

# Genesis: Genesis 2 – The Two Trees in the Garden

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## Keywords

Tree of Life, Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Garden of Eden, Sacrament, John Calvin, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Bavinck, Probation

## Abstract

This lecture explores the theological significance of the two trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It contrasts various historical and theological perspectives, particularly comparing John Calvin's sacramental view with Geerhardus Vos's probationary view. The discussion also examines the "self-deification" interpretation of the Tree of Knowledge, drawing on Herman Bavinck to argue that eating the fruit represents humanity's attempt to establish autonomous standards of right and wrong. Finally, it links the Tree of Life in Genesis to its redemptive, Christ-mediated reappearance in the Book of Revelation.

## Outline

### I. The Garden of Eden (Genesis 2)

#### A. Geographic Location (Previously discussed)

#### B. The Trees of the Garden (Genesis 2:9, 17; 3:3)

1. Key Biblical Statements on the Trees
2. Divine Commandment to Adam and Eve's Expulsion

### II. The Tree of Life

#### A. Meaning and Significance: Absence of Explicit Biblical Exposition

#### B. John Calvin's Sacramental View

1. The Tree as a Sacramental Symbol of Life and Fellowship with God
2. Rejection of Intrinsic Efficacy: No Inherent Chemical/Physical Life-Giving Properties
3. Loss of the Symbol and the Thing Signified (Analogy of Samson's Hair)
4. Christ-Centered Salvation: Recovery of Life Only via the Death of Christ
5. Assumption that Adam and Eve Participated in the Tree Prior to the Fall

#### C. Geerhardus Vos's View

1. Alignment with Calvin's Concept of a Sacramental Symbol

2. Distinction: Postulates that Adam and Eve Never Ate of the Tree Before the Fall

#### **D. Theological Context: Protestant/Evangelical Approaches to Sacraments**

1. Reluctance as a Reaction to Roman Catholic "Ex Opere Operato" Theology
2. Old Testament Critiques of Ritualistic Formalism (Isaiah 1, Amos 5)
3. Reformed Definition (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 92)

#### **E. The Tree of Life in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:7, 22:2, 14, 19)**

1. The Parallel of Paradise: The Closed Way in Genesis Re-opened in Revelation
2. Role of Jesus Christ: Access Reclaimed through His Cleansing Blood

### **III. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**

#### **A. Biblical Statements in Genesis 2–3**

1. Named by the Lord (Genesis 2:9)
2. Prohibition with Death Penalty (Genesis 2:17) — Death as Divine Punishment
3. The Only Forbidden Tree in the Garden
4. Serpent's Claim (Genesis 3:5) and God's Confirmation of Man's Self-Deified Knowledge (Genesis 3:22)

#### **B. Three Interpretive Views**

1. The Mythical View
  - a. Derived from Pagan Mythology (Jealousy of the Gods)*
  - b. Interpreted as Humanity's Evolution to Reason or Civilization*
  - c. Vos's Objection: The Narrative is Inherently Ethical and Moral*
2. Geerhardus Vos's Probationary View
  - a. Instrument to Lead Man Through Probation to Moral and Religious Maturity*
  - b. The Name as Neutral: Knowing Good and Evil is Desirable, Not Culpable*
  - c. Knowledge Achieved Either Way: Two Forks of the Probationary Choice*
  - d. Interpretive Prerequisite: Treating Genesis 3:22 as Ironical*
3. The Self-Deification / Autonomous Norm View (Vannoy's Held View)
  - a. Literal Interpretation of Genesis 3:22 (Real Transformation of Status)*
  - b. Definition of "Know": The Power to Distinguish, Specify, and Decide Values*
  - c. Comparison with Children (Deuteronomy 1:39): No Maturity to Choose Autonomously*
  - d. The Act of Sin: Choosing Independence from God and Assuming His Prerogative*
  - e. Herman Bavinck's Support: The Desired Emancipation and Placement Above the Law*
  - f. The Ongoing Human Dilemma: Continued Struggle with Autonomy and Independence*