



Man: Death and Willful Ignorance

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:4-5)

A reasonable reading of the Genesis Three account of the fall will indicate that Adam and Eve knowingly and willingly violated God's law regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent planted doubts in their minds with his "Yea, hath God said...." Once the doubt took root the serpent introduced false information, "...your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

This narrative is filled with subtleties as the corrupting drama unfolds. Adam and Eve could have immediately rejected Satan's disparaging question with a simple and accurate response. By accepting the doubt that the serpent planted, they took the first step toward breaking the commandment. In raising the question the serpent dishonors God's character, a typical step that appears in almost every error that Satan plants in the minds of people. It implies that God was duplicitous, that He didn't really tell Adam and Eve "the whole story."

The planted doubt grew. Eve's response misrepresents and misquotes God's commandment. "...neither shall ye touch it lest ye die" was not part of God's law; it is a corruption of the commandment that Eve added. It gives the serpent concrete affirmation that his diabolical scheme is working.

"In her reply to [Satan's] question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*."¹⁷³

God reveals His character through His word. When we do not retain His word precisely, a distorted concept of God is

the result. This led Eve to *doubt* God's goodness."¹

Notice carefully the three steps of sin that Thomas identifies. 1) Eve disparaged the divine privilege that she and Adam enjoyed in the garden; 2) she overstated the divine restriction; 3) she underrated her obligations.

In the New Testament Adam, not Eve, is consistently blamed for the sin and subsequent fall of humanity under the curse of this first breach of God's law. "*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*" (1 Timothy 2:14) Did Paul intend to suggest that Eve was actually deceived, while Adam understood the consequences of their sin? Perhaps, but that is not Paul's primary focus in the passage, so we should leave the question as an interesting possibility and follow the primary theme of the lesson. At the least we may safely conclude that Adam did not eat the forbidden fruit out of deception or ignorance.

A major point that we may gather from both the third chapter of Genesis and New Testament teaching regarding the events in the Garden of Eden is that Adam ate the fruit as a willing act, a defiant act against God who gave him the law, and with full knowledge of his action. Literally, he chose to ignore the knowledge that he had of the consequences of his sin. Peter confronts "willful ignorance" rather bluntly in Second Peter 3:5 and context. Paul develops this theme in greater detail, specifically dealing with the moral choices and consequences of "willful sin" in Romans 1:18-32. When any man or woman sins, it is first a willful decision; secondly, it is a moral choice—that is a choice that has known moral consequences.

Interestingly Scripture frequently uses light and darkness as the moral equivalents of

¹⁷³ 173. W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 48.

¹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Ge 3:2.

knowledge versus ignorance and of life and death. Light serves as an analogy for either life or knowledge, while darkness serves as an analogy for either death or ignorance. Without question human moral decisions involve degrees of knowledge, but no human may sin and offer the defense of full ignorance. When the wicked attempt to plead ignorance on the Day of Judgment, Jesus warns that their plea shall be rejected. (Matthew 25:41-45)

A primary characteristic of human depravity, of human fallenness that grows out of Adam's sin, appears in acts of willful and knowing rejection of the available and understandable knowledge that God has provided. The evil deeds that humans choose to practice do not grow out of any divine compulsion or robotic divine orchestration. They grow out of a sinful and depraved nature in humans that knowingly reject the moral evidence that God has presented. Some specific sins may be sins of ignorance, but in the greater landscape of moral choices man's plea of ignorance shall be rejected at the final judgment.

Historically theologians refer to the consequences of Adam's sin as "the fall." What are the implications of the fall? In fact did a fall really occur? Three syllogistic structures analyze the major views of various schools of theological thought regarding the fall.

First Syllogism

1. Before the fall, man was capable of keeping God's law.
2. Man chose to break God's law and suffered divine judgment.
3. Despite man's sin, man remains capable of keeping God's law. If in some way (variously defined by different "salvation by works" ideas), man does keep God's law, he shall be saved.

The obvious question—and the obvious problem—with this syllogism appears in the fact that no real fall exists. Man was capable of keeping the law before the fall; he is capable of keeping the law after the fall; thus, no real fall occurred.

Second Syllogism

1. Before the fall, man was incapable of keeping the law. This view grows out of the idea of double predestination. Rather than man being a true free moral agent, from the beginning, man was a robot in the hands and under the robotic control of God.

2. Man chose (or was divinely orchestrated) to break the law and suffer divine judgment.
3. Before the fall, man was incapable of keeping the law; after the fall man was incapable of keeping the law.

Again, we see no apparent or obvious "fall." Before and after the fall, man remains in the same functional position of incapability to keep the law. Thus no real fall occurred here either. While the first illogical view of the fall grows out of various "salvation by works" theological ideas, this view grows out of the various fatalistic or deterministic views that—at the end of the day—lay the responsibility for the fall at the feet of God, not man.

Third Syllogism

1. Before the fall, man possessed free moral agency, a God-given ability to keep the law.
2. Man knowingly chose to violate God's law in eating the forbidden fruit.
3. Subsequently and as a direct result of man's free and knowing violation of God's law, man is now incapable of perfectly keeping God's law. A true fall has occurred.

Only this third assessment defines a true fall. Both analogical functions of light and darkness interact in this dynamic. God created man in the light of His perfect world and in the light of clear knowledge of the single commandment that He gave to man. Man made a conscious choice to ignore the light of God's revelation in that law. Subsequently—and precisely in keeping with the divine warning—man died. God's law specifically stated, "*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.*" (Genesis 2:17) In terms of his natural life Adam lived several hundred years after this event occurred. However, Scripture clearly describes an immediate moral darkness—and thus a moral death—that affected Adam and Eve from the very moment when they ate the forbidden fruit. Immediately—and precisely as God warned them—they suffered an immediate death to innocence, to comfortable fellowship and interaction with God their Creator. Notice their immediate change of disposition. (Genesis 3:7 and context)

Scripture equates sinful pride with man's fallen disposition. This theme appears as clearly in the third chapter of Genesis as the other

features that we have discussed. Notice the serpent's initial enticement.

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.
(Genesis 3:5)

"...be as gods;" do not overlook the point. This conversation occurs in the Garden of Eden long before paganism and the various forms of idolatry became the rule of fallen man's corruption. Adam and Eve have a single concept of "God." Moses used the same precise Hebrew word when he wrote "...be as gods" as he used at the beginning of the sentence, "For God doth know..." The serpent's appeal goes to the heart of pride, enticing Adam and Eve that they may become just like God! Human pride would vigorously defend this theme, a convincing testimony to our fallen corruption. If we merely know the distinction between good and evil, what is the problem? Ah, the problem is monumental. The true character of the fall appears in the serpent's subtle deception. God certainly knows the difference between good and evil, the reason He commands one and forbids the other. Further, God is morally perfect. In no way at any time or under any circumstance does God confuse good and evil or in any way practice evil. As God, He knows the difference, but He retains His righteous character and never in any way practices evil in any way. (James 1:12-17) However, the serpent's deception appears most clearly in this point, as well as the character of the fall—its ultimate impact on Adam and Eve, as well as all subsequent humanity. I'll make the distinction by a series of specific factual points.

1. God, being omniscient (all-knowing) knows the difference between good and evil.
2. God, being thrice-holy God, neither practices any form of evil—sin—nor is even enticed to do so. He is God!
3. In their defiant and deviant act of sin Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of evil. They already knew good.
4. However, in their defiant rebellion against God they lost the ability to do good.
5. They equally lost the ability to avoid doing evil. A true fall did occur!

At its heart man's act of sin violated God's moral and material "good," both in terms of moral beauty and in terms of moral benevolence.

Man's act, at its heart, is an act of moral self-mutilation. Prime time television increasingly displays offensively graphic images of severe injury to the human body. (Have you watched CSI or NCIS lately?) Imagine a willing, conscious, and self-imposed act of self-mutilation far more severe than any of these images. That image fails to capture the full impact of man's willing, conscious, and knowing choice to violate God's law in the Garden of Eden. In every way imaginable man's act of self-mutilation—moral self-mutilation—offended every facet of God's initial creation—"good" and very "good." Man, not God, introduced ugliness into God's perfect—and beautiful—good world.

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