

Genesis 2:8 – 17

^{1:27} God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' ²⁹ Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; ³⁰ and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so. ³¹ God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:4} This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. ⁵ Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. ⁶ But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. ⁸ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰ Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹⁵ Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. ¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'

^{3:22} Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'-- ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Questions

1. What were God's goals for humanity?
 - a. Explicit:
 - i. To bear His image to the creation (Gen.1:27)
 - ii. To be fruitful and multiply (Gen.1:28)
 - iii. To spread out and fill the creation (Gen.1:28)
 - iv. To tend and guard the garden of Eden (Gen.2:15)
 - v. To eat lots of good fruit (Gen.2:16)
 - b. Deduced:
 - i. To enjoy beauty and food
 - ii. To spread the garden: The only way to reconcile the commands (1) to spread out over the world and (2) to tend the garden was to spread the garden, to tame the wild creation. This required Adam and Eve to have their spiritual connection with God intact.
 - iii. To finish filling the creation: At some point, we would have finished.
 - iv. To finish naming the creation
 - v. To gather up the praise of God from all creation and give it voice.
 - vi. To become more and more like Him, until they asked God about eating from the Tree of Life; and He invited them to eat from that Tree and live forever in His very Life.
2. How was God showing humanity how good He is?
 - a. Beauty: The entire creation was majestic and splendid
 - b. Food and nourishment: deliciousness and provision
 - c. Human joy in relationship, marital sex, love, and childbearing
 - d. *Growth in our own understanding of goodness, and evil, too, by contrast*
 - e. These were God's way of wooing us towards Himself. These were God's ways of showing us how good He is.
3. Why were the two Trees special? Let's think about the physical appearance of trees.
 - a. Trees are older than human beings. At times, they appear to be ancient. They would have appeared to Adam and Eve as fruit-bearing gifts that were, perhaps, ancient, and continued on for their descendents to be even more ancient.
 - b. Trees are firmly rooted, immovable.
 - c. Trees are taller, bigger, stronger than human beings.
 - d. So in Scripture and in other cultures, trees symbolize age, firmness, strength, time and memory. (This is why Ents in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* are special creatures, being shepherds of the trees, and having extremely long memories.) Things hung on trees are meant to be *remembered*. They are *memorials*. In other places in Scripture, we see the negative side of this:
 - i. ^{Dt.21:22} If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.
 - ii. ^{Josh.10:22} Then Joshua said, 'Open the mouth of the cave and bring these five kings out to me from the cave.' ²³ They did so, and brought these five kings out to him from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon.... ²⁶ So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees until evening.
 - iii. ^{2 Sam.18:9} Now Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. For Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. And his head caught fast in the oak, so he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him kept going. ¹⁰ When a certain man saw it, he told Joab and said, 'Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.'
 - iv. ^{Esther 7:9} Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, 'Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!' And the king said, 'Hang him on it.' ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

- v. ^{Acts 2:22} Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst...you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.
- vi. ^{Acts 5:30} The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging him on a cross.
- vii. ^{Acts 10:39} We are witnesses of all the things he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put him to death by hanging him on a cross.
- viii. ^{Acts 13:29} When they had carried out all that was written concerning him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

4. What was the Tree of Life?

- a. According to Genesis 3:22 – 24, the tree of life makes people live forever. However, it appears that the tree of life would have sealed humanity in whatever state they were in. After the fall, human beings were in a dying, corrupted state. This is why God expels human beings from the garden. He doesn't want to deny humanity something good. He wants to protect them from something bad. He wants to prevent human beings from becoming dying beings, corrupted *forever*. Notice that in 3:22, God doesn't even complete His thought. He chokes on His own thought, the thought that humanity would be forever corrupted. The earliest writing theologian outside the New Testament, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, said this: 'Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.' (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6)
- b. The Tree of Life was God's way of inviting human beings to live with God eternally, to be drawn into the life of God. This wasn't 'really long-lasting life' as something apart from God, with an optional *relationship* with God thrown in, if we wanted God. The Tree of Life seems to have been the eternal life from *within God Himself*, based on relationship. God allows us to be co-creators with Him of *our own nature*. Through this Tree of Life, He will preserve the choices we make about ourselves in relation to Him. This is why He had to heal and redeem our corrupted nature once we ate of the other Tree.
- c. From the New Testament, we get more insight into this. As a Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love one another freely. Yet it is their very divine nature to love one another, and they would never violate their own divine nature. Perfect freedom is the ability to choose according to one's nature. What, then, is the nature and freedom of human beings? If human beings were to be like the Triune God, and bear His image, we would have to both love God and one another, and do so freely. So God originally made our human nature good ('it was very good' in Gen.1:31) and inclined towards Him in love. We had a free choice to love God. And God, precisely because He respects human free will out of His love for us, wanted to give us the choice to fuse our free will to our good nature permanently, so that we would never sin, i.e. so that we would voluntarily choose to always love God eternally and bind ourselves to Him. This is why God was wooing us to Himself in the goodness of the creation. This was the nature of the Tree of Life.
- d. Does this mean that human beings could have just obeyed God in love, eaten from the Tree of Life, and been joined to God forever? *Yes. It could have been that simple.*
 - i. Did God *have* to come in human form in Jesus to die for our sins? That is debated. God seems to have already placed Himself into His creation to be partaken of by human beings in the Tree of Life. Hence, Meredith Kline, professor at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, calls this the sacramental tree. Kline asserts that the Tree of Life was in fact the Logos-Son of God (*Kingdom Prologue*, chapter 4, section 2; 1993). The Son of God incarnated into human flesh would later say something to echo this Tree of Life, 'Take, eat, this is my life, given to you....' On the other hand, there is a long tradition of thought that the Son of God would have come in human flesh in some way, even if the fall never happened.

- ii. Revelation 13:8 is unusual and deserves special comment. For more information about this, please see my analysis of Revelation 13. http://nagasawafamily.org/john_revelation-13.book.analysis.pdf
 - iii. *This means that evil was never necessary.*
- 5. Why the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil? *To actually teach humanity about good and evil.*
 - a. They should have hung Satan the serpent on the Tree of Knowledge (suggested when Moses hung a serpent on a pole in Numbers 21:4 – 7). What is hung on trees is meant to be remembered. This tempter and his temptation should have been remembered forever in his defeat. Notice, however, that the Tree of Knowledge was not there because of Satan. Satan merely corrupted its proper use. It was important to humanity's development into the fullness of the image and likeness of God and it would have been there regardless.
 - i. Where did Satan come from? Satan was an angel who rebelled against God. He didn't like the fact that God told the angels to serve human beings. Satan thought he was above that, so he sought to prove that human beings were not worth serving. Hence, he lied to them and tempted them. But Satan did not appreciate or understand that God was somehow present in the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge to serve humanity as part of the creation and from within it.
 - b. To teach humanity about boundaries. God understands the human need for good boundaries. As I have become a father with each of my two children, I understand better why the tree of good and evil was there and off limits. Of course Adam and Eve would later bear children. That was God's intention. They would need to respect each other's boundaries: spouse to spouse, parents to children, sibling to sibling; humanity and the created world. In order to do that, they needed to properly listen to God because He would be the one to help them know how to treat each other. God's fundamental boundary is that they would not define good and evil for themselves. God was saying, 'If you want to understand good and evil, come to Me, and I'll define it for you.' So long as human beings respected God as the king of His creation, human life would flourish, and healthy human community was truly possible. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is not a trick. It's not a test. It's reality. *It symbolized the fact that the definition of good and evil lay outside of humanity, and was older, taller, more ancient, and more venerable than humanity.* The tree symbolized the fact that God alone defines good and evil. And from that vantage point, He reserves to Himself the everlasting fruit of the tree. The tree of knowledge is a gift from God that physically represents His ancient presence *outside of the human being* to determine and define good and evil for all creation. The power to define good and evil does not rest within the human being. As such, *the tree of knowledge is fundamentally good in itself.*
 - c. By not eating from the Tree of Knowledge, *they would have grown in the knowledge of evil* (and good, too, of course). They would have understood *through experience*, the more time passed, that God is good. How did they know that life was good, and God was good? Because it would have just kept getting better and better for them!
 - i. Exegetical point: If Adam and Eve had had their first child in the paradise, they would start to understand by contrast what it might mean to lose their child. If they had continued to grow in love and relational experience with each other, they would start to understand by contrast what it might mean to have walked through life alone. Thus, the only way to understand evil is actually to resist it, reject it, and pursue growth in the goodness of God's will. That's because when we do evil, we rationalize it, blame someone else, and get used to it, and therefore we simultaneously lose insight into what evil really is and how terrible its consequences are. That's why I say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil really did provide knowledge of good and evil. It wasn't a trick or test. If Adam and Eve had continued to reject the evil (trying to be their own gods), and grown in the goodness of God's plan (being centered on Him and drawing life and love from Him), they would have understood evil very well, not by actually doing evil, but by rejecting it utterly. Adam and Eve would have had more and more beauty, variety of fruit, wonder at the creation, creativity, relationship, sex, love, children, love, relationship, and on and on.
 - ii. Exegetical point: God had already shown that creation and goodness followed an arc of development and growth. God had said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.' (Gen.2:18) That is, Adam was alone and unable to bring forth more life on his own.

That was *not good*, and Adam had to understand it viscerally and personally for himself. He alone had that experience, and he could talk about it. He could name it. Other people could imagine it. Adam's aloneness wasn't in a moral sense evil per se, and God did not leave him there, but it was a physical analogy to what evil would really be like if they chose it: alone, isolated, unfruitful – the opposite of what God intended. And in fact Adam did blame Eve after the fall, drawing them both into some degree of aloneness and isolation. Furthermore, God had made the light shining on the earth 'good' on day 1 (Gen.1:4) to contrast with the darkness on the earth. It wasn't that night and darkness were evil per se, but it was a physical analogy of what evil would really be like if they chose it: not able to see, to behold, to face something and know its nature and call it good. And in fact, they became unable to fully see a blessing.

- iii. Principle: So you always understand evil better when you grow in goodness, because you understand it by looking backward along your personal *trajectory*. When you do something kind and loving for another person, or do a community service activity, and you feel that whisper of satisfaction and meaning, you feel more energy and motivation to continue. You want your career and life to somehow be more and more tied to that purpose. Then, when you look backward, you can see by contrast that you didn't have as much purpose, meaning, and enjoyment of goodness as you did before. You understand evil! Not by participating in it, and doing it, but by going in the other direction: into the goodness God designed.
- iv. Illustration: C.S. Lewis describes a world and a race which did not fall into temptation, in his book *Perelandra*. This is what the Adam figure says there: 'We have learned of evil, though not as the Evil One wished us to learn. We have learned better than that, and know it more, for it is waking that understands sleep and not sleep that understands waking. There is an ignorance of evil that comes from being young: there is a darker ignorance that comes from doing it, as men by sleeping lose the knowledge of sleep. You are more ignorant of evil [on Earth] now than in the days before your Lord and Lady began to do it. But [God] has brought us out of the one ignorance, and we have not entered the other.' (C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, p.209)
- v. Principle: You do not need to *do* evil in order to know and enjoy God's goodness. Yet they would have also *understood* evil. How? By resisting it. They would have understood that God's boundaries were good for them, and brought them life. Not just the one boundary of not eating from the Tree of Knowledge, but all boundaries, although the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge symbolized all other proper God-given boundaries and summed them up in itself. By not eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, they would understand that they must not internalize boundary breaking. You are what you eat. When Adam and Eve did eat from this Tree, they not only broke a boundary, they became boundary breakers. They decided to supplant God's authority in creation as the one who defines what good and evil are. In effect, they tried to become their own gods. Their human nature became fundamentally corrupted.
- vi. Once again, this means that *evil was never necessary*. We do not need to do evil in order to know good.
- d. Recall James 1:13 – 15: ¹³'Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.' The Tree of Knowledge was not a temptation. It was just a fact that was designed to teach humanity to refuse evil in all its forms.
6. God says, 'Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil...'' (3:22). If this is true, then in what sense did God *know* good and evil prior to the fall?
 - a. In the sense of *determining* and *defining* good and evil.
 - b. Before the fall, evil as it pertains to human beings did not exist in an embodied way. It was only a theoretical possibility. God of course understood evil as a theoretical condition that the human beings could fall into, and also as a real condition that Satan had fallen into. We were meant to learn about evil, too, in the Garden of Eden, not by participating in evil and doing it, but by growing in the goodness God intended for us, and by imagining the irony and tragedy of removing life and draining life from the garden and from ourselves. We were therefore meant to freely

choose to always choose God (i.e. eat from the Tree of Life). We were meant to reject the evil of turning aside from God and His calling.

- c. Adam and Eve's fall is an irony: in our efforts to be 'like God,' we took to ourselves the prerogative of God and became twisted and corrupted in our nature. Adam and Eve passed that corruption onto their descendants. Thus, we have internalized in ourselves the impulse to define good and evil from within the human being, whether individually (like Cain in Genesis 4:16 – 25) or corporately (like human beings at Babel in Genesis 11:1 – 9). That is why we are prone to *relativism*.
 - i. Application: If we can define good and evil for ourselves, what would happen?
 - ii. Application: How does relativism produce aloneness and isolation?
- d. Is God both good and evil? No! He's only good. God *knows* good and evil because He determines the good, and is the highest good, and He can understand what the evil of alienation from Himself as a hypothetical possibility, but not because He *causes* both good and evil.
- e. Here is a Jewish reflection from a book outside the Bible:

'God did not make death,
Neither does He have pleasure over the destruction of the living.
For He created all things that they might exist,
And the generations of the world so they might be preserved;
For there was no poison of death in them,
Nor was the reign of Hades on the earth.
For righteousness does not die.
But the ungodly summoned death by their words and works;
Although they thought death would be a friend, they were dissolved.'
(*Wisdom of Solomon* 1:13 – 16).