

Genesis 2:15-17 ¹⁵ *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.* ¹⁶ *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ 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.”*

Genesis 3:22-24 ²² *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” – ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ 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.*

John 3:14-15 ¹⁴ *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Text: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:22-24; John 3:14-15 A 3/18/18 Psalm 148 Resp. Psalm: 96
Hymns: 42, 143 (1-5), 778, 354

THE TREE OF LIFE TO THE CROSS

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Our text begins, *“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”* God gave Adam and Eve work to do in the Garden of Eden – perfectly satisfying work. Adam and Eve were sinless. Nothing they did went wrong. Everything came out the way it was supposed to. That’s the way things were in all of God’s creation. But they sinned, and that changed everything. God told Adam, *“Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you”* (Gen. 3:17b-18a). That’s how life is for us after Adam and Eve sinned.

God had told Adam, *“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.”* God gave Adam, and later also Eve, the specific command not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to show their love and gratitude for everything He had done for them and for our whole human race by obeying Him. As John says in his first epistle, *“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”* (5:3a).

God made Adam and Eve perfect. They perfectly understood God’s command, and were perfectly able to obey it. God didn’t make them like puppets, forcing them to do what He wanted. God gave Adam and Eve a perfect will so they could willingly serve Him out of love. But they chose to disobey God. It is not our place to tell God that He should have made Adam and Eve (and, for that matter, the angels) so they could not sin. When Adam and Eve (and Satan and the angels who rebelled with him) sinned, it was not God’s fault for the way He made them. It was their own choice and their own fault.

When God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He warned them, *“For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* God didn’t go into detail about all the consequences of disobeying Him: all the evil and suffering there would

be in the world, death for every human being, hurricanes and volcanoes and tsunamis, and so much more. God gave Adam and Eve His command, and He told them the consequences if they disobeyed. When God tells us something in His Word, we need to listen and obey. If we do, things will turn out as they should. If we don't, we suffer the consequences.

From our human perspective we could say that 'all' Adam and Eve did was eat some fruit. God had told them, "*...in the day that you need of it you shall surely die.*" Before they would have lived forever and never died. When they ate the fruit they immediately became sinful. They began the aging process that eventually caused them to die. And they became subject to eternal death in hell. Look at the effect their sin had on our human race and on everything else: the sin we all commit every day, all the evil and suffering in the world, the devastation and death caused by acts of nature, and on and on. Because our human race comes from Adam and Eve we all die, and we're all subject to eternal death in hell. Scripture says, "*Through one man*" (Adam) "*sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Ro. 5:12).

After Adam and Eve sinned the Bible tells us, "*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 cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. God made sure they couldn't get back in and eat fruit from the tree of life. The tree of life would enable them to live forever, but they would live forever in their sinful state.

When God first created Adam and Eve they walked with God and talked with God, in perfect harmony with Him. When they sinned they ruined that perfect harmony with God. But God promised them He would send a Savior as one of their descendants (Gen. 3:15). The Savior would defeat Satan, sin, and death for them and for us all. Adam and Eve lived their lives in the certain hope of the promised Savior and His salvation.

This brings us to the portion of our text from the third chapter of John. Jesus speaks of "*Moses [who] lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.*" Jesus had been speaking about how we're saved. Jesus refers to a time when the children of Israel, traveling through the wilderness, were bitterly complaining about God. He sent poisonous snakes that killed some of them. The others cried out to be rescued. God had Moses make a snake out of bronze and put it up on a pole. When someone was bitten by a poisonous snake and looked at the brass snake up on the pole God miraculously cured him, and he lived. Jesus says, "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Jesus Christ is the Savior God first promise to Adam and Eve. God through the brass snake on the pole gave physical life to people who were dying. Jesus through His cross gives eternal life to us who were facing eternal death.

Adam and Eve failed to obey God and brought themselves and us physical and eternal death. Jesus perfectly obeyed His Father to the point of giving His life for our sins on the cross, bringing us forgiveness for all of our sins and eternal life. As Scripture says, "*As by one man's*"

(Adam's) "*disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's*" (Christ's) "*obedience many will be made righteous*" (Ro. 5:19).

Our forgiveness and eternal salvation are a free gift from God through faith in Jesus. At the time of Moses, all those who were bitten by poisonous snakes had to do was believe what God said and look up at the bronze snake, and they lived. All we have to 'do' is believe in Jesus who died for our sins on the cross, and we're saved! The Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved*" (Ac. 16:31).

We live our lives by faith in Jesus knowing that one day will see Him and be with Him in heaven forever. In heaven we're not going to be like those pictured in cartoons, floating on clouds and eternally strumming harps. As in the Garden of Eden, God will have things for us to do that will be perfectly satisfying for us. Also as in the Garden of Eden we will see God face-to-face, worship and praise God face to face, and walk with God and talk with God, all in perfect harmony with God. We will have perfect health and happiness and peace forever (cf. Rev. 7:13-17; 21:22-27; 22:12-17).

Today we've traveled from the tree of life to the cross. After Adam and Eve sinned, had they been able to eat fruit from the tree of life they could have lived forever. But they would still be sinful. The tree of life could not take away their sins. Jesus' death on the 'tree' of the cross has taken all of our sins away, and guaranteed eternal life for us with Him in heaven. Amen.