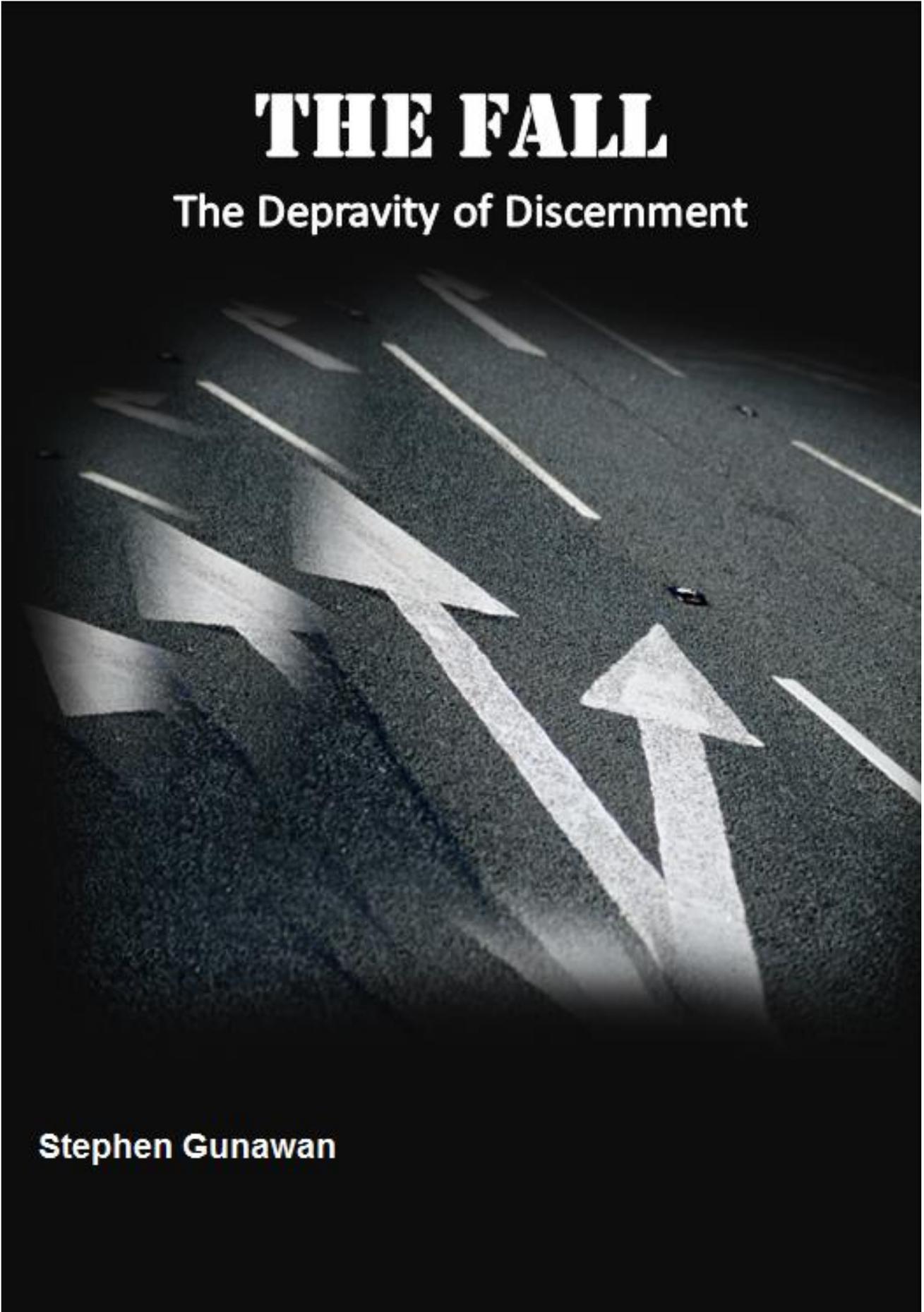


# **THE FALL**

**The Depravity of Discernment**

**Stephen Gunawan**

A black and white photograph of a road at night. The asphalt is dark, and several white arrows are painted on it, pointing in various directions. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the arrows and deep shadows in the surrounding areas. The overall mood is mysterious and somewhat unsettling.

## Preface

Just a quick note. There is another article preceding this one, and it is called "*Creation: Understanding the Mess We're in by Understanding the Way it was meant to be.*"

Now that that's out of the way, let's begin.

When talking about deception, one thing should be common sense: good liars don't look like liars. When someone with a cunning look come to you suspiciously trying to strike up a conversation, you are bound to put up mental defenses against him. But most of the deceived are never aware that they are being deceived. Some can even be militantly wrong! However, it is almost shocking how such common sense eludes us almost everytime. We never think that we are the one being deceived. We are almost always self-confident, self-assured and self-justifying in whatever we believe in. This attitude is dangerous, and naive.

The Bible tells us that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. The **WHOLE** world? Yes, that's what it says. And that statement was made as an anti-thesis to something else. "*We know that we are the children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one*" (**1 John 5:19**). We are the children of God; they who are of the world is under the control of the evil one. The children of God are not under the control of the evil one, the rest of the world is. The thesis is plain and simple. But wait! How is it that the world is deceived, or is controlled by the evil one? Do our lives display that antithetical status from being controlled? Are we different from the world? Is the church being perceived as being drastically different from the world, or is it being regarded as somewhat similar? Is the church influencing the world as its light and salt; or is it being influenced by the world? Do we set a standard for truth, or do we adopt what the world thinks as truth? Once again, are we distinct from the world? If not, how is it that we are so certain that we are not jut some naive, gullible and deceived individuals who have just come under the great deception of the father of lies? That, like those deceived people we are just plainly unaware of our own status? That the angel of light that we thought we saw was in fact the devil himself in disguise (**2 Cor 11:13-15**)?

Jesus Himself taught this. That there will be some people who naively think they are His but are not. People who confidently call Jesus, "Lord, Lord" (now, aren't Christians the only ones who do that?) but are neither known nor accepted by Him (**Mat 7:22-23**). Now, are we these people?

Okay, enough teasing for now. Paul encourages us to be consciously aware of Satan's schemes so that he would not outwit us (**2 Cor 2:11**). In that same book 2 Corinthians, Paul expressed his concern that "*just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ*" (**2 Cor 11: 3**). I thus see it fitting that we investigate the events in the garden of Eden, and how the deception came. And hopefully, as we do so, we would each investigate our own inner hearts to see if we are indeed in the right path.

*"Search me, God, and know my heart;  
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting"*  
(**Psalms 139:23-24**)

## Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

The thing about discussing deception is that it is so deceptive. You don't believe me? Let me ask you a few questions to begin with then:

- The tree is called "Tree of the knowledge of good and evil." They were forbidden to eat from it. Logic concludes that God did not want them to know good and evil. The devil advised that by eating it you will get that very knowledge;
- And that they shall not die. Well, despite the fact that God said that they would. And then they ate, and they did not die. Adam even lived on for another 930 years. Who lied?
- Eve did not desire a wrong thing, did she not? She ate the fruit because of the promise that she will be like God.

So, to summarize:

What Satan said (3:4-5)	What happened to Adam and Eve
You shall not surely die	Adam lived 930 years (5:5)
Your eyes will be opened	Their eyes were opened (3:7)
You will be like God, knowing good from evil	"The man has become like one of Us, knowing good from evil" (3:22)

I hope you see what has happened here. Prior to Satan's temptation, truth and error was easily discernable. God said, "do not eat." Obedience is good, disobedience is bad. So, not eating is good; and eating is bad. Truth and error is definite and clear because man is still in relations with the Source of Truth – God.

## Did God want Man to Know God from Evil?

One of the most curious question people asked of this story is whether God actually wanted man to know good from evil. Why were they disallowed from eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Why was it that God Himself admitted that after Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, that they now know good from evil (**Gen 3:22**)? It seemed dubious if God had wanted to give them such discernment.

To answer this question, I would like to give an illustration through a true story.

When Corrie Ten Boom was ten years old, because of something that she had heard from school, she asked her father something. This is an excerpt of that from her book *"The Hiding Place"*:

(From a ten year old child) "Father, what is sexsin?" He turned to look at me, as he always did when answering a question, but to my surprise he said nothing. At last he stood up, lifted his traveling case from the rack over our heads, and set it on the floor. "Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?" he said. "It's too heavy," I said. "Yes," he said. "And it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It's the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you." And I was satisfied. More than satisfied – wonderfully at peace. There were answers to this and all my hard questions. For now I was content to leave them in my father's keeping.

I think the above story gives the answer better than any lengthy theological discussion could achieve. God initiated a fatherly relationship with man when He created him in His own image and likeness. This

atmosphere is evident in the way the bible describes a father-son relations, “when Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth” (**Gen 5:3**). Note how the language was purposefully penned to reflect **Gen 1:26**.

And we all know this to be common knowledge in educating children. Introducing complexities too early in a child’s life will taint his ability to discern truth from error in the future. For example, if a child asks you, “is lying wrong?” and you answer him by telling him about the difference between white lies and blatant lie, and arguing your position on this topic (whatever this view might be!), you are exposing the child to premature complexities. This will not only confuse him, it will hinder him from growing in that knowledge. For a small child, the perfect knowledge is that lying is wrong; is a sin and should not be done, full-stop.

This is the biblical whole-picture with regards to discernment:

*“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (**Heb 5:13-14**)*

The verse simply says this: That spiritual maturity is defined by the degree of our ability to distinguish good from evil; and how we maintain purity whilst being increasingly exposed to complexities. In the fallen world, this means maintaining such purity despite being exposed to the corrupting nature of the world; this being shrewd without turning cunning, and being sincere without being naïve.

But one very important thing that we need to note is this. The Hebrew word “Yada” which is translated “knowing” good and evil in Genesis can also be translated into “distinguishing,” or “discerning.” So in fact, **Hebrews 5:13-14** defines this very knowledge that God wants us to have. It is supposed to be:

- Attained not in an instant, but rather through “constant self-training”
- Attained not immediately, but after we have slowly upgraded ourselves from drinking “milk” to the increasingly “solid food”
- Attained through teaching about righteousness (Greek *dikaiosunè*). This is not simply being right, which uses another word *tsedek*. *Dikaiosunè* is the righteousness of God, with God Himself being the source.

So, what really was the problem with the temptation of Eve was a distortion of this. Satan was offering not righteousness, but rather self-righteousness. What Adam displayed was in fact greed pure and simple, for he had been given all and every kind of other trees that were also “*pleasing to the eye and good for food*” (**Gen 2:9**). The only additional thing that was not offered by the rest of the trees was “desirability for gaining wisdom.” Satan was offering man a chance to determine and define goodness by and of himself; dethroning God as the sole source of goodness and wisdom. “You can have your own wisdom,” Satan was in fact saying. Satan had tempted man to echo his own rebellion in **Isaiah 14:13-14**. In saying that they will become like God, Satan is saying, “you don’t need God anymore, you can become god.”

What it should have been called ( <b>1 John 2:16</b> )	How Eve defined it ( <b>Gen 3:6</b> )	What’s Behind the Scene
Lust of the Flesh	Good for food	What satisfies us
Lust of the Eyes	Pleasing to the eye	What we appreciate/ regard as beautiful
Pride of Life	Desirable for gaining wisdom	Whom we glorify

**1 John 2:16** gives three categories of the sinfulness of the world; and those three matches exactly with what Eve was tempted with in the Garden. Eve looked at the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and called it “good for food” when she should have called it “lust of the flesh.” She called it “pleasing to the eyes” when she should have called it “lust of the eyes.” Why lusts? Because God had already given them everything that are good for food and pleasing to the eyes (**Gen 2:9**). She just wanted more, and wanted what they could not have. That is lust. And Eve also looked at the fruit and saw it as “desirable for gaining wisdom.” But that was pride; the “pride of life.” She wanted wisdom beyond what God had given her. She thought that by eating it she could become like God, not in His holiness and love and justice, but in His omnipotence and omniscience. She thought that if that happened, she could discard of the need for God. This is pride.

And John made it clear that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life did not come from Him. God is the source of all that is good; and he created everything as “good” and collectively as “very good.” And John echoed James when they singled out the source of sin and all that is bad: “Desire.” The world and its desires pass away, John claims. **James 1:13-15** gives the process of the entrance of sin.

Evil Desires → sin → death

## **The Truth of God and the Lies of Satan**

Earlier on, I had mentioned how Satan’s lie seems very truth-like. Everything that he said would happen, happened. Adam and Eve lived on. Their eyes were indeed opened. God even admitted that they had somehow become like Him.

But this is the very nature of a skillful lie – it resembles the truth. And we had already described how Adam and Eve had no right to be tempted by the “good for food and pleasing to the eyes” aspect of the fruit. That was an excuse plain and simple. And wisdom is but a spiritual mask to the pride in their hearts.

So it is time to come back to the question we began with; see the result of their sin; and define what truly happened, so we can put things into perspective.

### **1. Opening of the Eyes**

One of the very first thing Adam and Eve noticed when they ate the fruit was the shame of their nakedness. This was the result of the opening of their eyes; and it was hardly the result they were looking for! You would agree with me that this looks like the perfect scam: The liar is legally right, and cannot be criminalized, yet the victim undoubtedly suffer loss. Consider the following illustration:

This is not a true story, but resembles what happens in a country where media is controlled by the government. In a newspaper in communist China, this was the headline: “in an international car-race, our great country has proven its worth once again by attaining the 2nd place. And America, our enemy, had come in 2nd last. This proves that we are indeed capable of competing against even the mightiest country in the world!” What the newspaper conveniently ‘forgot’ to mention was that the race had only 2 participants!

See what happened? Every information given within that article was truthful. The race was indeed international, as it had more than one country participating. China did gain 2nd place, and America

did come 2nd last. But when we account for the fact that there are only 2 participants, we get a totally distorted view of who is the winner and who is the loser.

But this was exactly what happened to Adam and Eve. They imagined that after they had eaten the fruit, that their eyes would be opened, and they are going to see great and wonderful things that were previously concealed from them by God. Their eyes were indeed opened. And they did not like what they saw.

“Shame” happens because of the loss of glory. Some commentators have explained that the reason Adam and Eve did not feel shame prior to eating the fruit was because they were covered with the glory of God. I think that this is a very accurate explanation, and a similar language is used in **Habakkuk 2:16** where exposing of nakedness is equated to turning glory in to shame.

And we end with **Phil 3:18-21**. This verse can help explain what Adam and Eve traded for this opening of the eyes. In this context, Paul is comparing two different positions. (1) The *sinner’s position* where they have their minds set on earthly things; and “their glory is in their shame.” They are proud of all the wrong things, and cannot find glory except in the wider context of shame. But look at the alternate position (2) The position of the Regenerate is that of salvation. We are already saved, and have a citizenship in heaven. We are in Christ, and have the Spirit as a seal of promise that we will be transformed to become like Him. And what will that be? Christ “*will transform our lowly (shameful) bodies so that they will be like His glorious body*” (**3:21**). And this Christ to whom we will be transformed to be like, is “*the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being*” (**Heb 1:3**)

So what did Adam and Eve lose in Genesis 3? They had lost the glory of God. This is why it is said of sin “*for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (**Rom 3:23**). Adam and Eve thought they will be as glorious as God. What they attained was a falling short of that glory. This was what had truly transpired.

## 2. **Becoming “like” God**

Again, there is a play of terms happening here. Adam and Eve was already created in the “*image and likeness*” of God. So they are already LIKE God. The greatest lie that Satan had implanted is this: “God is ungenerous. He created you in an imperfect manner so He can gain all glory for Himself. You should not feel content with this state you are in. You should want more, and be more. You should crave more. You deserve more. So you should stage a *coup de tat* and take God’s place. Then and only then will you be truly like Him.”

Behind this temptation is a desire not only to be like God in His holiness, righteousness, love, etc. It was a covetous desire of His power, His wisdom, His knowledge (what is known in the theological world as the incommunicable attributes of God); without wanting to be like Him in His love, justice, mercy, gentleness, longsuffering, etc (ie. the communicable attributes of God). God is God. Despite the fact that He created man in His image, we can never be equal to God in status. And the desire to attain this was the ultimate covetousness; and the greatest sin. Again, it was the pride Satan himself fell under (see **Isa 14:13-14**), and is now using to tempt Adam and Eve.

We are called to be like God. We are called to be conformed to the image of Christ, who is “*the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being*” (**Heb 1:3** – note the different

emphasis I put on the same verse as compared to the earlier point). And **Philippians 2:5-11** tells us exactly how this is to be done. It is not done through a *coup de tat*; it is done through submission. It is not done through self-elevation; it is done rather through self-denial. It is not done through the defense of a right; it is done through a willing sacrifice. In short, it was the exact opposite of what Satan offered. We are exalted when we humble ourselves. We are like Christ when we deny ourselves. Our rights are preserved when we are obedient in our responsibilities. When we decrease and God increase, we glorify Him. And the more He is seen in us, the more glorious we become.

This is why **1 Tim 6:6** says, “*Godliness with contentment is a great gain.*”

### 3. “*You Shall not Surely Die*”

This is a comparatively easy one to put into disrepute. A fish out of water may still be breathing, but we all know it is as good as dead because it had been cut off from its source of life. Adam might have lived after he fell, but:

- The fate of mankind has been since sealed with death. In **Gen 5**, the hopelessness of the situation is pictured in the words used, “*Adam lived 930 years... and then he died. Seth lived... and then he died. Enosh lived... and then he died. Kenan lived... and then he died. Mahalalel lived... and then he died. Jared lived... and then he died. Methuselah lived... and then he died. Lamech lived... and then he died.*” Everyone shared of the same fate (save Enoch who God had taken away). And the seal of that fate was death. Despite even the length of their lives, all things ended in death.
- Man is both spirit and body. And the more intrinsic, valuable and essential part of man is his spiritual nature. The extreme difference in their value is noted in this: “*what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*” (**Mat16:26**) The answers to those questions are loud and resounding “No!” and “Nothing!” And when looked at this way, Adam and Eve did die the very day they ate. They were cut off spiritually from God, and they died spiritually. This is how the Bible defines spiritual life “*now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*” (**John 17: 3**). Spiritual life is defined as a life that is in relations with God; because God is the Source of all the good, pleasing and perfect things that we can have. God is the Source of Truth and the Source of Life for all men and Christ is the Way that leads us back to this God; which makes Him the Way the Truth and the Life (**John 14:6**). And without Him, we are spiritually deceased.

And this inward reality of spiritual death will be the cause of the inevitability of our physical death.

### 4. *Knowing Good and Evil*

Now let us try to understand God’s statement, “*the man has now become one of us, knowing good and evil*” (**Gen 3:22**). The inevitable questions that everyone would ask are: (1) was Satan telling the truth? and (2) did God not want man to know good and evil?

Earlier on, I used an example of Corrie Ten Booms’s question about sex to his father when she was ten. The question in and of itself was not wrong; it was premature. Sex is not something that is evil; or something taboo, but is meant to be understood in the proper context of mature age and within

the bond of marriage. If a child knows of sex, and if a teenager experiments with sex in an early age, the very thing that was not a sin to begin with, now becomes a corrupted vice. And so, when God said that the man has known good and evil, we can understand it this very way, that man had known good and evil in an extremely premature way; and so their very discernment (which was actually part of God’s plan for mankind) has now become corrupted.

And how is discernment corrupted? In every way.

Blessing	Curse	The Curse as a Corruption of the Blessing
Be fruitful and increase in number (1:28)	I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children (3:16)	The blessing and curse of <i>increment</i>
Fill the earth and subdue it (1:28)	Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. I will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (3:17-18)	The blessing and curse of <i>productivity</i>
Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground (1:28)	By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return (3:19)	The blessing and curse of <i>dominion</i>
I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it (1:29)  The Lord took the man and put him in the garden to work it and take care of it (2:15)	Cursed is the ground because of you (3:17)  God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken (3:23)	The blessing and curse of <i>work</i>
Suitable helper: “This is now the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (2:18; 23)	Your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you (3:16b)	The blessing and curse of the <i>institution of family</i>
God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them (1:27)	Until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return (3:19)	<i>Life that became death</i>
God dwelt with man	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel (3:15)	<i>Spirituality that became spiritual warfare</i>

The above table shows us a very interesting fact. The curse that God gave had a lot in common with the very blessing and mandate He gave. Labor for a woman becomes a mixed feeling of fear and

anticipated joy. Man has since dreaded work in such a way, they think that in heaven all we will do is grow wings, play harps and sing praises. The dominion over nature that we were supposed to have is replaced with being dominated by the uncertainties of nature. Submission that was supposed to be protective and loving becomes domineering and has led to the misguided attempt for women to desire to rule over men (and their fateful failure to do so). The eternal nature in which God had created man with was destroyed by sin and resulted in death becoming his ultimate end. Spirituality that was so straightforward and certain because God dwelt with Adam and Eve in the Garden. This covenantal relationship was severed and man has ever since been without hope and without God in the world (**Eph 2:12**). Man's sense of spirituality becomes darkened, and in this warfare all of man is controlled by the evil one (**1 John 5:19**).

Another session can be made to discuss just this effect that sin has on our ability to discern good and evil. But for now, it suffices to say that because man had sought to know good and evil outside of God, they have lost the Source of that very knowledge. And because man had sought to gain that which takes progressive revelation to know, his understanding of it becomes so darkened.

In claiming to be able to define good and evil independent of God, man had become arrogant beings who do not walk in the truth. In seeking to know this prematurely, the knowledge had become tainted, or totally depraved in such a way, man can no longer discern what is good and evil.

This is the true result of the Fall; and we see it till this very day.

In exposing these results, we see that the Devil indeed was a masterful liar. *"He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies"* (**John 8:44**). The story of the Fall was one of deceit, of untruth and of intentional evil. But lie was so natural to the Devil that it seemed to resemble the truth. He will always come to us offering something that seems good, pleasant and desirable and will come more often not as a threatening monster but as an angel of light (**2 Cor 11:14**); in order to catch us unaware. This is the scheme that we need to be aware of so that we will not be outwitted (**2 Cor 2:11**).

Knowing that God alone can lead us into the victory against such an ancient foe; and knowing full well that this victory is assured to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we should abide in Him at all times. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight"* (**Prov 3:5-6**).

Soli Deo Gloria!