

Knowing Good and Evil

The question: In Gen. 3:22 God says, "The man has become like one of us; he knows good and evil." (NCV) But we know that God does not know evil experientially, like Adam and Eve did. So how do we deal with this statement?

"On Gen. 3:22, you will note that that this is precisely the 'knowledge' that Satan/Serpent promised Eve. They have received what he promised, to their shame and misery. God's comment to the InterTrinitarian Council ('Us' = Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) is that man now knows what He/They know (s) about evil: it alienates from God; it brings condemnation; it drives one away from the presence of the Lord in cowering fear; it brings shame and guilt which can never be adequately covered by man's works/efforts; it results in those possessing it being banished from the Garden of God forever (the 'flaming sword' = eternal judgment).

To take from the Tree of Life in this state of knowledge would be fixation; i.e., never changing possession of the cursed knowledge (as Satan/Serpent possesses). God's prescription to drive man out and bar him from the Tree of Life is a mercy. Unlike the Serpent, man may be redeemed from his sinful state (Satan/Serpent is fixed in damnation). If someone goes through the 'flames' and under the 'sword' on man's behalf (a Mediator), man may be restored to the Garden of God--indeed, brought to the eschatological state which Adam forfeited, even Heaven itself in the midst of which stands the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:2, 14).' (J. Dennison, theologian and teacher at Northwest Theological Seminary)

You will be like divine beings who know good and evil. The serpent raises doubts about the integrity of God. He implies that the only reason for the prohibition was that God was protecting the divine domain. If the man and woman were to eat, they would enter into that domain. The temptation is to overstep divinely established boundaries. (See D. E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God* [PTMS].) (NET Bible notes)

God certainly knows both good and evil, being the creator and sovereign Lord of both (Prov. 16:4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.). Yet He Himself is good. (Psa. 5:4 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You.) I do not understand this mystery, but evil is certainly subordinate to Him. Evil men He created are like clay in the potter's hands, which he makes for various purposes (Rom. 9:21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?). His overall purpose is good, even if he uses evil instruments. (T. McVay, a friend of Linda's)

In putting together tomorrow morning's bulletin, I was reminded of your question about Genesis 3:22 when I got to the Shorter Catechism lesson. We put items from the Shorter Catechism Illustrated in our bulletin to accompany the catechism reading of the week. Here is this week's lesson --- it presents the conventional understanding (that "knowledge" = "awareness") a little differently than I have seen.

Q.12. *What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created?* A. When God had created man, He entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon the pain of death.

Illustration. In the reign of Charles I, the goldsmiths of London had a custom of weighing several sorts of their precious metals before the privy council. On one occasion they made use of scales, poised with such exquisite nicety that the beam would turn, the master of the company affirmed, at the two-hundredth part of a grain. William Noy, the attorney general, standing by and hearing this, replied, "I shall be loath, then, to have all my actions weighed in these scales."

"With whom I heartily concur," says James Hervey, "in relation to myself. And since the balances of the sanctuary, the balances in God's hand, are infinitely exact, O what need have we of the merit and righteousness of Christ, to make us acceptable in His sight, and passable in His esteem." -- John Whitecross, Shorter Catechism Illustrated, 1828. (P. Kelley, a friend of Linda's)

I am no scholar and even hesitate to share my thoughts, but regarding the other passage, I thought of knowing good and evil as referring to discernment - knowing what is good and knowing what is evil. God surely knows what is good and evil, even though He is separate from evil. (W. Hunter, friend of Linda's)

My understanding of "knowing good and evil" is not about experience, but about the ability to differentiate between good and evil. God knows evil because of His very nature of being holy. Man, on the other hand, knows evil by experience, by losing their innocence. (C. Cheung, friend of Linda's)

Everything we KNOW is not experiential but we still KNOW it. So, we can know truth even if we have not experienced it: I do not have to be / experience divorce to Know it is a big problem, or that God hates divorce, etc. We also know that God does KNOW about sin and He threw Satan out of heaven for sin. So you might even say God experienced sin's actions even if He did not sin. (B. Hunter, friend of Linda's)
