

**Palisades Community Bible Church**  
**Online Bible Study**  
**Dealing With Misleading Logic**

By: Brent Briggs

[This study examines a faulty trail of logic which illustrates a problem associated with inadequate knowledge of the Bible. The word of God is applied to straighten things out]

I love it when a very logical assumption about God is posed, and God's own words provide correction. What follows is a fine example, and it may just answer some questions YOU have along the way....

Hannah Tatum Whitall Smith (February 7, 1832 – May 1, 1911) was a lay speaker and author in the Holiness movement in the United States and the Higher Life movement in the United Kingdom. She was active in the Women's suffrage movement, the Temperance movement, and authored books on the Christian life.

Smith wrote of an exchange she had with her pastor. She recounts her question, and his reply:

**"... I had noticed he had said in the course of his sermon that the thing which distinguishes a man from a beast is free moral agency, and I asked him if this free moral agency did not necessitate a knowledge of good and evil.**

**'Most certainly it does.' was his reply, 'and that is just where man shows his divine origin.' etc., etc.**

**Then I said; "Why did God forbid man to come to that knowledge? And why is it called a 'fall' when he did come to it? Did not God Himself say after it was done 'Man has now become as one of us to know good and evil?'"**

To paraphrase Smith's question, she observed that her pastor said 'THE THING that separates man from animal is freedom of moral choice.' The pastor confirmed it; 'that's where man SHOWS his divine origin.' He was saying that free moral choice is the primary distinction.

She then asked 'why did God, then, FORBID man to come to that knowledge? Why is it called a FALL when man came to that knowledge?'

Sometimes, an intelligent question, such as this, causes us to pause and ponder questions of our own. Perhaps our own questions have been lying just beneath the surface and, now hearing it, they pop right up!

If that is now happening to you, you are in a good place. It is the wrestling between knowing and not knowing that will make what follows a faith-building process. When we see how God's unimpeachable consistency corrects faulty assumptions, we will also have our own positions strengthened.

Keep in mind that God wants us to be knowledgeable, and NOT misguided or uninformed!

**“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”  
Proverbs 2: 6**

### **Logic Can Be Misleading. Discernment Is Key!**

While Ms. Smith's line of questions seems very logical, God's word points to flaws within the logic in her Pastor's premise. Free moral agency is but one characteristic that distinguishes man from beasts. Others include a spiritual dimension, and the fact that only mankind was made in the image of God. God created beasts and man entirely differently.

**“God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1: 25**

In the creation account, “And, God saw that it was good.” Means God had completed that activity and was satisfied with it. (Please note that there are no fossil records of any significant creature having been created after the creation of mankind) After this successful step was finalized, God took the next step:

**“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”**

**27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.**

**28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”” Genesis 26-28**

God created mankind with entirely different characteristics from those of the animal kingdom. God created mankind with an entirely different purpose than animals. Not only is man anatomically unique, he is a spiritual being, and he has attributes of God's character in, and on, him. We resemble God inside and out. Jesus, in the form of a human, said:

**“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” John 14:7**

Had this pastor stated that ‘ONE OF THE THINGS that distinguishes man from beast is free moral agency’ his premise would have been correct. Had he acknowledged that man, created in God’s image, is dramatically different from beasts in many ways, he would have been correct.

Ok, let’s assume that first issue has been put to rest. How about the rest of Ms. Smith’s question?

### **Next Question...**

If a premise is true, then it can beg another question. Since ONE OF man’s distinguishing attributes is freedom to choose between right and wrong, then, the freedom to choose requires that man come to a knowledge of both good and evil. Why did God forbid man to come to that knowledge?

Now, Ms. Smith is the one with a flawed premise. She assumes that God did not want man to come to a knowledge of good and evil. Without this knowledge, man’s free moral agency would be void. Man would be incapable of exercising choice, if he did not know the difference.

She further asked why it is called a “FALL” when man came to that knowledge of good and evil. (Is your head hurting, yet?)

God did not forbid man to come to the knowledge of good and evil. God FREELY GAVE man knowledge of both good and evil. God wanted man to KNOW. God wants man to choose Him. The only thing God forbade was eating of the one tree.

**“And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Genesis 2: 16-17**

Imagine a mother telling her child that the door on the oven is very hot. “If you touch it, it will hurt you. It will burn you. If you don’t touch it, you won’t be burned.” Did the mother deny her child the knowledge of choosing to whether to touch the oven door? Or, did she give it freely?

I was painting a room for a customer and, at the end of the day, I put up a sign; “Wet Paint! All woodwork, doors and windows are wet!” Not only that, I told them face to face. Next morning, I came in to find the door, windows and trim had random fingerprints. I informed the customer that those prints would have to be sanded out

and repainted, and that would incur additional labor charges. That was the cost of ignoring the warnings.

In these examples, the child and the customers were given full knowledge – just as God gave Adam and Eve full knowledge of both right and wrong. God did NOT “forbid man to come to that knowledge,” as Smith asserts. Ms. Smith’s question; “Why did God forbid man to come to that knowledge?” is based on a faulty assumption.

### **Last Question...**

Ms. Smith’s final question is faulty, as well. It is based on a series of faulty ideas building on one another. As with a math equation, if you get one factor incorrect, the entire equation ends up with a wrong answer.

Her interpretation of “The Fall” is that God was inconsistent. If God gave man free will, then denied man the knowledge of good and evil, then when man obtained that knowledge, “THE FALL” was God’s failure.

Not so, at all! First, we just saw how God gave man full knowledge of good vs evil behavior, then clarified the consequences. So, who was responsible for the very first act of disobedience; the free choosing of evil? Was it God’s failure to be clear? It wasn’t for the lack of knowledge; it was Adam’s and Eve’s free choice to disobey God and follow Satan.

The term "Fall of Man" is not found in the scriptures. It is a theological expression for man’s transition from perfection to sin. Adam's and Eve's disobedience to God was the first human sin. They ruined human nature, passing on sin to every person born after them. The "fall" was when man, living in a perfect environment, chose evil over good. It was not man's intellectual knowledge of it, it was his decision to abandon good and follow evil.

I was in the Navy for 8 years. In every port city was thousands of opportunities to corrupt one’s life: bars, gambling, drugs, prostitution, etc. I could walk through those places KNOWING the difference between good and evil. Yet, it was my choices, my actions, my response to temptation, that made the difference. Same with Adam and Eve.

Note that other trees are mentioned:

**“The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Genesis 2: 9**

God had put many beneficial trees, as well as the tree of life in the garden. What kept them from eating from those? God only warned them away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could easily have eaten from the other trees and have been blessed. Why didn't they? Of the multitude of choices in that garden, why did they choose to disobey?

### **Why, Indeed!**

To answer that one, we have only to look at ourselves. After all, aren't we our parent's offspring? Didn't we inherit Adam's and Eve's sin nature? Let's look around and find out WHY they weren't all excited about the tree of life, and got busy, instead, with the forbidden tree.

When I became a Christian in the late 1970s, life revolved around the church. There was Sunday morning Sunday School and Worship service. There were Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. One night a week was choir practice, and another weeknight of either prayer meeting or a bible study. Once a month, we volunteered to knock on doors, or visit the sick or shut in. When families visited, we went to church together. When a football game was on, we went to church. If the kids' soccer matches were held on Sunday, we went to church. If there were errands to run or jobs to be done, we did them during the week. When Sunday came, it was God's Day.

Today, we can barely get folks to one meeting a week! Many Christians consider their once-weekly attendance to be the pinnacle of Christian growth. Since covid, a large number of Christians prefer to sit home and watch on TV or computer. Church attendance is at an all-time low...by choice.

Yes, there are professions that require hours on Sunday, and those are exempted (health care, emergency professionals, etc.) But, lives driven by job, school, and social schedules that interfere with one's walk with Christ may need evaluation.

What's our initial reaction to an invitation to get involved more than we already are? Talk with pastors and the answer is; "We just can't get folks to participate." What is getting in the way? Is it God honoring? Are Christians so busy studying their Bibles on their own, or witnessing that they have no time for this admonition?.....

**"And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10: 24**

It's a choice. God gave man free will; 'love God, or don't.' Man spends his time and resources as he pleases. Our original parents did it. We do it. Man pays the consequences for his actions. Yes, the Christian's sin is forgiven. The Christian then chooses how to live; honoring Jesus and growing in spiritual maturity, or NOT.

**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Matthew 6: 24**

**“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3: 2**

By the way, God DID forgive Adam and Eve for their sin. He slew an innocent animal and covered them with its skin. From that point on, a blood sacrifice was required for the faithful and repentant to be forgiven....right up to Jesus' crucifixion.

The original sin, though forgiven, caused curses to fall upon all of mankind and this earth. In the same way, our own sin causes problems in our families and personal lives.... even when it is forgiven. The earthly consequences are our earthly wages.

If my customer had to touch all the wet paint after being warned twice, the cost of fixing it was the consequence.

The life we live in Christ, now, is our choice. Adam and Eve knowingly chose to eat from a tree that God told them would lead to their death.

**“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6: 19-21**