

TWO TREES

“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.” (Genesis 2:8-10 (KJV))

The learning process is enhanced by contrast and comparison with something with which we are familiar. Strong as an ox, big as an elephant, and bright as the sun immediately communicate to those familiar with an ox, an elephant and the sun. With this in mind it is easy to understand why the Scriptures use symbols like a lion, a leopard, and a bear to communicate fear and terror. Similarly, an earthquake, a tempest, and a swelling sea also create an adrenalin rush for those familiar with earthquakes and storms. Such comparisons, however, would not work with Adam and Eve. They had never seen a predator or a storm. All the animals in Eden ate herbs (Gen.1:30). Not only had they never seen a storm, they had never even seen rain (Gen. 2:6). Adam and Eve, however, were familiar with trees. Trees were something they could relate to and understand. So God used two trees to communicate to them the concepts of “good” and “evil”.

God placed these two trees in the midst of the Garden. One was the tree of life, and the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The centrality of their location ensured their visibility. These two trees would always be accessible. While Adam and Eve were free to eat from all other trees, they were forbidden to taste or touch the tree with the knowledge of good and evil. Since everything in the Garden was “good” Adam and Eve had only a partial understanding of that tree. They understood “good” but “evil” was an enigma. The word “evil” was like a foreign language. While they didn’t understand “evil” they did understand “tree”. Whatever “evil” was, it came from that one tree. Whatever “evil” was it was within their grasp like a piece of fruit .

The Hebrew word for “evil” is “ra”. Strong, in his Exhaustive Concordance, states that it comes from the root “ra.a” which means “fragmentation”. Adam and Eve knew unity and harmony for God is not the Author of confusion. “Evil”, as we now know, produces chaos and confusion. “Evil” caused the ground to produce thorns and thistles. “Evil” caused the animals started eating one another. “Evil” led Cain to kill his brother.

The Bible also uses trees to represent good. The Psalmist said that a man who delighted in the Law of God was like a tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). The fruit produced by such a “tree” can be eaten and it’s seeds planted to enrich the lives of others. Jesus, as you recall, was said by Isaiah to grow like a tender plant and a root out of dry ground (Is. 53:2). The “Seed” of woman would grow into a tree powerful enough to produce fruit to bless the whole world.

The Bible also uses trees to represent evil. With reference to false teachers Jesus warned that they would be like wolves in sheep’s clothing. But like a tree, you would know them by their fruit. The forbidden tree in Eden was also deceptive. It as good to look at, good for food, and desirous to make one wise. It’s fruit, however, was “evil” and would prove fatal.

There is something basic and foundational in this story. Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God we need to make an association between our sin and theirs. God told them what to do and what not to do. Sin involved making up their own rules. They were not satisfied with God’s definition of right and wrong! This corrupt thinking is as up to date as the morning news. In virtually every area of life the main stream of society is in the process of redefining right and wrong. Someone quipped that the fastest growing religion in the world is man’s worship of himself!

As it was in the beginning, evil is in our midst and immediately accessible. Leave it alone!