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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, TREE OF LIFE”
First Corinthians 1:18, 22-24; Genesis 2-3

I invite you to take a good look at the cross.

■ {NLT} **“The message of the cross is foolish.”** Paul says as much in **First Corinthians 1:18**.

{GW; Amp} **“The message of the cross”** – the cross itself – **“is nonsense.”** It **“is... absurdity and folly.”** It is **“sheer silliness.”**

■ {NLT} Granted, the apostle is speaking of people who do not know Jesus. **“The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction!”**

■ {I Co 1:22} He explains that Jews **“demand signs”** (wonders and miracles) to prove that God is behind it. Gentiles for their part expect **“wisdom,”** intellectual logic, a line of reasoning that makes sense to them.

■ {I Co 1:23; MSG, GW} Instead, God has given us the cross. To natural eyes, it looks like an **“anti-miracle”** and **“unphilosophical nonsense.”**

? Is this so difficult to understand?

☑ Consider this: had Messiah taken on flesh in a different time or place, we would not be looking at a cross. It would be a pile of stones, a gallows, a stake, a guillotine, or a rifle or electric chair or gas chamber or syringe. How fashionable would it be to wear a miniature of one those on a gold chain around your neck?

The cross was an instrument of both execution and torture. It was designed to extinguish life inexorably but s-l-o-w-l-y, and with utmost agony.

📖 That is why we reserve the word *excruciating* for our worst anguish. It combines the Latin prefix *ex-* (meaning “out” or “thoroughly”) with the Latin verb *cruciare* (“to crucify” or “to cause pain”).

{tribunesandtriumphs} Not only so, the cross was devised to inflict maximum humiliation. We picture Jesus draped in a scrap of cloth; but he was stripped naked, totally exposed. It was typical for spectators to mock the victims. Crucifixion was so shameful that, with rare exceptions, the Roman government did not execute its own citizens that way, in order to preserve their dignity.

{Dt 21:23, NRSV} According to Deuteronomy, **“anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”** In Hebrews 12:2 we read that Jesus **“endured the cross, scorning its shame.”** Philippians 2:8 {Mace NT; TNIV} explains that the Son of God **“abased himself”** (demeaned himself, allowed himself to be disgraced and degraded) **“by becoming obedient to ... death on a cross!”**

{Is 53:2} If, as Isaiah prophesied, the crucified Christ **“had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,”** how much less desirable does the *cross* appear!

? {I Co 1:23} Is it any wonder that **“Christ crucified”** is **“a stumbling block to Jews and [stupidity] to Gentiles”**?! Why wouldn’t it be?

Yet I love the cross. Maybe you do, too.

? Why do we love the cross? What is there to love about so hideous an apparatus?

{Ge 2:9} Let us go back, further back than first century Palestine, all the way to the beginning. The LORD YHWH “**planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put**” the first man and first woman. He “**made all kinds of trees to grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.**”

{Ge 2:9} Eden was a paradise brimming with food to sustain the body and beauty to nourish the soul. In the “**middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**”

{Ge 2:16-17} As for the tree of knowledge, the LORD YHWH made it off-limits. He said, “**You are free to eat from [every other] tree in the garden; but you must not eat from**” *that* “**tree.**”

📖 The reason for the prohibition depends on the meaning of “**the knowledge of good and evil.**” I believe it is insight pursued without reference to God, natural judgment that disregards or defies divine revelation, the so-called “wisdom” of creatures who demand autonomy from their Creator.

{Ecc 7:17} Such “**knowledge**” is destructive folly. As Scripture cautions, “**Do not be a fool – why die before your time?**” Hence, the LORD warned the man and the woman, “**When you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will certainly die.**”

{Ge 3:22} As for the tree of life, it was a means of physical immortality. Anyone who ate of its fruit would “**live forever.**” Their bodies would never pass away.

God did not forbid this fruit from the beginning. When he placed Adam and Eve in the Garden he said “**you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,**” but they were “**free to eat from any [other] tree,**” *including the tree of life.*

{Jn 10:10} Doesn’t this disclose the Creator’s good heart toward us? He desires that we “**have life to the full,**” vitality of body, mind, and spirit. That is why he gave our forebears free access to the tree of life.

It was only after they chose the way of death that merciful God declared it off-limits. This, too, discloses his kindness.

Until they ate the forbidden fruit, the man and woman lived in harmony with him, each other, and the Creation. They were whole, at peace, fully alive; but by pursuing autonomy, they set in motion a process of distortion and decay. Their relationships with God, each other, and the world were broken. They exchanged trust, unity, and glory for suspicion, alienation, and shame.

Imagine going on like this forever, perpetually dying on the inside while your body cannot perish. It sounds like hell to me! Therefore, God’s ban on eating from the tree of life was an act of love and mercy.

? What does this have to do with the cross? What is the link between the trees of Eden and the cross of Christ?

★ 1st) the apostles speak of the cross as a tree.

{Gal 3:13} Five verses in Acts, Galatians, and First Peter speak of Jesus being “**hung on a tree.**” Most

English language translations use the word “**cross**” but the original Greek word is not σταυρος [stauros]; it is ξύλον [xύlon], literally “**tree**”.

★ 2nd) the apostles view Adam and his tree through Jesus and his tree.

{Ro 5:12, 15, 18} Paul writes about this at length in Romans and I Co. I will limit myself to a few verses:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.... But...if the many died by the trespass of the one...how much more did... the gift that came by the grace of the one... Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all...so... one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all.

★ 3rd) the cross is the definitive source of true knowledge.

{Ro 5:8; I Jn 3:16} It *enlightens regarding God’s love*: he “**demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” “**This is how we know what love is: Jesus... laid down his life for us.**”

{Mt 10:38; 16:24} It *enlightens us regarding the nature of Christian discipleship*: “**Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**” “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**”

{I Jn 3:16} It *enlightens us to our calling in the Church*: “**Jesus... laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another.**”

Whereas the knowledge Adam and Even gained from their tree alienated them, the knowledge we gain from the cross of Christ unites us to God and each other.

★ 4th) the cross is the definitive source of real life.

{I Co 15:22.45}: “**As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**” How will he accomplish this? By his death and resurrection, that is, by the power of his empty cross.

{Ro 6:3-6} “**All...who [are] baptized into... Jesus are baptized into his death... If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.**”

If God is saving us by grace through faith in Christ, we have a foretaste of abundant life now. Yet we will receive it in all of its fullness when he returns.

{Rev 1:18} In Revelation 2:7 “**the Living One**” who “**was dead, and now [is] alive forever,**” promises: “**To those who are victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**”

{Rev 22:2, 14} Moreover, when he describes his vision of our eternal home, John writes:

“On each side of the river [of the water of life] stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” “Blessed are those who wash their robes” [{Rev 7:15} “**in the blood of the Lamb**”] “**that they may [eat of] the tree of life...**”

☑ {Osborn} The apostles speak of the cross as a tree. They view Adam and his tree through Jesus and his tree. The cross is the definitive source of true knowledge and real life. In short, **“The cross is at once the two trees in the Garden of Eden, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life.”**

{I P 1:3-4; Acts 2:23-24} **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus!” “Wicked men put [the Son] to death [on a hideous cross]. But God raised him ... freeing him from...death,”** and **“in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through [his] resurrection...into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.”**

{I Co 1:18, 24} **“The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power...and... wisdom of God”** for life!

This is why I love the cross. Do you love it?
Hallelujah, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.