

Considered Rather Than Commanded - Choose Life

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One of the most disturbing things to me, among many, in the run up to the general election in this country last month, was the literal barrage of political ads proudly proclaiming, “Women’s Rights to Choose!”

Typically, at least in the campaign ads that I saw for all of the different local and national seats that were up for election in the Midwest (and specifically in Illinois), conservative candidates who even mentioned support of a right to life and/or a traditional marriage position were vilified.

The words of the announcers in the commercials literally oozed with venomous tones as they proclaimed that so-and-so hated women and homosexuals, because the particular candidate had the audacity to mention they were pro-life, pro-family, and/or pro-monogamous heterosexual marriage. Of course, they did not say they were *pro* anything. What they kept saying, over and over, was they were against people, especially those women and homosexual right to choose.

I think this year, more than any other, I not only witnessed people calling good evil and evil good, but screaming it from every direction. We are living in unreasonable times; I mean, there is not careful thought and reasoning, but raw, emotional demands to choose selfishly determined rights, that all proudly know belong to them.

Of course, we know, even though we are living in a progressively more lawless society, this is nothing new, because there is nothing new under the sun right from the get-go.

So, we are going to begin today’s sermon right where Herbert Armstrong left off at the end of his life. So please turn with me to Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:7-9 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 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.

Genesis 2:15-18 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 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." And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 2:22-25 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3:1-8 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make

one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Please keep in mind verse 3 and Eve's declaration of the location of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was in the midst of the garden along with the Tree of Life.

The word midst is *tavek* (taw'-vek), #8432 in Strong's Concordance, from an unused root meaning "to sever," "a bisection," i.e. (by implication) "the center—among(-st)," "X between," "half," "X (there-,where-)," "in(-to)," "middle," "mid(-night)," "midst (among)," "X out (of)," "X through," "X with(-in)."

We will get back to this in a few minutes because its location could be relevant to God's command.

Within my hearing, Mr. Armstrong was often criticized by some within the Worldwide Church of God for focusing so much of his attention on the Two Trees in the waning years of his life. How many times in the last few years of his life did we hear sermons that were focused on Genesis 1-3?

But brethren, these were not mere ramblings from an old man, but an exclamation point to all the work God was doing to get His church back on track, ready to make the right choices while learning to live like God; while preparing for Jesus Christ's return.

Right from the beginning God clearly gives men the way to go, but also the freedom to choose, because here in a nutshell is what this whole Bible and the history of mankind is all about: God gives us His eternal law of love, and then expects us to carefully consider what to do with it. His commandments are life, and they always will be for us to use to live as He lives. They are the

way for us to carefully consider how to live within what God says is our right to choose as He commands in Deuteronomy 30. They are His gift to us so that we can choose the productive life He has set before us.

Just as God prophetically told Israel there in Deuteronomy 30, looking beyond their years in the Promised Land, and their scattering among the nations, and His regathering of them at the end time, His intent was for them to have the circumcised hearts He has already given us, to live His commandments, His way of life, from the inside out and choose life!

In the sermon I gave at the Feast this year I repeated the phrase a number of times, “Considered Rather than Commanded.” This is what we are going to focus on during this message today.

God’s law is perfect—His commandments are just and pure, because His commandments are in fact His law of love, and they will never go away. They will always be with us, because God is creating us in His very image and likeness. His law is the way He Himself lives and they must be just as much an intrinsic part of each and every one of us as it is intrinsically part of the Father and the Son.

It is with this in mind that God is teaching us to diligently work to live carefully considered rather than commanded lives. God’s commandments are exactly that—they are commandments, not suggestions! Therefore, they are our guidelines for us to make carefully considered decisions that keep us on the His path life.

Perhaps at this point it would be good to clarify a bit what I am trying to get across with the phrase, Considered, rather than Commanded, regarding the daily application of God’s law of love in every moment of every day in every situation from the inside out.

I think it may help with just the simple Webster’s definition of the action verb, *consider*. From Webster’s Online Dictionary: 1) To think about carefully: such as to of especially with regard to taking some action. 2) To regard or treat in an attentive way. 3) To gaze on steadily or reflectively. 4) To come to judge or classify.

Brethren every one of these aspects of the word, *consider*, are the way we need to look at the perfect law of liberty—that is, within God's commandments that are life.

God's commandments must be carefully thought about with every action we take. They must be regarded and treated with careful attention. They are to be studied reflectively. They are the source of judgment and classification.

With this in mind let us get back to the Two Trees, and the four vital lessons we can glean from Genesis 2 and 3.

1. Taking of the fruit of that tree caused them to separate themselves from God as it says in,

Genesis 3:7-10 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

2. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was in the midst of the Garden.
3. God uses this to give us a clear warning right from the beginning what will always be Satan's modus operandi.
4. God declared, as recorded in:

Genesis 3:22-24 "Behold, the man has become one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he

was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

They had gained an insight into their circumstances that they did not have before but they could not consider it correctly. Rather than being drawn to God, it drove man from God.

I Corinthians 8:1-3 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

Brethren, the carnal mind only bolsters your own pride, and causes division.

I would like to read these same verses from the Message Bible in Contemporary English all the way through verse 9, because I think it does a nice job of driving home this point, especially on how God's people interact with one another.

I Corinthians 8:1-9 The question keeps coming up regarding meat that has been offered up to an idol: Should you attend meals where such meat is served, or not? We sometimes tend to think we know all we need to know to answer these kinds of questions—but sometimes our humble hearts can help us more than our proud minds. We never really know enough until we recognize that God alone knows it all. Some people say, quite rightly, that idols have no actual existence, that there's nothing to them, that there is no God other than our one God, that no matter how many of these so-called gods are named and worshiped they still don't add up to anything but a tall story. They say—again, quite rightly—that there is only one God the Father, that everything comes from him, and that he wants us to live for him. Also, they say that there is only one Master—Jesus the Messiah—and that everything is for His sake, including us. Yes. It's true. In strict logic, then, nothing happened to the meat when it was offered up to an idol. It's just like any other meat. I know that, and you know that. But knowing isn't

everything. [This is a very important key to this sermon, brethren.] If it becomes everything, some people end up as know-it-alls who treat others as know-nothings. Real knowledge isn't that insensitive. We need to be sensitive to the fact that we're not all at the same level of understanding in this. Some of you have spent your entire lives eating "idol meat," and are sure that there's something bad in the meat that then becomes something bad inside of you. An imagination and conscience shaped under those conditions isn't going to change overnight. But fortunately God doesn't grade us on our diet. We're neither commended when we clean our plate nor reprimanded when we just can't stomach it. But God does care when you use your freedom carelessly in a way that leads a Christian still vulnerable to those old associations to be thrown off track.

As long as we are here in the New Testament, let us touch on just a couple of verses that give us an idea of just how far knowledge without all the other attributes of God will set up a wall of separation from God—when knowledge is the only thing we have apart from God's law of love working from the inside out.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

Mark 1:16-18 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

And now down in verses 21-26:

Mark 1:21-26 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, "Let us

alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.

Obviously the demons have clear knowledge of good and evil—holiness and unholiness—but it only causes a violent division from God and the purity of His holiness that is in Jesus Christ.

So now let us go back to those trees and take a bit of a walk through that Garden.

Brethren I really do not think we appreciate how important those messages that God inspired Herbert Armstrong to give through the waning years of His life were to our understanding of the overall plan and purpose of God, and to the unity that must be within the Body of Christ at Jesus Christ's return!

Perhaps one of the most important proofs of that is the explosion of the Worldwide Church of God, and the division that exists between the splinter groups as the splintering continues.

Continue to keep in mind part of what we read in the paraphrase of I Corinthians 8. We sometimes tend to think we know all things, that we have all the answers to all the questions, but sometimes our humble hearts can help us more than our proud minds. We never really know enough until we recognize that God alone knows it all. But for us, knowing is not everything. If it becomes everything, some people end up as know-it-alls who treat others as know-nothings. Real knowledge is not that insensitive. But God does care when you use your freedom carelessly in a way that leads a Christian still vulnerable to those old associations to be thrown off track.

Brethren, knowledge alone puffs up, but love of God edifies. The love of God in Jesus Christ teaches us how to carefully consider and use that knowledge to draw us closer to God and one another. But to this day we are sometimes more concerned with prideful pontificating according to what we think we know, rather than humbly considering God's eternal law of love within all our relationships.

Before we get back into Genesis and what went on in the Garden, let us turn to a critically important instruction that I feel came from a firsthand observation of how the meekest of men dealt with others.

We will be reading again from the epistle of James, but I would like to preface this with a personal opinion that to me adds a great deal of important instruction to what we can glean from this.

The apostle James, who was the brother of John, and the first of the apostles martyred by Herod around 44 AD was not Jesus Christ's physical half-brother. However there is a great deal of speculation regarding that other James who gave the apostle Paul the instructions regarding circumcision of Gentiles and wrote the epistle of James.

A good many commentators consider this James, who was not of the original 12, a cousin of Jesus, while others consider both him and Jude, who wrote the epistle of Jude younger half-brothers of Jesus. For what it is worth, my personal opinion is that even though his physical brothers were not among Jesus Christ's disciples before His death and resurrection, following His resurrection they were converted. With this physical family background, they then became powerful eyewitnesses in retrospect to how their physical brother, God in the flesh, conducted Himself throughout His life.

How many times have you been critical of someone's behavior based on preconceived ideas, but after some kind of event you were able to look on experiences with this person with an "a-ha" moment? How much valuable and helpful information do you think God may now have given us from a spirit-driven James and Jude who could reflect on the conduct of relationships from a perfect elder brother that they witnessed for the better part of His life. Please consider the brevity of these two epistles and the importance of the few instructions God has given us because He made sure they were included in His Book.

With this in mind I think we can learn a good deal about how to conduct our own lives from the epistles of James and Jude, especially regarding how careful we need to be in what we say with the limited bit of wisdom we have.

Please remember as we read this, James was very likely reflecting on the tenderness and mercy that came from the lips of the very Creator of all things throughout a lifetime. So again, if you are not already there, please turn with me back to James 3:

James 3:1-10 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

James 3:16-18 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Brethren how much self-seeking is there in what you think you know and trying to give everyone the benefit of your truth, especially when it does not line up with the truth of God's Word. How much benefit is there in that?

James had a very unique perspective following his conversion, probably unlike any other because he had been an eye- and ear-witness to the perfect Man for most of his life. And in retrospect, what he saw and heard from his physical elder brother's interaction with others to perfection left an indelible mark on him and a road map to follow for us.

I would like you to hear what James wrote again from verse 13 on, but again please listen to how The Message, a paraphrase translation, has it:

James 3:13-18 (The Message) Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats. Real wisdom—God's wisdom—begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.

Please remember doing the hard work, because it will come up again later in this sermon when we get back to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil being in the *midst* of the Garden.

Brethren, James was an eyewitness to how the Living Word of God carefully used His perfect knowledge in accord with His love for all men and passed the pattern of conduct on to us, perhaps following a lifetime pattern of His elder brother within their physical conditions James could boldly tell us what he does.

Let us turn back a couple pages to James 1 and we will pick it up in 17-27:

James 1:17-27 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

How many of us are really trying to look into God's perfect law of liberty, and learning to do these things, as James probably witnessed the most powerful human being who ever lived as a man, humbly do Himself? Rather than calling down legions of angels, as it was absolutely within His power to do, He went about doing the works of the perfect law of liberty.

As I was preparing this section of the sermon, I suddenly remembered a scene from the movie *Ben Hur: A tale of The Christ*, where Judah Ben Hur was being marched as a prisoner through the dirt roads of Galilee under a scorching sun, chained to a group of fellow prisoners and dying of thirst. He stumbles and falls pleading for water and suddenly this Man comes out of His shop where He is diligently working as a carpenter and tenderly provides a ladle of water. An abusively bullying Roman soldier comes over and tries to flog the Man and push Him out of the way of providing the life-giving water to Judah Ben Hur. But with one look from the Man who was kneeling in the dirt to provide a cup of life giving water, the bully soldier cowers and turns away.

Although a movie portrayal, I think it is probably indicative of exactly the simple acts of kindness from Jesus the Christ were the hallmark actions James witnessed and inspired what we just read.

Now brethren again, while considering and specifically thinking about the words we just read about how using knowledge with godly wisdom manifests itself in peace, please turn with me to Proverbs 2.

Proverbs 2:1-15 My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity, and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths.

Please note that receiving God's Word and treasuring His commands—His commandments—is the key to understanding righteousness and justice and every good path. Wisdom enters the heart and knowledge becomes the pleasant path of righteousness that delivers us from the evil perversity of the wicked.

Knowledge gained apart from treasuring God's commandments as given from His mouth does not give us the heart of wisdom that will keep us out of the perversity of the wicked. Knowledge of and by itself will only lend itself to a mean-spirited ambition, boasting that you are wise, twisting the truth to

make yourself sound wise. It is the furthest thing from wisdom; it is animal cunning, devilish conniving.

If we are considering God's commandments in all things, then wisdom enters the heart to correctly discern God's way of righteousness and holiness with proper fear of the Lord that will draw us to Him and not drive us into hiding ourselves from Him!

Brethren, those things that Mr. Armstrong spent so much of his life to focus on in Genesis 1-3 are vital to our unity within the Body of Christ.

Please turn with me back to Genesis 2, where we will look at another important lesson for us to glean from this event.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 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."

Let us continue the story very shortly after Adam and Eve broke the first covenant God made with men who were in the process of being created in His image.

Genesis 3:8-11 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

First of all let us get back to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil being in the midst or possibly the center of the Garden, and perhaps directly next to the Tree of Life.

What we are seeing here in this translation of God's command to men in Genesis 2:15-17 seems to be an emphatic command from God to tend, keep, and not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with an, "Oh yeah! You can eat if you want from those trees you are tending and keeping."

But that is not what it says. In verse 16, "freely eat," is actually a figure of speech in the Hebrew called a *p olyptoton*, which is the repetition of the same part of speech in different inflections to make a point. Here are verses 16-17 as they appear in *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible*:

Genesis 2:16-17 (YLT) And Jehovah God layeth a charge on the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden eating thou dost eat; and of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it—dying thou dost die.'

This type of figure of speech used there at the end of verse 17 where we see the typical translation, "you shall surely die." While in Young's Translation, it is more precisely translated, "dying you shall die." I hope that you can see there is more commanded here than just tending, keeping, and not eating! Eating is also commanded, and not simply, "Well, if you feel like it go ahead and have an apple." This is important because it has a lot to do with everything else going on here in within the Garden and God's initial covenant with men, with His command regarding tending, keeping, and eating.

Can we speculate regarding what those other trees may have represented? I think we can hazard an educated guess, but first I would like you to turn to a commanded responsibility that we share regarding eating that is right in line with this. Please turn to Exodus 12.

Exodus 12:15-20 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on

them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

Leviticus 23:3-6 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.'

And now then, under the New Covenant, we see Jesus Christ's all important declaration as recorded in John 6:

John 6:32-35 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 6:47-48 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life."

John 6:58 “This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

Of course, here we see the Word of God, who, after the fact had to offer Himself up in sacrifice. But remember this is the God who walked with Adam and Eve before they sinned and they could freely be digesting His every word as He walked and shared with them all He had that would bring them life! But they needed to believe, tend, keep, and eat! They had an opportunity then to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Word of God without the impediment of sin.

I would like to insert something that I think you may find relative to this point from a sermon that Richard Ritenbaugh gave around the days of Unleavened Bread in 1998, because they—Adam and Eve—had the face-to-face opportunity then, in direct contact with the Word of God, that we have now through His Holy Spirit. But it always has required faithfully diligent work.

Try to apply what Richard wrote to the time before sin entered the picture, even though his Unleavened Bread sermon certainly applied more specifically to after the fact of sin:

A few years back a minister mentioned something that made a lot of sense to me. This was not the only thing that has made a lot of sense to me that he said, but this one in particular struck me for some reason, and that was he said the festivals in which we commemorate God working on behalf of men last one day! Passover lasts one day. Pentecost lasts one day. Trumpets last one day. Atonement lasts one day. Those are all things where God does something to step in to intervene and work in behalf of men. But the feasts in which we play a part in, lasts an entire week. We have the Feast of Tabernacles, which lasts seven days, and that is a period of time where man and God work together to bring about virtual utopia on earth, both physically and spiritually, but it takes a while because man and God must work together to produce it.

Changing man's world to God's world will take one thousand years, and then at the end Satan is going to come back in and do some destruction.

The symbolism of living in tabernacles itself gives you an idea that you are going on a long journey. It is not something that can be done quickly. It is a lifetime experience. Of course we have the seven Days of Unleavened Bread which typify our coming out of sin, and also coming out of this world, to follow God. The Protestant doctrine of "once saved, always saved" to the contrary, this process takes a lifetime of hard work and constant vigilance in order to maintain it. We may spend twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years learning the ways of Satan—learning the ways of this world, allowing our human nature to lead us about by the nose. We also need an equal amount of time to unlearn it and begin to learn God's way and to do God's way.

Brethren this is not nearly the same situation that faced Adam and Eve before the fact, but it certainly was the same in that although they merely had the spirit of man in them they had the ability to connect with God's Spirit. They did not have God's Holy Spirit within them yet but they had direct, unfettered contact with God, to teach them His way of life and how to use His eternal law of love as it needed to be applied with careful consideration. If they kept their part of the covenant God made with them, it would continue.

At this point I want to cite a section from a sermon by John Ritenbaugh regarding the Edenic Covenant from part four on his series on Leadership and Covenants. John said:

The Edenic covenant begins by listing its blessings. God speaks directly to Adam and Eve, but since all humans came from them, this covenant is addressed broadly to the entire human race. The overall picture shown in this universal covenant is that the entire creation—earth itself with all that is on it, humanity and the life given us—is a multitude of gifts from God. The key to understanding this is the phrase, "and God blessed them" (Genesis 1:22). Both the Hebrew term and the English translation of blessed

indicate the same sense of "to do good for," "to favor," "to endow," "to bestow prosperity or happiness," and even "to honor and exalt."

The Bible begins with the fact that, because of what God has done, we exist, we live and have being, we think, plan, build, and look to the future. We did not give ourselves even one of these necessary gifts. This is where our relationship with God must begin, where we must start in our thinking about ourselves. These realities, if take to heart honestly and seriously, are major factors regarding our place in life.

The covenant's emphasis is on His purpose. The earth itself is a major teaching device, and receiving it brings responsibilities whether one is converted or not. The most critical question is, "How will we use what we learn from the creation to enhance life?" Caring for the creation requires work, as does spiritual salvation. So, earth is also given to us for our use within the parameters of His creative purposes.

Perhaps most important, the Edenic Covenant introduces the sovereign Creation God Himself. In the first five verses of Genesis 1, He stands alone, drawing our focus to what He wants us to learn first about Him. He presents Himself standing at the beginning of all things. He precedes everything.

Brethren, as John said, the earth itself stands as a major teaching device. So too did the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve before sin entered the picture. So with this in mind, let us consider what those other trees in the garden of Eden could have and probably did represent for them to eat.

Galatians 5:22-26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Adam and Eve did not have the Holy Spirit of God in them, but they did walk with the Word of God daily, and the Garden was a teaching tool! As the old saying goes, “You are what you eat.”

That saying came from a French lawyer by the name of Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote in 1826 an essay, “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.” Within a similar 1863 essay titled, “Concerning Spiritualism and Materialism,” a German by the name of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach wrote: “Man is what he eats.” They were both making the point that the food one eats has a bearing on one's state of mind and health.

Brethren, this is exactly what God was teaching Adam and Eve face-to-face. If they would have continued to faithfully and diligently tend, keep, and eat from the trees in the Garden, slowly but surely they would come to the point under God's direction that food would become part of what they were. However, we need to step back into the Garden and see what they did with the gift they had been given because it is a bit of vital instruction for us.

First of all I would like us to go back to Genesis 3 again because there is a distinct clue there:

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

We have seen that God was in direct contact with and instructing Adam and Eve so His walking with them in the Garden would not have been an unusual surprise.

I would like to read this to you from a few translations that give us a better sense of the importance of timing here.

Genesis 3:8-9 (New Living Translation) When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Genesis 3:8-9 (Good News Translation) That evening they heard the Lord God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the Lord God called out to the man, "Where are you?"

Genesis 3:8-9 (Holman Christian Standard Bible) Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

Genesis 3:8-9 (Complete Jewish Bible) They heard the voice of Adonai God, walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, so the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Adonai God, among the trees in the garden. Adonai God, called to the man, "Where are you?"

Genesis 3:8-9 (The New Revised Standard Bible) They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

There are two important things here for us to consider. The first is the timing and the second is God's question. I believe they are both related, and I think it is important to look at them together. What I mean is to see them as two interrelated things.

Our Omnipotent Creator did not need to ask them where they were. He knew where they were! But I would like to propose that His question is more along the lines of a question you might ask yourself when you are supposed to meet someone at a specific time in a specific place and they are not there. You say, "Okay it's 5 PM and we had an appointment. Where are they?" The other part of that is that He was there to meet them in the breeze of the evening, after work had been done and it was time to reflect.

For us perhaps this may be comparable to our own time we spend with God in prayer at the end of the day to review the events of the day, as we come before Him with requests and seeking His direction and correction.

But my personal speculation on this is that what we are seeing here is a very specific time, on a very specific day that God had set apart for teaching and fellowship and review after a satisfying week of work.

I think it was the start of the Sabbath that God had specifically created for man, as Jesus Christ told us, and this appointment that He had made to draw them and us closer to Him for rest, refreshment and development into His very image was broken by sin!

Just as God taught Israel in their wilderness journey by the food they had collected before the Sabbath the important lesson of His special time with them and living as He lives, by using what He miraculously provides, He may have been teaching Adam and Eve the same valuable lesson: “Six days shall you diligently do all of your work in tending, keeping, and eating, but the Sabbath is holy time for rest, refreshment, and eating with Him, from the abundance He has given to learn more fully to live as He lives.”

However, sin had caused a break in this most precious cycle.

This brings us to our third point: God is using this time with Adam and Eve in the Garden to give us a clear look at what will always be some of the most subtly destructive means Satan will use to pull us off track. First of all, consider something that may not be as obvious as others, but still an extremely critical point for us to consider every day of our lives: What were Adam and Eve doing wasting the time God had given them to tend, keep, and eat from all of the other trees in Garden?

How quickly we get sidetracked with time wasters. God gave them fulfilling work to do that was not only satisfying and keeping God’s blessing in order, but it was providing them with much needed food to eat! Then, under God’s direction they would eventually become what they ate in the very image and likeness of God, exuding godly love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But as soon as they

began taking their eyes off their responsibilities and got caught up in time wasters, the trap was sprung.

Brethren, how carefully are we when considering how we are using our God-given gifts including our time? When we start to spend more time considering other things, and are not as attentive to our God-given responsibilities as we should, steadily and reflectively caring for our work at hand, we are on our way into trouble. It certainly did not work out too well for Adam and Eve when they took their eyes off the ball!

The other much more obvious characteristics of Satan's work and spirit is he will always be mixing truth with lies, while trying to get you to question and reject authority, trying to get you to speak evil of those in authority. It may even come in the guise of convincing you of your need to point out your brother's faults for his own good.

Be very careful brethren. God is showing us by what went on in the Garden that we are up against the most cunning and crafty beast in creation, who will try to get you to work and think just like he does.

As we see in Jude 1:6-8, Satan and his minions reject the word and authority of God and think nothing of speaking evil of those who are in authority.

As we see in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:14-18, Satan will always be questioning God and God's eternal law, because any perfect godly wisdom that was in him became corrupted by his high opinion of himself. He is now absolutely devoid of the wisdom from above to understand the proper judgement of good and evil. So he will always be questioning God's perfect and eternal law of love that God Himself lives.

This then brings us to point 4 and God's declaration that in taking from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil man became as One of them to know good and evil.

Genesis 3:22-24 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of

Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

God does not lie. Very clearly here the Word and the Father agree that by doing what they did man became like Them—to know good and evil! However, as evident from their actions, Adam and Eve were not anywhere near having everything they needed it to deal with it. There was a very serious component missing! Satan knew it and He was trying to use the very thing that would be an intrinsic part of mankind's nature one day to destroy Men along with God's ultimate plan to create us in His image and likeness.

At this point I want to strongly recommend that you retrieve John Ritenbaugh's very important sermon, ["Eden, the Garden, and the Two Trees \(Part Three\)"](#), given at the Feast in 2007. And specifically the section on the four items in the Holy of Holies:

1) The Ark of the Covenant with its Mercy Seat, signifying the throne of God, signifying His presence; 2) the golden pot of manna, signifying Jesus Christ, our Savior and our High Priest, at His right hand; 3) Aaron's almond rod that miraculously budded, signifying the Tree of Life, God's power and authority; and finally, 4) the tablets of stone placed inside the Ark, directly below the Mercy Seat, from where God judges.

John then goes on to explain how each one of these items were represented in the midst of the Garden of Eden and how and why the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents the perfect and holy law of God and His righteousness and judgment that will last forever.

This section is very, very important to help understand and appreciate that it was not the fruit of this tree that was anything less than very good but Adam and Eve's taking of it against His command, and without any idea how to use it right. That was the problem!

This is the very crux of what God set before Adam and Eve in the Garden. The forbidden tree, representing the law, was never designed to produce eternal life but in taking it at that time it only brought death.

But now through Jesus Christ and the new life we are given, we have God's Holy Spirit added so we can walk in obedience to God's law in sharp contrast to what we did prior to our calling. We can now carefully keep our focus on Jesus Christ and how He lives so we can consider how to make the right choices from the inside out in accord with God's perfect law of love, expressed in His commandments!

Brethren, as we know from places like Psalm 19:7-8 and Psalm 119:16, 24, 47—God's law is perfect, makes the simple wise, and is a delight. But Adam and Eve made the wrong choice and did not carefully consider God's command! They had direct communication with God, but they made the wrong choice and did not stick to God's command to diligently tend, keep, and eat. Rather, they allowed themselves be swayed by Satan's declaration that it was their right to take to themselves something that God knew they could not possibly handle at that time.

Without the Spirit of God dwelling in us we could never handle it either, but now as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, who dwells within those who humbly continue forward in faith, God is making sure that we can carefully consider God's law and make the only choice that is really our right to choose.

So for a closing scripture please turn with me to Deuteronomy 30.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 “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; 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 today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore 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."

Mr. Armstrong's concentrated focus on the Two Trees was a clear warning for us all to stay the course in obedience to God, carefully and diligently considering the work He has given us to do, so we can choose life, to love and cling to the Lord our God, living as He lives with Them for eternity!

As a bit of a postscript to this sermon, Nancy and I were discussing this subject today at breakfast and I said it reminded me of a scene from a movie we had seen a number of years ago, that she said I needed to add to the sermon.

In the movie there was a Marine colonel on the witness stand in the wrongful death trial of two Marines. They were being held accountable for the death of someone who had died when the two Marines were in the process of carrying out an illegal order that the Colonel had surreptitiously issued. The young Navy lieutenant, who was defending the Marines was in the process of an intense cross examination of the Colonel trying to get him to admit his own guilt in issuing the order, when the Colonel heatedly blurted out, "You want the truth?" To which the defense attorney pretty much replied it was his right, followed by the Colonel's heated reply, "You can't handle the truth!"

Brethren, this may be a simple-minded example, but neither Adam and Eve or anyone of their descendants, except Jesus Christ can fully handle God's perfect and eternal law of liberty and judgment until God has finished His project, and it is just as much a part of us as it is Them to be used correctly.

In the meantime we must continue to carefully consider how to apply God's law within the means He has given through His Holy Spirit knowing that the only right we have is to choose life as He gives us the ability and opportunity to do it.

