience Was Spiritually Destructive"**



There was nothing essentially evil about the tree or the fruit of the tree. It is unlikely that the fruit, in and of itself, gave Adam and Eve any further knowledge. That is, the physical fruit may have contained some vitamin C and some beneficial fiber, but it was not spiritually nutritious. However, the act of disobedience was spiritually destructive. That sin

opened Adam's and Eve's eyes to evil. For the first time, they knew what it was to be evil, to feel shame, and to want to hide from God. Their sin of disobeying God brought corruption into their lives and into the world. Eating the fruit, as an act of disobedience against God, was what gave Adam and Eve the knowledge of evil—and the knowledge of their nakedness (Genesis 3:6-7) **"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."** Adam and Eve chose, of their own free will, to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. The results—evil, sin, suffering, sickness, and death—have plagued the world ever since.

"Man Acting Apart From God"



The meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is man acting apart from God, man pursuing goodness according to his self-will, man hastily and impatiently seeking after the knowledge that God has not granted, and man pursuing progress by his own means rather than by trusting in God. What all these mean is that man is

simply acting alone and independently, outside of God. This is the first sin committed by man. In God's eyes, the meaning of sin is not necessarily related to committing many defiling acts. As long as man seeks anything, does anything, or acts in any way by himself, he has sinned, regardless of whether the thing he seeks after or does is good or bad. (John 15:5) "I Am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing." God hates to see man acting independently apart from Him. God wants man to depend on Him. The purpose for God to create and save man was for man to depend on Him.

"The Tree of Death"



The Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil is represented by the tree of death Jesus was crucified and died on. The Good is represented by Jesus dying for our sins and we can now have eternal life in Him. We can now have the knowledge of our Heavenly Father through Him.

Evil is represented by our sins that was laid upon Him. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the forbidden fruit. The fruit of disobedience that caused our separation with God. At the cross all our sins were laid upon Christ and therefore divine judgment fell upon Him. There was no way of transferring sin without also transferring its penalty. Both sin and its punishment were transferred to the Lord Jesus. It was a question of meeting the claims of God's holiness; it was a matter of satisfying the demands of His justice. Not only was Christ's blood shed for us, but it was also shed for God: "He gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:2). The death of Christ on the cross was a death of curse: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). The "curse" is alienation from God.

"The Tree Of Life"



The same is true with God's demand on us today. In Genesis, figuratively speaking, God's life and man's life were only planted together in the midst of a garden. Today God's life and man's life are both within us. The saved believers are all regenerated, that is, we are all born of God and have established a life-relationship with God. Jesus transformed the Tree of Death into the Tree of Life. The created

life is now within us and so is the Creator's life. The present problem is whether or not we live according to God's life and completely depend on God in our daily living. As our physical body cannot survive without the created life, in the same manner our spirit cannot survive without the Creator's life.

"God's View Is Not As Small As Ours!"



God wants us to have no activity apart from Him. He wants us to die to ourselves. He wants us to attach ourselves to Him as if we could not even move without Him. God does not want us to initiate anything by ourselves, but He wants us to act according to His instruction in everything. God wants us to realize that we are helpless and that we should depend on Him wholeheartedly. We should reject any independent

act apart from God. It is altogether of the self to do anything, try to do anything, or have done anything without praying, without waiting for God, without seeking His will and clearly understanding it, without recognizing the self's weaknesses and impotence, without helplessly turning to and depending on God, and without the assurance (through the inspection of the conscience) that nothing of the self is involved. God does not care how well you have done something; He only cares about who does it. Besides His Own work, God is not satisfied with anything else. You may act, work, labor, or suffer for Christ and His church, but unless you are certain that this is what God wants you to do, and unless you realize your own inability in fear and trembling and turn to God to work through Him, in God's eyes, you are sinning just like Adam. God's view is not as small as ours! You can labor, and you can do something according to your own delights; but you will not have any spiritual usefulness at all. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, And He will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6