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by Zac Poonen

God had great plans in mind for Adam and Eve, when He created them. But these plans could not be fulfilled apart from their being tested. And so He placed in Eden an attractive tree with luscious fruit called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And He forbade Adam and Eve from eating of it. The failure of Adam and Eve in Eden was primarily a failure of faith. Faith is the total leaning of the human personality on God, in total confidence in His perfect wisdom, love and power. Eve failed to have such a confidence in God and was thus lured by Satan into disobeying God's command. Satan suggested to Eve that there was a flaw in God's wisdom in not allowing them to eat of that tree. God had not given Adam any reason why the tree was forbidden. Faith never needs to have a reason for obeying God. It is our intellect that demands to know the reason first. Obedience to God must always be the obedience of faith, not the obedience of reason.

Paul said that he had been called "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" (Rom.1:5). He also said that the "preaching of Jesus Christ had been made known to all the nations, leading to the obedience of faith." (Rom.16:25, 26) Our intellect is the enemy of faith, as is clear from Proverbs 3:5 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart (not 'head') and do not depend on your own intellect." The wisdom of God is hidden from the clever and the intelligent and revealed by the Spirit to those who simply believe like little babes. Jesus said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes." (Mt.11:25). The intellect is a good servant but a bad master; and so its proper God appointed place is as the servant of the spirit in man - the spirit itself being subject to the Holy Spirit.

God gave Adam no reason as to why he could not eat of the forbidden tree, because He wanted to develop Adam's faith in Him. And this is the first area where God tests us too. Can we obey Him even when we cannot understand why He calls us to do something? What about when God calls us to do something that our reason tells us is unnecessary?

When Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat and to walk on the water that command was contrary to everything that Peter's reason told him. But if he had followed reason, he would never have experienced that miracle. One could quote many such instances from the Scriptures. And here lies the reason for the powerlessness of many Christians and why many believers never experience the supernatural workings of God in their lives. They live by reason and not by faith.

Faith is also a total confidence in God's love. Satan suggested to Eve that God did not love them sufficiently and that this was why He had kept that lovely fruit out of bounds for them. If Eve had been living by faith and not by reason, she would have replied, "Well, Satan, I don't understand why God has told us not to eat of that tree. But I am certain of one thing - that God loves us intensely; and so I am sure that He will never withhold any good thing from us. So, if He has forbidden this fruit, there must be a very good reason for it, that has our good in view." That would have been the answer of faith. But instead she fell for the Devil's lie. It is only the shield of faith in God's perfect love for us that "can extinguish every flaming missile of the Evil One." (Eph.6:16).

All discouragement and depression are the result of living by reason and not by faith. All anxiety and fear also have their roots in the same cause. God allows us to be tested - to be tempted to doubt His love, when He withdraws from us the 'feelings' of His manifest presence with us - so that we can be strong in faith and thus come to the place of maturity where He can fulfill His purposes through us.

God made that tree of knowledge of good and evil attractive because it was only thus that Adam and Eve could be tested. Would they reject something so attractive, in favour of God? Or would they reject God and choose what pleased themselves? This is the choice that faces us too in the moments of temptation. And that's why God has permitted temptation to be so attractive. It is only when we reject some forbidden thing that is really attractive, and to which we feel tremendously drawn and which we know can give us pleasure, that we prove that we love God wholeheartedly.

It is also thus that we prove our faith in God's perfect love - believing that what God has forbidden He has done in perfect love for our very best. Thus every temptation to sin and to disobey God becomes a trial of our faith. To live by faith is to

believe that every commandment of God has come from a heart of perfect love that desires the very best for us.

When God gave the Israelites the ten commandments, Moses told them, "God has come to test you" (Exod.20:20). It says in Deuteronomy 33:2,3, "At God's right hand there was a fiery Law for them. Indeed (this proves that) He loves the people". Would they believe that this fiery law was a proof of God's love for them? That was the test. Where Eve failed to trust God, the Israelites also failed and they too disobeyed the commandments.

But it is just here that Jesus overcame. He lived by faith. Every temptation that Satan brought to Him in the wilderness was refuted by the simple reply, "It is written.....". Jesus lived in obedience to every word of God.

God's Word was given in perfect love for man and Jesus obeyed it in faith. Thus He has become a Forerunner for us. If we are to serve God's people effectively, it is essential that we too live by faith - and manifest our faith by total obedience to God's commandments. Thus alone can we be examples to others.