

# In the Garden

## The First Garden - Overview

We have misunderstood the Gospel of Christ.

The authors know how that sounds. Controversial. Sacrilegious. Cultic. Heretical. Satanic. It is nevertheless the truth. The purpose of this writing is to express as clearly as we can the root and flower of this misunderstanding, and to succinctly explain the true meaning of the Gospel. It will then be left to the thoughtful reader to come to his or her own conclusions. As an overview, we will state simply that the good news is much better than we have realized; much better than most of us can even imagine.

The following is a summary, from beginning to end, of the cardinal points of the Gospel as it is commonly understood today. It is preached more or less in this form by millions of speakers worldwide every seven days. It has affected our songs, our Bible translations, and our religious life. It will be very familiar to most Christians. *And it is wrong.*

1. In the beginning God created the Universe.
2. Everything in the creation was good, including humanity.
3. While God has many attributes, two are of primary importance as it pertains to the Gospel: He is perfectly loving and He is perfectly just (righteous).
4. The creation was a manifestation of his love.
5. In order to assure that his justice might be known, and that we might remember that he is God and to be obeyed, he set one Tree in the Garden that Adam was forbidden to touch, as a test of Adam's obedience.
6. Adam, however, did partake from this Tree.
7. This act of disobedience angered God, and offended his sense of perfect righteousness. It missed the mark of proper obedience. This is called sin. It is rebellion against the perfect will/law of the creator.
8. God therefore punished Adam by casting him out of the Garden of Eden, cursing him with a life full of suffering.
9. This brought death and suffering into the world. The wages of sin is death, eternal separation from God.
10. God's perfect righteousness cannot abide the presence of disobedience, otherwise known as sin.
11. Therefore, due to this sin, Adam was destined to spend the rest of eternity apart or away from God.

12. However, God's loving heart could not tolerate such a thing. Though Adam justly deserved God's temporal and eternal punishment, God nevertheless wanted Adam to have everlasting fellowship with him. But Adam's sin made fellowship with the perfectly righteous creator impossible.
13. God needed a solution to this divine dilemma.
14. He found the solution in Christ.
15. God needed a sacrifice to atone for humanity's sin, a way to vent his righteous wrath in a way that would not punish all humanity forever.
16. And only a perfect sacrifice could atone for that sin.
17. So God sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to suffer on behalf of all mankind.
18. Jesus was the only perfectly obedient man. True God and true man. He was therefore the only possible candidate for the righteous sacrifice.
19. God allowed Christ to be crucified. Christ took upon himself the sins of the world.
20. God punished Jesus for the sins of humanity. He gave to Jesus what we deserved in order to give us what he deserved.
21. Having obtained the perfect sacrifice, God's sense of justice was satisfied.
22. Jesus was then resurrected three days later, proving that he had broken the bonds of sin and death.
23. He now offers forgiveness to all those who will trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. If you believe that Jesus died for you, then God will not hold your sins against you. If you doubt or deny that Jesus died for you, then you stand condemned on the basis of your own unrighteousness.
24. There is nothing we can do to deserve heaven. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
25. Our only hope for everlasting life, then, is to have faith in the all availing power of Christ's blood shed on the cross.
26. Washed by God's grace and forgiven through faith in Christ, we can now have fellowship with God.
27. We have been saved from eternal damnation.
28. This is the good news. This is the Gospel.

This is the common understanding of the Gospel, so I will refer to these items as CUG#. The last item, therefore, is CUG #28.

## **A Narrative Presentation**

Here is a more narrative presentation of the Christian message as it is commonly understood and proclaimed:

God made the world and all mankind. Being loving, he set many trees and delights for man to partake. But he is also a God of justice, and as such must be obeyed. So he set one Tree, just one, that he didn't want man to touch, providing

mankind with the opportunity to show obedience. But of course, man did partake of this Tree. This angered God beyond measure. It was a spiteful, childlike rebellion, and it incited God's wrath. He punished man by cursing him to a life of suffering and death, casting him out of the Garden of Eden, condemned to die and spend the rest of eternity in suffering and torment, separated from God. However, God's loving side was unable to accept this. What was needed was a sacrifice to appease the wrath of this perfectly just God. Nothing else would do. And the sacrificial offering had to be absolutely perfect. So God sent his own son, Jesus the Christ, to Earth. There he was mocked, scorned, beaten, whipped, crucified and finally killed. Inasmuch as Jesus was perfect, being true God and true man, the sacrifice was acceptable. God had vented his wrath, pouring upon Jesus the suffering and condemnation that we all deserve. This satisfied God, whereupon Jesus was resurrected from the dead three days later. This broke the bonds of death. Forgiveness is now offered to those who will have faith that Jesus died for their sins. There is nothing we can do to be worthy of God's righteousness or forgiveness, for we have all sinned and therefore deserve eternal damnation. All we can do, what we must do, is trust in the all-availing power of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

## **The Power of Interpretation**

"Now wait one minute. You think that's wrong?"

Yes, it is wrong. What we have here is a classic case of misinterpretation. We are continually called to interpret facts in our lives. It is a proper and necessary process whereby we transform external events into our personal reality, and therefore determine how we need to react to the situation. For example, I look at the gas gauge in my car. The needle is on empty. That is the objective fact. But what does it mean? And what am I to do about it? How should I react? How am I to appropriate this external truth for my subjective reality? It could mean: I'm about to run out of gas and should therefore proceed immediately to a gas station. Or it could be no cause for concern, since my gas gauge is broken and I just filled the tank. It means nothing at all if the car is turned off.

Any of these could be correct, depending on the circumstances surrounding the event and the knowledge and experience I am using to interpret it. This is a crucial point, worth repeating. We interpret present external events based upon our subjective reality, which is shaped by our knowledge and personal history. If I have incomplete information, or events in my history have prejudiced me to a certain perspective, it will be difficult for me to make an accurate interpretation of the situation.

That is the case with our common understanding of the Gospel. We have misinterpreted crucial events in the unfolding of God's revelation of redemption through Christ, and in so doing have, for the most part, missed the point. Seen within the context of most people's lives, especially as it relates to the relationship they had/have with their parents, this is understandable. That is to say, there are specific reasons for these misinterpretations. Bringing them to light will, hopefully, give us a "cleaner" context with which to understand God's actions, opening the horizon to purer and deeper understanding. That is the purpose of this writing.

Specifically, then, what is wrong with the understanding of the Gospel as outlined above?

- I. It makes God out to be fickle and arbitrary, and fails to understand the nature of the trees in the Garden of Eden (CUG#5).
- II. It does not comprehend proper punishment, presenting God as irrationally vindictive (CUG#12). The notion of eternal punishment is incompatible with the divine.
- III. It does not understand the nature of sin (CUG#7). Sin is not simply disobedience or inadequacy of performance.
- IV. Failing to comprehend the problem, it cannot possibly understand the solution. It slanderously ascribes to God the most abhorrent of behavior (CUG#21). Punishing someone else for what I have done is not good, let alone divine. It is sick.
- V. It keeps salvation within the realm of a form of work righteousness, whereby one is accounted worthy of heaven on the basis of something one does or does not do. (CUG#23).
- VI. Above all, it simply fails to understand the true goodness, glory, power and love embodied in the Gospel. The tragedy is that the good news is ever so much better than we realize! We are missing out on incomprehensible blessing.

## **The Events of the Gospel Are True**

We wish to state quite clearly here that we are in no way calling into question any of the events or facts in the Gospel, only their *interpretation*. Specifically, God did create the world. There was a Garden of Eden. It contained two trees in the middle. Adam and Eve partook from one of the trees and were cast out of the Garden by God. The wages of sin is death. Christ was sent to atone for this problem. He was crucified, died, and three days later rose from the dead. And this is our only means of salvation.

## **Two Windows into Eternity**

The Bible gives us two infinite windows into the spiritual world: the fall of man and the redemption. They go hand in hand, working in unison to reveal divine truth. If we fail to understand the one it will be impossible to understand the other. Therefore, what we will do now is begin with a discussion of the Garden of Eden, attempting to explain as clearly as possible where we have misunderstood its message, and present what the authors consider to be a much cleaner, purer interpretation. We will then be equipped to examine Christ's passion in the brighter light of comprehension.

## **The Historical Question**

The origin of the world is, and will probably remain, a hotly debated issue. Creation / evolution / big bang. "Seven days" symbolizing seven eras of evolution, gap theories, etc. Were Adam and Eve "real", or "only" myths? Did the Garden of Eden ever exist?

For the purposes of the present writing, none of this matters. Whether Eden was real or "only" a symbol is immaterial. The historicity of Adam and Eve is insignificant. That is because the creation / fall accounts in Genesis relay essential truths to us which stand on their own, regardless of their association with material history. This is a difficult point for many people to grasp. We are not saying that Eden was "only" a symbol; neither are we calling it physical history.

We will take no position.

However, what the Eden story tells us about *ourselves* is true. If it is "only" a fable, then the fable has a valid moral. Understanding that moral is limitlessly more significant than worrying about its historical basis. Put another way, what if we were able to establish, to the absolute certainty of even the most skeptical and atheistic among us, that Adam and Eve were actual historical people? What if we had them eating the forbidden fruit on videotape? So what? Who cares? What does that have to do with me?? We are only concerned about the "so what?" We have a great deal to learn about life from the Genesis accounts of creation and Eden. That is what matters. That is what we will focus on.

## **The Creation of the Universe**

As is often the case, it is best to start at the beginning. The very beginning. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) The first Chapter of Genesis accounts that God spoke and the universe came into being. The key word in the account is "good". The light was good. The seas were good. The earth, trees, and vegetation were good. Every living creature, including mankind, was good "and God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good". (Genesis 1:31)

**Crucial Point #1:** Everything in the entire universe, every single thing that existed, everything everywhere was **good**. Beautiful. Wonderful. An extension and expression of the nature and attributes of the transcendently glorious Being that had created it. Whether under the earth, in the water, on the land, in the sky, all the stars, all the planets, all the galaxies, absolutely all of creation, all of the entire manifest universe was good! Everything that was, was good. Goodness was the only reality.

We have lost perspective on this central point. We tend to see the world as a horrid, wicked place. But even to this day, the underlying truth is that "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude..." (I Timothy 4:4) God is good. God is love. The creation, as an extension or projection of his being, shares in this goodness.

As I previously mentioned, the Bible gives us two windows through which we can gaze at the world of the spirit: the fall and the redemption. Paradise lost and paradise found. Any attempt to understand the one without the other is doomed to fail.

## **The Two Trees**

Genesis 2:9 says: "And 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." These two trees were in the "midst", the exact center of the Garden. What were they? What are they? I ask this because the entire spiritual journey of man, indeed the complete history of the human race, can be seen as different types of reactions to and relationships with these two trees. What were they? What are they? They were right next to each other. They grew, meaning they expand and change over the years. Like the positive and negative poles on a battery, they provide the energy to propel humanity into the future. What were they? What are they? One is the problem, the other the answer. Partaking of one, we lost access to the other. Jesus' encounter with his Tree (the Cross) removed the barrier that was placed to bar us from the Tree of Life.

So, what were these trees? What do they mean to us now? For in fact they still exist, still growing in the midst of the Garden. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God." Not "was in the paradise of God" or even "will be in the paradise of God", but "is (back then, even now) in the paradise of God." The paradise is the Garden of Eden. It's still there. The trees are still there! Your entire history and destiny lie embodied in these trees.

Have you ever thought about them?

## The Account of the Fall of Man

To help us begin to examine the trees, we will need to take a close look at the account of the fall of man. You will see that the entire narrative centers on these two trees, even as the entire Garden of paradise centers around them.

### **Genesis, Chapter 2:**

<sup>9</sup> And 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.

<sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any Tree of the Garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup> 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."

<sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

### **Genesis, Chapter 3:**

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any Tree of the Garden'?" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the Garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup> but from the fruit of the Tree which is in the middle of the Garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" <sup>4</sup> And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its food and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. <sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the Garden.

<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> And he (Adam) said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the Garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." <sup>11</sup> And He (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the Tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup> And

the man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the Tree and I ate."

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for you husband, and he shall rule over you."

<sup>17</sup> Then to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the Tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; <sup>19</sup> by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

<sup>20</sup> Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. <sup>21</sup> And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever." <sup>23</sup> Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> 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.

The fall of man can succinctly be summarized as:

1. God commanded man not to partake of the Tree in the middle of the Garden. (CUG #5)
2. Man partook. (CUG #6)
3. God cast man out of the Garden. (CUG #8)

## **Forbidding the Fruit**

***Crucial question #1:*** Why did God command Adam to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?



In many ways this is the most important question. The answer to this question will, in fact, shape our entire interpretation of the fall, sin, punishment, guilt, forgiveness and redemption. We must be certain to ponder this very carefully. As a result, we will spend a good deal of time on this issue.

## **What the CUG Says**

The answer given in the common understanding of the Gospel (CUG #5) is that God forbade this one Tree in order to test man's obedience. God's loving nature had created the "very good" universe; God's righteous nature needed obedience. Let me quote an author whose identity will remain hidden: "Eve ate of the Tree which God, to test man's obedience, had told him not to eat...By transgressing this one positive and express commandment, which God had given to our first parents to test and to try their obedience, Adam and Eve virtually transgressed the whole law, because thereby they broke through the restraint of the entire moral law, within which God wanted them to live."

This is the heart of the matter. The CUG says that the Tree was a test. God demands obedience. Adam failed the test by disobeying. This incited God's wrath, offending his perfect justice. The original sin, then, was disobedience. Sin=evil=disobedience. From this comes guilt, and guilt necessitates punishment. From this one act of disobedience man lost all fellowship with God and was deserving of eternal punishment. The purpose of the law is to show us how truly guilty we all are.

**Please notice that the entire theology of sin and redemption, as it is commonly understood, is based upon the interpretation that the forbidden fruit was a test, and that Adam's sin was that he failed the test, otherwise known as disobedience.**

We better be absolutely certain we have that right!

In the above-quoted book, and in fact in all references I've ever personally heard or read, the forbidden fruit is treated like any other fruit on any other tree. The only thing "special" about it was that God said, "don't eat it." Again from our mystery guest: "To eat the fruit of a Tree seems to us a rather innocent matter, but since God had forbidden it, it was a sin to Adam and Eve...the eating of the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve does not seem to us to have been such a great crime; yet it was the disobedience against God, manifested in this apparently innocent act, that made it a damnable sin."

So, as it's commonly understood, the question of the nature and identity of the Tree that held the forbidden fruit is simply immaterial. God said don't touch it, and that settles it.

## On Parental Rules

Several factors come quickly into play here:

1. Parenting
2. Punishment
3. Love
4. Justice

They are all related. How we view them shapes our perceptions of much of the world.

Let's say a parent has a rule. A parental law, if you will. Little Adam must not touch the x!@. X!@ can be anything at all. Why shouldn't Adam touch it? There are two possible answers. The first is parent centered, the other is child centered.

*Answer #1:* Parent centered (selfish): Adam shouldn't touch the x!@ because it could hurt the *parent*. Perhaps it's a priceless piece of crystal that parent fears will be broken, or a shirt that no one else wears because "it's mine." Whatever the object, the parent's concern is for him/herself, his/her own interests, which could be hurt if little Adam touches the x!@. The parent is in actuality the object of the parent's love, in this case. In my household, our teenage daughter is not allowed to use one certain type of hairspray because it contains something (who knows what?) that permeates the house and irritates my mild bronchitis, making it actually difficult for me to breathe. There is nothing wrong or sinful about using the hairspray; but its use hurts me. There is no known or imagined harm to come to our daughter from this hairspray. This rule (law) has me as its ultimate beneficiary. Obedience to this rule is necessary for my well-being.

*Answer #2:* Child centered (selfless): Little Adam shouldn't touch the x!@ because it could hurt *Adam*. Whether it is a pan on the stove, a knife in the drawer, a bottle under the sink or a crawly thing on the ground, it represents a danger to little Adam. This danger is unknown to little Adam, because if he knew the dangers he would not willingly touch it. Most adults do not deliberately burn, cut, poison or otherwise hurt themselves. The parent then commands Adam to not touch the x!@, because the parent is concerned for Adam's well-being. Here, Adam is the object of his parent's love. In my household we have another rule that our daughter must have all

her homework completed before watching TV at night. This is for her benefit, to help her concentrate on her work when her mind is freshest. Work before play, as the saying goes. My life is not affected one way or the other, regardless of when (or if) she does her homework. In this case, our daughter is the ultimate beneficiary. Obedience to this rule is necessary for her well-being.

Both answers are a healthy and normal part of day-to-day human parent/child relationships, when properly balanced. Most parents look out for the needs of their children, trying to protect them from harm. But human parents have needs and desires, too, and it is not "wrong" to try to keep little Adam from destroying a precious family heirloom. Unfortunately, all too many people grow up in an environment where the parent's first and only priority is the parent, and not the child. Absolute obedience is expected simply because that's the way it is. You could say that many of us grow up in an environment overbalanced by too many "Answer #1" (selfish) types of parental commands.

**This is a very significant factor in the misunderstanding of the Gospel** that has developed over the years. We have interpreted God's actions and commands as those of the autocratic self-serving parent who is determined to have his own way. Obedience is mandatory for God's sake, because he is holy and righteous and simply cannot abide sin. Our disobedience is the hairspray in his divine nostrils, irritating and inflaming the holy lungs, so God punishes us for bothering Him.

## **CUG: God Is Fickle, Despotic and Arbitrary**

Now it's time to ask *Crucial Question #1* again: Why did God command Adam to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Did God have His interests in mind, or Adam's? Was the Creator of the universe being self-centered or child-centered? Selfish or selfless? Was this command arbitrary or purposeful? Was God trying to test Adam or protect him? Who stood to be hurt if Adam ate from the Tree, God or Adam?

The common understanding is consistently based in the *Answer #1* (selfish) scenario. The answer has already been given: the Tree was a test. This was based on God's own interests, in that His perfect righteousness required obedience, and it was therefore necessary for Adam to demonstrate his obedience by keeping this command. This reasoning is based on a **human** relationship with a self-centered parent who cares not for his/her child's interests so much as his/her own.

***This is wrong.*** It is a misinterpretation of God's motive for forbidding Adam to eat this fruit. It is not that God *couldn't* have been testing Adam. Certainly the

Creator of the entire universe has the power, ability and right to do whatever He chooses. This is called Divine Providence. It is His game, so He makes the rules. Let us assume for the moment that the forbidden fruit represented nothing more than a test of obedience. What was such a test going to accomplish? What was its purpose? Even if God was being selfish in the purpose of this command, what did He stand to gain? "Well, this test would have been able to establish Adam's obedience." And then? "God would know that he was being given proper respect, being obeyed by his children." So what? Do we really think that the sovereign Lord of the spiraling galaxies was not going to be happy until he had proven to Himself that Adam did what he was told??

Put another way, what did God stand to lose, or how would He be hurt, if Adam disobeyed? "Adam would not be honoring God or worshipping him. Adam would not be properly acknowledging God as the righteous Lord of his life. Adam's disobedience ignores God's command, making Adam the ruler of his life instead of God."

This reasoning is centered in the notion that Adam's obedience was an end in itself, its own purpose and meaning. It was a test of obedience for obedience's sake only, without any dependent value. It was a test of obedience for the sole purpose of being obedient. The limitless all-powerful universe builder could not have been actually hurt in any way except in the area of pride. He wanted to be obeyed, and that's all there is to it.

Let's go back to the illustration of hairspray that irritates my bronchitis. What if:

1. The hairspray didn't irritate my lungs;
2. It couldn't harm my daughter in any way;
3. It had no odor of any kind;
4. And it was completely benign in all aspects, cosmetically, economically, politically and environmentally.

And yet I *still* absolutely and uncompromisingly demanded that this hairspray never be used, under any conditions whatsoever? What would you think of me as a parent? Despotic, fickle, arbitrary, selfish, ridiculous? "My house, my family, I said so and that settles it. No questions to be asked or answered."

What if I further told you that my daughter used the hairspray just once, and that I had locked her in a prison for the rest of her entire life, and had vowed never to speak to her ever again? And furthermore, I saw to it through my influence that she was put to death in the gas chamber.

Would you want me to help parent your child?

Absurd as it seems, this is *exactly* the behavior the commonly understood Gospel ascribes to God! The common understanding of the Gospel would have us believe that this was just a tree, any tree. The tree didn't matter. It doesn't enter into the equation. What was essential is that God said, "Don't touch it." It's not that the Tree was harmful to God or man, or that eating from it would alter anything. The tree was no threat to anything or anyone. It was God's fragrant, benign hairspray that was off limits just because. "Because I said so, that's why!"

## Another View of God: Loving and Purposeful

But hold on one moment! It's not just any Tree. Its fruit was/is not just *any* fruit. This is a very significant Tree, folks! It is *the* Tree of *the* Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was good for food, a delight to the eyes, could make one wise, and *altered consciousness!* This was no simple apple tree that God chose just because it was handy. This was *the* Tree of *the* Knowledge of Good and Evil.

- Not just any Tree - **THE** Tree.
- Not just any knowledge - **THE** knowledge.
- Not just any subject, but **Good and Evil!**
- And it was in the absolute **center of paradise.**

Maybe, just maybe, God actually had a *reason* for forbidding Adam and Eve to eat from this Tree. Maybe, just maybe, his command wasn't a test, but a **warning!** Maybe, just maybe, eating from this Tree could really seriously hurt Adam, and with him the whole of creation. Maybe, just maybe, Adam's sin wasn't a matter of his disobedience, but was a result of what eating from the Tree did to him.

Think about this. Really think about it.

**Realize the power of this idea, because it changes everything.** This shifts God's motives from Himself to Adam.

Let's say that God had an *Answer #2* (selfless) reason as to why Adam shouldn't touch the Tree. We then can see that:

- The Tree was not a test.
- The Tree represented a very real danger to Adam, which God was trying to prevent.
- God was not testing Adam's obedience, but was selflessly trying to warn Adam about something that could hurt him.
- He was not being arbitrary, but purposeful.
- This was not fickle, it was loving. God is love.

(At this point many people ask that, assuming the above is true, why did God ever put the Tree there in the first place? If the Tree was harmful, why did God grant Adam access to it? These are perfectly reasonable questions that I will deal with, but the answer is dependent on understanding a bit more about the Tree. So the answer will be presented a little further on.)

## **Which View Is Right?**

How are we to decide? Between these two views of God's forbidding of the fruit, which should we adopt as our interpretation? In some respects this is a personal decision that each person must make for him/herself. However, there are two considerations here that overwhelmingly support the second view.

1. The Tree was not harmless. The old saying "No harm, no foul" does not apply here. After eating from the Tree, Adam was changed. His consciousness was altered. "...The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked..." (Gen 3:7) God was trying to avoid this change. This change was not desirable. So we see that God was actually trying to accomplish something in this command, which had nothing to do with testing obedience to a meaningless despotism. We will soon be examining the exact nature of this change, and why it was so harmful and undesirable. But for the present issue at hand, as to why God forbid this Tree, it suffices to note that a harmful change came upon Adam, a change that the loving and purposeful Creator of life sought to warn against: "...For in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen 2:17)
- 2 Justice apart from love has no meaning. To say that God is righteous is significant only in that it means he is at all times perfectly loving. What is the purpose of a law? Hopefully we've established that a law for its own sake is selfish, capricious and despotic, without any value for those subject to the law. Law must serve a purpose in order to be just. A law serving no purpose other than itself is unjust, and absolutely contrary to the nature of God. So to say that (CUG#3) God has two attributes (love and righteousness) is itself an extension of the very misunderstanding we are dealing with. God's true nature is love; this is good and right. God is righteous in that he is always operating in perfect accordance with his true nature. Thus, there is no divine attribute of "justice" that operates autonomously from the divine essence, which is love. This justice didn't need to be established or demonstrated in any way. So testing Adam's obedience simply for obedience' sake was to try to satisfy a need that didn't exist.

## **Summary: Why God Forbade the Tree**

In summary, then, why did God command Adam to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

1. God had a purpose.
2. That purpose was to try to keep Adam from harm.
3. Harm could come because the Tree was a great danger to Adam.
4. So, out of selfless love, the Heavenly Father was trying to protect and guide his children.

But, alas, it was in vain. Adam did not heed his Father's warning. As so often happens, we had to learn the hard way.

## Eating the Fruit

Having established that God's prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit was an attempt to keep Adam safe from harm, the next logical questions are: what pain was God trying to spare Adam? What was (is) this Tree? What could it do to Adam (us)? We will now examine the forbidden Tree, attempt to determine its nature, and see what effects these have on those who eat from it.

## Adam and Eve before the Fall

What was life like for Adam and Eve before the fall? After they had just been created, what was Eden like for them? What did they think about? We know that they were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26), but what does this mean? These are difficult questions. We have only a tiny bit of information in the Genesis account. The rest we must deduce.

We bring it up here because there is one absolutely critical point that we must understand. From this one point we can gain much understanding about both Eden and the fall.

**Crucial Point # 2:** Before the fall, all Adam and Eve knew was *life*. They did not know evil. And they did not know good as "good." It was only *life*.

It is quite impossible for us to overemphasize this. This very well may be one of the most significant ideas in the history of our race. It is a mistake to think that before the fall Adam and Eve only knew good, and that after the fall they knew evil. In other words, this is wrong:

Before = good, after = evil

They partook from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before the fall they neither knew good nor evil. They only knew life. Thus,

Before = life, after = good & evil

Or in other terms,

Before = monism, after = duality

Yes, everything was created good. But Adam and Eve didn't know it as "good". They only knew it as being what it was. *It was what it was*. Adam was created "very good", but he didn't know himself as "very good". All he could say of himself was "I am what I am." Thus, he was "naked but not ashamed," living as an organic part of the whole of creation. In that he was a living, dynamic being, with the future of eternity open before him, he could therefore say, "I will be what I will be."

God knew/knows good and evil. That is why God could declare that all He made was "very good," because He knew the difference. But from Adam's perspective, all that existed, albeit good, was all he had ever known. He had nothing to compare this goodness to. It was therefore not relative to anything else, but absolute.

All Adam knew was *life*. The fruit from the Tree of Life. His consciousness was single-minded, unitive, monistic, free from all awareness of duality or separateness. He lived "as one with nature," to use a modern phrase. Try to imagine that from the moment you were born:

1. You were sitting in a room full of light,
2. You could not close your eyes or turn away, and
3. The light was always on.

Furthermore, no one else existed to tell you about a thing called "dark." Yes, you would know the light, obviously. But you would know it not as a relative thing, the opposite of another, but as an absolute unchanging permanence. You would have nothing to compare it to, no frame of reference.

So it was with Adam and Eve. They knew good, but not as "good". (We realize that we are repeating ourselves. Many of these concepts are so foreign to our normal way of thinking that we try different approaches or views in order to encompass the idea.) From this central understanding, we can gather much about the state before the fall:

Unitive - a monistic awareness without relative good and evil

Oneness - an organic part of nature

Harmony - living in easy conjunction with the world



Unashamed - nakedness was natural  
Egoless - no need to clutch to me, myself and I  
Peace - life with no enemies or problems  
Love - limitless, for the whole of the created goodness  
I will be what I will be - the fullest recognition of life.

According to the commonly understood Gospel (CUG), evil = disobedience. The purity of paradise was shattered when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden Tree.

**Crucial Question #2:** What was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

As we have seen, the CUG answers this question by saying that the Tree was simply an ordinary Tree that became important only when God chose it as the object of his obedience test. Why then was it called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Because:

1. Through this Tree Adam could gain the knowledge of good by being obedient, and
2. Through disobedience Adam learned evil and its ramifications.

In other words, in the CUG, evil = disobedience. As we have seen, this is a meaningless ascribed quality, if obedience serves no purpose other than itself. But what if, in fact, the Tree was intrinsically harmful? If God had a reason for commanding Adam to avoid it, what danger did the Tree represent? To echo an earlier example, what was wrong with the hairspray? If the essence of the evil contained/represented in the Tree was not an aspect of disobedience, then what was it? This leads us to...

**Crucial Question #3:** What is evil?

This is the toughest question of all.

## **Evil: The Very Important Question**

This question is so very important because it has so many repercussions. From this comes our understanding of sin, the fall, expulsion from paradise, the law, and establishing the plan of salvation. But wait! There is more. Biblical religion claims that the fall of man accounts for the root of all problems that have ever been encountered on this planet: murder, rape, idolatry, theft, lying, child abuse, taxation, war, cancer, malaria, suicide. All pain and suffering have resulted from this Tree, because these are all manifestations of evil.

## What is evil?

Please note, if by any chance this point has been missed, that the entire common understanding of the Gospel, from beginning to end, is based on the idea that evil = disobedience. To state that evil is *not* synonymous with disobedience is *to cause a re-evaluation of our understanding of the entire Gospel*. For this will mean that:

1. Adam's sin was not of disobedience,
2. So the expulsion from the Garden was not punishment for disobedience,
3. And the purpose of the law was not to show us how disobedient we are,
4. And Christ's death was not a vicarious punishment for all of our wrongdoings.

This is, as they say, the cat's meow.

What is evil? That is the question.

## What Is Evil?

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil brought duality into Adam's consciousness, or the pairs of opposites. The unitive perception of *life* as it is was, split into dual awareness of good and evil.

Evil is the opposite of good. So all we need do is find out what good is, and its opposite will be evil. What is good?

Everything!

Huh? That's right. Try to imagine yourself in Adam and Eve's place before the fall. Everything, everywhere, is good! Remember crucial point #1? Well, here it is again.

*Crucial Point #1:* Everything in the entire universe, every single thing that existed, everything everywhere was good. Beautiful. Wonderful. An extension and expression of the nature and attributes of the transcendently glorious Being that had created it. Whether under the earth, in the water, on the land, in the sky, all the stars, all the planets, all the galaxies, absolutely all of creation, all of the entire manifest universe was good!

Everything that was, was good. Goodness was the only reality.

Existence = good  
All that is = good

Being = good  
Everything that is = good

Neither Adam nor Eve could look at, point to, or imagine anything other than *goodness*.

We live in a world full of evil and suffering, so it is very hard for us to comprehend the pristine perfection of paradise. Pure goodness and beauty. Everywhere they looked, everything they saw, touched and thought, radiated perfect goodness.

So what is evil? Evil is the opposite of good.

Existence = good  
The opposite of existence = good's opposite  
The opposite of existence = evil  
Non-existence = evil

All that is = good  
The opposite of all that is = good's opposite  
The opposite of all that is = evil  
Nothing = evil

Being = good  
The opposite of being = good's opposite  
The opposite of being = evil  
Non-being = evil

Everything that is = good  
The opposite of everything that is = good's opposite  
The opposite of everything that is = evil  
Everything that is not = evil

There you have it.

Existence = goodness  
Nonexistence = evil  
If good = what is, then evil = what is not.

"What? Are you saying that evil is not? Doesn't exist?" Yes. That is right. That is the exact truth.

"Sir, you are one sick puppy. It is pathetically irresponsible to deny the existence of evil."

Hold on! Don't leave yet! Follow me just a little more. Let's look at the facts:

- Fact 1:* Everything that God created was perfectly good. "And God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good". (Gen 1:31)
- Fact 2:* Since everything was good, nothing was evil. There was no object that Adam or Eve could point to that was bad.
- Fact 3:* Against God's command they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Knowledge of good. Knowledge of evil. Knowledge of what is, knowledge of what is not. Everything they saw, touched, heard: everything that existed for them to experience and know was good.

For them to know evil, they would have to know something that didn't exist in the whole of creation! They had to become aware of something that didn't exist. Knowledge of evil. There was no thing, object, or created entity they could know that was evil.

So here it is.

***Crucial Point #3:*** In order to know evil, Adam and Eve had to have their eyes opened to what was not. Partaking of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve became aware both of what did and what did not exist.

This gives us the answer to *Crucial Question #2:* What was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil contained the ability to make one see life from the perspective of what does not exist, in addition to what does. The fruit of the Tree altered consciousness.

And we are also able to directly answer *Crucial Question #3:* What is evil?

Evil is not a thing. No thing is evil. Every created thing was and is good. Evil is a knowledge, a way of thinking, an orientation, a way of looking at life. It turns away from the wonderful, good things that are and contemplates / imagines all the things that are not.

Good and evil are not ontological opposites; that is to say, they do not exist in the same manner. Goodness exists. Everything that God made was/is good. Evil is a projection onto the goodness, a denial of it.

Naked: not clothed. Goodness is reality. Evil is a mistaken perception of that reality. The Bible tells us so - all you have to do is read it. What was the first thing

that happened after Adam and Eve ate from the Tree? Gen 3:7 "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. And they knew that they were naked."

What does that mean? Why is it significant? Certainly Adam and Eve had been aware of their bodies before the fall. Adam said "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," (Genesis 2:23) so Adam knew he had a body, and must have known all of its particular details. But this was good. He was made good. The human form is good. God made it so. But Adam ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the *first thing that happened was he became aware of what was not*. He was not clothed. Not covered. Having the body was not a problem before. And his body didn't suddenly become dirty, wrong or evil because of this Tree. But Adam had a new perspective. His consciousness was altered. He knew what he was, but now he also knew what he was not, and he was not covered! He was naked. And he immediately started putting barriers between himself and the rest of the creation. ***This was an absolutely cataclysmic change.***

From this perspective has come all suffering into the world. Thus was evil born. This is sin. Not an act, but as a state of being, a knowledge. "A sin" is any single act that is based upon this mindset.

## **Results of Eating the Fruit**

Knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge of what is and what is not. Adam's unitive perception of life became split in two; unity became duality, for Adam and Eve and for all of us to come. Added to his awareness of all that the world contained was the ability to conceive of all that it did not contain, to see its perfect goodness as *lacking something*. He became aware of himself as a self-existent being, separate and apart from the rest of the creation. He sought to cover himself, to hide, to protect himself from God. I and not I. This and not this. Ego centered. Self-centered. The flowing harmony of the creation had been shattered. Split. Shame. Strife. Enmity. Hatred. *Adam had re-oriented himself from the real to the unreal.*

## **Like God, Knowing Good and Evil**

There is a very significant point that seems to have been ignored by virtually everyone. It is contained in Genesis 3:22. "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, *the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil...*'"

Why is this significant? Notice that the serpent *did not lie*. By God's own words man had, in fact, become like God, knowing good and evil.

Why is this a problem? In the time of pre-creation, God knew all potential manifestations, both "good" and "bad". God could have chosen a world of limitless suffering and pain for all creatures. But God is good, and sought to create/manifest only the goodness into the universe. That is why Adam had only goodness to know. The entire creation was a bringing into expression all that is good and beautiful. When Adam partook from the forbidden Tree, a window opened in his consciousness into the entire unmanifest realm, gaining awareness of all the undesired horrors that God sought to keep out of manifest existence. And what didn't God create? Hate. Strife. Anxiety. Fear. Disease. Death.

## **Why the Tree Was There**

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil had to be there. If humanity was to be free, then the ability to see life from the perspective of nonexistence had to be an option. A baby, during the first few months of life, cannot recognize him/herself as being separate from the world around them. This is a purely egoless state. The infant goes from a state of unconscious unity while in the mother's womb, to a state of unconscious separation when born. When a child is a little older, she discovers "me" and "not me," and enters a period of ego-centered life that constitutes conscious separation. Later in life, each person begins the journey to overcome his own ego as the center of existence, "arriving" hopefully at a state of conscious unity.

We see this cycle flowing endlessly throughout creation. Adam was at first unconsciously united with God before the creation, when he was only God's mind in pure unmanifest and potential form. When created, he was endowed with free will and a degree of autonomy. But since he only knew the unitive whole of life, he was unconsciously separate from God and the rest of creation. Through the fall, he became aware of "me" and "not me," thus entering a state of conscious separation.

This state of conscious separation from God is where we find ourselves now. We then embark upon life and the spiritual pathway, to love others as ourselves, to transcend the ego state, and become reunited with the divine nature, whereupon we are consciously reunited with what we have always been and could never otherwise be: God. This cycle is called the Breath of God. He expires. He inspires. That is why the Tree had to be there. In order for us to have free will, the Tree had to be there. Certainly, if Adam and Eve had not eaten the forbidden fruit, one of their offspring would have, eventually, done so.

## **The Love of Money**

"The love of money is the root of all evil." I Tim 6:10. There is yet another way to look at this issue of evil, and it is related to the famous passage just quoted. When Adam ate from the forbidden Tree, he turned away and tried to hide himself from God. This is a very significant re-orientation from the Creator to the creation. If we place barriers between ourselves and God, He can no longer be our source. We are our own masters, seeking to solve our own problems and provide for ourselves. How do we do this? With money.

Money represents the potential to manifest the material world according to one's wishes. Money = physical options. Why does anyone want money? Because of its abilities to provide what we think we want. The quest for money is the quest for the material world. Desire for money is an expression of attachment to the material world. And why do we seek to manifest the material world? Because we think it will provide comfort, happiness, satisfaction, peace, etc.

Herein lies the tragedy. God is good, and desires to give goodness, peace, bliss, love, and comfort. That's what the world was made for! And it is precisely those things that we seek - to know that we are okay. What we really want is to know with absolute certainty that we are wonderful and perfectly loved exactly as we are, in our complete nakedness. But in our ignorance and shame we hide from the essence of life itself, our source and origin, God the Creator. We clothe ourselves, pretending that we are other than we really are. We hide from God, seeking limited and transitory comforts from the material world, when the answer lies within the spirit realm. So we seek to be able to manipulate greater and wider sections of the creation, thinking that if, indeed, we could rule the world we would, finally, be satisfied.

Thus, we pursue our happiness and satisfaction in a lengthy roundabout. Love of money is indeed the root of all evil. Meanwhile, the Spirit quietly waits.

## **Body, Soul and Spirit**

Man, created in the image of God, is more than a body, more than a physical entity. He is also desire, emotion, mind, and will. These we call the soul, the non-corporeal aspects of our being. And within these, animating these aspects, is the spark of life itself - the spirit. Inasmuch as we are all within God, we are a limited aspect of God that has shaped himself into will, mind, emotion, desire, and placed it all in a physical body. Exactly like a man stepping into an automobile (car), so too each "higher" vehicle places itself into the "lower" vehicle in order to gain experience and expand horizons.

The point of this is to note that the soul and spirit of man are of primary importance. They are, in fact, eternal, being non-material extensions of the limitless self-existent Being who created this universe. The body is to serve the

soul. The soul is to serve the spirit. Life is out of balance when the soul is used to serve the body. Note please that money can only manifest the material world. It cannot, in and of itself, affect the soul. The soul is affected by money / materialism only insofar as the soul is attached to the physical reality.

Before the fall, the spirit was dominant, pouring itself out in different creations. After the fall, the body became dominant. The state of Adam's body (naked) affected his soul, causing him to feel shame and fear. So Adam felt (in his soul) this shame, fear, discomfort, etc. How did he try to solve the problem? Well, he did not seek peace from God, examining the problem spiritually. Rather, he turned to the material world to solve the problems of his soul. If he could cover his body and hide from God (physical solutions) then everything would be fine. The love of money is the root of all evil. Additionally, he denied culpability within himself. "The woman you gave me..." Adam sees Eve as the direct cause, God the indirect cause of his problems. He is a victim of circumstances. This places enmity between himself, God and his only fellow human.

## **Evil: The Delusion**

One last observation along these lines. As evil crept deeper and deeper into Adam's life, it brought with it an ignorance, a denial of the truth, a delusion. How? Adam, even with his fig leaf, was still stark naked. He was only pretending to be otherwise.

Adam, even with his denials, was the sole cause of his discomfort and problems. He was only pretending to be otherwise.

God, even with his glorious creation, was still the only reality. Adam was only pretending it was otherwise.

Adam, even with his unhappiness, was still living in paradise. He was only pretending to be otherwise.

***Adam had forgotten.*** Steeped in ignorance, he had exchanged the bliss of the creator for the pain of his own making. He stopped seeing what was, and began dwelling on what was not. Thus was born envy. Thus was born anxiety. And he sought to solve his problems with the material world, instead of the Spirit that had created it. Sound familiar?

## **Good and Evil: A Summary**

We have come quite a distance from the commonly understood Gospel. The fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the source of all problems.



The direct problem was the knowledge of what is not that the fruit made available to Adam. Disobedience was the indirect problem. The results contain ego-centered living, materialism, strife, and all the other pains we have brought upon ourselves. Evil is a knowledge - a knowledge of what does not exist. A turning away from what is to what is not.

Here, in chart form, is a summary of these thoughts.

<b>BEFORE THE FALL</b>	<b>AFTER THE FALL</b>
Life	Good and Evil
Real	Unreal
One	Many
Whole	Fracture
Monism	Dualism
Toward God/Creation	Toward self
Spirit oriented	Material oriented
Unashamed	Ashamed
Egoless	Ego - Sense of separate self
Attuned to God	Against God
Naked	Covered
Open	Hiding
Comfort	Fear
Harmony	Discord
Peace	Strife
Love	Hate
Joy	Sorrow
Us	Me and Not(Me) = You

## **Leaving the Garden of Eden**

Our story so far: God told Adam not to eat the forbidden fruit. Adam ate it. His eyes were opened, knowing good and evil. Now what? How does God respond? What's a Father to do?

## **God's Response**

Here again are the pertinent verses from Genesis, Chapter 3:

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for you husband, and he shall rule over you." <sup>17</sup> Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the Tree about which I commanded you, saying, `You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

<sup>20</sup> Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup> And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever"

<sup>23</sup> Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

The events are clear. God tells Adam and Eve they will suffer. It is also plain that God will cause this suffering. "I will greatly multiply your pain...cursed is the ground because of you..." He casts them out of the Garden, making it impossible for them to eat the Tree of Life. God prevents Adam and Eve from living forever. God, in essence, condemns Adam and Eve to death. Why does God do this? "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the Tree about which I commanded you, saying, `you shall not eat from it'." That certainly *sounds* as though God is punishing Adam for disobedience.

### ***But he wasn't.***

As we have seen in the previous two sections, Adam's disobedience was the indirect problem; his disobedience led to the direct problem, which was the knowledge of good and evil.

Example: a parent says, "Don't touch anything under the sink." Little Adam disobeys, drinks some poison and becomes very sick. The parent responds, "Because you didn't do what I told you, we have to take you to the hospital." In this example it is very easy to see that though little Adam's disobedience led to his sickness, it is not the disobedience itself that made him sick; it was the poison

that made him sick. *In the very same way*, the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was poison to Adam and Eve! Adam and Eve were quickly getting sick. "All right, fine. But God still punished Adam and Eve for eating from the Tree." That is the next issue we must examine: punishment.

## The Two Types of Punishment

Remember our earlier discussion of the two forms of parental commands: selfish and selfless. We concluded that God must have been acting selflessly in his prohibition against the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, with the best interests of His children in mind. Previously, we saw the harm that came to Adam from this Tree. Recall also our illustration of little Adam and the x!@. What happens if/when little Adam does indeed touch the x!@? In the answer #1 (selfish) scenario the parent gets hurt. Parent feels anger and loss because the x!@ is important to him/her. In the answer #2 (selfless) scenario Adam gets hurt. Parent feels sorrow for Adam because he has been pained, and tries to comfort and heal.

Who was hurt through Adam's transgression? The only obvious answer is "Adam." If that is true, and God was acting selflessly and lovingly toward Adam and Eve, then God must have felt sorrow for Adam and Eve because they had been pained, and tried to comfort and help heal them. How then are we to understand that God "greatly increased" their pain and "cursed" them for what they had done?

Good question.

There are two types of punishment, paralleling the two types of parenting:

*Punishment type #1:* Seeks to hurt another as retribution for some harm experienced by the punisher. This is vindictive, after the fact. The parent hates the color green, and has commanded that Adam never wear green clothing. One day Adam "forgets" and wears a green hat. The parent then whips Adam for disobeying, for offending the parent's aesthetics.

*Punishment type #2:* Seeks to deliver a lesser hurt that can be understood or related to, in order to try to prevent some greater hurt that cannot be comprehended. This is protective, before the fact. Little Adam is reaching for a pot on the stove. Parent slaps Adam's hand (which Adam can feel and understand) to communicate the message that Adam must not do that, trying to save Adam from an incomprehensible agony.

Which type of punishment do you think God gave to Adam and Eve?

## The Vindictive God of the CUG

The commonly understood Gospel, while wrong, is at least consistent in its view of the arbitrary, vindictive God. God is "just" (CUG # 3). He required, therefore, obedience for its own sake, thus the command not to touch the one Tree. Adam disobeyed (CUG #6) out of stubborn, sinful rebellion. God punished Adam for having done this, casting him from the Garden of Eden, destined to lifelong suffering until dying a death of eternal separation from God (CUG # 8 & 9).

God was angry. His perfect righteousness was offended, and he absolutely would not want to have His disgusting, sinful children around to mar His heavenly beneficence and glory. Since the test of obedience was arbitrary, "God" *could* have simply forgotten or forgiven the transgression. Such a vast amount of suffering from such a small, meaningless test. Like a spoiled child who has been offended, "God" gets mad that Adam and Eve failed this arbitrary test. He has one really nice toy that He will only let His friends play with: the Tree of Life. And since Adam and Eve made Him mad, "God" won't let them touch His nice Tree. So out they had to go. "Get out of my sight! I never want to see you again! And for good measure, I'll be sure you never enjoy another day as long as you live!!" Some "God", huh? A selfish, arbitrary parent, who vindictively punishes his children eternally for offending his capricious whims, multiplying pain and suffering to vent his all-powerful anger?

***This is not right!*** This thinking is a manifestation of the very evil that came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil! This is a vision of a God as evil as the minds that conceived it. It is, in fact, evil itself. *It is not real.*

Yet this is the conception we have had drilled into us.

Once Adam and Eve began to know good and evil, everything became polluted - *especially their knowledge of God.*

## The *Real* God

This is the *real* God, the creator of heaven and earth, our heavenly Father:

God is love. (I John 4:7)

God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all (I John 1:5)

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is *good*; for His loving kindness is everlasting! (Psalms 106:1)

Why, then, would a good, loving God "increase pain...curse...and cast out?" Strange as it may seem to our darkened hearts and minds, He was trying to help. To heal. "What??!?" That's right.

You see, after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit, a disease was born in their souls. The knowledge of good and evil may not have been toxic to God, but it was absolutely deadly (!) to Adam and Eve, who were created to be manifestations of pure good. Just like little Adam in the example of the poison under the sink, they have eaten something very harmful to them.

Now, what is a loving parent to do? If you saw your child convulsing from ingesting poison, after you had warned/ordered him/her to stay away from the kitchen sink, how would you respond? Would you slap your child for disobeying you? Would you throw him/her out on the street, vowing to never speak to them again? If you had an antidote for the poison, would you deny it to them in anger? Of course not!! It is only the most vile and loathsome so-called parents who would act in such a horrible manner!

*Yet again, this is exactly the behavior the common understanding of the Gospel ascribes to God!!!*

At the point that your child is writhing in pain, slapping him/her has no value. No meaning! You are willing to forgive any trespass. The fact of your child's disobedience is absolutely meaningless in the light of the life threatening situation he/she now faces. You must deal with the poison!

*It is exactly the same with God.* Adam's transgression, the fact that he disobeyed, was and is insignificant. God is love. God is forgiving. "For Thou, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon Thee." (Psalm 86:5) God was not punishing Adam. Forgiveness, if it was needed, was already his. All he had to do was ask. No problem. Paradise never lost.

The problem, however, was Adam's sickness. Knowledge of good and evil was eating him alive. Killing him. Causing him to be ego-centered, out of harmony with his mate, hiding from his God.

What Adam needed was an antidote! But God didn't have one on hand. Not quite yet. It would take a few thousand years to make one.

But God got to working on it right away.

And when it was ready, He made it available to everyone.

In another Garden. Called Gethsemane.

## To The Hospital

But in the meantime, God still had a little problem. What to do with Adam and Eve? If your child was convulsing from poison and you didn't have an antidote at hand, what would you do? In all probability you would take him/her to the hospital, which is exactly what God did to Adam!

God sent Adam out of the Garden of Eden, out into the cold world, to till the soil by the sweat of his brow until he returned to the ground. *This world is a hospital for souls sick with the knowledge of good and evil.* But why did Adam and Eve have to suffer? Why did God say He was going to "greatly multiply" their pain? *It was a blessing* that God added pain to Adam and Eve's lives. Pain, albeit unpleasant, serves a very good and useful purpose: to indicate what is wrong, and to steer us toward what is right. Without it, we could destroy ourselves utterly without the slightest indication that anything is wrong.

In fact, this condition exists: it is a disease medical science calls neuropathy. People with this disease have nerve endings that are incapable of transmitting pain signals. People with this condition can actually amputate one of their own limbs and not feel a thing. They simply die from blood loss. It is a very deadly disease, in that children afflicted with it must be carefully supervised and taught how to avoid situations that seem harmless to them.

This was precisely the situation with Adam and Eve. Yes, they had caught the sickness of good and evil knowledge. Yet it did not control them utterly; there was still much life within them. God gave them pain to be their guide. Life out of balance would yield suffering, as a constant tutor to lead us back to the truth. But, thanks to the fact that God kept them apart from the Tree of Life, the suffering would not be everlasting.

## Barred From the Tree Of Life

One nagging issue remains: the Tree of Life. Why did God make it impossible for Adam and Eve to have access to it? If the Tree of Life could give everlasting life to Adam and Eve, why didn't God allow them to eat from it? In other words, since the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil brought death to them, wouldn't the Tree of Life heal them? Wasn't this, in fact, the antidote for the poison in their soul that we referred to earlier? It seems incredibly cruel for God to deny them this Tree, if it could have solved their problem.

The Tree of Life is life itself. It is ever growing. It is the source of all living things. It is rooted in the spiritual world, in that life is much more than a collection of chemical processes. Being a spiritual reality, not bound by its manifestation

within time or space, it is eternal. *Whatever touches or "eats" from this Tree becomes immortal.*

Therefore, if God had allowed Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Life, their knowledge of good and evil, and all the suffering it begat, would have become *immortal and everlasting!*

To use the illustration of the poison once again, this would be like little Adam convulsing and retching in pain forever and ever and ever and...but God is love, and He would never let such a thing happen to His children. He loved them, and wanted to protect them from harm. Remember, that in His act of creation God manifested only goodness. Through the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve gained knowledge of evil, all those potentials God sought to avoid. (Hopefully this point has been well made by now). Had these non-manifest potentialities been touched by the Tree of Life, they would have been given manifest, positive reality. Evil, then, instead of being a knowledge of what is not (a delusion), would have become a created/manifest existence of equal status with the rest of the universe.

So God sent them from Eden, placing an angel to "guard the way to the Tree of Life," to certify that they could not accidentally stumble upon it and immortalize their knowledge of evil.

Paradise lost - but not forever.

## **On Sin and Death**

"The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) "The soul who sins will die." (Ezekiel 18:4)

Knowledge of good and evil is deadly. Souls sickened with this disease have been barred from the Tree of Life. Hopefully it is clear by this time that God has set things up this way as a manifestation of his love and concern. Life is good. Knowledge of evil brings pain and suffering. If sin could touch the Tree of Life then the suffering would be everlasting. In His goodness, God saw to it that all suffering from sin would be limited and temporal.

So, all sin must die, and will die. Not as a punishment or retribution, but as a natural result (wage). For every action there is an equal but opposite reaction. For every sin there is death. We see this in two important ways:

1. Directly, or the death of the sin. Hatred must die. Enmity must stop. Strife will end. Darkness will give way to light.

2. Indirectly, or the death of the part of the soul that is attached to the sin.

This last idea is quite important and must be expanded. We'll use an example. Let's say that little Adam is perfect in every way except one: he hates the x!@. It has plagued him throughout this entire writing, and by now he is sick of it. He hates, loathes and despises x!@. This hatred, with all of its ugly and unpleasant feelings, cannot be allowed to continue forever. It must stop. Little Adam must cease his hatred. This sin (the hatred) must die. So too, that part of Adam's soul which is attached to the idea of hating the x!@, those thoughts and feelings, must die. That part of Adam's soul must repent, turning away from this sin.

All of our thoughts, feelings and desires are a part of us, of our soul. That part of us that is polluted must be healed. The cancer must be killed. The part of our soul that is diseased with sin must die. Not the whole soul, just the part that is sick! The CUG (#11) would have us believe that due to one sin, one time, Adam eternally lost communion with God; that this one act of disobedience so angered God's sense of justice that he could never, ever tolerate to see his children again.

*This belief is a manifestation of the very evil born in the Garden! It is wrong.*

Once again it ascribes to God the most atrocious of acts and motivations. Back to the example of the x!@ again. Little Adam's parent said "don't touch the x!@," but Adam did. What kind of human filth would be so angered that he/she would never, ever speak to Adam again? In fact, is there anything at all that your child could do that would cause you to disown them forever? For a loving parent the answer is "no!" Though the parent may rightly renounce the act, the parent will always care for the child. "Hate the sin but love the sinner."

*So too with God! Any sinful act must simply be repented of; it is not necessary for the entire soul to die.*

However, there is a deeper problem: the knowledge of good and evil still remains. This is the state of sin, which will continue to generate acts of suffering. The state of sin can be likened to cancer, which in turn attacks different organs in the body. We can eradicate the cancer from each organ, but until the body stops producing new cancer cells, it is not really healthy.

## **Repentance**

In the Bible, turning from sin is called repentance. We have stated that evil is a knowledge, a mode of perception. It is therefore not so surprising, now that we are beginning to really understand this whole business of evil / sin / punishment / repentance, that the Greek word we translate into English as "repent" is



"metanoia." It literally means "to change the mind." *To "repent" means to think differently!*

So here are a few passages with the word "repent" replaced with "think differently":

- Job 36:10 "He makes them listen to correction and commands them to think differently of their evil."
- Matt 4:17 "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Think differently, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"
- Acts 8:22 "Think differently of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart."
- Acts 17:30 "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to think differently."

Astounding, yes?

Though it should be obvious, we will nevertheless state that repentance doesn't consist simply in stopping what you are doing or feeling sorry for past acts. The essence of repentance is to have a different attitude (thinking) all together.

## Conclusions

So we see that God is very willing and eager to forgive. He does not need or want to punish anyone eternally for anything. Each act of sin must stop. This is called repentance. That part of the soul which is attached to the sin will die, for God has seen to it that all evil and suffering is temporal and limited. But the fundamental problem remains: knowledge of good and evil. That is the root of sin, the state of sin. Individual sins are the branches and flowers (fruit!) from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Mankind will not be healthy until the state of sin is eliminated, until we no longer know good and evil, but only *life*. God was preparing the cure.

## Summary of the Garden of Eden

Here, in summary form, are the cardinal points we have seen in our examination of the Garden of Eden. They are presented in parallel with the first twelve points of the common understanding of the Gospel (CUG) outlined earlier.

1. CUG: In the beginning God created the universe.  
**Truth:** In the beginning God created the universe.
2. CUG: Everything in the creation was good, including humanity.  
**Truth:** Everything in the creation was good, including humanity.

3. CUG: While God has many attributes, two are of primary importance as it pertains to the Gospel: He is perfectly loving and He is perfectly just (righteous).  
**Truth:** God is love. God is perfectly just (righteous) in that He always works perfectly in accordance with His loving nature.
4. CUG: The creation was a manifestation of His love.  
**Truth:** The creation was a manifestation of His love
5. CUG: In order to assure that His justice might be known, and that we might remember that He is God and to be obeyed, He set one Tree in the Garden that Adam was forbidden to touch, as a test of Adam's obedience.  
**Truth:** In order to try to keep Adam from great harm, God commanded (warned) Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
6. CUG: Adam, however, did partake from this Tree.  
**Truth:** Adam, however, did partake from this Tree.
7. CUG: This act of disobedience angered God, and offended His sense of perfect righteousness. It missed the mark of proper obedience. This is called sin.  
**Truth:** This Tree changed Adam's perception from a unity of the glorious goodness of life, making him know good and evil. It made him aware of both what was and was not. What was, (created) was good. What was not (uncreated) was evil.
8. CUG: God therefore punished Adam by casting him out of the Garden of Eden, cursing him with a life full of suffering.  
**Truth:** God set immediately to try to heal his poisoned children, preventing them from eating from the Tree of Life, which would have immortalized their pain. Their pain was to be only temporal, guiding them back to the paths of goodness.
9. CUG: This brought death and suffering into the world. The wages of sin is death, eternal separation from God.  
**Truth:** In his goodness and love God saw to it that all suffering and evil would be limited and temporal. All evil, all sin, will die.
10. CUG: God's perfect righteousness cannot abide the presence of disobedience, otherwise known as sin.  
**Truth:** Though God was willing to forgive Adam's transgression, Adam sought to hide from God. Adam did not want fellowship with the Creator.
11. CUG: Therefore, due to this sin, Adam was destined to spend the rest of eternity apart or away from God.  
**Truth:** Therefore, all Adam had to do was repent, turn from his sinful ways, and return to the goodness that was intended. Unfortunately, in his fallen condition, he had no way to do this. He simply could not heal himself. Clinging to his delusions and filth, man was lost.
12. CUG: However, God's loving heart could not tolerate such a thing. Though Adam justly deserved God's temporal and eternal punishment, God

nevertheless wanted Adam to have everlasting fellowship with Him. But Adam's sin made fellowship with the perfectly righteous Creator impossible.

**Truth:** However, while humanity wandered struggling, God set out to create a surefire cure for man's spiritual sickness.

## Life Between the Gardens

God spent His time between the gardens of Eden and Gethsemane preparing the antidote for Adam's poison: the knowledge of good and evil. As pertaining to our purpose here, the following were the key events:

1. First God began to prepare a social order ("a people") capable of receiving the antidote. This he did through the Hebrews, becoming the father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
2. God revealed His Name, the most powerful mechanism by which His people were to be able to learn His nature and attributes. The personal Name by which his people would remember Him and learn about Him. This is the subject of "God is not God's Name."
3. God revealed the law.

The law has received a lot of bad press the last few thousand years. While some of the Jews imagined it was a means of salvation, it was never intended as such. It was simply a guide for life, showing people how to live in order to maximize love, joy, peace, patience, etc. It is fashionable to see the law as an impossible standard by which God would condemn people, *but it was never intended to be so*:

Deuteronomy, Chapter 30:

<sup>11</sup> Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. <sup>12</sup> It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?"

<sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" <sup>14</sup> No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

<sup>15</sup> See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. <sup>16</sup> For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

<sup>19</sup> This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (NIV)

Once you understand God's loving nature, this becomes easy to understand. The law was not an impossible standard; it was simply a guide to prosperity and healthy living. Yet it was never intended as a mechanism for salvation. God does not love us more or less depending on our performance. God is love.

Let us be very clear on this. Righteousness can never come from performance. Even absolute "perfection," whatever that might be, is incapable of generating righteousness. Perfection consists in returning to the pure egoless state, wherein God is the only reality. Only God, only life, is good, perfect, and therefore righteous. Any performance, if it is self-centered, is a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The world is still good! Evil is only a knowledge, given animation by our limited life form, but not eternal. *There are no problems at all, save those inside our own heads.*

Evil must die; the wages of sin is death. We must have a new way of thinking, a way to overcome the knowledge of good and evil, and return to the Tree of Life; know life, as in the beginning! We still need the antidote! Grace is the only reality. All life and breath is a gift/manifestation of God. It is part of the problem that we imagine that we are capable of any act apart from God. That ego-centered consciousness is the very problem.