

Legalism: Living from the Tree of Knowledge

We've been looking at shadows, preliminaries of future realities. In a not-to-similar way the 2 trees in the Garden of Eden are allegories of lives of either legalism or liberty. Rick Joyner's 1986 book "There Were Two Trees in the Garden" deals with this dichotomy very effectively, bringing release to those who can 'hear'. He points out that an understanding of the tree allegory "can also enable us to recognize and stay on the only path to true liberty and eternal life".¹

"There were two trees in the Garden of Eden that challenged the course of the entire human race—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Metaphorically, these same two "trees" continue to be the challenge that will determine the course of our lives. When we become Christians these challenges do not end—they may well increase, and many times we will have to choose between the fruit of these trees. Between them we find the focal point of the dichotomy between the kingdom of God and the domain of evil. Understanding this difference may be the most important understanding one could ever have.

When speaking of the two women who bore Abraham's sons, Sarah and Hagar, Paul explained that they represented allegories, or symbolic representations, of biblical truths concerning the covenants of law and grace². In this same way, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life also represent profound biblical truths that are crucial for us to understand if we are going to walk the path of life and avoid the snares of death."³

We do have a few misconceptions about the trees in the Garden of Eden:

1. The fruit on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good was not an apple (an old furbphy)
2. The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil brought death, not their disobedience.

"First, we must understand that Satan did not tempt Eve with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge just because of the Lord's prohibition to eat it. He tempted her with it because the source of his power was rooted in that tree. Furthermore, the Lord did not give this prohibition just to test Adam and Eve—He did it because He knew that the fruit of that tree was poison. When He instructed Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, He did not say "If you eat from that tree I'm going to kill you", but, "in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die"⁴. It was not just man's disobedience that brought death to the world, but the fruit from this tree."⁵

Focussing on the OT Law, the 10 Commandments, or any other form of religious legalism has it's origins in 'right & wrong' – i.e. the knowledge of 'good & evil'. This is why legalism produces death from that same tree-source, not the abundant life of the Kingdom⁶.

"What could be such a deadly fruit? The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil metaphorically represented the Law, which includes the Law given by God through Moses, as well as what we call "legalism". Legalism is adherence to humanly imposed laws which are implemented to try to make men righteous. Why did God give the Law if its fruit was poison? It is for the same reason that He put the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden. As we will see, this was actually to free man so that he could have a special relationship to God.

However, this relationship would not come by eating from the tree, just as it cannot come through the Law. The Tree of Knowledge had to be put in the Garden because there could be no freedom to obey unless there was freedom to disobey. There could be no true worship unless there was the freedom to

1 – Rick Joyner (2010) "There Were Two Trees in the Garden" MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 57]

2 – See Galatians 4:21-26

3 – Rick Joyner (2010) "There Were Two Trees in the Garden" MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 44-53]

4 – See Genesis 2:17

5 – Rick Joyner (2010) "There Were Two Trees in the Garden" MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 58-63]

6 – John 10:10

not worship. We will examine this in more depth later, but this is why the Apostle Paul declared, “the power of sin is the law”⁷. This is because it is through the Law that we derive our knowledge of good and evil.”⁸

A good adage is: ‘self is sin’. This however becomes legalism rather than freedom when we focus too much on ourselves. A repentant lifestyle requires self-analysis, but introspection on a constant basis feeds into legalism, as exemplified by the outcome of eating the fruit from the wrong tree.

“We may wonder how this knowledge brings death until we see the fruit. The knowledge of good and evil kills us by distracting us from the One who is the source of life: Jesus—the Tree of Life. The Tree of Knowledge causes us to focus our attention upon ourselves. The Law empowers sin, not just because it excites the evil in us, but because its remedy for resisting the evil is a form of good that is really self-righteousness instead of the righteousness provided by God through His Son, the Tree of Life. This knowledge derived through the Law will drive us either to corruption or self-righteousness, both of which lead us to death.

It is significant that the Tree of Knowledge is found in the center of the Garden⁹. Self-centeredness is the chief malady that it afflicts us with. After Adam and Eve ate its fruit, their first response was self-inspection or self-centeredness. Before eating, they had not even noticed their nakedness—their attention was on the Lord and the purposes for which He had created them.

After eating, they were forced to measure themselves by the good and evil which they now understood. There is no easier way to keep us from the Tree of Life than to have us focus our attention upon ourselves. This is what the Law accomplishes. Because of this, Paul called it “the ministry of death” and the “ministry of condemnation”¹⁰.”¹¹

The liberty and freedom of the gospel that Paul was so eager to maintain¹² is easily forfeited by anyone when they become legalistic, even with what’s held up as sound doctrine.

“Again, when we define the Tree of Knowledge as the Law, we are not referring only to the Law of Moses. We often think of the Old Testament as the Law and the New Testament as grace, but this is not necessarily true. The Old Covenant is the letter; the New Covenant is the Spirit. If we read the New Testament with an Old Covenant heart, it will just be law to us. We will still have dead religion with righteousness that is based on compliance with written commandments instead of a living relationship with God.”¹³

Food for thought?

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7 – See I Corinthians 15:56

8 – Rick Joyner (2010) “There Were Two Trees in the Garden” MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 64-74]

9 – See Genesis 3:3

10 – See II Corinthians 3:7, 9

11 – Rick Joyner (2010) “There Were Two Trees in the Garden” MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 75-88]

12 – Romans 8:21; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1,13; 2:4; Romans 14:1-15 (1 Corinthians 8:9; Acts 15:10)

13 – Rick Joyner (2010) “There Were Two Trees in the Garden” MorningStar Publications (e-book) [Kindle location 89-92]