

Genesis 2:8–17 — The LORD God Planted a Garden Eastward in Eden

The Two Trees, Life and Responsibility, Innocency vs. Holiness, and the States of Humanity

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:8–17

“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The Garden Eastward: Toward the Sun Rising

Eden is not the whole world, and the garden is only a part of Eden. God planted a garden eastward in Eden — a special provision within a larger setting for the man he had made. The direction eastward, toward the sun rising, carries something of an expectation. Malachi 4:2 reaches to it: the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings. The garden planted eastward was pointing forward to the glory of the Lord Jesus arising in the earth. When he comes in the millennial kingdom, all that the garden was pointing toward will be made good — not a restoration of Eden, for God never restores to an original, but something better, something superior in accordance with his own thought, always centred in Christ.

The contrast with the wilderness where the Lord Jesus was tempted is instructive. Adam was tested in the most favorable circumstances imaginable — every tree pleasant and good, provision abundant, fellowship with God. The Lord was tested in the most unfavorable circumstances — alone, hungry, in a wilderness. Adam failed with every advantage; the Lord stood without a single natural support. Righteousness, we learn, is a matter of the heart, not of circumstance. The righteous one will be righteous wherever he is placed. And the unrighteous one will act out what is in his heart regardless of what surrounds him.

The Tree of Life in the Midst: What God Put at the Centre

God said that the tree of life was in the midst of the garden. It was Eve, in her conversation with the serpent, who placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst. That transposition is telling. Satan's approach drew attention away from the tree of life — the proper centre — and focused everything on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which Eve describes as being in the midst of the garden. It may simply have been in the centre of her mind, filling her thoughts so completely that it seemed to occupy the place that the tree of life should have had.

What God put at the centre was the tree of life — and that is clearly pointing to what is central in the mind and heart of God: Christ himself. He is the tree of life. Revelation 2:7 gives the promise to the overcomer at Ephesus — the assembly that had left its first love: to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. The reward to those who overcome the condition of lost first love is eating of the tree of life, and that is inseparably linked with the intensity of a first love for Christ himself. What was placed in the centre of the garden was always meant to speak of him.

The Two Trees: Life and Responsibility

The two trees represent two great principles that flow down through the ages. The tree of life speaks of sovereign grace — the free gift of God, given not on the basis of anything in man. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil speaks of responsibility — the principle of man's meeting his obligations and gaining something on that basis.

God's dispensational ways unfold the truth of these two trees in history. He first established the principle of the tree of life: the unconditional promises to Abraham. These are actions of sovereign grace, given without condition, 430 years before the law. Then, when man had not learned from Eden the lesson about responsibility, God took up that very principle: the law of Moses, which puts man under responsibility to see if fallen man can perform. All that the Lord has said, we will do. The outcome was total failure. And when he who is the tree of life came into the world, the men of responsibility — who had the law and were tried upon its ground — cut him down. They would not have him here. That is how God dealt with these principles in history.

Arminianism is, in essence, a persistent eating at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It agrees rightly that man is responsible. But it takes the next fatal step: that man can meet that responsibility. He just needs to put forth the hand of faith, exercise his will toward God, accept what God offers. That is eating at the tree of responsibility and expecting to get life from it. But the discharge of responsibility is not the way to get life. It gets a bad conscience, which is exactly what man got in the fall. Life comes only from the tree of life — from Christ, by grace alone. The fruit of the tree of responsibility, as man attempts to eat it, produces only the awareness of his own failure and nakedness.

The Fruit Not Intrinsically Wrong: It Was the Forbidden

There was nothing inherently wrong with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was a tree like the others. The issue was not the nature of the

fruit but the word of God that forbade it. God had commanded: thou shalt not eat of it. Man exerted his own will against that command. Self-will is the root of sin — not some specific category of act, but the assertion of a will that has no right to assert itself against the Creator's word. J.N. Darby put it well in a different connection: they ask why God would separate man from himself for eating an apple. The better question is why man would separate himself from God for eating an apple. The answer is self-will.

Innocency: Not Holiness, Not Righteousness

Non-dispensational theology has often described Adam's state in the garden as one of holiness or righteousness. This is not accurate. Adam was innocent — and by innocence we mean ignorance of good and evil. He did not have the knowledge of good and evil, and therefore he had no conscience. There was nothing to have a conscience about. When God afterward says the man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil, it is a plain statement that man became that and was not created that way. The text itself is clear.

Holiness is a different state. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, his humanity was not in a state of innocence — it was in a state of holiness. Luke 1:35 says: that holy thing which shall be born of thee. The Spirit of God overshadowed Mary, and the humanity that the Lord took into his person was holy humanity. He could not sin, not only because deity is united to his humanity, but because the humanity itself was holy in its state. Innocency and holiness are therefore not the same: Adam had innocence, the Lord had holiness. Adam could fall; the Lord could not.

When a sinner is saved, he is not brought back into innocence — that is never recovered. He has a new nature, but the old nature remains until the rapture. God never restores to an original; he always brings in something better. What we shall be at the rapture — conformed to the image of Christ, with no old nature, in a

glorified and holy state — exceeds anything that Adam had in Eden. God's purpose in Christ is always superior to what preceded it.

The tree of life also in the midst of the garden.