

**The Tree of the
Knowledge
of
Good and Evil**

Martyn Shenstone

Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible © Nelson Word.

Quotations appearing as 'Strong's xxx' are taken from the New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and Lexicons © Nelson Word. The underlining of scripture verses in quotations is added at the discretion of the author for emphasis only.

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL
ISBN 978-1-898824-02-2

Copyright © 2007 Martyn Shenstone

Published by:

Martyn Shenstone Ministries
Folkestone
United Kingdom

www.martynshenstone.com

Printed in the United Kingdom

Contents

Chapter 1	Who's Perfect?	5
Chapter 2	What's in a Tree?	12
Chapter 3	The Sin of Cain	19
Chapter 4	The Spirit or the Letter?	27

***Special thanks to all my faithful partners
who have supported this ministry.***

***Every life that is changed by reading this
book, has been changed by you and
I working together.***

*And my God shall supply all your need according to
His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

*Now to our God and Father be glory forever and
ever. Amen.*

Philippians 4:19-20

Chapter 1

Who's Perfect?

A small child learning to walk may stumble, sometimes even fall. No one, since the beginning of the world, would venture to say that such a child was not perfect. In fact, a newborn baby is described as perfect, even when it can't co-ordinate arm and leg movement.

When Adam and Eve were created they were also perfect, not because they were created physically mature but because of the innocence of their nature - like that of a newborn child. All they knew was God's love. All they believed was what God said. This is what made them perfect. Their faith in God made everything right even though they had much to learn.

Adam and Eve were evidently created as adults, they could walk and talk, they could reason but they were also on a journey. They had great promises made to them, they were to be fruitful, multiply and have dominion.

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion...

Genesis 1:28

To take dominion you need maturity. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God and placed in the Garden of Eden but they were not mature. They were not in the same position as God. God knew everything, they didn't. God had infinite wisdom but they hadn't had the time to acquire that much. Unfortunately for Eve, someone else in the Garden of Eden had a vested interest in her not following God's advice at all.

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

Genesis 3:5-6

Eve must have been made to believe that she was in some way inadequate, otherwise she could not have been tempted to be made wise. She mistakenly thought that eating the fruit would make her more like God.

Why was the serpent tempting Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by claiming among other things, that she would be more like God? Surely this approach would fail? Adam and Eve were already like God!

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

Eve was deceived about one thing more than anything else. The nature of God. The same is true of many people today.

One of the most profound mistakes people make every day is to misunderstand the nature of God.

People have complicated God and made Him deep, profound and obscure. God is none of these things.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Him. Jesus of Nazareth is the most perfect expression of any and all the parts of God's character. If you have a view of God that you can't find an example of in the life of Jesus, then your view is wrong. A disciple called Philip once asked Jesus if he could actually be allowed to see God and said that this would be enough – all of his questions would be answered. Jesus replied to him:

He who has seen me has seen the Father.

John 14:9

Who's Perfect?

What was Jesus? Jesus was normal, friendly, he hated religious hypocrisy and loved ordinary people. There is nothing deeper about Jesus than his love for God the Father in Heaven and the people of Earth he came to save. That's it.

If not for the devil's rebellion in Heaven and Adam's sin in Eden there would hardly have been a serious moment with God since the creation of the world, all would have been fun and laughter.

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve's relationship with God was supposed to be one of simple trust – of child like faith. This does not mean that they themselves were childish. It means that their relationship with God was based on innocence and trust. What else could it have been?

Then along came the fallen angel Lucifer, the devil, also known as the serpent, recently booted out of heaven by the Archangel Michael after a failed rebellion there (Revelation 12:9). Adam, instead of protecting the Garden of Eden as he was commanded to do in Genesis 2:15, lets the devil stay and the problems start.

The serpent brings with him new depths of sophistication and intellectual promise. The devil eventually persuades Eve that she really needs to become more like God, as though she isn't already. The devil gradually wows Eve with his new and recent freedom. Obviously after his failed rebellion in heaven, he has glossed over the whole thing as some kind of tragic failed bid for true freedom - you know, the usual rubbish about breaking away from God's control, etc. God has never ever tried to control anyone in the first place.

Eve starts to doubt the nature of God. Instead of understanding that her simple straightforward relationship with God, based on innocence and trust, is actually the most perfect reflection of God's own nature. Innocence and trust is the basis for true holiness. She starts to think that there is a deeper side to God. A more glorious and profound side which she is missing out on. Something beyond His word. Sound familiar?

You can still find this kind of flawed thinking today. Someone

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

recently talked about the glorious restoration of humanity's lost relationship with God. They said that Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and indeed collectively all of humanity, were and are, and forever will be, supposed to: "know and serve God's infinite majesty."

What is *servicing God's infinite majesty*? God just wants to hang out with you. That's why he created you in the first place.

Serving God's infinite majesty sounds so deep that you are going to need a lot more than a relationship of simple faith and trust to get to the bottom of that one. This is exactly the problem! People hear stuff like this and go off and try to be profoundly spiritual and become profoundly weird instead. People should simply be real with themselves and God. The more real you are with yourself and God the more spiritual you are.

So what about God's infinite majesty? Surely that exists too? You want to know what God's infinite majesty is? Let me tell you. I can tell you this great revelation not because I'm a preacher but because I can read the Bible.

God's infinite majesty is found in His straightforward trusting loving nature. That's it. It's no deeper than that. Sure, God as the Bible says in Psalms 147 has limitless understanding.

Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.

Psalm 147:5

God's understanding is awesome compared to our ability as individuals to accumulate knowledge. However, God plainly said of mankind that given enough time and unified dedication there would be nothing that we could not achieve.

And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them."

Genesis 11:6

Who's Perfect?

Based on these verses from the Bible the accumulation of all the knowledge in the Universe and the ability to do literally anything is theoretically possible for mankind, but so what? Would that make us great? No, not at all. God's greatness, majesty and all the rest of it are found in His love.

God is Love

1 John 4:16

Everything that Adam and Eve lost in the Garden of Eden was restored through Jesus. 1 John 4:15-16 is the most perfect summation of everything that the devil stole from Eve in Eden and that has now been restored.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

1 John 4:15-16

This is as plain as it can be. If you say that Jesus is your Lord then God lives in you and you in Him. If you believe in God's love for you and abide in it, then God abides in you and you in Him. What else is there? With God abiding in you and you in Him there is nothing that you will lack. Jesus plainly said so himself.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:7

Notice the difference is in the abiding. If God's word abides in you, you will be full of faith and able to move any mountain. Serving God's infinite majesty and other similar notions are not mentioned. If you want something deeper and more meaningless then you'll have to go somewhere else to get it.

In the final analysis the only thing that really counts is your faith in God and His word, expressing itself through love.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Galatians 5:6

The only thing that really matters to God is your confidence in Jesus making you right with Him; Which comes from believing God's word about everything from the salvation of your soul right through to the provision of the shoes on your feet. The more you abide in God's word the more everything else is going to fit into place, sooner or later, one way or the other. The more you abide in God's word, the more intimate and real your fellowship becomes with Him. That's the only thing that really counts and you will never get beyond it.

The devil persuaded Eve that this life of faith and abiding in God's word was not spiritual enough. She was persuaded by the devil to move away from a life of faith because it was too simple. Not intellectual enough. Not deep enough. Not reflecting God's majesty enough. Not allowing for God's sovereignty enough, as though God's sovereignty could be violated by Eve's faith or indeed anyone else's.

The devil talked Eve into a new way of freedom. The one he had tried but failed in. A way to exalt yourself but also a way to corrupt yourself, distance yourself from God and make an enemy of everyone around you. A way of doubt. A way of living that sounds and looks good but is really a dead end path, based on the accumulation of so called spiritual knowledge - so that you can make yourself perfect.

What is this way? The way of living from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong. A way of self perfection. A way devoid of faith.

Eve wanted to be wise and more like God. Both of these were good things and the Bible plainly says Eve's motives were good but she went after them the wrong way. She thought that by focusing on right and wrong she would gain more wisdom and improve herself to become more like God. She was wrong. Partaking of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil actually

Who's Perfect?

took her further away from God!

Eve tried to take what she thought was a short cut. Eve knew that she was not as wise as God and did not know all that He knew. So she fell for the deception that she needed to accelerate her spiritual journey. The tragedy is that Eve had already arrived. Prior to the fall, she lived by faith. She did not need to go on a journey anywhere. She simply needed to maintain her fellowship with God and not allow anything or anyone else to undermine it. But Eve was deceived. She did the one thing that God had said should not be done.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "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, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Genesis 2:15-17

Eating that fruit and indulging in the knowledge of good and evil lead to death. How? As Eve's attention moved away from God by focusing on the knowledge of what was right and wrong, she unwittingly began to separate herself from God's love. She cut off God's life giving anointing flowing toward her while paradoxically trying to move towards God.

Eve thought that spiritual life came from doing what's right. She knew that God did everything right so she thought that if she did too she would be more like Him. She was wrong.

There's no love inherent within right and wrong. Some people think the more you do right, the more you love God, the more you do wrong the less you love God. This is not true. The more you love, the more everything you do is right. God is love. Everything He does is right. The Bible doesn't say, *God is right*, it says, *God is love*. Right comes from love, not love from right. Your right actions will never make you right, but love will.

God is Love

1 John 4:16

Chapter 2

What's in a Tree?

What was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Are we simply talking about something like an apple tree here? No, literal fruit does not reveal knowledge to anyone. Are we talking about an obedience test? I don't think so.

The existence of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden was not a test, the Bible plainly says so.

God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

James 1:13

It was not a special temptation put in Eden by God, it was simply a way of living outside of a union with God based on Adam and Eve's ability to do right and wrong.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents a way of doing things, a way of living and thinking. It's fruit represents the consequences of living that way.

The analogy of a tree being a strong source of something is found elsewhere in the Bible, especially in the Book of Proverbs, where wisdom is described as a *Tree of Life*. The Hebrew word for *tree* literally translates as a *firmness* or something *established*. Right and wrong are established and fixed, they exist whether you like it or not. God didn't create wrong, it's just what's not right.

So there is a way of living, based entirely on the knowledge of what is right and wrong, which is possible to live by but also destructive. To live in this manner is to ingest what comes from the heart of this way, i.e. its fruit. And what does its fruit do? It kills you, not instantly, but gradually. It cuts you off from God, the only source of life, and you begin to die, slowly but surely.

What's in a Tree?

You become disconnected from God's life. In the Hebrew of Genesis 2:17 God literally warns Adam by saying, *...in dying you shall die*. Dying becomes a way of living that itself results in death. That's why God literally said, *in dying you shall die*. Living a life of dying results in spiritual death.

This reveals a startling truth. Getting your spiritual sustenance from knowing what's right and wrong and trying to live based on that information is, according to God's warning to Adam and Eve – a lifestyle of death! And yet many religious people think and believe the very opposite. They think that if you can really know what's right and do it, and know what's wrong and not do it, then you're being godly and coming closer to perfection.

You can enslave yourself to this hopeless task of trying to be perfect like God through ordering your own life without faith and love. But God is neither perfect nor imperfect.

God is love and this is perfection

This fruitless attempt at perfection is exactly what the devil did. He didn't start with 'I hate God and I want to overthrow Him', or 'I want to be evil and not good any more.' No, he wanted to be perfect like God, as he mistakenly thought, but without love.

**"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'**

Isaiah 14:12-14

Startling words! The very deception that he deceived himself with he also tried on Eve, *'...you will be like God, knowing good and evil*, Genesis 3:5. Well what's so bad about that? Surely

wanting to be like God is a good thing? That depends. Imagine you get up tomorrow and decide to be perfect, to be amazing, in fact, you actually want to be as amazing as God. The first question is why do you want to do this? This aim is already laced with pride and a fatally flawed recipe for disaster. God does not sleep but if He did He wouldn't start the day by getting up and deciding to be amazing. I mean what does He think about all the time, what is He doing? Simple.

God is Love

1 John 4:16

The devil knew good and evil but was not acting in love, the result was that everything he did was an abomination. Jesus demonstrated how to behave to his disciples. He washed their sweaty dusty feet after a long walk in sandals and said to them.

Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

John 13:12-15

The point is this. The devil's rebellion started when he decided he could govern just as well as God, without love. The problem was he missed the whole point, it's not the letter of the way you do things that makes them work, it's the spirit behind them. If you are not living in a real relationship with God your heart cannot be full of love because only God is the source of all true and unconditional love.

If your heart is full of God's love everything you do will be right. If you do not have God's love abiding in your heart but still try to do things right, you will mercilessly push aside anyone who gets in your way. In other words, everything you do will be wrong no matter how right you do it.

Adam and Eve were supposed to live in a real relationship with

What's in a Tree?

God full of implicit trust and faith in His love for them.

**Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him.**

Hebrews 10:38

Isn't it a bit mean of God to say that His soul has no pleasure in people who draw back from faith? No, not at all. Drawing back from faith is the same as drawing back from God and therefore love. It is the best way to distance yourself from God, and when you do, you are vulnerable – just like Eve was. This is why God has no pleasure in you doing such a thing, because you are exposing yourself to harm.

Eve tried delving into the knowledge of good and evil. She was trying to be more like God, more perfect. She unwittingly cut herself off from God's sustaining life. Sadly she was deceived.

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Eve in Genesis 3:13

...the woman being deceived fell into transgression.

1 Timothy 2:14

Adam went further, he was not deceived, he committed treason.

**If I have covered my transgressions like Adam,
by hiding my iniquity in my bosom (heart).**

Job 31:33

And:

**But like Adam they transgressed the covenant;
there they dealt treacherously with me.**

Hosea 6:7

Adam and Eve both did the wrong thing. Eve from a right motive, Adam as part of an act of treason. Regardless of their motives neither of them ended up any better off for it.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Attempting to reach perfection by trying to gain spiritual freedom outside of a relationship of faith and trust in God, or trying to come closer to God by sincerely trying to be as good as you can both have the same result. You end up further away from God and less like Him than when you started.

So what was the Tree of Life? The Tree of Life is representative of the way to receive God's life based entirely on trusting in His love. In short, it is being like a child. Like the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil it is also fixed. It's always there. God's life, His endless flowing river of love to you never goes away from you – you can only go away from it.

God's grace is the endless flowing river of His goodness and favour that is flowing toward you and me right now. It is available to all without any partiality, or need, or merit on our part.

According to the Bible, God's grace is on all mankind. However, not all men receive it. Like any gift, God's grace has to be received. How? The same way you would receive any gift. By faith. God's grace can only be received by faith, because it is a gift. A perfect life is a life of faith in God and His word regardless of shortcomings. Faith is *the way* into grace.

It is of faith so that it might be according to grace.

Romans 4:16

There could have been no other possible way for Adam and Eve to have lived before the Fall. Indeed throughout all eternity there will be no other way for anyone to live before God.

We will never live in God's presence and receive His love by measuring ourselves up to Him, based on our knowledge of what is right and wrong or our attempts to make ourselves perfect. In fact, this approach actually distances us from God and causes an obsession with ourselves, a consequential realisation of our own inadequacy and then fear, followed by the usual pride, hate, et al. The rest is of course humanity's history.

What's in a Tree?

God created man with the capacity to exercise faith and with an equal measure of latent faith within us all.

**God has dealt to each one a measure of faith
Romans 12:3**

The Bible also says that man and woman were created in God's image and that God Himself created the worlds by faith. So on this basis we also all must have faith residing in us because we are created in God's image.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible

Hebrews 11:3

We understand that God's faith filled words framed the world's. God believed what He spoke and there it was! By faith, as the list goes on in the following verses from Hebrews 11, various Bible heroes also accomplished great things.

Faith is the simple and straightforward way everyone is supposed to receive God's life. It was the same straightforward way that Adam and Eve were supposed to live. It works in a very simple way. Faith is believing and speaking what God says.

Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believe and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak.

2 Corinthians 4:13

It could not be any easier. What do we believe and speak? 2 Corinthians 4:13 says we believe and speak *what is written*, obviously the scriptures, literally the word of God. And what were Adam and Eve supposed to believe and speak? Exactly the same thing, the only difference being that it was not written down since they heard it straight from God's mouth with their own ears. They would have continually only heard God's words of love and acceptance to them in Eden, but the

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

serpent told Eve that this was not enough. That God's straightforward love for her was too simple. That beyond God's apparent acceptance of her there was really another deeper way. A way which God was holding back from her by commanding her not to depart from her naive faith. A higher way, an intellectual way, a way which was more right and which if she was willing to strive to reach it she would achieve by her own efforts – then she could really become more like God.

The devil was lying. No such way has ever existed. There is nothing beyond God's love for you.

Adam and Eve were supposed to live by faith, their vision and hope was supposed to be God's word to them and their desires were all supposed to be full of love.

**And now these three things abide [remain fixed],
faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these
is love.**

1 Corinthian 13:13

Faith is how you do everything. Hope is your vision, where you are going. And love is why you're doing it in the first place. The sovereignty of God doesn't come into it. Yes I know what I said. You see God's sovereignty has already established faith, hope and love so if you want to inject something new it can only be negative since you can't outdo God by creating something better than He already has.

Anything that God says to you, either through His written word or through the promptings of His Spirit in your heart can't be improved upon. In other words, you can't go round it and get an equally good or better result. What God says to you is already full of faith, hope and love. Therefore any alternatives will have to have less faith, less hope and less love in them than what God had said and planned for you in the first place. They will be corrupted and consequently so will their results.

By moving away from God's plan for your life and His way of doing things you can only add a lack of faith, a lack of hope and a lack of love to your life.

Chapter 3

The Sin of Cain

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the first born of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Genesis 4:3-7

The first child of Adam and Eve, Cain, had to master sin, not with good deeds and hard work, but like his younger brother Abel did. God told him there was a way to do it. How? By working even harder with his crops that he had brought as offerings? No, it was with something that focused his attention on God's unconditional acceptance of him and not on his efforts to come to God on the basis of his own deeds. It was a sacrificial lamb. The sacrificial lamb was something that Cain was supposed to present to God in faith acting as a catalyst between his conscience and his relationship with God.

The whole point of the sacrificial lamb was for Cain to be made to understand that the only way for him to relate openly to God was with a completely clear conscience. Any other way of approaching God is absolutely futile.

When God warned Cain that sin was crouching at the door of his heart and desiring to rule over him and that he should

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

master it He was not warning him about killing Abel. God was warning him about abandoning a lifestyle of faith and of trying to relate to Him by being good enough through his own efforts.

Cain had to come into God's presence in complete assurance of faith, anything less would breed condemnation and fear. Once fear took a hold anything could happen, even murder – and it did.

Cain ignored the warning, he decided he wanted to come into God's presence on the basis of his own hard work. Cain was afraid that his brother Abel was more spiritual than him and so he killed him to keep himself first in the queue.

Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Genesis 4:8

It was not that God had some problem with Cain or indeed any one working hard to come close to Him. It is simply that He knows how destructive this approach is to ourselves. All it does is block the clear conscience that comes only from faith and instead reveals our own inadequacies and results in us comparing ourselves to others. Our comparisons are then either founded in pride, if we think we are superior or a sense of inferiority, if we think we are inferior. Pride and inadequacy both breed fear which in turn can result in any other sin – even murder.

Both Cain and Abel had to work. Tending a lamb or cultivating crops both required work. Both were good things and brought good results. A life of faith takes effort and diligence just like a life of works. The difference is that a life of faith opens your heart to God because all of your confidence is entirely in God's acceptance and love for you.

On the other hand a life of works without love does not open your heart to God because your confidence is in what you can do. Since you can never do enough to be perfect you invariably

The Sin of Cain

end up living with a sense of inadequacy, comparing yourself to others and giving yourself a false sense of achievement. Unfortunately if others appear to outdo your spiritual success you perceive them as your enemy like Cain did with Abel.

Working hard to do what's right is not invalid, it's just that it's not a viable basis for a relationship with God.

The lamb that Abel presented as a sacrifice in Genesis 4 had absolutely no redeeming qualities in itself. It was just a farm animal, but it was also a graphic picture, the death of an innocent life, to remind man that only another pure life given on his behalf could keep the way open to God for him.

Jesus was that life. He was the Lamb of God. The one innocent life taken in our place to buy us back from our failures and Adam's treason. In many places throughout the Bible Jesus is called the Lamb of God.

The more we think we are coming close to God on the basis of how good we are, the further we are actually getting away from Him. Jesus said so in Luke 18.

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Luke 18:9-14

The more we think we lead by example by being better than

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

others, the more brittle our confidence becomes, because it relies increasingly on our ability not to fail. We think our achievements are nothing special and that consequently perhaps we are nothing special.

We are all special and everything we do is special when it is presented to God and others as an act of faith and love. The moment you start imagining you are closer to God because of your achievements is the exact same the moment that you start moving away from Him. Certainly, results are very important and God's plans for our lives are full of wonderful results but these are not the basis of our relationship with God.

Some people think, *well I'm a nice enough person*. The problem here is that when something goes wrong in a *nice* person's life, they are bewildered and shaken, and wonder, *why has God allowed this to happen to me?* God hasn't allowed anything to happen to them. They allowed it themselves. Nice people suffer undeserving fates all the time. According to the Bible you are supposed to look after yourself by receiving God's grace for protection through faith, not by being especially nice. It just doesn't work any other way – if it did doubtless God would accommodate that too.

Cain made the worst possible mistake of all, he said, I have worked hard and now here is the result of my efforts, accept me God on the basis of my good works. This was a disaster, not because God was offended with his hard work but because of the effect it was already having on Cain. The Hebrew of Genesis 4:5 literally says that Cain was full of wrath and then despondent when his sacrifice and hard work was not accepted.

This clearly shows that Cain had no faith and love in his heart to start with otherwise he would have been overjoyed that at least his dear brother Abel was accepted. After that Cain would have quickly made the necessary changes God warned him that he needed to make, but he didn't.

Cain wanted to be seen to be spiritually above his brother who seemed to usurp his status as the most spiritual person around. When Abel was accepted but he wasn't Cain was furious. All

The Sin of Cain

this hard work for nothing and his dreamy brother gets God's acceptance and he didn't. In his anger Cain kills his brother Abel – to make things right, or at least *right* the way he thought they should be. This is the hallmark of the religious person. They would gladly murder if they could to keep everything right – and often through the ages they have.

In reality both Cain and Abel had God's love. God was still talking to both of them. God didn't reject Cain outright, rather He warned him that sin was trying to master him in order to try and save him. God rejected Cain's offering and Cain's way of trying to relate to Him because it was devoid of faith and love. God didn't say to him, 'if you carry on like this I won't have anything to do with you any more.' No. God said, *sin lies at the door and is trying to master you.*

If Cain had carried on the way he was going he would have ended up like the devil, heartless and perfect, a monster who would rule his younger brother and descendants with the iron rule of religious perfection. His arrogance would have ruthlessly exterminated anyone who challenged his authority – all in the name of what's right.

The ultimate lie is that you can make things right without love.

This is what the devil himself believed when he rebelled and decided that he was fit to rule heaven and as he put it, *be like the Most High* (Isaiah 14:14). He was so obsessed with his own perfection and blind to his own developing shortcomings that he must have actually believed God was being too lax in the way he simply loved all the angels and people regardless of their imperfections. The devil thought he could make things right.

Some people in religious circles still think like the devil today, they despise the God of love and exalt perfection itself above love. They even assert that all imperfection is a sin and offensive to God and that He is somehow biting His lip with our shortcomings only because he loves us so much. That God is patiently waiting for humanity to get it's act together by becoming perfect and that for those who don't He will finally

run out of patience at the end of time and fly into a rage and throw them all into hell. The Bible does not say our imperfections define us. Our faith and attitudes define us.

For whatever is not from faith is sin

Romans 14:23

The theologians will always tell you something different, that whatever is not perfect is sin. But no created being since the beginning of creation has ever been perfectly good. Jesus said in Mark 10:18 that no one is truly good except God alone.

When I was a child I lived in Rio de Janeiro. In the midst of the city is a mountain on which stands a huge statue of Jesus with his arms outstretched wide. It's called Corcovado. It is one of the most beautiful sights you could ever see.

It was the same in Eden with Adam, later with Cain, it has been the same all down the ages and it is the same now. God's arms through Jesus are always outstretched towards you. He is not rejecting you but you can turn away from his open arms and demand he accepts you on the basis of how good you are, on what you have done and what you have not done.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you

James 4:8

The scriptures do not say, 'work your way towards God, try and get His attention and impress Him with all your good works.' No, how do we draw near to God? Is there a way we can come straight into His presence without being overcome by all our failings and shortcomings? A way that Adam and Eve used to do before they fell? Yes there is.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of

The Sin of Cain

grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16

We have to hold on to our confession, and what is that confession?

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

1 John 4:15

It's almost too easy to accept and yet it's not easy at all because it demands that we relinquish all pride and humble our selves. This is why religious people object and become so angry with Bible teaching on faith and grace, it reduces everyone to the same level – in reality it actually exalts everyone to the same level: to that of all being loved by God and of all being equal in His sight.

Some people assert that all this grace and faith stuff has resulted in the wholesale collapse in moral standards that we see in society; That when people are not focused on living right the only natural result is license and sin. The answer is apparently to make stricter rules with harsher penalties so that people will live more right. But with absolute control there is no place left for faith, hope and love. It is all replaced with rules, rules which can never be kept, neither by those who are given them nor by those who make them, so corruption and hypocrisy follow.

The collapse happened when people were still trying to live by rules and without faith and a real relationship with God. Everyone was a hypocrite and when the next generation came along they saw it and rejected it.

Love brings freedom not license.

Control results in licence because the more totalitarian the regime the more the hypocrisy and abuse are committed by it in the name of what's right. Authoritarian control is the most perfect expression of the devil's true nature, pride and

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

arrogance built upon the fear of losing everything.

The answer is not to impose rules but to reveal the real overwhelming goodness of God. When people saw Jesus healing the sick from all backgrounds the Bible does not say there was an explosion of sin because the people thought, *well God healed that corrupt tax collector and prostitute so I can live like them too and everything will be just fine.* No, the Bible says that when the multitudes saw the miracles they glorified the God of Israel, but when the religious leaders of the day got involved even those who were miraculously healed by Jesus eventually started shouting *Crucify Him!*

Remember, Adam was the most perfect man there ever was and he fell, so what hope is there for you if you stop depending on God's love and start trying to make it on your own?

For the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written the just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:17

Notice that it does not say: *from faith to works.* You should not start off with faith and then try and improve yourself further with works. This is the sincere mistake that Eve made. No, the scriptures tell us how we are supposed to live.

...from faith to faith.

Romans 1:17

Chapter 4

The Spirit or the Letter?

**For you have taken away the key of knowledge
Luke 11:52**

Jesus lamented that the religious leaders of his day did not use a key when teaching and applying the scriptures. He said that not using this key meant that they were not entering into the kingdom of God. Worse, he said that others were hindered from finding God because of the teaching of the scriptures without using this key. What is the key? It is found at the beginning of creation...

**Then God said: "Let us make man in Our image,
according to Our likeness."
Genesis 1:26**

The key is simple. It is this: God made men and women to be like Him. To be whole and to be free. Every application of scripture that takes away from a person's wholeness is being misapplied because it has not been unlocked with this key. This key unlocks all of the Bible. Without this key the Bible becomes a book of slavery and bondage, with it the Bible becomes a book of Life. It is the foundation of all creation.

**If the foundations are destroyed what can the
righteous do?
Psalm 11:3**

In Luke 11:37 Jesus takes up an invitation to eat at a Pharisees house (the Pharisees were a group of religious leaders) and sits down. His host remarks that he didn't ceremonially wash before eating, and that's it - all hospitality is gone! For seven verses Jesus calls his hosts greedy, wicked, foolish, cursed, proud, hypocrites and like hidden graves. Another group at the house, called lawyers, object so Jesus starts on them too. They are

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

accused of loading people with false burdens which they do not carry themselves, murdering God's prophets, failing to enter the kingdom of God and hindering others from too. In verse fifty two Jesus declares the lawyers cursed and exclaims to them: ***you have taken away the key of knowledge.***

Instead of serving the main course the Pharisees and another group, called Scribes, also start shouting at him and try to catch him out so they could have him locked up or even put to death. Hardly a nice little dinner party! So what upset Jesus so much? The answer is incredibly simple but blind to many.

The answer lies in the phrase, *the key of knowledge*. A key unlocks something. If something needs to be unlocked it must be hidden in some way. One clue is in the parts of the Pharisees, Scribe's and Lawyer's behaviour which Jesus reacted to. Jesus objected to the way they dealt with everything from an *appearance* of right and wrong perspective. They washed the outside but not the inside. They were meticulous about small things but neglected God's love and justice. They loved to be seen as important, but were like hidden graves - fine on the outside but rotting on the inside. In a nutshell they propagated an image of God to the ordinary people as someone who was more concerned about things being *done right* than their welfare. They removed the key of knowledge. They ignored God's real character and what everything He did was really about - helping and loving people. Hence people were distanced from God, even put off Him. The best example of this is in the gospel accounts of Jesus healing on the Sabbath.

In Luke 13:11 Jesus heals a woman who has been very ill for eighteen years and is severely bent over. The leader of the synagogue objects because Jesus is working on the Sabbath. This is in fact true, healing was considered a part of ministry in the Old and New Testaments and therefore work. Matt 10:10 even specifically defines being a healer as ministry work for which one is eligible to be paid.

Therefore Jesus unequivocally broke the 5th Commandment by working on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). Right here Jesus gives us a revelation which should have been obvious but most

The Spirit or the Letter?

of us miss. In Luke 13:16 he says, *should not this woman be loosed on the Sabbath?* He is making the simple point that the most important thing is for people to be free and whole. Mark 2:27 sums it up perfectly when Jesus says: *the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

If your application of one of the Ten Commandments does not result in someone being made free and whole then it's invalid. Am I saying we can break the Ten Commandments? Yes and No. If the application of any scripture does not follow its original purpose - the wholeness and well being of people - then we are missing the point completely. It's like saying, are we not supposed to keep the speed limits on the roads? Yes of course, but the emergency services break them all the time to save people. The limits are there for our safety but they can and should be broken in a realistic way to put out a fire or save someone in a road accident. Only a fool would insist that under no circumstances, including emergencies, must anyone ever break the speed limit. However in the church world this sort of madness goes on all the time.

I recently read what must be one of the dumbest articles of all time and one which perfectly sums up this flawed religious thinking. It was on a popular Christian website.

The author was talking about how we should never lie. He said lying is a sin and correctly articulates how the ninth commandment about 'bearing false' witness is from any perspective a lie. The example is then given whereby if some Nazi soldiers in WWII demanded to know if there were Jews hidden in a house, whether the occupants should lie and say *no* to protect them or tell the truth and say *yes*. The author in an incredible monumental performance of religious barmyngness articulates how one should always tell the truth even in such circumstances because:

"If we love God, we should obey Him (John 14:15). To love God first means to obey Him first—before looking at our neighbour. So, is the greater good trusting God when He says not to lie or trusting in our fallible, sinful minds about the uncertain future? Consider this carefully. In the situation of a

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Nazi beating on the door, we have assumed a lie would save a life, but really we don't know. So, one would be opting to lie and disobey God without the certainty of saving a life—keeping in mind that all are ultimately condemned to die physically.”

Earlier in the article the author also said:

“As fallible, sinful human beings, our imperfect thoughts may not be able to comprehend what God has in mind [referring to both this WWII scenario and any others in life in general] and we need to strive to trust God when He speaks on this subject, regardless how hard it may be. We need to place our faith fully in Christ and trust in God in all things—and not lean on our own understanding.”

Sounds flawless doesn't it? What's missing? The point of everything is missing, that's what's missing. Pause for thought and try applying this approach to the woman who had been bowed over for eighteen years who Jesus healed on the Sabbath in Luke 13. Without a shadow of doubt this is exactly the reasoning that the Pharisees would have used when Jesus broke the 5th commandment by working on the Sabbath and healed the bowed over woman. They would have said, 'The Law says...' and then reread the above quotes and insert into them the sick bowed over woman instead of the Nazis beating on the door, e.g. *If we love God, we should obey Him. To love God first means to obey Him first—before looking at our neighbour the bowed over woman...*

Jesus was exasperated with people who handled God's word in this manner. He asked them a question that clearly demonstrated that the purpose behind something God had commanded was greater than the technical application of it.

Ought not this woman...be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?

Luke 13:16

This inability to grasp God's good purpose for people is the hallmark of the Pharisee. God has no purpose in handing women and children over to a demonic Nazi regime to be

The Spirit or the Letter?

stripped naked and collectively herded into a gas chamber to die a horrible painful death from inhaling chlorine gas and burning their lungs out.

But you know what - without the key of knowledge you can't see the wood for the trees. You can't see God's love, you can only see the Law, to which you tack on some kind of mysterious nonsense about God having higher purposes; that like in the earlier example being gassed is some kind of special revelation of God's love that we can all learn from.

I mean seriously, Jesus walked into the Synagogue in Luke 13 and saw the bowed over woman and he healed her. According to the Bible she had been like that for eighteen years. Didn't the leader of the synagogue see her too? No. All he saw for eighteen years was the rules. But the rules were made for people. So how can anyone who reads that about Jesus imagine him also happily saying, 'yes here are my Jewish relatives they're all going to die anyway so you may as well gas them now, it's all the same to me and by the way I foresaw it all, in fact, no, wait, I even predetermined it...' Duh!

Law without love is not truth. Something that is true with love is not true without it, even though they may be the same. Truth is indelibly linked to love because God is both love and the source of all truth. God's truth is love. Everything that God has shown us to do and not to do has never existed in isolation to His love and His original desire from creation for our well being.

Please note that when I say truth I do not mean facts. The earth is a globe regardless of whether someone tells you that in love, fear or deceit. I am not talking about that kind of scientific truth at all. However some people think that spiritual law and principles are the same as their perception of natural or physical laws - that they exist in only one dimension anchored to nothing except their own immutability.

This is exactly what Jesus had to deal with when facing the Pharisees. To them not working on the Sabbath was an end in itself - because to them all of what God had said was an end in itself. Everything God had said was a glorious isolated

unimpeachable truth simply because God had said it. This was because in their minds God was also glorious and isolated existing in a kind of holy vacuum. This is nonsense. God is real and normal! Of course His holiness is awesome and beyond our comprehension but His holiness is to what? Holy means *devoted to* or *separated to*. So what is God Holy and separated to? Himself of course – there is nothing greater than Himself. And what is God Himself?

He who does not know God does not love, for God is Love

1 John 4:8

Simple! But way too hard for people who spend their lives in seminaries to grasp. In everything we deal with in life we have to look at the love behind it to establish what is really right and wrong. You can do many right things that hurt people and many apparently wrong things, like lying to Nazis soldiers, driving an ambulance above the speed limit and healing on the Sabbath that actually turn out to be right things because they are acts of love.

Think about it. God the Father Himself perpetrated the greatest injustice of all time. He laid on Jesus the penalty for all the sins of the world when Jesus was the only person who had ever lived who had never sinned. But guess what? It was also the purest act of love that had ever been and will ever be and so that made it right. In fact it was so right that it provided righteousness for all of us too!

What's it all about? People. Right and wrong is what is good for us and what is wrong for us. There is nothing that is good for us that is wrong to God or bad for us that is right to God. Ah yes but...

**“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”**

Isaiah 55:8-9

The Spirit or the Letter?

Yes they certainly are and Jesus definitely demonstrated that when the Pharisees tried to handle the Law without the key of knowledge. God's ways are ways of love and wholeness to us. Religious ways are ways of law handled without love and leading to death. Indeed this is exactly what the Apostle Paul said even about the New Covenant:

Our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

Aha, you may say, you're off track again Shenstone because Paul was referring to the Old Testament Levitical Law as being an imperfect way to gain righteousness. No and No. First: the Old Testament Law was not imperfect and unable to bring righteousness, it did, in the life of Jesus. There was nothing flawed about the Old Testament Law, it's just that no one else kept it because they were too busy trying to keep it the wrong way, by the letter of it and not by the spirit of it. Jesus broke the letter of the Old Testament Law frequently but he kept the spirit of it flawlessly all the time.

And, No again, because if you reread the verses above you will see that Paul is not actually referring to the Levitical Law anyway but rather to the New Covenant. Paul does not say anything about the 'Law' here rather Paul only says, *we are ministers of the new covenant not of the letter but of the spirit.* The Old Testament Levitical Law is not mentioned. So what is Paul actually saying?

Shockingly the Apostle Paul is saying that even the New Covenant applied by the letter and not by the Spirit also brings death, just like the misapplication of the Old Testament Levitical Law did!

In every situation we have to ask are we using the key of knowledge to unlock the challenges we face in life. Are we dealing with people in troubled or difficult situations from a "you have to keep the rules even if it kills you" approach

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

anaesthetised with all kinds of meaningless nonsense like, "God knows best." Or are we really saying what would Jesus do? What brings wholeness and life to the individuals we are trying to help. Contrary to popular belief we are not supposed to soldier on until every last ounce of strength has gone from us while we die keeping the rules and undermine the very reason that they are there in the first place - for us. Jesus said:

"I ask you one thing: Is it right on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"

Luke 6:9

Jesus expects you to be able to comprehend what is right and wrong by using your conscience and correctly handling His word using the key of knowledge. You are expected to grow up enough to know the difference between lying fraudulently for selfish gain and lying saying something that is not factually true to save people from being murdered.

'But this love and grace approach could be abused!' Tell me something new. Of course it can be abused. The Garden of Eden proves that. God entrusted Adam with freewill and the Earth and look what he did. It can also be abused the other way too. You can crucify the Son of God based on the letter of the Law. So what's the solution? **Grow up!**

Stop enslaving yourself to sin while falsely calling it freedom and love. Stop pontificating around laying down the letter of the new covenant without love and leaving people bowed over in a lifetime of bondage.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:11-13

If you want to know God, pray this prayer:

Dear God in Heaven

I am sorry that I have been so wrong about you. Now I see from the Bible that you never wanted me, or anyone else, to shed even a single tear.

I have made many poor choices. Please forgive me.

Thank you that you sent Jesus your Son to pay for all my sins and that you raised him from the dead to give me new life.

I have decided to follow you and I now say out loud –

Jesus is my Lord!

Thank you for giving me a new heart. I will always be real with You and myself. Thank you that you have only good things in store for me.

Amen

If you have prayed this prayer from your heart, you are now a Christian!

God said in the Bible: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus also said: "Whoever comes to me, I will never cast away." Whatever challenges you may face, always remember that God never rejects you, and that He is not the cause of unfair things in your life. Rise above them.

Ask God to guide you everyday. Read the Bible and ask God to help you understand it. Check out: www.martynshenstone.com

Yours

Martyn Shenstone