

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Podcast Audio

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to another deep dive. This time, you've been looking into Genesis again, especially that story of the Garden of Eden. You sent over a really interesting lecture about it.

We're going to unpack some of the symbolism around those two trees, you know, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Yeah, the Garden of Eden. It's one of those stories that people are always talking about and thinking about even after all this time.

For sure. And those trees right in the middle of it, it feels like they could help us understand something really deep about us, about humans and our connection with God. But before we go too deep into all that symbolism, maybe we should just quickly remind everyone about the story itself, just to set the scene.

Good idea. So in Genesis 2, we meet Adam and Eve. They were created by God and put in this beautiful garden, like a paradise.

Everything they needed was right there. The Bible describes it as perfect harmony. So we've got this perfect place.

And in the middle of it all, there are these two trees, two trees and two very different destinies. Exactly. Genesis 2.9 actually describes the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And then God gives them that command, the one everyone knows: don't eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Right. OK, so let's start with the Tree of Life.

In your notes, you mentioned John Calvin, that he thought this tree was like a sacrament. I have to admit, I'm never quite sure what that word means. What was Calvin trying to say? Well, imagine a sacrament is something you can see and touch, but it represents a much deeper spiritual truth.

Like in some churches, when they have communion, the bread and wine are real things you eat and drink, but they represent Christ's body and blood. They connect you to something bigger. OK, I think I'm getting it.

So Calvin didn't think the Tree of Life itself had magic powers, right? He was saying that it was a symbol. It represented the life that God gave to humans, a life of being close to God, relying on him and obeying him. He even quotes Genesis 2.9 directly.

Quote: He gave the Tree of Life its name, not because it could confer on man that life with which he had been previously endowed, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God. So it wasn't about literally living forever just by eating the fruit. It was about recognizing that deeper connection with God.

Exactly. It was like an outward sign of something inward, like when people wear wedding rings. The ring doesn't make the marriage, but it's a way of showing that commitment, that promise.

The Tree of Life was a reminder of that promise between God and people. I see. But if it was so important, why did God send Adam and Eve out of the garden and stop them from going back to the Tree of Life? If it was so good, wouldn't it have been better to let them keep eating from it? Calvin actually talked about that.

He believed that even though God kept them away from the Tree of Life, he wasn't keeping eternal life away from them, you know, in the end. It was more like showing them what their disobedience had done. They broke that close connection with God because of what they did.

So it's like God was saying, you decided to go your own way. You can't depend on this symbol of our closeness anymore. There's a new way back, but it'll be harder now.

Yeah, that's a good way to put it. It's interesting to compare this to what Gerhardus Voss thought, another theologian who had some really interesting ideas about the Tree of Life. Yeah, your notes mentioned him too.

What was Voss's take on it? He agreed with the whole sacrament idea, but he took it further. He thought Adam and Eve actually never ate from the Tree of Life before they messed up. Wait, really? So they were in this paradise, had everything they needed, including this symbol of being close to God, but they never actually ate from it.

That's how Voss understood it. He says they sinned and then they were kicked out and never had the chance. But if they never ate from the Tree of Life, even when they were innocent, what does that mean about how close they were to God back then? Were they not completely connected even in paradise? It's a great question, and it leads to something else fascinating about the Tree of Life.

It doesn't just disappear after the fall. It comes back again right at the end of the Bible in Revelation. Oh yeah, in the New Jerusalem.

It's at the beginning and the end of the whole Bible. Exactly. And in Revelation, people can reach the Tree of Life again, but this time it's for people who've been saved through Christ.

Revelation 22.11 says, Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the city. Washing their robes means being cleansed by Christ's sacrifice. So it comes full circle.

The Tree of Life, which represents that perfect relationship with God, is lost because of sin, but then it comes back because of faith in Christ. That's a pretty powerful message for people who believe in redemption. But okay, enough about the Tree of Life.

What about that other tree, the one with the forbidden fruit, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Ah, yeah, that's where things get even more complicated. Trust me, there's so much to talk about there. All right, let's get into this Tree of Knowledge.

I was reading your notes, and you mentioned some pretty out-there theories about it. Some scholars think it's just a myth borrowed from other old stories, you know, stories about gods who didn't want humans to become too smart. Yeah, some people definitely see it as a mythological thing, maybe representing a fear that humans would become like gods themselves.

But isn't the whole story presented as actually happening? You know, like it's fact within the Bible. It seems important for understanding, like, why humans are the way we are. Yeah, that's a good point.

And remember Gerhard de Vos, who we were talking about before, he totally disagreed with that mythological idea. He pointed out that it was God who put the Tree of Knowledge in the garden. And after Adam and Eve messed up, God doesn't act like he's jealous or scared of them because they know more.

So if it's not just a myth, what did Vos think the Tree of Knowledge was all about? He saw it as a way for humans to grow spiritually, like a test. He said the name Tree of Knowledge of good and evil isn't necessarily a bad thing. It doesn't mean it's automatically off limits.

So Vos didn't think that knowing the difference between good and evil was wrong? Nope. He thought humans could have learned that difference whether they obeyed God or disobeyed him. The tree was just the thing God used to give them a choice, a way to show they trusted and obeyed him.

That makes sense. But if just knowing wasn't the problem, then why was eating from the tree such a huge deal? It seems like God gets really upset about it in the story. Remember that verse, Genesis 3:22, when Adam and Eve eat the fruit, God says, the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

Vos thought that was kind of ironic. Ironic. So he's saying they ate the fruit, but they didn't really understand good and evil.

I'm not sure I follow that. It's a little tricky. Vos thought that because they disobeyed, they missed the whole point.

It's like if you bragged about winning a race, but you actually lost. You think you achieved something, but it's not real. Okay, I see what you're getting at.

But what if we don't read that verse as being ironic? What if we just take it literally? That's a good question. And it brings us to another way of understanding it, a really interesting one, I think. It's called the self-deification view.

Self-deification. That sounds intense. What does it even mean to know good and evil in this context? It's more than just knowing right from wrong, like having facts.

The Hebrew word for know here suggests something deeper. It implies the power to decide between good and evil, like saying, I get to decide what's right and wrong. So it's not just about knowing the difference, but deciding what it is.

Exactly. When they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve weren't just getting information. They were trying to take God's place, the one who decides what's right and wrong.

It was like a rebellion, wanting to be their own gods, in a way. Wow, that's a power move. It's like they wanted to tell God what to do and make their own rules about what's good and bad.

And that's a temptation that we still struggle with today, don't you think? Like when you hear people saying, "My truth is the only truth," or "no one can tell me what to believe." Oh yeah, all the time. Especially online, like everyone's trying to be the boss of what's right and wrong.

And they end up judging and putting down anyone who disagrees with them. It's a dangerous way of thinking. And it comes from that same desire to be our own gods.

That's a really good point. It's easy to think our own viewpoint is the only one that matters, like we have it all figured out. Well, we are only human.

We make mistakes. And we don't know everything. And we're definitely not the ones who should be deciding what's right and wrong for everyone else.

Which is probably why we need God. He's the only one who can really set the standard for truth and what's right. Exactly.

He's the source of all goodness. The one who gets to define what is right and fair. But this is what I find weird.

We all know this deep down, right? Trying to be our own gods doesn't work, but we keep falling for it. Why do you think that is? It's the oldest story there is, isn't it? From the Garden of Eden to right now, humans want to be in control, calling the shots. But I think it goes deeper than that.

Maybe it's a desire for something bigger than ourselves, but we're looking in the wrong place. So instead of turning to God, the real source of life and purpose, we try to make our own meaning, find our own purpose. Exactly.

We go after money, power, fame, knowledge, trying to fill this emptiness inside us. But it never really works, does it? It's like when you're thirsty, and you drink salt water. You just get thirstier.

That's the sad part about being human. We were made to be close to God, to have purpose in his plan. But we keep choosing to go our own way.

And it just leads to feeling empty and lost. So how do we get out of that trap? How do we choose the path of life like the Tree of Life represents? How do we get back to being connected to God? I think it starts with being humble, admitting that we don't know everything, that we aren't the ones who get to say what's ultimately true or right. So it's about letting go of our egos that need to be the boss all the time.

Right. It's recognizing that there's something bigger than us, a wisdom that goes way beyond what we can understand. And that's God, right? Yes.

God is where truth and goodness and life come from. Yeah. And he wants us to be in a relationship with him, a relationship built on love, grace, and obeying him.

I know some people hear obedience and they think, ugh, rules. I get it. But truly obeying God when it comes from love is actually incredibly freeing.

How so? Because it frees you from having to be in charge all the time. When you surrender to God's will, you can let go of that pressure to find your own meaning or purpose. Your identity and purpose come from him.

It's like we can trust that God is the captain of the ship and we don't have to steer it all the time. Exactly. That trust, that surrender, that's the key to experiencing the amazing life Jesus talked about.

The life represented by the Tree of Life, right? A life connected to God, a life full of purpose and joy and peace. And it's a life that's open to everyone, to anyone who's willing to be humble, to want what God wants, and to accept his grace. This has been so insightful.

We've covered a lot and I definitely have a lot to think about. Me too. And I think this sets us up to ask some even deeper questions about what knowledge really is, why we're so drawn to being our own gods, and what the real path to a fulfilling life is.

It really is amazing how those two trees kind of sum up all the big decisions we have to make in life. They're like two totally different ways of looking at knowledge and even like how to live. And like we were talking about that self-deification thing, trying to be like, God, that's what the Tree of Knowledge represents.

And that takes us away from God, right? It can even feel like, I don't know, a kind of spiritual death. It often starts with good intentions. You know, wanting to figure yourself out, be free to decide your own truth.

But like we said, that road usually ends badly. Makes me think about all the ways we try to be in control these days, like thinking we can just make our own meaning and purpose without needing anything bigger than ourselves. It's because we're rejecting that we need God.

You know, it's like we're grabbing his authority and putting ourselves in charge of our lives. And that never really ends well, does it? We, humans, aren't perfect. We make mistakes, bad choices.

Exactly. When we act like we're God, we usually just mess things up for ourselves and for everyone around us. OK, so how do we fight that? How do we choose the life path like the Tree of Life is showing us, that path of staying connected to God? I think it starts with getting humble, recognizing that we're not all-knowing, that we don't have all the answers.

We're not the ones who get to decide ultimately what's true and what's right. So letting go of the ego, that need to control everything. Yeah, exactly.

Recognizing that there's something much greater than us, a wisdom we can't even grasp. And that's God. Yes, God is the source of all truth, all goodness, all life.

And he wants us to have a relationship with him, a relationship based on love, on his grace and on obeying him. I know that when some people hear obedience, they just think it means following a bunch of rules. I understand that.

But real obedience, the kind that comes from a heart that loves God, it actually makes you free. Really? Because you're free from having to be in charge of everything. When you surrender to what God wants, you don't have that pressure to create your own meaning or find your own purpose.

Your identity and your fulfillment, they come from him. So it's like, we can trust God's got this; he's steering the ship, and we can just relax a little bit. Right.

And that trust, that surrender, that's how we experience the abundant life Jesus talked about. The life symbolized by the Tree of Life, a life connected to God, full of meaning and joy and peace. And anyone can have that life.

Anyone who humbles themselves, wants what God wants, and accepts his grace. Wow, this deep dive has really made me think; it feels like we've only just started to understand the story and what it means for us now. There's always more to learn, isn't there? I hope everyone listening will keep thinking about these ideas, study the Bible more, and look for wisdom from God.

It comes down to a choice, doesn't it? Do we try to be like God, even though it separates us from him? Or do we choose the path of life, surrender to God, and find real fulfillment? That's the invitation. Let's all be brave enough to make the right choice. Thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the Garden of Eden.

I hope you leave feeling challenged, inspired, and maybe a little more ready to choose a life that's truly full. And until next time, may God bless you and guide you on your journey.