

## **Did God tell Adam and Eve not to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?**

What did God say?

Gen 2:16, 17 “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, THOU SHALT NOT EAT OF IT: for in the day that thou eatest thereof THOU SHALT SURELY DIE.”

How did Eve respond when the serpent asked, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

Gen 3:2, 3 “And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, YE SHALL NOT EAT OF IT, NEITHER SHALL YE TOUCH IT, LEST YE DIE.”

It is generally taught that 1) Eve added, “neither shall ye touch it” to God’s original command and thereby unwittingly making God’s requirements appear more grievous than it was, which gave Satan an advantage; a wedge. And 2) Eve, responding, “lest ye die.” instead of “thou shalt SURELY die” also gave the impression that undermined the consequence; making it appear less severe than how God originally intimated to the first parents, etc.

And Ellen White appears to affirm this thought:

Eve had OVERSTATED THE WORDS OF GOD’S COMMAND. He had said to Adam and Eve, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” In Eve’s controversy with the serpent, SHE ADDED “Neither shall ye touch it.” Here the subtlety of the serpent appeared. THIS STATEMENT OF EVE GAVE HIM ADVANTAGE; he plucked the fruit and placed it in her hand, using her own words, He hath said, If ye touch it, ye shall die. You see no harm comes to you from touching the fruit, neither will you receive any harm by eating it. {Con 14.2}

“...Eve went from the side of her husband, viewing the beautiful things of nature, delighting her senses with the colors and fragrance of the flowers, and admiring the beauty of the trees and shrubs. She was thinking of the restrictions which God had laid upon them in regard to the tree of knowledge. She was pleased with the beauties and bounties which the Lord had furnished for the gratification of every want. ALL THESE, SAID SHE, God has given us to enjoy. They are all ours; FOR GOD HAS SAID, “OF EVERY TREE OF THE GARDEN THOU MAYEST FREELY EAT; BUT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL, THOU SHALT NOT EAT.” {2Red 9.1}

“Eve had wandered near the forbidden tree, and her curiosity was aroused to know how death could be concealed in the fruit of this fair tree. She was surprised to hear her queries taken up and repeated by a strange voice. “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” EVE WAS NOT AWARE THAT SHE HAD REVEALED HER THOUGHTS IN AUDIBLY CONVERSING WITH HERSELF; therefore, she was greatly astonished to hear her

queries repeated by a serpent. She really thought that the serpent had a knowledge of her thoughts, and that he must be very wise. She answered him, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." {2Red 9.2}

And for a while, I have held this view that Eve in fact added to God's original command, and that she also underestimated the consequence and so on.

Until I came across these statements from The Story of Redemption:

In the midst of the garden, near the tree of life, stood the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree was especially designed of God to be the pledge of their obedience, faith, and love to Him. OF THIS TREE THE LORD COMMANDED OUR FIRST PARENTS NOT TO EAT, NEITHER TO TOUCH IT, LEST THEY DIE. He told them that they might freely eat of all the trees in the garden except one, but if they ate of that tree they should surely die. {SR 24.1}

"Eve, unconsciously at first, separated from her husband in her employment. When she became aware of the fact she felt that there might be danger, but again she thought herself secure, even if she did not remain close by the side of her husband. She had wisdom and strength to know if evil came, and to meet it. This the angels had cautioned her not to do. Eve found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the fruit of the forbidden tree. She saw it was very lovely, and was reasoning with herself WHY GOD HAD SO DECIDEDLY PROHIBITED THEIR EATING OR TOUCHING IT. Now was Satan's opportunity. He addressed her as though he was able to divine her thought: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Thus, with soft and pleasant words, and with musical voice, he addressed the wondering Eve. She was startled to hear a serpent speak. He extolled her beauty and exceeding loveliness, which was not displeasing to Eve. But she was amazed, for she knew that to the serpent God had not given the power of speech." {SR 32.2}

"...The Lord would not have them investigate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, for then they would be exposed to Satan masked. HE KNEW THAT THEY WOULD BE PERFECTLY SAFE IF THEY TOUCHED NOT THE FRUIT. {1SP 40.2}

"...Poor child! you occupy a position similar to that of Eve in Eden. She imagined that she would be highly exalted if she could only eat of the fruit of the tree WHICH GOD HAD FORBIDDEN HER EVEN TO TOUCH, LEST SHE DIE. She ate, and lost all the glories of Eden. {2T 560.2}

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Setting up the context we read:

"...Eve went from the side of her husband, viewing the beautiful things of nature, delighting her senses with the colors and fragrance of the flowers, and admiring the beauty of the trees and shrubs. She was thinking of the restrictions which God had laid upon them in regard to the tree of knowledge. She was pleased with the beauties and bounties which the Lord had furnished for the gratification of every want. ALL THESE, SAID SHE, God has given us to enjoy. They are all ours; FOR GOD HAS SAID, "OF EVERY TREE OF THE GARDEN THOU MAYEST FREELY EAT; BUT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL, THOU SHALT NOT EAT." {2Red 9.1}

"Eve had wandered near the forbidden tree, and her curiosity was aroused to know how death could be concealed in the fruit of this fair tree. She was surprised to hear her queries taken up and repeated by a strange voice. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" EVE WAS NOT AWARE THAT SHE HAD REVEALED HER THOUGHTS IN AUDIBLY CONVERSING WITH HERSELF; therefore, she was greatly astonished to hear her queries repeated by a serpent. She really thought that the serpent had a knowledge of her thoughts, and that he must be very wise. She answered him, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." {2Red 9.2}

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"Eve had OVERSTATED THE WORDS OF GOD'S COMMAND. HE HAD SAID TO ADAM AND EVE, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In Eve's controversy with the serpent, SHE ADDED "Neither shall ye touch it." Here the subtlety of the serpent appeared. THIS STATEMENT OF EVE gave him advantage; he plucked the fruit and placed it in her hand, USING HER OWN WORDS, He hath said, If ye touch it, ye shall die. You see no harm comes to you from touching the fruit, neither will you receive any harm by eating it. Eve yielded to the lying sophistry of the devil in the form of a serpent. She ate the fruit, and realized no immediate harm. She then plucked the fruit for herself and for her husband. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." {2Red 11.1}

In the passage above it appears that EGW is commenting on the temptation based off of an exegesis of the Genesis text. She places the Divine command of Gen 2:16,17a verbatim in Eve's mouth on pg 9.1 and then, on 9.2, we see Eve's modification of that Divine prohibition. Thus we see that Eve was aware of the original Genesis 2 prohibition, as it was given, and had actually been speaking about it to herself. So this commentary from sister White, based upon an exegetical view of Genesis 2 and 3, is dealing specifically with the Gen 2:17 command. Yet even here I would note that EGW's comments are not strictly and completely exegetical because she puts Gen 2:17 as an utterance that God gave "to Adam

and Eve" whereas in Genesis 2 only Adam existed when it was originally given. Thus there must be more to the story than the Genesis narrative itself details. So, while the Bible doesn't tell us how, we do know that Eve received this information somehow because of her response to the serpent.

Examining EGW second comment:

"In the midst of the garden, near the tree of life, stood the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree was especially designed of God to be the pledge of their obedience, faith and love to him. OF THIS TREE THE LORD COMMANDED OUR FIRST PARENTS NOT TO EAT, NEITHER TO TOUCH IT, LEST THEY DIE. He told them that they might freely eat of all the trees in the garden except one; but if they ate of that tree they should surely die. {1SP 27.1}

"Eve, unconsciously at first, separated from her husband in her employment. When she became aware of the fact, she felt that there might be danger; but again she thought herself secure, even if she did not remain close by the side of her husband. She had wisdom and strength to know if evil came, and to meet it. This the angels had cautioned her not to do. Eve found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the fruit of the forbidden tree. She saw it was very lovely, and was reasoning with herself why GOD HAD SO DECIDEDLY PROHIBITED THEIR EATING OR TOUCHING IT. Now was Satan's opportunity. He addressed her as though he was able to divine her thoughts: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Thus, with soft and pleasant words, and with musical voice, he addressed the wondering Eve. She was startled to hear a serpent speak. He extolled her beauty and exceeding loveliness, which was not displeasing to Eve. But she was amazed, for she knew that to the serpent God had not given the power of speech. {1SP 35.2}

"...The Lord would not have them investigate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, for then they would be exposed to Satan masked. HE KNEW THAT THEY WOULD BE PERFECTLY SAFE IF THEY TOUCHED NOT THE FRUIT. {1SP 40.2}

Related EGW comment:

"...Poor child! you occupy a position similar to that of Eve in Eden. She imagined that she would be highly exalted if she could only eat of the fruit of the tree WHICH GOD HAD FORBIDDEN HER EVEN TO TOUCH, LEST SHE DIE. She ate, and lost all the glories of Eden. {2T 560.2}

In the comments above EGW is not commenting on the temptation based off of a strict exegesis of the Genesis text. She has introduced more data (which is the right of a true Biblical prophet) and places the prohibition not to touch the fruit as a part of the Lord's command. This new material is a bit difficult to reconcile with her previous comment. It may be that she is writing homiletically here. Or perhaps she is taking something else for granted like maybe how Adam and Eve interpreted the command.

If we accept this as literal then the only solution I can figure is that God must have given commands about the tree of knowledge of good and evil more than once. The first time, as given to Adam (and perhaps reiterated to Eve) there was no prohibition about touching the fruit. The second time was an amplification and the Lord added another restriction about not touching it lest they die.

So then how do we reconcile the two accounts if they are both literal? Here are a few points.

The original command, as recorded in Genesis 2, is not to eat the fruit because in the day you do you will surely die. The second one would be an amplified reiteration of this command and has as a part of it to not even touch it lest you die. The second command would therefore be more like a warning that appears to be functioning to prevent one from even coming close to eating the forbidden fruit.

Also the context of EGW's first comment about Eve overstating the command is based on Eve's audible declaration of the Genesis 2 prohibition. It is that command that was in Mrs. White's purview there.

"Eve had overstated the words of God's command...."

Notice we are dealing with a "command" singular and this is likely a reference back to Genesis 2:17. This particular command said nothing about not touching the fruit but only to not eat the fruit. This is what Satan questioned, presumably, based off of Eve's own audible statement of this prohibition to herself.

When the serpent spoke to her she entered into controversy with him instead of running away. And it was at this time that she stated the amplified command.

"...In Eve's controversy with the serpent, she added "Neither shall ye touch it."

This gave the enemy an advantage because he then plucked the fruit and put it in her hands.

"...Here the subtlety of the serpent appeared. This statement of Eve gave him advantage; he plucked the fruit and placed it in her hand, using her own words, He hath said, If ye touch it, ye shall die. You see no harm comes to you from touching the fruit, neither will you receive any harm by eating it"

Satan's actions here made it seem like God's amplified command (again if we take it as being directly from the Lord) was a lie since no harm came to her and this emboldened her to break the original command by eating it.

**Eugene William Prewitt:** I understand it this way: God did warn them not to go near it, not to touch it, and commanded them not to eat it. The warning was related to the command closely such that to go near and handle the fruit would lead to eating it. When

Eve confounded the warning "touch not" with the command "eat not" she made an opportunity for the serpent to place fruit in her hand and to reason like this, "look now, you touched, and are doing fine. So eating will be harmless too."