

“Wisdom and Freedom” Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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.”

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today is a very good day. Thanks be to God! We have this opportunity to look at the first few chapters in the Bible. They are saturated with God’s wisdom. Today we’ll only scratch the surface of these riches.

These chapters, God’s revelation, when we understand it, gives us a lens through which we can clearly see what is wrong with this world and what is wrong with us. That makes us wiser. Let’s gain some wisdom.

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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.”

First thing that we should notice in these verses is the abundance of God’s generosity. He gave Adam this wonderful freedom. “Everything is yours. You may enjoy all my gifts, all of them”. And He gave to Adam this wonderful wisdom.

As we can read in the following verses, Adam understood how God’s creation functions, he was able to name all the living creatures, and in a few words he provided the best ever summary of what marriage is. Gen 2:24.

It was like God saying: “You may live in this state of abundance and blessedness forever, free to enjoy my gifts, free from any worries and concerns, free to live the life you are created for; as long as you trust me and listen to me. Everything is yours. That’s my gift to you. Enjoy your freedom. Enjoy your wisdom.

But if you turn away from me you surely will die. For I am the source of life. If you are separated from me, you will die, you don’t have life in you, I give it to you”. This is how good it was according to God’s design.

Now, a little comment about good and evil. We usually think about them as moral categories. Not so in these chapters. These words have different meanings. We could rephrase and say that good is something that functions properly.

Something that functions according to God's design, to His Word. Evil, on the other hand, is something that doesn't function properly, something that is against God's Word, against God's very good design.

To know the good would be to know God's order of creation and to live accordingly. Evil would be going against this good order, destroying the goodness of God's creation, and death would then come into the world to restrain the evil.

Now, let's see what happened! What did the serpent do? He knew that Adam and Eve lived and flourished listening and obeying God's instructions. Life in harmony with the Word of God was their source of life, and wisdom and freedom.

That's why the serpent attacked God's Word. **"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"** This is the most devilish of questions. Do you see what the serpent did?

He subtly twisted what God had said and thus made them believe that God's gifts were actually some sort of unfair restrictions. Loving Creator said "be with me, listen to me and enjoy all these gifts forever".

The serpent changed it to "did He really make you stay with Him and forbid to eat what you want?" This is how the devil fights, how he deceives people. It is so simple, once God's Word explains it to us, then we can recognize those deceptions.

See how it works! The devil takes wonderful gifts of God and presents them as some oppressive restrictions. Then he offers to set us free by disobeying our loving Creator and Redeemer. Let's look at some examples. Commandments are helpful.

The Triune God gives us the gift of Himself – "I will be your God, and will provide for you" – the devil twists it into "He is robbing you of your choice, of your freedom, you should be able to make up your own mind! You yourself can be like God!"

And we all fall to this deception. Loving Father says – "I will come to be with you and to bless you on the holy day, come and receive my blessings", the devil twists it into – "He is taking away your time, you should decide for yourself what you want to do with your time." And so many are deceived.

We could continue these examples with all Commandments seeing how the devil destroys and twists God's gifts of peace and order, of life, of marriage and sexual intimacy, of possessions, of good reputation and so on.

Today the entire Western society suffers terribly, because they have listened to this voice – "did God really say?" We live in this society which cannot receive God's blessings for they have rejected the gift of parental authority (the 4th Commandment). In the name of equality and freedom. The result is... an ever-growing number of selfish individuals who care only for themselves.

We live in this society where the gift of life is rejected in favour of our rights to exterminate those who can cause us inconveniences. In the name of choice and dignity. And so... we endorse the killing of the unborn and the elderly.

We live in this society where the gifts of marriage and sex are scorned and mocked. Where premarital sex, cohabitation, different sexual perversions are celebrated. In the name of love and freedom, of course. And the result is... unhappy and hurt people, lost hopes, lost trust, broken relationships, loneliness, and so on. Epidemic...

We live in this society where the gift of possessions is made into a god that defines who we are and how valuable we are, and so on. I am sure we could come up with different other examples also from our church's life, like the ongoing critique of God's good design for the office of pastors. No good for us...

Once we understand how the devil works, it helps to understand why the world thinks that Christianity is all about restrictions and foolishness; because this is how the devil keeps presenting the most precious gifts of God.

And don't make a mistake thinking that we are not a part of this problem. We are. The Church in the West has accepted too many of these things as normal. We have rejected the authority of God's Word. We have been cowardly, scared, we haven't spoken the truth. And we believed that there won't be consequences...

But now we worry – where are our young ones? By doubting God's Word and wisdom, by not teaching it – and the blame mostly goes to us, pastors – we have let the next generations down. Now we all are paying the price. A very high price.

Let's get back to the text. **“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** See what is happening?

Here the serpent attacks the loving Creator. He portrays our God as some kind of evil despot who wants to restrict your freedom, your potential. “God just doesn't want you to have all the good things that you could have. But don't worry, you don't have to listen to Him, you can be like gods themselves”.

Did you notice how 'being like gods' was defined in these verses? Being like gods is to have true wisdom, and to be able to know good from evil, that is, to know what functions and what doesn't according to God's design.

In other words, God the Creator has established His order for how things are to function, and to know this good order is true wisdom. What the serpent was saying – that people will be able to define themselves what works and what doesn't. That we will become creators of our own realities. The serpent lied, and his lies robbed us of God's blessings. Many have believed his lies. Today like never before...

Remember, true wisdom is to know God's good order of creation. To know God's will. And we can know it only from God Himself, when He speaks to us and we listen to His Word. God's Word is the source of true wisdom.

This is how the Word of God reveals what is wrong with the world and with us. We have lost trust in God. We don't want to listen to His Word. We have lost true wisdom. And we have lost true freedom.

Sure, it is good to know and understand this all, however, recognizing our state doesn't fix it. Therefore, listen to this! Our gracious God still desires to give you the wisdom and freedom that the first Adam lost at the Fall. He Himself promised that He will restore what our disobedience had broken.

This is why Jesus, the Son of God, came as the second Adam. He too was similarly tempted. Even more... But He remained faithful, confessing that true life, freedom and wisdom comes from the obedience to the Triune God.

He clung to the Word of God... and the devil had to leave. On the cross Jesus reversed the curse of the Fall, He defeated all our greatest enemies that had kept us enslaved since the dawn of humanity – sin, death and devil.

Now the Second Adam comes to offer to you what the first Adam lost. Joyful fellowship with the true God, genuine freedom and divine wisdom. How does He do that? It's very simple. As Jesus speaks to you, He sends His Spirit to dwell in you.

As you learn what God has done for you in Jesus – not sparing even His very life for you – the Spirit convinces you that He, indeed, does love and care for you more that we can comprehend. You begin to trust that this God wishes that you flourish, that He longs to bless you, as your loving Father.

Then we want to know Him better, we want to draw closer to Him, we want to experience His presence and His goodness. We begin to trust Him... The Spirit convinces us that it is our God who gives us true freedom. And so we begin to long to live in harmony with how our gracious God instructs us.

We want to understand His will for our lives, and the Spirit blesses us with His wisdom. The Word of God reveals to us God's good design for our lives, and thus He makes even the simple wise, and He Himself helps us to rejoice in this new life.

That is how our God transforms us and restores us. We could say that the Second Adam brings us back to Eden. It begins already here. This is our garden. Right here. The Divine Service. The Sacrament in our tree of life. Jesus Himself comes to us and feed us with this life-giving food right here.

This is where heavens and earth meet again. This is where all the angels and saints join together in the feast of our Lord, and where we – deceived, beaten and abused by the serpent, as we all are, are welcomed and restored by Jesus Himself.

This is where our new life begins. Eternal life. What the first Adam lost the second Adam has regained. And here it gives it to you. True freedom, true wisdom, and true life in the presence of our holy God. Come and receive, for everything is prepared.

Jesus did it. For you!

And the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding keeps your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.