

OpenTheo

Q&A#107 The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Image of God

February 17, 2019



Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "In your video "Created in the Image of the Angels" you say that humans were supposed to grow into the Image of God, but don't discuss how this relates to the verse you referenced in passing earlier in the video: "Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—" Can you expand on the meaning of this verse in the context of the passage (did the serpent speak part of the truth earlier in the passage, or is this just a verbal play on what the serpent had said?) and in the context of what you believe the Bible teaches about redeemed humanity and the image of God. (I realize I could have asked via a comment to the video, but this is an issue a wide range of Bible readers, with different levels of familiarity with the scriptures, find perplexing, and a video might be helpful.)"

Within this video, I mention Walter Moberly's The Theology of Genesis:

<https://amzn.to/2tsr68a>

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account:

<https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account:

<https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, in your video created in the image of the angels, you say that humans were supposed to grow into the image of God. But don't discuss how this relates to the verse you referenced in passing earlier in the video.

Then the Lord God said, Behold, a man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. Can you expand on the meaning of this verse in the context of the passage? Did the serpent speak part of the truth earlier in the passage? Or is this just a verbal play on what the serpent has said? And in the context of what you believe the Bible teaches about redeemed humanity and the image of God? Yes, this is an important question.

If you look through the text of Genesis 2 and 3, it would seem, at points, that the serpent tells the truth of the matter. You will not surely die. In the day that you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Or like one of the gods. Now, this seems to be what happens. They don't, they're not struck by lightning the moment that they eat of it.

Nor do we see them dying and being cut off. We'd rather see their eyes are opened. And God himself, no less, declares that they have become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

So there seems to have been something in the serpent's message that rings true. It seems to be, in some respects, more true than what God has said. And this presents a puzzle for the reader of the text.

Particularly as it's clearly presented to us as a text in which God is the trustworthy character. That for God to be presented in such a way in this opening text, the first dealings that human beings have with God. And it seems that God is not in fact fully trustworthy.

That's a problem. Satan's words, or the serpent's words, present God as not being entirely trustworthy. God is not giving them the true picture.

God knows that their eyes will be opened. That they will become like one of the gods, knowing good and evil. And that they will not surely die.

And that seems to be what happens. So there is a problem presented for the reader. I've found Walter Mobley's treatment of this in this book here.

Quite helpful. He talks about Genesis 2 and 3 as texts dealing with wisdom. As texts that train the reader in how to think about wisdom.

Not just as texts that tell a straightforward narrative. But texts that prompt the reader to

think through some tough questions. By presenting them with difficult conundrums.

Now the tree, I believe, is a tree that's associated with wisdom. It's associated with rule and kingship. The knowledge of good and evil, as we see elsewhere in scripture, is associated with rule.

Solomon receives the knowledge of good and evil from the Lord in 1 Kings. In 1 Kings chapter 3 we see that Solomon has his dream. And in his dream it says that, Therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people that I may discern between good and evil.

For who is able to judge this great people of yours? He asks for the knowledge of good and evil. Likewise, earlier we see David described in chapter 14 of 2 Samuel verse 17. Your maid servant said, The word of my Lord the King will now be comforting.

For as the angel of God, so is my Lord the King in discerning good and evil. And may the Lord your God be with you. So he's like the angel of the Lord.

He's like one of the gods. He's someone who has the knowledge of good and evil. And his eye looks throughout the land.

Later on we see in chapter 19 verse 27. And he has slandered your servant to my Lord the King. But my Lord the King is like the angel of God.

Therefore do what is good in your eyes. Again, good eyes angel of the Lord. These are significant associations that the King is like the angel of the Lord.

He's the one that guards. He's the one that judges. He's the one that exercises rule.

And so the angel of the Lord, I believe, is ultimately associated with Christ himself. And the image that is born there by the King. The King is like one of the angels.

He's the one who rules and who judges and who upholds the nation. What we also see is that the tree is this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's associated with good.

And it's associated with the eye. And this is something we've seen throughout chapter 1. God sees and he judges. He sees the light that it is good.

Evening and morning is the first day. There is this seeing and judging. The ruler is someone who sees and judges more generally.

Their eyes are opened. The ruler is someone who's able to perceive, who has wisdom and shrewdness and cunning like the serpent. The serpent is someone whose eyes are open.

Someone who has the ability to see the world and perceive the way that things are. And

to judge and rule accordingly. Now that can be exercised in a wicked or a good manner.

But there's an opening up of the self through this. Now in showing us a way in which human beings were in fact opened up. And their eyes were open to reality.

And they were able to judge. They did become like one of the gods in some sense. In showing us that occurring in a sinful way.

What we see is that often there are times when we come to a sort of perverse wisdom. Where there can be an illumination that is in fact destructive. That is in fact something that feels liberating.

That feels to expand us. But actually is something that contracts, that twists, that distorts us. And goes against our good.

It's something that you see within the story of Adam and Eve. That they grow up before their time. There's a certain opening of the eyes that we see.

That is an opening of the eyes where we just end up seeing through everything. The cynicism for instance of the young person who's never truly been able to appreciate the goodness of things. They just see everything that's false.

The nakedness of everything. And in many ways that's what happens to Adam and Eve. Their eyes are opened but they don't have eyes open to perceive things in a true way.

To be able to delight in them. To be able to rule righteously. Rather they have their eyes opened and they see the nakedness of themselves.

And they see the nakedness of other things. That judgement that they are opened up to is not a good one. And so they are sent out into the world.

They sense their nakedness. Now that nakedness is not just, oh we're not wearing clothes. Or some sexual shame.

There's part of that in it no doubt. But there's also a sense of that feeling that you might get in a dream. Where you're standing up in front of a large crowd of people to deliver an important speech.

And you're naked. That there's this sense of being unprepared for something that is very important. Where you need to exercise rule and judgement.

Where you need to exercise some degree of... You need to present yourself in a certain way. And you're not prepared. You're not dressed for the job.

And Adam and Eve are not dressed for the job. They are those who have taken a task upon themselves that they are not prepared for. And being aware of your nakedness.

Nakedness and shame are the opposite of glory. Glory is you're clothed with glory. That can be the clothes of the king.

That can be the clothes of someone in high office. But when you see nakedness it's that recognition of a loss of integrity. And that need to clothe yourself.

To cover up your sense of the loss of integrity. What we see in these passages then I think is Adam and Eve propelled out into the world by their sin. That they become like one of the judges.

One of the gods. They have taken on themselves this task of ruling in the world. And their eyes are indeed opened.

But yet they're opened in a way that is poisonous and destructive. They see nakedness rather than having glory. Now what does this mean for the image of God? Were they just supposed to remain in the garden and never actually participate in this tree? I don't believe that's the case.

I think one day they would have eaten of the tree. When we look through scripture we see the knowledge of good and evil presented as a good thing on many occasions. Solomon is given the knowledge of good and evil.

David as the king is like the angel of the Lord having the knowledge of good and evil. We see the same thing described of people of God in the New Testament. In Hebrews.

That a sense is being trained to recognise good and evil. Being naked is not just a matter of innocence. Innocence is part of it.

But innocence has different senses. Innocence could be a lack of guilt. But innocence is also immaturity.

Children are innocent. They're innocent not just because they have not sinned in the same way as actively as adults have. They're also innocent because they're naive.

They're garrulous. But they're garrulous in a way that they have no cunning. They have no knowledge or wisdom of the world.

They can't discern between good and evil. They're those who are in this very basic immature state. And that difference between good and evil is also something that involves a raising up to the level of maturity.

The infant knows things as good purely in terms of taste and preference and desire. And this is something that's played upon with the fruit. The fruit is an object of physical desire.

But there is a different sort of goodness. There's a moral goodness that is distinct from

mere appetite. What seems good to me? What is desirous to me? What is something that will satisfy my longings and my desires and what I want for myself? What we see with the true goodness is the goodness that is achieved through judgment.

That discerns what is good and bad. And that is something that's very different. Now, would they have participated in the tree? I believe they would have.

But yet, this is like kids taking the keys to the father's car before they have learnt how to drive. Before they have come of age. And so it becomes as ashes in their mouth.

It's not something that gives life. In fact, their eyes are opened. They receive the thing.

But it ends up proving destructive for them. It's something that throws them out into the world. And they find that they're just not ready for things.

And gradually, everything unravels. So what we see in a seed form within the garden is then played out in the land as brother kills brother. And then we see it played out in Lamech and his wives.

We see it played out in all the events that lead up to the flood. As the whole world becomes polluted with evil. And the thoughts and intents of man's heart are only evil continually.

There is this progression and this spreading out of this blot of sin. And so the judgment that they seek, the judgment that would make them more like the gods, to be those who can rule, those who can assess things properly, and those who can exercise some degree of authority within the world, is something that they receive but in the wrong manner. And so there's a play, in some sense, upon what the serpent says.

But the serpent is telling the truth of a kind. They will become like one of the gods, knowing good and evil. But they'll become like one of the fallen gods, one of the fallen angels, one of those who have rejected God's authority.

They'll become as those who have taken that law into their own hands, as those who have rebelled against the standard of good and evil. And so what they end up with is this self-condemning knowledge. This knowledge that ends up condemning and showing that they are naked, that they are unprepared.

What we see in scripture then, I think, is a movement, not just from death and fall to salvation, but a movement to maturity as well. As we look, for instance, I've described the movement from priest to king to prophet. There is a movement there from one level of maturity to another.

And we see that again, I think, within the Gospel. The Gospel is not just bringing us back to stage one, this world that we were first placed within, and removing sin from it.

Rather, it's the world grown up.

It's humanity come of age, humanity entering into the full image of God, that we now have the knowledge of good and evil. We now rule. We can now discern between what is right and what is wrong.

And we can see and we can judge. We will judge angels. And so the king who is like the angel of the Lord, knowing good and evil, that will be all of us entering into that, what it means to be those who can rule within the world under God.

And so I think this passage is a very pivotal one for understanding a biblical view of wisdom. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is withheld from them for a time. They will eat of it one day.

And that, I believe, will also involve a sort of death, just as the creation of Eve involved a sort of death for Adam as he was placed into a deep death-like sleep. So they will have to pass through a new experience of a sort of death to enter into the new life, raised up to a new life of rule and authority. And that's something they have to be prepared for.

I think this is one of the things that we see with Christ, that Christ's resurrection is not just dealing with sin and then coming back. There's an entrance into a new maturity, that the old Adam, the soulish man, is replaced by a man, the Lord of the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit. And this is a transition from glory to glory.

It's a transition from one level of authority to another. It's a transition where we enter more fully into what the image of God means, as we enter into that authority and rule within the world. I hope this helps.

Any further questions, leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts. The links to all of those are below.

Thank you very much for listening. And Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow. God bless.