

THE TREE

“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’” (Gen. 2:16,17).

This tree is significant beyond words. It stands at the crossroads. It determines life or death. It reappears, not only in every generation, but in every life. At some point in every life, every person will be individually challenged with the same question. Do we obey God or do we make up our own rules?

Soccer is the most popular sport in the world. Literally billions of people are captivated by it. Athletes practice endless hours and multiplied thousands cannot wait to turn on the TV or rush to the stadium to see a soccer game. As popular as it is, however, this amazing sport can be destroyed by one single decision. Do we obey the rules or make up our own rules? If every soccer player decided to do what was right in his own eyes the popularity of the game would vanish like a vapor. There are literally thousands of games in the world. They range from board games like checkers and chess, to athletic contests of strength, and speed. No game, however, can survive without rules.

The tree in our text defined “good” and “evil”. These words are meaningless to those who do not believe in God. Atheist Richard Dawkins has said it like this: “ *The universe we observe has ... no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. ... DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music*”. If man is merely a bag of chemicals who has evolved from pond scum, what does it matter whether you love your neighbor or eat your neighbor? If there are no rules and no Rule Maker, why criticize Hitler? He was merely dancing to his DNA.

Don Richardson, in his book *Peace Child*, writes of the Savi people in Netherlands Guinea. This stone age tribe considered lying and duplicity as a virtue. The book opens with the story of a man seeking to make peace with this tribe. After convincing the man they were his friends they killed and ate him. In their way of thinking, the longer they deceived him the more virtuous they were. When Don told them the story of Jesus, Judas Iscariot became their hero. He epitomized the deception and duplicity they were striving for.

Eve looked at the tree and noticed that it was good to look at, good for food, and desirable to make one wise (Gen. 3:6). The more Eve thought about it the more she was inclined to disobey God. Even though Adam was not deceived he still joined with her in this rebellion against the rules (1 Tim. 2:14). Sometimes the best way to escape from a serpent is to flee. For example, the Bible warns us to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). It is not wise to try and reason your way out of fornication.

Adam and Eve already knew what was “good”. Everything around them was “good”. That’s the way God made everything. The word “evil” however allured them as it was a mystery. What did this new word mean? Was God trying to keep them from something desirable? Had they decided to trust God and go by the rules they would never have had to dig a grave, shed a tear, or experience a pain. They chose, however, to make up their own rules and the rest is history.

But what about you and me? In these last days some will abandon the faith and be seduced by evil spirits and the doctrines of demons. Such teaching comes from hypocritical liars whose conscience has been seared with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:1,2). Their new nomenclature involves “your truth” and “my truth”. Just as in Eden, the wicked one is trying to trick us into forgetting what God has said and making up our own rules. Remember, when you make up your own rules you ruin the game!

The Psalmist said: **“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” (Ps. 1:1-3).**

Be careful where you “walk”, “stand”, or “sit” for evil company invariably corrupts good character (1 Cor. 15:33).