

Salvation Part 1 – The problem

Genesis 2:8-9,15-17 NKJV

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. [9] And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... [15] Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; [17] 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 surely die."

Moses writes in Genesis (the first book of the Bible) that there were two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden. You'll note that God's command to man was that he could eat freely from any tree (including the tree of life) except from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. While Moses is recording the story of creation, he is loading the account with metaphors and deeper meanings to tell us the central message of the Bible.

God's command to man was in fact to eat from the tree of life – a picture of eternal life. The choice between the two trees is in fact the choice between life, and death. They chose the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which resulted in death. If they had chosen the tree of life, they would have "lived forever" (Genesis 3:22) or had "eternal life."

It's helpful to note that the Bible often uses "eat" as a metaphor for "believe". This can clearly be seen when Jesus says, "unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you." (John 6:53). Jesus is saying that unless we believe in His sacrifice and what it has accomplished for us, we will not have eternal life.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve chose death. The trees were incidentally next to each other in the middle of the Garden – this shows us that to "eat" from one tree, you'd have to pass the other. So, they didn't just take from the wrong tree because there wasn't another option or they didn't know better. Their choice was in direct rebellion to God's instructions not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and more so, it was a rejection of God's invitation to eternal life. Eating from the wrong tree was about not trusting in God, but trusting in themselves.

We see that Cain "eats" from the wrong tree by taking the knowledge of good and evil into his own hands, resulting in him killing Abel. These trees are a

picture of the choice that we face: will we choose to “eat” from the tree of life and receive eternal life? Or will we “eat” of the knowledge of good and evil and die? We all have to choose which tree we will eat from, and until we choose to eat from the tree of life, we are actually rejecting it and rejecting God’s invitation.

Isaiah 64:6 GNT

[6] All of us have been sinful; even our best actions are filthy through and through. Because of our sins we are like leaves that wither and are blown away by the wind.

Romans 5:12 GNT

Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned.

Romans 3:23 KJV

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Every one of us falls short - none of us are perfect. But what does this really mean? Until we choose to embrace the message of the gospel - to partake of the Tree of Life - we remain incomplete, lacking the glory of God and the promise of eternal life. Salvation is the indwelling of God's Spirit within us, forever, and it is the fruit of believing in the gospel. Recognizing our need for salvation is crucial. We all require a Savior to rescue us from our sin - we simply can't save ourselves.

John 16:8-9 NKJV

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: [9] of sin, because they do not believe in Me;

The sin we need rescuing from isn't lying, killing, stealing, or sexual immorality. Although these are all wrong, they are merely fruit of a deeper problem. The sin that every one of us needs saving from is the sin of unbelief – not believing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the promise of eternal life that the gospel brings. The sin of unbelief is what causes man to “fall short” of the glory of God. But believing in Jesus and His redemptive work would bring a man into right standing with God, where he no longer falls short (even though he isn't perfect in his conduct).

Ezekiel 36:25-27 NKJV

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. [26] I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Here we see a promise of salvation through the prophecy of Ezekiel. The promise of God is that through salvation He cleanses us (we are now clean), gives us a new heart and a new Spirit (His Spirit). This describes the new creation that we read about in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

John 3:16-18 NKJV

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. [17] For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. [18] "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

God's love for mankind was so great that He reached out to us to make salvation available. He saw that man fell short and couldn't save themselves, and so God made everlasting life available. All we need to do is believe in (eat) Jesus' redemptive work.

Questions for reflection

1. What stands out for you from this lesson?
2. How does the choice between the two trees in the garden reflect a deeper spiritual decision that we all face?
3. Read Deuteronomy 30:19. How does this verse describe the "two trees"?
4. Read John 3:36, and 5:24. Can you see the "two trees" in these verses?
5. Read Romans 6:23. In essence, Paul is explaining the "two trees". How does he describe them?
6. According to Romans 3:23, why do we all need salvation?
7. Read Ephesians 1:13. Explain God's answer to man's problem (or deficiency).
8. How has this lesson changed your view of God and salvation?