

Sermon Script

Title: **A Fruit for The Root of All Family Problems**

Scripture: Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-9, 19

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Good morning, brothers and sisters, peace be with you.

Last week, Pastor Ken began a new sermon series called “Family Foundation,” inspired by passages from Genesis. Today, I’ll be continuing this series. After last Sunday’s service, I had the chance to speak with several brothers and sisters; some of them shared a significant impression of one particular slide from the sermon, this one.

I believe that many will agree that we have problems in our families, the hot fights, cold wars, the tensions, the unsatisfiable complaints, the cycles of hurt that repeat themselves from generation to generation — have you ever wondered where all of that started? I mean, the very beginning.

Based on the most ancient story of the entire human race, Christians, and many non-Christians know, all the problems started from a fruit of a tree. There is a pervasive cultural misunderstanding regarding the identity of this “forbidden fruit.” From Renaissance art to modern tech logos, the popular culture universally depicts it as an **apple**.

The Hebrew text of Genesis refers simply to *peri* (fruit). The transformation of this generic fruit into an apple likely stems from a clever Latin pun used by early scholars like Jerome, who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Vulgate in the 4th century.

The Latin word for "apple" is *malus*, and the Latin word for "evil" or "bad" is also *malus*. Because "apple" and "evil" were homonyms in Latin, artists and poets found it to be a perfect symbolic shorthand for the fruit that brought "evil" into the world. However, the biblical text is intentionally non-specific.

Today while we focus on the fruit, I think it is necessary to study the name of the tree first. The tree’s name is “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen2:9)

Before I tell you what’s that means in the English Bible, please allow me to tell you what’s that means in the Chinese Bible, because the translation of this particular word in the Chinese Bible is obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Chinese Bible in the hands of the Chinese people was not translated by the Chinese themselves, but by foreign missionaries, (of course, these missionaries were supported by the help of their Chinese co-workers.)

English, we have NIV, but I'm talking about CUV. The story of the Chinese Union Version (CUV) of the Bible is a compelling tale of devotion, perseverance, the unwavering spirit of missionaries and the grace of God.

In 1890, the Second General Conference of Protestant Missionaries was held in Shanghai. Delegates from various denominations agreed that, due to China's extensive territory, large population, and considerable diversity among missionary organizations, the translation of a unified and standardized Chinese Bible was necessary.

So, a cross-denominational "Dream Team" was formed, more than 100 senior missionary scholars participated in this monumental task spanning 28 years. By the time the Mandarin Union Version of both the Old and New Testaments was finally completed and published in 1919, only one translator, Chauncey Goodrich, remained alive; the others had already been called home to the Lord.

The actual story is way more complicated, but since then, this version of the Bible has become the Bible of the Chinese people. Even after more than a century, and despite the emergence of new Chinese translations, this hundred-years-old spiritual heritage continues to be the predominant choice in Chinese Bible studies and Sunday worship services. It is also the edition I consult daily.

### The Chinese Angle: Discerning vs. Defining

In this CUV edition, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was translated to "the tree of 分別善惡". In Chinese,

分辨善惡 means to discern good from evil.

分別善惡 means to define good from evil.

The difference seems not much, but obviously if you eat, you have the "the knowledge of good and evil," then you should be able to discern good from evil. So, the translators should translate this to 分辨善惡, better than 分別善惡. But they didn't do that.

Most people, when they read "the knowledge of good and evil," assume this is about acquiring moral information — learning the difference between right and wrong. As if before eating the fruit, Adam and Eve were morally uneducated, unenlightened. But, come on, the whole Bible is teaching about "learning the difference between right and wrong," is that really what God didn't want Adam and Eve to learn?

In Chinese, 分辨善惡 (fēn biàn shàn è) means to discern good from evil — to receive a standard, understand a teaching, apply a principle. I am handed a moral compass, and I learn to read it.

But 分別善惡 (fēn bié shàn è) means to determine and declare what is good and what is evil. Not to receive a standard, but to be the standard. I do not consult the compass; I am the compass. I decide. I define. I do not need God to teach me good and evil. I am like God, I have authority, I have power, whatever I declare to be good, that is good; whatever I determine to be evil, that is evil. I can originate the knowledge of good and evil, and I can press that knowledge on to others.

This is a difference between a judge who applies the law and a tyrant who writes it. One is wisdom. The other is godhood.

The Book of Revelation gives us a striking warning about those who declare good from evil without the capacity for discerning good from evil.

**【Rev3:17】 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.**

The church at Laodicea had become very good at declaring — "We are rich, we lack nothing!" — but utterly incapable of discerning their actual condition - their spiritual poverty. This is exactly what the fruit of this tree produces in human beings:

**【Gen3:7】 Then the eyes of both of them were opened,** and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

An inflated sense of clarity combined with a diminishing sense of reality.

Is the phrase "their eyes were opened" considered a bad thing? Yes. I remember it clearly. When I was still young (14?), my grandma has already warned me: "Aldo, before you get married, keep your eyes wide open. Look carefully, evaluate thoroughly, think twice about what kind of person you want to marry. But once you are married — from that point on — you must close your eyes. You cannot go looking for faults in your spouse. You can only accept, accommodate, and embrace them unconditionally. Otherwise, your marriage will have all four seasons — sometimes in the same afternoon.

So, having "your eyes opened" isn't necessarily a good thing—especially for those who are married. You see, before their eyes were opened, Adam says, "this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." But after their eyes were opened, he says: "the woman You gave me... she got me into this mess."

**The English/Hebrew Angle: Hebrew cultural background**

That's how we look at this fruit/tree from the angle of Chinese translation.

Now let's look at it from the angle of the English translation. Even though English is my second language, but still, I can affirm: "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is a precise and faithful translation of the Hebrew. The problem is not the translation. The problem is that English carries none of the Hebrew cultural background that makes the phrase explosive.

In English, "face" means your literal face, but in Chinese, on many occasions, "face" means my reputation. The same in Hebrew, "a person have the knowledge of good and evil," on many occasions, that doesn't mean this person is knowledgeable, it means this person is God Himself. For example,

The Second Book of Samuel records an interesting story. One of David's sons, Absalom, devised a plan to murder the Crown Prince, Amnon (his half-brother), because Amnon had raped Absalom's full sister, Tamar. After the murder, Absalom fled.

Three years passed, King David missed this son, Absalom. So, Joab, the commander of the army, summoned a wise woman and instructed her to approach the King with a fabricated legal case — an excuse that would provide the King with a "way out" and a reason for David to bring his exiled son back home.

Within the dialogue of the story, the woman twice mentions a particular saying,

【2Sam14:17】 "And now your servant says, 'May the word of my lord the king secure my inheritance, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the Lord your God be with you.' "

【2Sam14:20】 Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land."

The woman is clearly flattering the king. But the cultural background is very clear here, knowing/discerning good and evil = knows everything that happens in the land = like an angel of God, that means like God.

And that is precisely what the serpent's unsettling words in Genesis 3,

【Gen3:5】 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The fruit does not merely offer information. It offers divinity. Or rather, it offers the illusion of divinity — while delivering only the arrogance of it.

The Inverse Angle: what if not-knowing is actually Good?

If possessing the knowledge of good and evil is “bad,” perhaps the Bible has something “good” to say about not possessing it? Let’s look at this from an inverse angle.

【Deu1:39】 And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do **not yet know good from bad**—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.

In the beginning of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses recalled the words he spoke to all Israel in the wilderness. At that time, the Israelites had come out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and were about to enter the Promised Land that God had prepared for them. Yet, they responded with all kinds of rebellion and constant grumbling. Why? **Because they "knew" good and bad!** They "knew" that life in the wilderness was **bad** and that returning to Egypt would be **good**.

Therefore, God’s anger was kindled, and He spoke through Moses, saying: “Fine. Since you 'know' good and evil and have decided for yourselves that the land cannot be entered, then you shall all fall in this wilderness. However, your children—those who **do not know good and evil**—they do not rely on their own opinions of what is good or bad. Instead, they listen to My word and My judgment. When God says something is good, they accept it as good and act upon it. When God says something is evil, they accept it as evil and guard against it. These very children, whom you presumed would be plundered by the enemy—these who do not 'know' good and evil—they are the ones who will defeat the enemy, enter the land I prepared, and take it as their inheritance.”

We have looked at this fruit/tree in three angles, Chinese, English/Hebrew, and the inverse angle. Then, **how did they eat it?**

The world’s first recorded Satan’s word is a question. “Did God really say...?” Brothers and sisters, the devil never knocks on your door, introduces himself and says, "Hello, I am Satan, here to destroy you." He comes as a voice in your head that sounds completely reasonable. It begins not with a denial, but with a question. And for the people of God, that question always targets one thing: our faith.

Satan would not say, "Don't go to church." He says, "Do you really think going to church matters?" He would not say, "Don't be grateful." He says, "Is God really being good to you? Look at your circumstances." He would not say, "Stop praying." He says, "Do your prayers actually accomplish anything?"

The serpent's question immediately had an effect on Eve. We can see it in Eve's reply. Compare God's original words in Genesis 2:16–17 with Eve's version in Genesis 3:2–3: God said: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden" — abundant, generous, open.

Eve said: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden" — the word "any" vanished. The word "free" vanished.

God said: "...the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" — precise identification.

Eve said: "...the tree that is in the middle of the garden" — the tree has become the obsession. She cannot even name it properly anymore. Her eyes are already fixed on it.

God said: "...you will certainly die" — emphasized and absolute.

Eve said: "...you will die" — the certainty has evaporated into vagueness.

And she adds something God never said: "you must not touch it." A small addition. But additions to God's Word are often the first symptom of a heart already drifting.

Can you feel the emotional temperature rising in Eve's words? Something has shifted in her. The garden once given as a gift is now defined by a single tree she can't get out of her thoughts. The God who provided her with all things now seems, in her perception, to be a God who holds things back. This is what the serpent's question accomplishes — not an argument, but a mood. Not a theology, but a feeling.

And where was Adam while all of this was happening?

**【Gen3:6】** ... She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

He was right there. He heard everything. He watched his wife's eyes change. He watched her reach for the fruit. He said nothing. He did nothing. He ate.

**Now let's look at what happens after they eat this fruit**, the fruit for the root of all family problems. Before they eat the fruit, what kind of condition were they in?

**【Gen2:7】** Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

If you are the director of a Genesis movie how will you produce this scene?

Have you seen those Terra-Cotta Warriors, those clay-made figure in China? On TV? Imagine you are directing a movie about Genesis—how would you bring this scene to life? Are you familiar with the Terra-Cotta Warriors - those clay figures found in China that are often depicted in television documentaries?

God blew a breath to it, and then the clay flaks started to fall from its surface and reveal the skin beneath. Soon it began to breathe, and started moving, and it became a living being, right? Hold on to that thought, let me show you some Hebrew words.

**【Gen2:7】** Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7 says, the man became “a living thing” with “life”. 5315 *nephesh* 2416 *chay* (*khai*), you don’t need to know the Hebrew words, just remember the numbers that representing the words, 5315 and 2416.

In Genesis 1:20, God creates fishes, creatures in the sea, and birds, creatures in the sky. You see, they are 5315 *nephesh* 2416 *chay*.

Same chapter, verse 24, God creates wild animals, living creatures move along the ground. You see, they are 5315 *nephesh* 2416 *chay*.

Humans, animals, fish and birds, they are the same, “living things” with “lives”. Also, the material that God used to create them is the same.

Remember Pastor Ken said last week? God used *adammah* to create *Adam*, use dust to make Dusty. You can say, *adammah* is *Adam’s* Ma, I believe the saying “Earth Mother” is from here, from Hebrew. Now, Genesis 2:19, God used *adammah* to form all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.

So, was Adam, upon his creation, simply like any other animal—living peacefully in a lush garden, unaware? minding his own business like an animal? Then God blew a breath to him, a light shined to him, and a holy connection is formed between him and God. In response, Adam worshipped; he became a living soul, set apart from all other creatures.

If you are the director of a Genesis movie, how would you produce the scene of Gen 2:7? Let us look at one more Hebrew word in Gen 3:8. And this one is famous.

**【Gen3:8】** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

If we look at the English translation, or the Chinese translation, it’s hard to see any peculiar thing. But the original Hebrew is highly poetic, that means very hard to translate. For example, the voice of God, the voice! is walking in the garden. How do you translate that? The word of God was walking? Jesus was walking?? It’s hard.

And here, on that day, in the garden, something was moving. It is not “in the cool”, it is the wind that was moving, but this word *ruwach* 7307, it can be translated to “wind”, 92 times in the whole Old Testament, but 232 times, it was translated to “spirit”, and please let me point this out, 27 times in the whole Old Testament, this word *ruwach* was translated to “breath”.

So, if this word can be accepted as “breath” here, then on that day, in the garden, right after they eat the fruit, “breath” was moving, my question is, is this “breath” move in, or move out?

Let's do a simple math here. According to Gen 2:7, what is man?

**【Gen2:7】** Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

“Dust” on the ground, plus the breath from God, the beath of life, and the man became a living being. So, man equals dust plus the breath of God, the Spirit of God, since God is a Spirit, we can even say, man equals dust plus God.

And then, continue on this equation, Gen 3:8 *ruwach* is moving, the wind, the spirit, the breath is moving out, So Man now become, dust plus the breath of God and minus the breath of God, that equals to Dust. Only dust remains **(Gen3:19)**.

Highly poetic, and highly mathematic. That's what happens after they eat this fruit, the fruit for the root of all family problems.

The fruit can be understood as a covenant — a symbol of a relationship, the relationship between God and humanity. In this relationship, God is the Creator and human beings are the creature. Trusting God's command is an obedience rooted in love.

To eat the fruit, then, is to shatter this relationship entirely. The creature attempts to usurp its place and seize the throne of the Creator. By this act, humanity declares: “We want to define for ourselves what is right and what is wrong. We want to become God — just like You.” This is a self-centered betrayal of the divine order.

And this act fractures the relationship — not in one way, but in fourfold:

It broke the relationship between humanity and God, they went hiding.

It broke the relationship between human and human, they started the blame-shifting.

It broke the relationship between humanity and nature, there is toil and struggle.

It broke the relationship between a person and their own self, they have guilt and shame.

Ok, that's a short version of the story of “a fruit for the root of all family problems.”

Is this the end? No.

Shortly, we are going to invite Dennis and his students to perform a Special Music on Amazing Grace. Before that, please allow me to share a reflection on the Amazing Grace given to us by the last Adam mentioned in **1 Corinthians 15:45**.

The first Adam stood in a garden called Eden, under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He knew God's will: “do not eat the fruit.” But he wanted to be “like God.” So he decided, “not Your will, mine be done.”

Then Jesus stood in a garden called Gethsemane, the scripture calls Him the Last Adam, He was also beneath a “tree,” because the cross itself, that instrument of death, the scripture calls it “a tree.” Jesus, being in very nature God, made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. So He decided, “not my will, Yours be done.”

Amazing Grace, where the first Adam hid from God after his failure, the Last Adam walked toward the cross, toward the darkness, toward death — for us.

[Invite Dennis.](#)

Closing Prayer:

Lord, our ancestors rebelled and ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The consequences have not ended. We feel them still — in our families, in our marriages, in our children, in our communities, in the world that cannot stop its wars and its cruelties and its quiet despairs.

But You did not leave us in the bushes. You came looking. You called: Where are you?

Lord, teach us to come out of hiding. May our prayer be not the last resort, but the first instinct. May we be not governed by our own definitions of right and wrong, but by Yours. May we confront the root of our life's problems and humbly submit to You.

In the name of our Lord Jesus, we pray, Amen.