

Imagining The Garden Of Eden (Part Nine)

Eating The Fruit

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Most of you, I am sure, have fond memories of your junior high and high school English classes—especially the ones that concentrated so heavily on grammar, right? Those were the great classes. You look back fondly on those teachers who drilled you and made you learn all of that important stuff that you would use for the rest of your life, in daily practice. We had to learn all the parts of speech, and I myself have a particular fondness for gerunds and participles. I can look back with great, almost glee, having to identify them in sentence after sentence. But we also had to identify them and use them in sentences, of course; and we had to mark them all on the page and use all these different little symbols and acronyms for these various things. Everyone's particular favorite, when doing grammar, was diagramming sentences. You got to be a little creative on your piece of paper—subject, verb, the whole predicate there, all the adjectives that come off it, the compounds. Compound and complex sentences were especially fun. Those were giant trees that you eventually had on your paper. Where do you put the prepositional phrase, coming off from this particular thing? All of that was better than coloring. For recess, you would want to do that in your spare time instead of going out and playing kickball or something.

I know, I sound like a real English geek, and of course my experience on the job here, with editing for so many years, I use that stuff every day. Maybe not diagramming the sentences, but I certainly have to look at how words are used in sentences and come up with the best way to say them.

My kids tell me, at the least the two oldest ones who have gone through Latin, that the same kind of things happen in Latin as happen in English. And they have to do all the declensions and everything of the Latin so that they understand how it is being used and all of that. Having gone through all of that in both English and Latin, I think they probably have a better grasp of grammar than I do, because Latin is just mind-bogglingly hard to comprehend. In every verb, you have to ask 12 questions to finally figure out

exactly how it is used in the sentence. So it can be quite an exercise of the mind to try to figure out Latin grammar. And of course, we have a hard time even with our own language.

But having gone through any foreign language, or trying to learn any foreign language will put you through the grammar paces, so that you have to learn that. I have read that people, once they have taken a foreign language, have a better appreciation for English because they have to struggle through the foreign language grammar; and it makes them appreciate having to learn English from birth and not having to learn that, too.

Hebrew has a great many of the same grammatical elements as any other language. But they go by a lot of strange names that we have never heard of before; and we have no idea what they mean. Like the word *po'al*. I bet you do not know what that is. That is the Hebrew word for *verb*. It means *to do*, and that is what you do when you are doing some sort of action; you do something. So that is the word that is used for a verb.

And then they have all of the verb stems, like *qal*, *niphal*, *piel*, *pual*, *hiphil*, and *hithpael*. Those of you who have gone through Keil and Delitzsch know that these words pop up every once in a while, and you say “hmm?” You have no idea what they are all about. There is no need, in this sermon, for us to go through all of this in great complexity. We are not going to through it to any extent, except to say that although Hebrew grammar is complex, especially in its verb forms, it has all of the essential elements that most other languages have as well.

However, for today I am most interested in the *imperfect conjugation* of Hebrew verbs because the main verb in God’s command to Adam and Eve, in Genesis 2:17, is of this sort. It is an imperfect conjugation of the verb.

I am going to give you a little bit of a grammar lesson here on the imperfect conjugation. It is not something you necessarily have to know, but it is interesting to know because it comes into play here and makes a very interesting point about this particular command.

Now I got this information that I am going to be telling you from Wheeler’s Hebrew Syntax Notes in my PC study Bible, and if you click above the

word, it will give you all of the information that you need to know about how it is used. It kind of parses it for you, so you can go and look and see it is singular, feminine, imperfect, or whatever. It gives you all of that information. But then of course, they have to tell you what all of this means, because most of us do not know. Here is my version of what they said: “the imperfect [remember, we are talking about the imperfect conjugation of verbs in Hebrew] does not focus primarily on the *time* of action [that would be *tense*—present, past, future], but on the *kind* of action.”

So imperfect focuses on the *kind* of action. We could also call it the *aspect* of action. This aspect depicts *states*, as in existence, and continuing, as well as actions as repeated, continual, durative or linear. I know that is a head-full to try to understand, but the big thing here to note is that it is speaking about an aspect or a kind of action, as either in a state or in an action itself. So if it is in a state, the verb comments on its existence, or as it says here, that it continues to exist. Existence and continuing. And the actions, as whether they are repeated, they are continual, whether they last long (they are durative), or whether they are linear (meaning they go on out).

The imperfect is also the form normally chosen to express *modal ideas*. I know, this is getting really deep, but just bear with me for a few minutes. Modal ideas are ideas of possibility, desire, or obligation. So we are talking about the verb being possible—it tells you whether these things are possible, whether they are a desire, whether they express an obligation.

There are also *volitional ideas*. Volitional ideas have to do with commands and requests. And then there are *contingent ideas*, which are about conditions. The verbs express conditions or even uncertainty.

We really do not need to understand all of that. The reason why I gave that to you is because I wanted to show you how complex this particular verb form, this verb conjugation, is. It expresses a lot of different kinds of actions or states, and it breaks it down into these three ideas: the modal, the volitional, and the contingent. What we are going to focus on from this point forward is the volitional aspect, and particularly the command part of the volitional. Because what we have in Genesis 2:17 is a command from God. So this has to do with choice, decision, and will. That is what the volitional ideas express.

Now we get to the really interesting part. The volitional use of the imperfect emphasizes the action commanded or forbidden. In Genesis 2:17, it is used in prohibition, meaning that it forbids something (not prohibition in the sense that you cannot drink alcohol). It means something is being forbidden. The reason is that in the Hebrew, this verb is connected with the Hebrew particle *lo'*. This particle *lo'* is the way that Hebrew often negates things. *Lo'* means essentially *no* or *not*. When the verb is connected with *lo'*, it is one of these imperfect verbs, and it expresses prohibition. It forbids something.

More importantly than that, this construction—*lo'* plus the verb—makes the command a universal, timeless prohibition. It is not just a prohibition, it is not just forbidding something one time. It makes it universal, meaning that it applies to everyone, and it is also timeless, meaning that it applies at all times. So *lo'* plus the verb means that the particular command that is being given, a prohibition, applies all the time in every circumstance, to all men.

The Wheeler's Hebrew Syntax Notes said that the verb [in Genesis 2:17] can be rendered like this, or basically what it means is this: do not *ever* do that, at any time. Whatever the command is that uses *lo'* plus the verb, it means do not ever do this. In scripture, it is often rendered like in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, "thou shalt not." And we all know that the Ten Commandments are universal and timeless. God gave them for all men, and to be used at all times, and to be applicable at all times. They are universal and timeless prohibitions. What we really need to understand here is that the one that is in Genesis 2:17 is of the same caliber.

So, with that short introduction, we are going to be continuing with my ongoing series on Imagining the Garden of Eden, which as you know is an extended exercise in using our God-given imaginations to consider what is written about what happened there in the Garden of Eden. Hopefully, by using our imaginations and thinking these things through, we will come to a greater understanding of God and His way of life. Once again, as I have done in every one of these sermons, I want to caution you about the use of the imagination, especially in this sense, that we need to make sure that we not let our imaginations run wild, but stay within the bounds of what God has revealed in His Word. We are not limited to what He says here in Genesis 2, we are limited by the entirety of the revelation. So if we can pull in bits and

pieces from other parts of Scripture to back up what we say, we can use our imagination to enhance what is actually written in this particular spot.

We need to do some review. What has been said in all of chapter 2 has been leading up to this command. But I just want to go back to the beginning of the paragraph, which is in verse 15.

Genesis 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

This is what we have been going over for the last few sermons. This is the context of the command. The command comes immediately on the heels of what we are told here in this little narrative verse, that God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it, and then bang! The command happens, in verses 16 and 17. So this is the context. These principles that were established in verse 15, which we have discussed in the last few sermons, set the stage for this command to Adam.

So we have to recall, as we are getting into this command, that first, God intentionally placed Adam in the Garden to dwell or live there in a state of *nuach* rest. Remember, I introduced that concept of *nuach*, which was the Hebrew word behind the word *put* in verse 15. “Put” here is a correct translation, but it does not give us the idea of what *nuach* actually represents. It is a kind of rest, a peace, a stillness that is special. It is only available in the presence of God. The best kind [of rest] is only available in the presence of God. God was there in the garden; it was His garden. He lived there, and He took Adam and then later Eve, into the Garden to dwell with Him and to be with Him all the time, and therefore to live in this state of *nuach* rest.

Remember, this *nuach* rest is not like the Sabbath rest. They are related, but they are different. As we have come to learn, Sabbath rest is a ceasing. It particularly means to cease the activity that we normally do on the other six days of the week. So we stop, and we are supposed to do something else. And the “something else” is triggered by this word *nuach*, because in *nuach* is the presence of God, and in the Sabbath day itself is the presence of God.

We have this opportunity every Sabbath to have, not just a ceasing of our everyday work, but also this sense of peace and calm, even victory,

redemption, and salvation that comes to us because we are in an intimate relationship with God. As Christians, we are to strive to enter that rest, as it says in Hebrews 4. Not just in the future, but in our daily lives, even when it is not the Sabbath. We are to try to live in this type of rest amid the turmoil of life in this world. And that is the kind of life that Jesus Christ lived. He was always in contact, in an intimate relationship with His Father. It made a great difference in His life. He was able to live sinlessly in this world, because He was always in this particular state of oneness with God.

We need to recall, from verse 15, that Adam was to tend and keep the garden. We could limit this to just cultivating and preserving the physical garden, the plants there, but it is more universal than that. Actually, this principle extends to all human activity, at any time and place. That is God's maybe over-arching command to us, that we tend and keep at all times. There are a lot of these kinds of principles in these first two chapters. In chapter 1 there was, "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and have dominion over all living things on the earth." And there are these about being in the Garden, to tend and keep it, and then the command that is given in verses 16 and 17.

But God desires mankind to work. In the last sermon, we saw that this tending and keeping speaks of service. It is not just physical labor, but it is service to develop, improve, protect, and preserve what He has given to us. We are supposed to maintain things and make them better, better than they were given to us. We are supposed to produce good fruit with them. We are supposed to take what God has given us and put it to good use, so that not only does it last, but it is embellished as well, so it gets better.

So our service should cause growth, produce good fruits that last, give benefits to others, and of course glory to God; ultimately, that is our goal. So with everything we put our hands to do, we glorify God.

Also, at the end of that last sermon, I mentioned that we have been called to priestly service. It is not just service in mundane matters, but now we have been specifically chosen out of this world to give priestly service, in caring for and preserving the things of God, and putting them into practice in our daily lives. So when we tend and keep, it is not just the physical things, it is the spiritual things as well. Those are even more important.

What has happened here, in verse 15 particularly, is that the ideal environment for humanity has been set up. And not only the ideal environment, but the ideal activity of mankind has been introduced. This is what God wanted Adam and his family to experience. He wanted them to experience this *nuach* rest at all times, and He wanted them to experience proper work, proper service, proper growth, in this wonderful environment, so that they could produce the most, and make the greatest leaps. Not physically, but spiritually. He was looking at the spiritual component from the very beginning.

All would be well if they had continued in this without fail. He had given them the best environment, the best instruction, He had given them the best physical bodies, He had given them the best of everything, and then said, “This is the way it can be. This is the way it can continue, if you follow these few instructions that I give you, these overall principles.”

But it was not just enough to have the environment. God needed to give Adam, and by extension all mankind, the instruction that they would need to fulfill their mission and not get sidetracked. And this is where Genesis 2:16 and 17 come in.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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.”

The verb that I mentioned being the imperfect conjugation is this one, *you shall not eat*, in verse 17. So “you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is in the same format as “you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” It is in the same format as those commands. It is universal and timeless. What He is saying here is, you shall not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge and Good and Evil—*you* shall not eat. Not Adam, not Eve—yes, it applies to them—but **you**. Each one of us. Have you ever thought of it that way? The command is universal and timeless.

I just want to mention here, in passing, that God had given Adam and Eve, and thus all of us, free, unfettered access to every other tree. Just the one, He held back and said “Do not. You shall not eat of it. You shall not take of it.” So He gave him everything but the one.

When I was thinking about this, it suddenly came to mind, maybe this is just the way my mind works, that this is the ultimate equivalent of a father taking his son out to the driveway in front of the house, and upon that driveway sits a brand-new car. This is not just any car: it is absolutely the latest model of sports car, with all the bells and whistles. Every option imaginable, from hand-crafted leather seats, to an absolutely wicked sound system, with a DVD player, with a race-car engine, and all the things you would like in an automobile. This is the perfect, best built, best running; there are no flaws in this car. It is the dream car that you have always wanted. Of course, the young man, who is being presented this automobile cannot believe his good fortune. He gets in there; he looks around; he kicks the tires; he pops the hood; he looks inside; he just revels in the leather. He turns on the sound system, everything is just wonderful. He can just imagine all the wonderful things he would be able to do with this car, all the good times he would have. But as the father hands over the car keys to him, he says, “Son, you can push every button on the dashboard. But *never* push that red one, right there in the center—you will see it is marked ‘nitrous’. If you do, you will surely crash and burn.” And you know what nitrous does—it makes you go fast. It gives you a boost.

Now we know that if someone, anyone, God Himself, tells us not to do something, our perverse human nature immediately wants to do that thing, right away. The first thought is, “Could I do it? Oh, just once? I want to experience this. Why not!?”

We have a rebellious streak as wide as the Mississippi River running through us, and it just pushes us to do what is forbidden. It just compels us to just push aside the taboos, whether they are God’s or society’s, or whatever they happen to be. We just have this drive, if someone tells us *not* to do, to do. We start to think, “I wonder what would happen if I did it? Nothing, right? What harm could possibly come? It is just a red button. It is just the eating of this fruit. There is nothing wrong with that fruit. God said that it was good

for food.” And then we think, “Hmmm...” Scratch our chin, we think, “Now, why did He tell me not to do this? I wonder, what is He keeping from me? Is it something that is really fun, but He wants to keep me from doing it because He wants to do it and enjoy it all for Himself? Or is it something that is really good, something that is really beneficial, something that would really help me, but He does not want me to have it, He wants it all for Himself.”

We all know how our minds work. We start having suspicions—“He is doing me no good. Why is He trying to control me like that?” Our minds start to figure out ways to justify why we should do that, the thing that is being forbidden.

But think about this: Adam did not have perverse human nature when God gave him this command. Have you ever thought about that? His mind was as pure as any man’s ever was, at this point. God said, “Do not eat of that tree in the middle of the garden,” and there is no indication in God’s Word that he questioned that at all. Now, admittedly, there is no indication that he accepted that either, readily with open arms—“Sure, God, why would I ever want that stupid tree anyway? I have 50,000 other trees that I can have, what is this one?” There is no indication either way. But we have to understand, the mind of Adam was pure at that time, and even when Eve comes on the scene, there is no indication at the end of the chapter that she was thinking rebelliously against what God had said. Although her reaction in chapter 3 was not good, she really did not have those thoughts, as far as we can tell, until the serpent started casting doubt on God’s command.

On the other hand, having lived under the course of this world all our lives, we have a nearly impossible time imagining the purity of their thought. We have never had a pure thought in our lives. Well, maybe we did when we were doing “gaga, goo-goo.” But since coming to rationality, our thoughts have not been pure because Satan has been working on them for all these years. We were born into a world in which Satan had been working on the people and the cultures of this world, and nothing is pure.

Let us go to Titus 1, very well-known verses 15 and 16. The part in verse 15 is what is well-known, you have probably quoted it before. Paul writes to this evangelist:

Titus 1:15-16 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in their works they deny *Him*, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Adam and Eve were completely pure. So God's command to them was seen by them as pure. It was a holy and pure command. There was no reason for them to think negatively about it, not at all. Their pure minds saw nothing but goodness and outgoing concern in God's command, and that is exactly what was there. God had no ulterior motives in saying this. They had no reason to think or to believe anything evil or self-serving in what God said. They did not think, "What is He holding this back for? Why does He not want me to have this tree?" To my mind, they probably said "OK." They may not have understood; in fact, they probably did not. Their minds were so new that they really did not grasp the enormity of it, but God gave the command and they accepted it, and they saw it as good.

Now contrast this to what people's reactions are to God today. How do they look at God and anything He commands? They are like these people in Titus 1:15, "the defiled and unbelieving." They cannot imagine that God does not have ulterior motives. They think that if He says for us to do something, or if we should not do something, He has a sneaky reason for why He says that. He wants us to "love Him," because He loves praise and glory. He wants to get something from us. That is how the perverted human mind works. They cannot see God as so pure in out-going love and concern for us that He does not want anything from us that is not good in return. They cannot see that. In fact, as we know, they have turned His commandments, which were all given in love and for the purpose of showing love to God and to man, but they have made His commandments into burdensome shackles.

They were not burdensome shackles! When He gave them, they were the epitome of His loving concern for us. "Do not do these things, because if you do, they hurt! They are the best things for you to keep, because if you avoid these bad things, you will have a wonderful life." It even says that in the fifth commandment, the first commandment with promise: If you honor your father and your mother, you will live long on the land which I am going to

give you. There is something good, there is blessing in keeping those things. But not to today's mind. Not even to "Christian" minds, and I have put "Christian" in quotes, because they think that God has kept them from something. He is shackling them with these burdens.

As if God wants nothing more than to restrain us and control us. That is what they think of God's commandments. Luther was one of those who hated the book of James, they cannot conceive of God's law being liberating. James, twice, at least twice (James 1:26 and James 2:12), called God's law the "law of liberty." Luther and most everybody else in the world cannot understand that. How can these restrictive (as they would say) laws and commands be liberating? Jesus gave us the answer in John 8:32—because they are the truth, and the truth makes you free.

I do not know if you have ever heard of the study that was done on a schoolyard with a group of students. The way it was conducted was that they decided that having fences around the schoolyard was restrictive. So they decided that they would take down all the fences that kept the schoolyard protected from the outside neighborhood. After a while, they found that the students were all huddled in the center of the schoolyard, as far away from the boundaries as they could get. They would play in this very small area, in the center, because they were afraid of what would happen if they got too close to the boundaries of the school, because that was a mean world out there, beyond the boundaries. They decided to put the fences back, and the children used the entire schoolyard to play in.

That is God's law. God's law is that fence. God's law gives us the boundaries where we can play. We have no problem going all the way up to the boundary, because that is still good. That is still right. And the boundary being there, we know that we should not cross over into it; that is the area of danger. But we are free to use that entire area of the schoolyard, as it were, to play, and it is a big schoolyard.

Remember what God did? Every tree of the garden is good for you, and you can take and eat of it, but it is just the one tree that I do not want you to have. So God gave us a huge schoolyard, and He said, "Just this little bit is off limits. Don't go there."

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In other words, He gave us the whole world, and everything in it, but He gave us an atmosphere to keep us close. If you go outside the atmosphere, you are going to die. I am thinking of the atmosphere, or once we get into outer space, as that area of badness, that is the forbidden tree, as it were. I am just making a different image so we can understand. As long as we are within the bounds, we are fine.

Now let us think about what Paul says in Titus 1. Paul says that these people who are defiled and unbelieving profess to be on God's side. That is what they say in verse 16. They profess to know God, but he says their works deny Him. Their works are their actions, their conduct, their behavior, and they prove, even though they may say with their mouth that they are Christians, or that they are "good people," or that they are "spiritual" (a catchword of today), or they "are with the side that is good," where they do not pin themselves down to any kind of religion. "Religion" is terrible, bad; but "spiritual"—that is good.

So they profess to be this way with their mouths, but just looking at them (as Clyde [Finklea] was talking about earlier), you see their fruits. You see their works, you see what they do. And you know that they really do not know God. They do not know God at all! They have maybe a sketchy idea of Him, but they do not know Him. They are not intimately related to Him in any way.

Paul describes their behavior: abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. Maybe we could say their behavior is disgusting and offensive. A person with truly spiritual eyes can see it. It is very easy to spot, like the Secret Service agent knowing a counterfeit bill, because he knows what a true bill is like in all of its particulars, so can a truly spiritual person know what evil is like in all of its particulars because he knows what is good and right. If it does not square with what he knows is good and right, it is bad. It is evil.

A person who is truly spiritually minded, who has the mind of Christ, can see the fruits and recognize them easily. They do not even have to be abominable to know that they are bad. But these are the words he uses: abominable, disgusting, offensive—you can tell, because they do not jive with what God's way is.

Disobedient, that is an easy one. They just do not do what God says to do. This particular word comes down to having poor judgment. They are void of judgment is actually one way to put it. So they make wrong choices, they are disobedient, because they do not judge “up here” properly and make good choices about what they do.

It also says they are disqualified for every good work. That means they are unfit to produce good works. They do not have what it takes to produce good works. It is not in them. They would not have the foggiest idea how to do a truly good work, because their thoughts, their words, everything they have learned, are evil.

That is how this world is, plain and simple. Sadly, it is how we were prior to our calling. We still have vestiges of those evil thoughts and actions lurking within us. In some of us, they are small, but in some of us, they are still large. We are working on them, and God is working on us, patiently, with great longsuffering and forbearance, for us to change, to transform back into the state of purity that Adam and Eve were in when He gave His command in the Garden of Eden.

He is trying to strip away all of that evil that has been built up over 6,000 years in us. I am not saying we are 6,000 years old, I am saying we are a product of 6,000 years of evil. God is trying to put us through whatever it takes to peel all that away, to strip it out so that the product that He gets is the purity that Adam was at that time.

We do not normally think of it that way. We think of a “second Adam,” that He is bringing us to the image of Jesus Christ, bringing us to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. But that is where the likeness between the first Adam and the second Adam is. The first Adam was pure. He had everything it took; he even had access to the Tree of Life. Every tree of the garden was available to him. So it is not out of bounds to say that he was the type of the Son of God at that point. But he failed.

So a second Adam was necessary to come and not fail, succeed, and be our Savior. Think about this: God is working in us to bring us back to the purity of Adam.

Let us go to I John 3, where that is essentially what is being said. It comes from the idea of being like Christ, but I just want to bring out in verse 3 this idea of purity.

I John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure [Christ, the second Adam].

So we are all working at this, in cooperation with God, to become pure, as Adam was, or as Christ was and is.

Maybe I do not need to say it this way, but why does this command in Genesis 2:16-17 have relevance to us? This is what I was getting at before: has this ship not already sailed, meaning this was a “done deal” way back then? This command was broken by Adam and Eve. Is it not just ancient history? A chance of unity and harmony with God that was passed by, by our first parents when they sinned. Remember that I said earlier that this command, by its very grammatical form, is universal and timeless in nature.

So God is speaking this command to us, every day. Perhaps you might want to add that to your first thoughts as you wake up in the morning. God says to us, every day, I have given you every tree in the Garden, except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Choose.

Are we following the example of the first Adam, who took of the forbidden fruit, or the fruit of the forbidden tree, denying his profession of knowing God? Or are we following daily the example of the second Adam, Christ, who kept God’s commands perfectly and truly knew God, as intimately as anyone ever could. Which is it? We daily face the choice.

Now notice I used the word “fruit.” If you would go back to Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17, you would notice that the word does not appear.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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.”

In fact, in all of chapter 2, the word “fruit” does not appear. That is kind of interesting. It does appear in the first chapter four times: verse 11, 12 and 29. Let us pick up the one in verse 29:

Genesis 1:29 And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.”

So “every tree whose fruit yields seed.” What is being set up here, and if we would have gone back to verses 11 and 12, it is pretty much the same thing, shows what a tree produces. He did not have to use the word “fruit,” because the product of the tree was its fruit. Later in chapter 3 it is used three times. It shows us there that Adam and Eve (particularly Eve in this case, but also Adam), understood that the thing that they could not have was the fruit of the tree. That is what was forbidden to them. And that makes sense: normally, what do you eat from a fruit tree? We do not normally eat anything but the fruit, or the seed, or the flesh around the seed. In a nut we eat the seed, or what is inside the seed. For an apple, we eat the flesh around the seed. So we eat that fruit. We do not eat the leaves, or the roots, or any of the branches. Sometimes we eat the bark, but mostly, it is the fruit. So that is what is implied, and they understood that.

So it is of the fruit of the tree that Eve and then Adam ate on that fateful day in which they first sinned, as shown in chapter 3. So let us consider this idea of eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree. Think about that—“eating of the fruit.” I think it is very interesting.

Let us go to Proverbs 1. We are going to read a long section here in Proverbs 1, verse 20 through the end of the chapter. This is a long soliloquy, you might say, by Wisdom; it [wisdom] is personified here. Wisdom is essentially, if we want to bring it down to its real meaning, is God. He is speaking. For some reason, Solomon puts it in the mouth of this personified Wisdom. I want you to think that this is God’s statement of what He has been dealing with.

Believe it or not, I was going through the Concordance on the term “fruit” and up until this point in the Bible, almost every occasion of the word fruit—even in the Psalms, although there might be one that is not this way—is

speaking of the physical fruit of a tree, or the fruit of a woman, the fruit of the womb (not the “fruit of the loom”). It is speaking of an actual physical product of a physical process. But at this point, a more figurative meaning comes into play. There might be one or two variations before this, but it is really at this point that it changes in a great way.

Proverbs 1:20 Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares.

We have to understand we are talking about God. God is outside. He is not hidden somewhere, He is out there, out in the world. He is making something known; He is preaching it publicly. He is out in the squares, the open squares. So this is not something done in a corner, it is not hidden.

Proverbs 1:21 She cries out in the chief concourses, . . .

We are talking about in the big cities, where there are lots of people, where there are people going by.

Proverbs 1:21 at the openings of the gates in the city. . .

That is where the important people sat for judgment, so it is going out to them.

Proverbs 1:21-22 She speaks her words: “How long, you simple ones [you naïve ones], will you love simplicity [naivety, silliness, stupidity]? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.”

Let us just add here that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is what we are talking about. He told them not to take the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and Wisdom here says that fools hate knowledge. Now He is talking about “right knowledge,” true knowledge.

God is not against knowledge. He is against the mixing of good and evil in knowledge. He is particularly against evil knowledge.

Proverbs 1:23 “Turn at my rebuke [Wisdom goes on]; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.”

More of the same. God is not hiding these things.

Proverbs 1:24-27 Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you have disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

Now think of this, they are not to take of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Proverbs 1:28 Then [once the disaster comes] they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.

Why? Because their sins have separated between them and their God. God is far away. They have not shown any reason for Him to come running to help them, because they totally disregarded His very open proclamation of His will.

Proverbs 1:28-29 . . .they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge [true knowledge, right knowledge] and did not choose the fear of the LORD.

This is a very important verse. They hated knowledge and they did not choose the fear of the LORD. Remember the imperfect [verb tense] has to do with volition. Choice, making decisions, and God says in the command, “you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” He tells them what the universal, timeless choice is.

Proverbs 1:29-31 . . .did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel *and* despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit. . .

There is that word that appears, pretty much for the first time, in this symbolic or representative way, this figurative way.

Proverbs 1:31-33 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.

These principles are starting to fall together here. What I see here is a rough sketch of God's dealing with mankind, from Adam on. In fact, Paul essentially repeats this in Romans 1 verse 18 through the rest of the chapter. He says that the revelation of God has been there for everybody to see, but unrighteous men have suppressed it. They have gone and followed their own ways, they have gone and made their own gods. They have done all of these terrible and awful things, and God says, "Psssh. I've had it with you. I'm going to just push you aside."

Like Solomon writes here, He is not going to come running when their destruction comes, because they have just totally ignored Him and suppressed all of those good things that He had given to them, especially in the form of right and true knowledge.

God has made His will and His way known from the beginning. It has been no secret. Think of this: He sent His Word, He sent His prophets, He sent His son, He sent the church of God, He sent all of the apostles, He sent thousands of church members, with their individual witnesses before the world. Still, after 6,000 years, men still ignore, disobey, and rebel against Him.

Jeremiah kept saying, "I have risen early, and I have told you all of these things that you are supposed to do." And what did they do to Jeremiah? They threw him in a pit. They tried to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They did not want to hear it.

You can see that with every one that God sent. People of this world have either ignored them, shunned them, persecuted them, or killed them.

Today, it has become so bad that men deny His very existence. That is the ultimate in plugging their ears—“la, la, la, la, la, God you don't exist, I'm not going to listen to you, I am going to do whatever I want.”

So He says in [Proverbs 1] verse 31 that He is going to let them “eat of the fruit of their own way.” Does that not sound like eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? It is very similar phraseology, although in Genesis 2:17, He does not use the word fruit, but He talks of eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But it is obvious that He is talking about fruit. In other words, He says He is going to let them reap the consequences of their behavior.

Now, recall my Dad's sermons on eating, several years ago. In it, he mentioned in those sermons how plentiful this figure of eating is, this symbol of eating, in the Bible. In fact, it may be the most numerous and consistent symbol in all of Scripture. You do not stop eating, do you? You eat every day or nearly every day. So it is an easy symbol to pick up, to understand.

Just as we need physical food to fuel our bodies, we need spiritual food to fuel our minds. The better the quality of the food, the healthier, stronger, and more vigorous we are. The same thing holds spiritually.

Now let us funnel these principles back into Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17. I am going to try to put this all together. God gave Adam and Eve free and unlimited access to the fruit of every tree in the garden but one. The fruit, or the fruits, of all of these trees, except for the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, were good for food. We even find out that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was itself edible; it was good for food. That is what they found out in Genesis 3, verse 6, that it could be eaten, it could be swallowed, it could be digested. It could energize the body and the mind.

So they were not only edible, and physically helpful (I am talking about all of these other trees, but even the one tree was helpful in a way), but even in the type, these other trees, including the Tree of Life—their spiritual outcomes were positive. Their fruits were good. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, even though it could be eaten and digested, and used to energize the body, its fruits were evil.

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Let us say we have all of these different kinds of trees: plum tree, peach tree, banana tree, guava tree, your normal apple tree, your grapefruit tree, and your orange tree. And let us just name all the nuts, and all of the other fruit. They are all there; they are all open to us. And there is this Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

But we are looking at the other trees right now. Just to put an image in your mind, let us say that each one of these trees has a correlating part of life to it. At the base of each one of these trees is plaque; it says “orange tree.” But under “orange tree,” it says “family.” Plum tree says “work,” that is your plum job; it is the one you really wanted.

Let us say that one tree, the orange tree, represented family life, and its fruit, God said, was good—you can eat of it. And let us say the plum tree, the work tree, represented things that could be learned and done in work—and that was good too. And then we had another tree, we will not name which tree it was, labeled “athletics.” There are lots of good things you can learn from athletics; it helps you keep your body going and that fruit is good. A fourth tree, let us say, was art. God made our minds to be creative, and there are lots of wonderful things you can do with art. I am not talking just drawing, there are all kinds of different arts.

Another tree represented our relationship with our friends, and that is a wonderful thing, and its fruit is good. Another one is our relationship with others who are not our friends: our neighbors, just acquaintances. Those fruits are good.

All these parts of life are represented by these trees, and their fruits are good. God wanted Adam and Eve, in eating of each of these trees, to experience the broad range of human life, and they all produced good things. They would have produced good results, because they were the product of right knowledge, applied. As it says in Proverbs 1:29, they would have done all of these things in the proper fear of the Lord. So He would have given them right knowledge, and they would have had proper respect for God, proper reverence for Him, and things would have been hunky-dory; they would have just been going, going, going. Wonderful product, fruit.

But—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden to them. God did not want Adam and his progeny to experience the consequences, the fruit, of the mixture of good and evil. That is why I said I wanted you to understand that God forbade the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Do you see the difference?

God wanted them to understand good and evil. But He did not want them to eat the fruit of the mixture of good and evil. Do you see the difference? Does God know what evil is? Yes, indeed. Obviously, He knows what goodness is, because He is the author of goodness. Everything that is godly is good. So God, in His wisdom, His perfection, His righteousness, and His holiness knows good and evil. And He would have taught us, His sons, Adam and all of his progeny, the difference between good and evil. But He did not want us eating the fruit of it.

Maybe this will start making you look at this a little bit differently. He forbade them to eat of it, because He knew the fruit of sin, and He wanted to spare them these harmful, horrible, woeful consequences that they would have learned through unfettered, bitter experience. He did not want to have them experience good and evil on their own and reap the fruit, eat the bitter consequences. In other words, there was a better way to learn the difference between good and evil, than to want to experience both as a kind of experiment to decide for oneself which he will follow.

Remember what Paul says at the end of I Corinthians 12? He says, “I show you a more excellent way.” And then he talked about the way of love (which Clyde [Finklea] mentioned again in his sermonette). That is what God would have done. God would have showed them the difference between good and evil, He would have taught them good and evil in a way that was loving and kind, and would have then given them all that they needed to reject the bad, and accept the good. God would have given them that knowledge without them having to experience the horrible penalties of sin.

God is not against knowledge. He is against the foolish people who reject right knowledge, in order to find out for themselves what is good and evil. In teaching them to become like Him, which He would have done (He in His wisdom has a righteous understanding of good and evil), He would have given them His proper, holy perspective on evil and on good. And in the fear

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of God, as it says in Proverbs 1:29, they would have understood it and avoided the evil.

Think of this: how was God acting with Adam and Eve? He had just made them. He was their father. He was acting as a parent.

Now I know, every one of you who has children, would rather say to them, “Of every tree of the garden I have given you freely to eat. But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, I don't want you to eat of it. So don't, ever!” So what do we do? We teach them the knowledge of good and evil in a loving way, rather than them going out in the world and experiencing it on their own, and having to learn the bitter lessons of whatever it happens to be. We set them down and we say, “Look, this is the way that God has told us that we should live. There are people who do not live this way. You can see them in television, and movies, and books, and you can see them out on the street. We can point out examples of people who have gone wrong, and say, Look! You don't want to experience this. Take it from me. We know that this is bad, so don't do it. Don't go there. We don't want you to learn from the bitter fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.”

This is what God did with Israel. Go to Deuteronomy 30, verse 15:

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish [did He not say that in Genesis 2:17?]; you shall not prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today...

Is that not interesting? Think of it this way: He called all these things in witness. We could say, look at the example of the way the earth is, and the people in it. Look at the way heaven is, and what happened there with Satan the Devil.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today, that I have set before you life and death [look at these examples!], blessing and cursing; therefore [seeing all this] choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD SWORE to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Same thing! “I have given you all of this. . .choose life. Choose the good. If you choose the evil, you shall surely die.” Same thing!

Now notice Romans 7, we will close here, He said the same to us. This is what I am getting at: God has presented us with the same scenario.

Romans 7:4-6 Therefore, my brethren [he is talking to us, in the church], you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ [he means that Christ’s sacrifice has paid that penalty of sin; the law is not over us anymore in that regard; it does not have a hold of us because Christ has paid the penalty], that you may be married to another [this is the goal], even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death [he is talking about when we were in the world before; we were reaping the consequences of our knowledge of good and evil that we were pursuing on our own]. But now we have been delivered from the law [meaning that penalty of the law], having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

So God has presented us with the same scenario. He has called us, and redeemed us from the curse, the penalty of the law. Now in this sense, we are then put in the same situation as Adam in the Garden of Eden. We have been cleaned up and purified in the eyes of God. He stands there, and He says to

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us, “You can eat of all of the trees of the garden, except the one in the center, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because that one leads to death.”

For us, the stakes are so much higher; because for us that death is the second death. So with God’s Spirit in us, and the right knowledge that we have been taught through His Word, let us do as He said there in Deuteronomy 30, choose life and good.