

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

God's Character (Wisdom) and Man's Character

Chapter 1

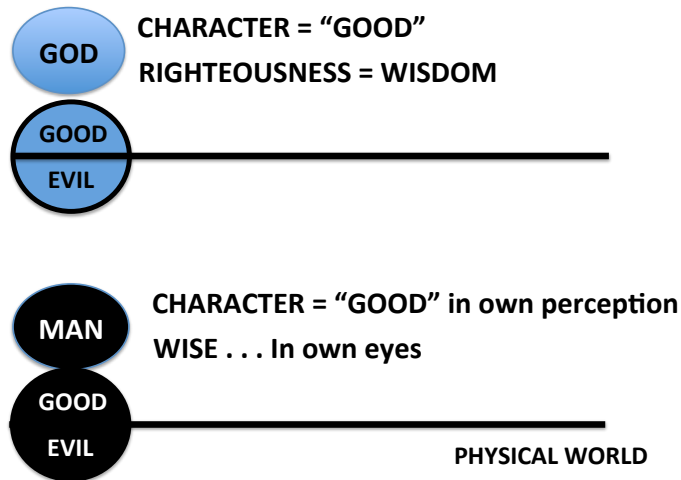
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Character . . . the heart . . . the desires . . . the motivation . . . wisdom. These are all words for the same thing. Within man is a basic drive. It is what makes him do what he does. It is what tells him what is right and what is wrong. It is his wisdom. In fact, everything that a man does is motivated by this character, his desires, his heart, his very own wisdom.

Man has a character. So also God has a character. They are as different as night and day. God's motivation, His desires, His wisdom, is what is "good." He alone determines what is good and what is evil. Unfortunately man also has a character but it is totally different than God's. It also (man's character) determines what is good and what is evil, but it is totally from his own perspective. Man's character is focused on glorifying himself and determines what is good and what is evil for his own benefit. God's character glorifies God. Man's character glorifies man.

It is always interesting that man always agrees with the god that he worships. That is because the god that he creates is always created from his own desires, man's own reasoning. Thus, he creates a god in his own image and then worships it. It is self-evident. These people always say, "The god that I worship is . . ." and then follows a diatribe on the things, not that their god has said, but what they have reasoned that their god should be like." Thus it is a self-confession that they have reasoned from their own mind to create their god.

So there are two different characters, God's and man's. The Biblical Story will show that each determines good and evil differently. They each have a different understanding, a different perception, a different "knowledge of good and evil." This is the problem. Note well, that there is no overlap. No "human wisdom" at its best ever merges in any way with the wisdom of God ("revelation"). While some things may seem similar, the motivations are diametrically opposite.



God's character as the Determiner of Good and Evil

Of course, there cannot be two correct standards of good and evil. There is only one. God, as the source of everything, is also the source of determining the only standard of good and evil. He alone has the correct knowledge of good and evil.

"In the beginning, God . . ."

In the beginning there was only God. There was only His character. Everything that came about, comes about, or will come about, is sourced from God. Everything that He creates is for Him and from Him. In Genesis chapter one and two God created a physical universe. His desire was that this universe would represent His character desires, and His alone.

"God Saw" (God evaluated)

As God began to act to create this universe, the Scripture states that "God saw . . ." The phrase "God saw . . ." means that God evaluated and determined . . . He perceived . . . In other words, God perceived the situation correctly and then pronounced that it measured up entirely with His own character desires that were "good." Thus the creation was "good" as determined by God.

It would be as if someone, after a particularly eventful day, said, "I can see that this was a good day." They actually aren't talking about seeing the whole day with their eyes, but they are saying that they are evaluating and determining the value of the day. They also aren't referring to the specific

events of the day, driving their car, going to work, or eating. They are talking about the value of those events as they benefitted their values, or fulfilled their expectations of what was “good” about life. The point is that they “saw,” or evaluated and determined, the value of the events based on their own desires, hopes and dreams, and came to a value judgment.

“... that it was good!” God’s Wisdom

God looked at what He had created and called it “good.” The Hebrew word here is *tob* (טוֹב, pronounced with a soft “b”). That meant that His evaluation of His handiwork was that it was exactly what He wanted. It fulfilled His desires exactly. As God is “good,” so now this creation was “good.” “Good” is what God is. This “good” is God’s character. It is His desires. Just as one’s character is how one thinks or is one’s wisdom, so God’s character is how He thinks, or His Wisdom. It is His perception of what is right and what is wrong, or “good and evil.”

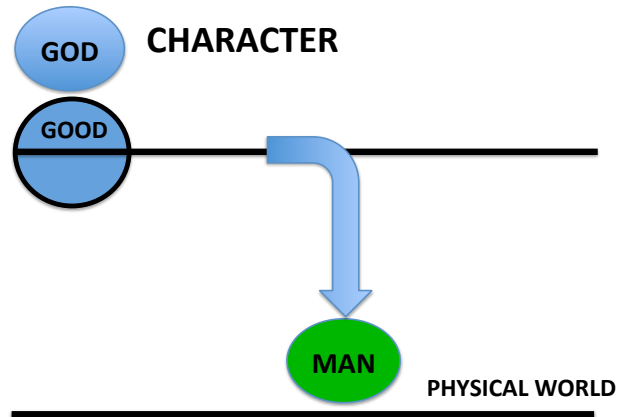
One might wonder how it is that God gets to evaluate His own character, since it is obvious that He would evaluate Himself as “good.” But that is the point. God is the only One. He is the source of everything. Thus everything He creates must reflect His character, that is, it must be “good.” The creation thus is “very good.”

While this might not seem fair with respect to human perception, there is no other choice. Man’s perception comes from his own character and he makes judgments based on his perception. Man has no other choice since he is locked into his own perception, or his own value system. God’s character must be assessed from some value system. And whichever value system evaluates Him, the conclusion will be based on that perception. There is no generic good and evil floating out in the universe that somehow magically applies both to God and to man so that both God and man are judged by this value system. Good and evil are established from a standard of someone’s perception from someone’s character. This perception must be from God’s character alone, not man’s.

Often one will hear how people assess the God of the Bible as “too violent,” or “too intolerant.” The question is, from which value system are they evaluating God? It is their own. Thus the God of the Bible is being evaluated from a perception that is not His. But this is a faulty evaluation since God is the sole determiner of “good and evil,” not man. Thus man has absolutely no ability to assess God from his own perspective. One can only assess God from God’s perception since that is, by definition, the only perception that is valid.

“Let Us make man in Our Image”

When God came to the sixth day, He made man. Since God had created this universe to reflect His desires, to glorify Himself, He appointed man to be in charge of doing exactly that. This is what is called, “ruling in His image (1:26).” When God made man in His “image,” it meant that man was to represent God’s desires (His character) perfectly as he ruled over this earth. Thus, man’s desires needed to match up with God’s desires and must be “good,” as God determined “good.”



Evil?

If God is good and He created man, and man was good, then where did evil enter the picture? Evil is the opposite and the absence of “good.” If man does God’s desires (“good”) then that is “good.” If he disobeys or does not do what God desires, then that is “evil.” So “evil” very simply is the rejection of what is “good,” or godly.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

I often tell my class to imagine that there is a tree planted in the front of the room. Then I ask them the following question. If its name was the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” what do you think you would get if you ate the fruit? Of course, the reply is “. . . the knowledge of good and evil.” That seems very obvious and the obvious is exactly the interpretation desired.

But this somewhat stymies the class, since it might seem that Adam and Eve already knew what good and evil was? Obviously good was doing what God said, “Cultivate the garden and keep it” (2:15). And they knew what “evil” was as well. It would be to go against God’s “good” desires and to eat the fruit of the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Thus if they already knew what “good and evil” was,

what knowledge would they gain if they ate of that fruit?

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (2:16-17)

Thus they did know what good and evil was, and death would be the result of doing “evil.” God had determined it. God determined everything. They could do good and eat of any tree, or they could eat of the forbidden tree and that would be evil.

“The Knowledge of Good and Evil:” Man’s wisdom

So, if they already knew what was “good” and what was “evil,” what was this “Knowledge of Good and Evil” that they would gain if they ate the fruit? What was it that they would get that they did not already have?

Remember the discussion that God’s character determined what was good, and also determined that anything different from that was evil? If man was to determine for himself what was good and what was evil apart from God’s determination then he would, by definition, know, or determine it, for himself (not from God). In fact, this is the definition of what a “god” is. That is, a “god” is one who determines “good and evil” for oneself.

Having received his instruction on God’s desires, man was now faced with an alternative. He could choose to do God’s desires . . . “good.” Or he could do Satan’s desires . . . “evil.” But if he ate of that tree . . . he would have Satan’s character (doing the desires of Satan). It would become his very own character and that character would determine good and evil for itself. No longer would he be subject to God’s determination of good and evil. He would be able decide for himself. He would think himself to be “free.” But what he didn’t realize was that what he perceived as “free” would actually be enslavement to an evil character, a character from Satan himself. (Note that one is always “enslaved” to their own character, whether it be good or whether it be evil).

Peter talks about this evil character and its claim to be free while it actually was enslaved to its own evil character.

¹⁸ For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, ¹⁹ promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. (2 Peter 2:18-19)

Thus, when Eve determined that eating of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was “good” (“she saw that it was good,” Genesis 3:6), it was different than

what God had determined (“saw”) was “good.” In other words, if they ate it they would get a different character from God’s, a character that perceived (evaluated) things from their own interests, not God’s. They would determine good and evil for themselves. But since they were opposed to God’s character they would now determine that what was really “evil” was good, and what God had determined as “good” was now evil (since God, not man, truly determined “good and evil”).

Isaiah speaks to exactly this when he states,

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight!

(Isaiah 5:20-21)

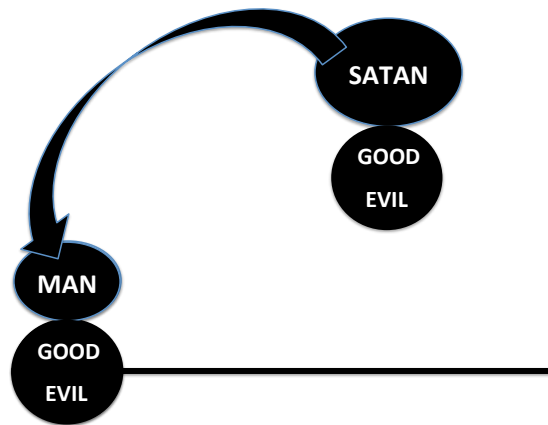
Man’s Wisdom from Satan

“Now the serpent was wiser than all the beasts of the field . . . “

At this point suffice it to say, that the reader is introduced to the antagonist, the evil character who is the opposite of the good character, God. Of course this is Satan operating inside this serpent in order to lure Eve into eating of the restricted tree. Satan is the antagonist to God. His character is evil. His “wise” (Genesis 3:1) character already¹ determines good and evil for itself and thus opposes how God “sees” things. That he is the antagonist to God is clear as he directly opposes God’s revelation of His character by saying, “Has God said . . . “ and “you shall not surely die . . . “ Thus this serpent (Satan) possesses a wisdom that is the opposite of God, that determines “good and evil” on his own from his value system.

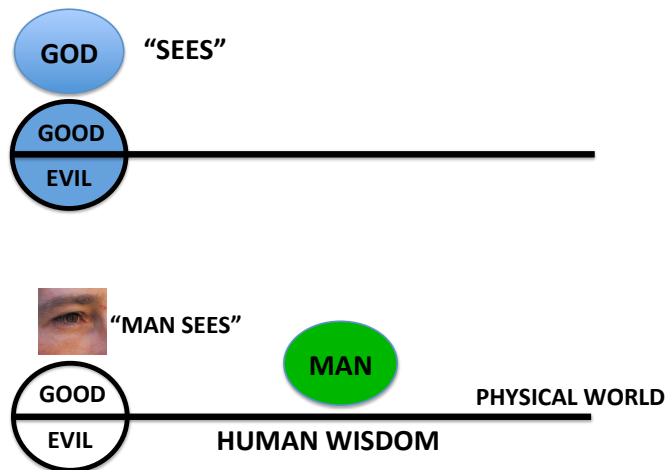
So, this serpent explains to Eve how he “sees” (determines) things and thus how she should “see” (determine) things. She takes the bait. She now evaluates the restricted food and determines (“sees”) from the deceit of Satan that rejecting God is now a good thing (so that she can be her own “god”).

¹ The question will most certainly arise as to how and when Satan got this evil character. At this point the text does not reveal that answer. Suffice it to say, that Satan has determined to lead Adam and Eve astray and thus already has a character that is opposed to God’s character.



Eve Determines good and evil for herself from Satan’s deceitful character

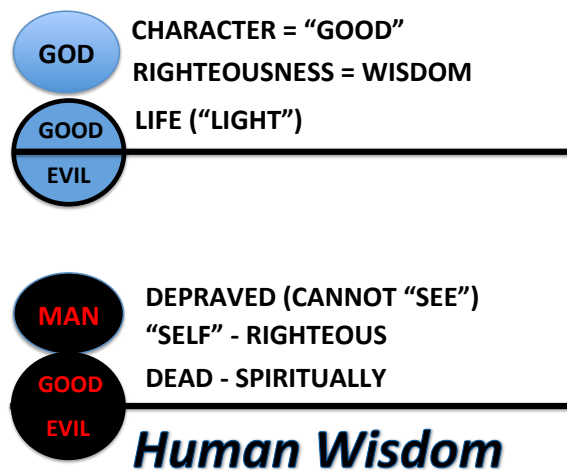
⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (3:6)



Notice that Eve “sees” now through the serpent’s eyes, through his perception. Her eyes are delighted. And she desires to have this new wisdom that can determine good and evil for itself. She eats. But she does not get a “new” wisdom, nor one that is independent and free. She gets Satan’s (the serpent’s) wisdom. Now forever she will have a wisdom that will determine morality apart from God’s character. Her new wisdom will focus on glorifying herself, not God. She will be locked into seeing through eyes that look only at the physical world and

determine what is best for herself. She will put herself before others and especially before God. She will remake God through her own eyes and He will become a god who conforms to her perception. She will remake morality and ethics as whatever benefits herself and she will call it “good.” She will say that her perception is God’s perception. While she will have a character that will please and serve her own desires, it actually serves her new god, Satan.

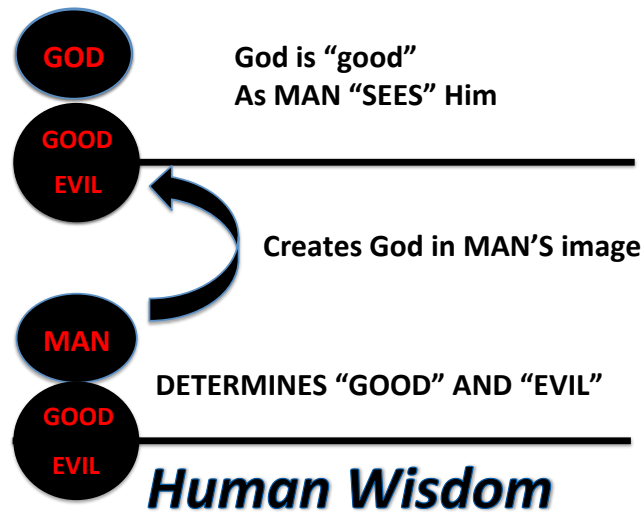
Man was originally to “see” (evaluate) with God’s eyes, not his own. But the moment Eve and Adam ate of the fruit, they received a different character than God and became their own determiner of good and evil. The text states that “then the eyes of both of them were opened” (Gen. 3:7), and now they would evaluate (i.e., opened eyes) quite differently than God.



Eve Makes God in Her Image

Since Eve now has her own character to determine everything, she will determine God now through her own eyes. She will make God out to fulfill her desires, not His. Thus God will become like her.

Later in the chapter God says, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:22). God is indicating that they had become their own god. The definition of a “god” here is one who is the source of their own determination of good and evil. Thus there would be two sources of that determination, or two gods. God was the ultimate, the only correct source. And now man would be a god, the depraved source (actually Satan as the source of the man’s depravity). Neither value system, God’s and man’s, could ever agree with the other, nor perceive either’s value system as good, since it would never conform to their own (self).



Adam and Eve Act on their Character

⁸ 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.

Of course, the first thing to notice is that God is "walking" in the garden. Normally, when not used physically, the Hebrew word, *halak*, (הָלַךְ) used for one's character expression. Thus when two people "walk together," they are in agreement (e.g., character or value system agreement). So now God's character appears in the garden and Adam and Eve hide, thus indicating they know their characters are not in sync with God's (no commonality, or fellowship²). In addition, since God has threatened them with death should they adopt a different character, they are avoiding that judgment.

⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." (3:8-10)

The word for "sound" here is the same word as "voice." One should recall that God's Word was the expression of His character in Genesis 1 when it was with

² This is the meaning of "fellowship" in 1 John, that is commonality of character. Thus in receiving "eternal life," man can have fellowship with the apostles, Jesus, and God, since they share the same "good" character.

His voice that He created the entire universe. It was His “voice” that revealed His character into the physical realm. Thus, the appearance of God’s Word, God’s voice, is a contrast with man’s character and he is immediately afraid of the impending judgment of God’s character on him. Note here that God’s Word or voice is the sole means of revealing God’s character. That is why Jesus is the “Word” in John 1:1.

Yet what is very interesting is that man explains to God why he is hiding. He is trying to tell God that actually nothing has changed (an excuse for not being in the open and “walking” with God). He is hiding because God is a fearful Judge and man recognizes he is now under that judgment since their value systems are now totally different. But what is clear is that Adam is deceived and is trying to deceive God. Prior to Adam’s sin, God was not His judge. But Adam’s eyes now explained everything in terms of what he could see, as Eve did earlier. He could see that he was naked. Adam’s new character had identified his nudity as exposing himself and his rebellious character before God. He thus sought to hide his evil character (unseen) by covering himself (seen), something that came from his newfound “wisdom.” (Man’s wisdom always excuses or “justifies” is errant behavior.) In other words, his newly acquired “depraved” character assessed himself as “good” and attempted to convince God that he was good in God’s sight by attempting to cover his sin. This, of course, showed the nature of his depraved character as he tried to explain to God why he was not walking with Him. Of course, the very fact that he was hiding shows he was not the same, and the fact that he was now trying to explain that everything was “good” when it was not, shows the nature of his new character, depraved. (Note that self-justification is by itself an indicator that man is not justified since if man was fulfilling God’s expectations he would need no “self-justification.” Man’s only correct justification is if God justifies him.)

Man and woman now have their own “wisdom,” their own character that perceives “good and evil” for itself. It will assess things solely by their view of the physical world and determine what is good or evil for themselves. But they will not be free since they are locked into determining only what this depraved character sees. And not only are they enslaved to their evil character, it isn’t even their own. It came from Satan himself.

THE BIBLICAL STORY: GOD’S CHARACTER REPRESENTED ON EARTH

To those who desire to understand the Biblical Story, this is the core issue. God’s character was to be represented in man throughout the earth. But, in the failure of man they would receive the sentence of death since they could not represent God. But God would desire from His character that His created beings would not die. So He prophesied that He would send His Son (Genesis 3:15) to be a sacrifice for their evil character. But even more than this, the Son would have the perfect character of God. He would be the Man who would represent God, be in His image. And He would give that righteousness that was in the character of God to

those who asked for forgiveness from their old character. Thus they would obtain a new character, new life, through this New Adam, called the Seed of the Woman (the ultimate progeny of Eve). It would not come to evil man through his perception since he could not perceive what was good from his own character. It would not come to man through good works, as man's perception of "good" was different than God's and his good works did not qualify. Thus God would have to "impute" God's character to man through the death of His Son. And God would have to enlighten man's mind so he could see that his own depravity and his need for God's good character given in His Son.

The Old Testament: The Hope of the Seed of the Woman to impart God's Character

From Eve ("she saw that it was good . . . and she took") through Cain (who rejected the revelation of the Seed of the Woman) through the Wicked World ("they saw that the daughters of men were good and they took them"³) to the Judges ("every man did that which was right in his own eyes"), the Old Testament character of Adam continually determined right and wrong, good and evil, based on what they determined from their own character's viewpoint. Moses in Deuteronomy 12:8 warned the Israelites against leaving the revelation of God in the Law to go to their own perception.

⁸ "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; (Deuteronomy 12:8)⁴

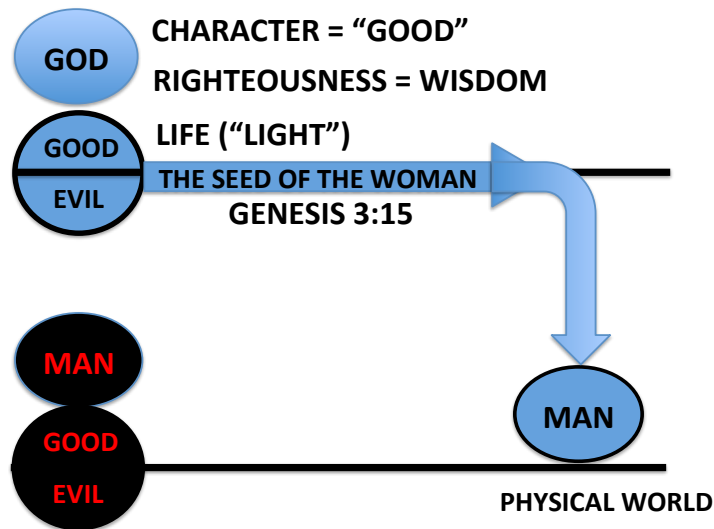
David, in a similar fashion to Eve when she had observed the fruit as good, observed Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11:2. He "saw from the top of the roof a woman bathing and she was good to the sight exceedingly" (טוֹבַת מְרִאָה מְאֹד). David thus contradicted God's character desires for his own, evaluating from his perception, not God's.

On the other hand, there are those who claimed the "good" revelation of God's character in the promise of the Christ to come ("the Seed of the Woman".) There was Adam (he named his wife, "Life" because she would bring forth this New Adam), Abel (who imitated God's demonstration of hope in the Seed of the Woman), Noah (he "walked" with God), David (in Psalm 16 David anticipates his ultimate child, the Christ).

³ The words, "saw," "good," and "took" are the same as Eve's statement.

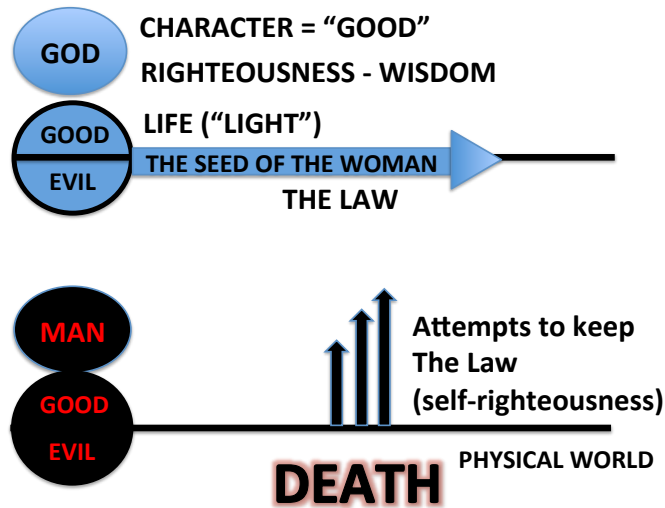
⁴ This was in regard to worshipping at the single place that God had designated when they got to the land (Jerusalem), and not wherever they wanted to worship (on every hill and under every tree).

Thus the Old Testament prophesied that the “Seed of the Woman, the Christ, would come and bring the character of God to man. Man was to hope, and believe, in this Promised One. That new character, that righteous character of God, called “eternal life” in John, was man’s only hope to return to a relationship with God.



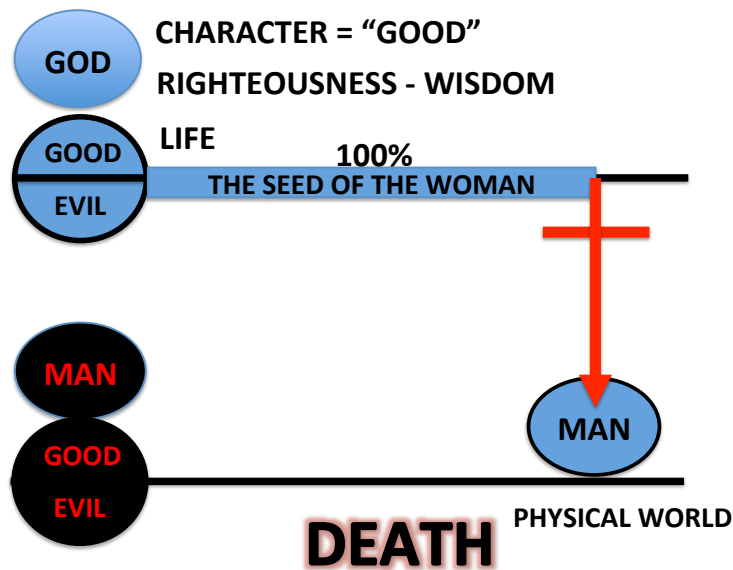
As the prophets came and went, they would bring the message of God’s character to a disobedient king and nation, Israel. They would tell the people what God wanted them to do and call on them to “repent.” But Israel would not since their evil character could not perceive (“see”) that God’s character, as revealed by the prophets, was “good.” They loved determining good and evil for themselves. So they lusted after pagan women, worshipped their gods (remember gods are imaginations from one’s own desires), and generally followed the ungodly Gentiles who determined everything for themselves, not God.

The Law, the revelation of God’s character, showed how evil man was and how he would never be able to qualify as righteous, i.e., God’s character. Man’s attempts to keep it would never do it. Man was to keep the Law from his heart (“love the Lord thy God”) and recognize his inability and come to God through the sacrifices that pointed to Christ, the Seed of the Woman.



The Gospels

Finally, the Seed of the Woman appeared on the scene. Jesus was the One who would die for mankind and then give His perfect, godly character, to those who ask for it and the forgiveness of their sins.



The Jews, however, loved their own determination of God and continued to worship a god made in their image by which they would be glorified (self-righteousness). Thus they picked verses from The Law and took them out of context, using them to justify themselves, feeling they had earned a relationship with God through their good works. Yet righteousness could only come from God as

source, never man's evil character. Good works could only glorify the man who did them. For man to glorify God he would have to receive the mercy of God, and that was through the sacrifices that pointed to the One who would bring the new character, Jesus the Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount

As Jesus began to introduce Himself and His theology, He stood on a mountain on the north side of the Sea of Galilee and preached. He stated that He was the One that the Old Testament longed for. He was the One who would bring the character of God to man. However, man had this evil character that determined what was "good" for themselves and thus Jesus showed them that they were wrong and did not match up to the desires of God (the true determiner of good and evil).

The Sermon is about the righteousness of God seen in the Old Testament (God's character revealed). Thus Jesus took the Law and showed them that their self-centered interpretation of it was evil even though they called it "good." His repeated statements in Matthew 5, "you have heard it said, but I say unto you . . ." were indications that the Pharisees would quote only a portion of the Law ("you have heard it said . . .") and claim they fulfilled it so to gain some glory for themselves. But Jesus showed that the Law actually said ("but I say unto you") that it was their heart, that old determiner of good and evil, that was evil. The Pharisees said, "You shall not murder," but did not realize that actually the Law required obedience from the heart regarding their brother, "You shall not hate your neighbor from your heart (Leviticus 19:17)." The Pharisees said, "You shall not commit adultery," but did not realize that the Law required that it be kept from the heart when it said, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife (Deuteronomy 5:21)." Thus both hate and coveting came from one's evil character and demonstrated that their character was evil, unlike God's. Thus the source from which they determined good and evil was bad. It perceived things as good, but from God's perspective they were evil. The Law reflected that a perfect representation of God's character was required.

² . . . 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:5-6)

In addition to that, lest man think that his "good deeds" were worth something in the eyes of God, Jesus made it clear that those who neglected the "least of these commandments" (5:19) would not achieve the character of God required for the kingdom. One had to be exactly the character of God to achieve life in the kingdom. To assess that anything less would do actually revealed one's depraved character as they set up their own value system for the kingdom, not God's.

In Matthew 5:29, Jesus makes a statement about removing your eye if it would be keeping you from the kingdom. His point is that the kingdom of God is the ultimate goal of man and there is nothing else of value, even one's eye.

²⁹ "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (Matthew 5:29)

Yet the "eye" in the Sermon on the Mount (as we have seen in the past Scriptures) is the perceiver or determiner of one's value system. It is the revealer of one's character, how they "see" things. In the example just before this statement in 5:27-28, Jesus pointed out that to "look" on a woman to "covet" her was adultery in one's heart or character. Thus this "looking" of the "eye" revealed one's character.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for (lit.: "to covet") her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

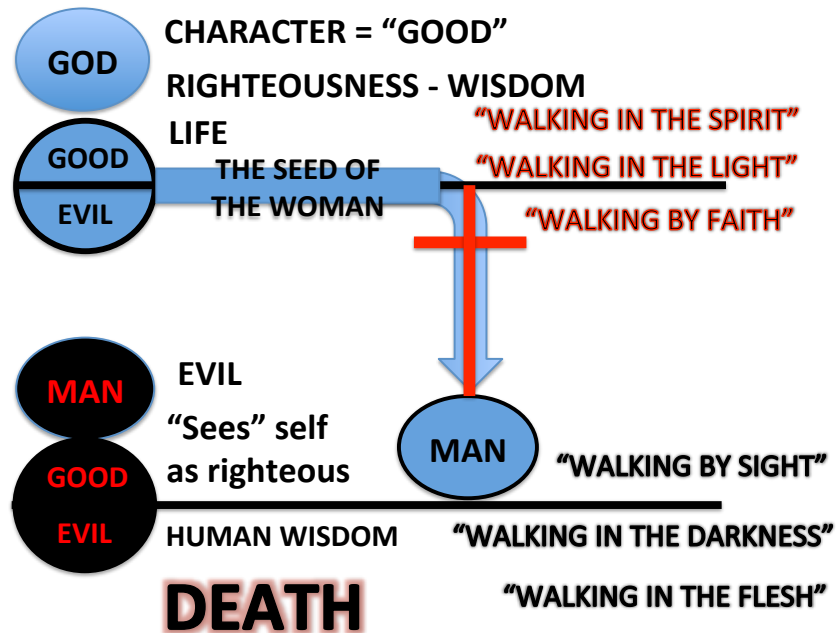
Thus one should not pluck out their "eye" since that would do no good. The "eye" was simply the revealer of one's character, which was solely located in one's heart. Thus, Jesus is saying their heart was the source of the problem and needed to be plucked out. They needed a new character. The old one could never do.

The Epistles and the Church Age

As the story moves into the church age, this new righteous character has been imputed into the believer and he is to walk on that basis, that is that he possesses that character and through that character he is to act on behalf of Christ.

The terms that are used for these two extremes are "walking in the Spirit" (revelation of imputed righteousness) versus "walking in the flesh" (self-glorification (success) through operating on human reasoning and sight) or "walking by faith" versus "walking by sight" which reflects similar concepts. John uses the terms "walking in the light" versus "walking in the darkness" and both John and James use the opposites of "life" and "death". Each of these is a contrast between one who seeks the source of "good" through the revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ and the other that seeks its own glory through human, self-glorifying reasoning. In short, life is from the very specific self-revelation of God in the Scriptures. Death is everything else.

The believer thus is to walk on the basis of the revelation of Christ and how God has given to man “eternal life” (the character of God) through the revelation of the Spirit (“walking in the Spirit” or “walking by faith”). He is not to operate on what he sees (sight) according to his own desires (flesh) based on human reasoning, which is death.



Application to Today's Believer

The believer has access to two natures.

The one is dead, that is, everything that comes from it is death, opposed to God, and without any benefit. This is the one that pleases self, glorifies self, and takes advantage of others for its own glory. It is the one that pursues selfish ambition, success as one's identity, rejecting sacrifice for the cause of Christ and the brother. For the believer, this character was paid for at the cross. Thus one's self-identity, one's ego, one's glory was judged dead and has no benefit with God. It determines what is good and evil based on one's own benefit, one's own values. It will seek glory in the church because of riches, honor, good looks, or any other thing to be elevated and called spiritual. It will avoid the outcast, those who cannot benefit their own selves.

The other is the character of God imputed to man. It determines what is good and evil according to the God that is in the Scriptures. It seeks to give up its life for the cause of Christ, seeks to give out the mercy that Christ has given, and does not value its life even to death for the cause of Christ.

Every believer has a choice. Walk according to the Spirit, or the flesh. Walk by faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ and imputed righteousness, or by sight. Walk in the light or the darkness. One is life and the other is death. While it is a lifetime decision to pursue one or the other positionally, it is a minute-by-minute decision sanctificationally.

There are a few things to say before we leave this topic and move to a second. Every deed, every thought, every action comes from either the new character, enlightened by the Spirit (“imputed righteousness”), or the old character driven by self-centeredness. The question always is, “where did that come from?”

I always use the Book of James as the book that focuses on this. I often say that I feel like James is sitting beside me as the message of his book goes with me. So if I am cut off in traffic and I shake my fist and the other driver, I can hear James clearing his throat intimating the question, “Where did that come from?” Obviously the answer is “bottom line,” which refers to the graphics where the top line is the revelation of God’s character and the bottom line is my self-centered, impatient, self-righteous character.

Or if I’m speaking with my wife and I get sarcastic, or impatient, I can hear James once again clearing his throat next to me, again with the implication, “Where did that . . . ?”

Another point that needs to be made concerning this “top line” (God’s character) and “bottom line” (self character), is that God’s character is always consistently righteous. It never varies. So if one is going to be the character of God they cannot just be that once in a while, but must be that totally, all the time, 100 per cent.

And another thing, God’s character is not just a doctrine, it is a living character that wants to do its desires. Thus God’s self-sacrificial character is looking to find someone, an opportunity, to self-sacrifice for the benefit of those in need. If man is going to exemplify God’s character in them, they would be looking for opportunities to show the mercy given them in Jesus Christ, as they shop, as they get gas, as they interact at work, when they come home to the wife, the children, their friends . . . yes constantly looking for opportunities to give the mercy of God given to them.

This is what James states when he encourages believers to seek for opportunities to express mercy (i.e., “trials”) when they are presented.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials . . .”
(James 1:2)