

John 1:1 **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.**

Genesis 1:26 **Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them...

Genesis 2:1 **Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.**

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

⁷ then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ 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 3:1 **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?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ 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.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

Satan has a way of manipulating... and teasing our curiosity – creating in us a desire to taste... just a small sample... that’s all. What’s the harm in that? Adam and Eve soon found out... that there are consequences for actions of disobedience.

God gave Adam and Eve access to the tree of life. They could eat of it freely and live forever. However, God specifically told them NOT to eat from... NOR even touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Children don’t seem to like the word “NO”... and in fact seems to have a way of peaking their curiosity AND desire. “No” seems to imply, “It must be something really good”... and so whether a 2-year old, 22-year old... or all the years that follow... we are forever tempted to “taste and see” for ourselves.

Rather than trusting and loving our heavenly Father, we desire to be independent – to be as gods making our own decisions about what is right and what is wrong; and in so doing we are as gods in charge of our own desires – and taking what WE want in life.

Like Adam and Eve, we too are tempted. We too disregard God’s Word of wisdom and warning. We too pick and eat forbidden fruit...because of the sinful nature passed down to all the children of Adam and Eve. We bear that sinful nature inherited from our parents — failing to trust God and his Word... and we all too often go our own way. And so we too bear the curse that goes with sin – eternal death... ^{Genesis 3:19} ***By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.***

²² ***Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”*** ²³ ***therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.***

Cut off from the tree of life, all of Adam and Eve’s descendents were cursed with eternal death; and unable to redeem themselves back into the righteousness of God the Father. But God did not forsake his creation to eternal damnation and death. When he cursed the serpent, Satan, the Lord said: ^{Genesis 3:15} ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*** God had a plan to forgive and restore his fallen creation, but it would involve another tree... a very costly tree.

Paul in Romans 3: ²³ ***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.***

The one who was there *in the beginning* would enter into creation with the created – in flesh and blood – born of the virgin Mary... the eternal Son of God became our brother, to redeem us from sin and death. What Satan started through Eve... would come back to defeat him through another woman, Mary.

What Satan started at the tree of life in the Garden would come back to defeat him through another tree – the tree of an old rugged cross that would become the new Tree of Life through Jesus the Christ's victory over sin and eternal death for you and for me.

Christ's cross – the tree of life – is for us! Jesus allowed himself to suffer horrible beatings to near death... and then be nailed to and lifted up on that despised Roman tree of death... for our sins. His blood that stained that tree cleanses sin's stain from us – forgiving and redeeming us from all our sins; and breaking death's hold on us. The grave could not hold him; and being baptized in Christ, the grave cannot hold us.

Christ's death on the cross was and still is folly to many; but his resurrection assures us of life eternal, in which we have every right to boast! Paul's words in Corinthians are most true: the message of the cross may appear weak and foolish to the world; but for us who are being saved, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. In spite of the world's self-centeredness and its condemnations, derisions and pity for those who proclaim Christ Crucified and Christ risen; we will continue to proclaim the Good News of Christ crucified and Christ risen, for it is the only hope for sinners. Only Jesus crucified on the Tree of Life cross promises the sweet fruits of forgiveness of sins, salvation and eternal life. The cross of Christ is indeed the Tree of Life – of eternal life.

Paul's focus on the cross – on Christ crucified was needed then and is needed today. It's all too easy to become caught up in the latest feel-good fluff and foolishness... and miss the main and crucial message of Christ crucified on the cross. Some churches seem so concerned about being offensive to some that they water down and interpret God's Word so as not to be offensive – even taking down crosses. Isn't that foolish?

As Paul says, the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Holy Scripture, God's Word to the wise, informs us of God the Father who IS – not the god we may want to make us feel good.

Many will still call us fools when we boast of Christ Crucified – when we boast that he is the only way to eternal life -- when we boast that Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection, and his gift of the Holy Spirit are all part of his salvation for us.

Indeed, if proclaiming Christ crucified, living under the truth of Christ's cross, and freed from eternal death are seen as foolishness by some, then call us fools – for we are forever forgiven and fruitful fools for Jesus the Christ!

Amen.