

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: Why God allowed Evil

By Jonathan Hartsuiker

Man was created to rely upon God's power – both physically and spiritually. We were made to be weak, dependent creatures who continually beseech God the Father for all our needs. Self-sufficiency is only found on the Great Throne. God saw fit to provide for our physical needs but allowed us to glean the knowledge of good and evil in order to reveal our spiritual weakness. Our evil behaviour is simply a logical consequence of the convulsion of free will, spiritual impotence and a knowledge of good and evil. God was not without purpose, however, for he desires to use our revealed spiritual weakness to compel us toward spiritual dependence. It is this refinement of creation for which the Father did not consider sending his only son too costly a sacrifice.

The Garden of Eden operated upon the same principle of dependence: we ate from the tree of life and it gave us everything we needed to live eternally. But we lived in complete innocence with regard to good and evil. Spiritually speaking, we did not have any compass to tell us whether our lives were pleasing to God. We were nearly robots – nearly. We had free will and one simple command. It was a stern command, but without the knowledge of good and evil, we would never have considered the option of disobedience. In Adam's mind, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was off-limits and he was going to keep it that way. Why would he disobey? He didn't know what evil was! The only thing that could have had any chance of moving Adam's hand to disobedience was a well-crafted trick. And so it came.

Hold on a minute! Time OUT! Where is God in this? What is HE doing? Isn't God an all-mighty, all-powerful creator who is sovereign over the whole of creation? He should have been able to do SOMETHING. He should have had the strength to prevent such a trick! Surely God could have silenced the deceitful snake and protected His innocent creation! Yes, He could have, but He chose not to. Why? Why would God allow the deceiver to steal away the innocence and beauty of a harmonious creation? Was He being negligent? Did He make a mistake?

Let's pose an alternative scenario: What if God had decided to endow Adam with the knowledge of good and evil from the very beginning? There is clearly something the matter with this, as we can see when we look at Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." Why does God so despise the idea of a man who discerns good from evil and yet lives forever? Somehow our dependence upon God for physical strength had to be broken because of our newly-acquired spiritual enlightenment. Could it be that God created us with physical and spiritual needs but only saw fit to sustain us physically? Could it be that a human, equipped with both free will and the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong, would not have the spiritual faculties to remain pleasing to God? The following 6000 years of human history have answered that question more than sufficiently: No.

This, however, is not a point of desperation. Rather, I have come to appreciate what God is up to in the grand scheme of human history. He started out with two innocent but powerless people who had two very real needs: physical sustenance and spiritual power. At the end of our collective biography, we see a holy nation of people who live and reign with Christ for ever and ever. Looking a bit closer at that perfect nation, we see individuals with the same needs common to mankind: physical sustenance to live forever and spiritual power to please God. Here at the end of the story, however, we find individuals who understand the difference between right and wrong.

So why do *these* people, whose names have been found written in the Lamb's book of life, get the privilege of eternal life? They know the distinction between right and wrong and they are still humans – weak and helpless to be found pleasing in God's perfect sight. They don't seem very much distinguished from Adam and Eve. What changed between the beginning of the story and the end? Simply put, God gave them His power:

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave you ancestors; you will be my people and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:24-28

No longer are they spiritually oblivious and no longer are they spiritually helpless, for it is God's spirit within them that causes them to walk in accordance with His good, pleasing and perfect will. Unfortunately, the consummation of God's will in our hearts is only possible when we freely invite it. He has truly given mankind freedom to do as it pleases. It is for this very reason that inviting God's will to replace our own is such a beautiful exchange. And it is for this very reason that God did not prevent the serpent from deceiving Eve and He did not prevent Eve from giving the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil to Adam. How would we know our spiritual weakness without the knowledge of good and evil? How would we know that we need God's will within us if we do not understand the severity of our spiritual weakness? How could God place His will within us without our free choice to invite it? How could we be pleasing to God without His will within us? How can we be the radiant bride of Christ if we are not pleasing to God?

And so I find that God's intentions for creation are both impeccably flawless and overwhelmingly beautiful. Flawless because he did not burden his infinitely weak creation with both free will and the wisdom to know good and evil. Instead, he instituted a command which we broke: “Do not eat from that tree.” Deceived or not, God's perfect justice still layed all of the blame of our enlightenment upon creation – not himself. If it were any other way, we could blame God for our inability to resist evil. His plan is beautiful because He was not finished on the seventh day. God still wanted to refine and improve us beyond what we were in the garden, but He can only do so if we freely desire it. The greatest fulfillment of our design as human beings is in learning to do the Father's will. As our will is gradually refined and molded to be in accordance with God's, we come one step closer to becoming members of the holy nation that is sustained physically and empowered spiritually.

God is sanctifying a bride from among the nations of this earth. He is bent on love and delights in providing the strength we need to remain pleasing before Him. He was not disappointed or confounded when we fell. Instead, he was eager to reveal to us the wonders of his power which were displayed on the cross of calvary. To Him be glory, honor and power for ever and ever. Amen.