

J. Quasten writes (*Patrology*, vol. 1, pp. 273-274):

In order to prove the worthlessness of the Old Testament Apelles composed a book entitled *The Syllogisms* which comprised at least thirty-eight books. Ambrose has preserved a large number of passages from this work in his treatise *De Paradiso*.

Saint Ambrose: Paradise (5.28 – 8.41)

(28) From this point on, the celestial precepts present no great difficulty. However, there has been raised by several authors a question which we ought to answer lest simple minds be led astray by erroneous interpretation. Many authors, like Apelles in his thirty-eighth volume, propose the following questions. How is it, for example, that the tree of life has more power for giving life than the breath of God? Again, if man is not made perfect by God and each person acquired by his own effort a more perfect state of virtue for himself, does it not seem that man would gain for himself more than God had bestowed on him? Then they make the objection that, if man had not tasted death, he certainly could not be aware of what he had not tasted. What man had not tasted was something unknown to him. Accordingly, he could not be afraid of that of which he had no knowledge. To no purpose, therefore, did God inflict death as a punishment on men for whom it holds no fear.

(29) We should be aware of the fact, therefore, that where God has planted a tree of life He has also planted a tree of life in the midst of Paradise. It is understood that He planted it in the middle. Therefore, in the middle of Paradise there was both a tree of life and a cause for death. Keep in mind that man did not create life. By carrying out and observing the precepts of God it was possible for man to find life. This was the life mentioned by the Apostle: Our life is hidden with Christ in God. Man, therefore, was, figuratively speaking, either in the shadow of life because our life on earth is but a shadow or man had life, as it were, in pledge, for he had been breathed on by God. He had, therefore, a pledge of immortality, but while in the shadow of life he was unable, by the usual channels of sense, to see and attain the hidden life of Christ with God. Although not yet a sinner, he was not possessed of an incorrupt and inviolable nature. Of course, one who afterwards lapsed into sin was far from being as yet in the category of sinner. Hence, he was in the shadow of life, whereas sinners are in the shadow of death. According to Isaias, the people who sinned sat in the shadow of death. For these a light arose, not by the merits of their virtues, but by the grace of God. There is no distinction, therefore, between the breath of God and the food of the tree of life. No man can say that he can acquire more by his own efforts than what is granted him by the generosity of God. Would that we had been able to hold on to what we had received! Our toils avail only to the extent that we take back again what was once conferred on us. The third objection, that one who has not tasted death cannot fear it, finds its solution in our common experience. There is an instinct innate in all living creatures which impels them to dread even what they have not yet experienced as harmful. Why is it that doves, even at the moment of their birth, are terrorized at the sight of a hawk? Why are wolves dreaded by sheep and hawks by chickens? In irrational animals there is a certain innate fear of creatures of a different species to the extent that, even though these animals are irrational, they have a feeling that death is something to be shunned. Such being the case, how true is it that the first man, fully and indubitably endowed with reason, should be conscious of the fact that death is something to be avoided!

Chapter 6

(30) There are some, again, who suggest for solution difficulties such as the following. For example, they maintain that refusal to obey an order is not always wrong. If the order is a good one, then the act of obeying is commendable. But if the order is a wicked one, it is not feasible to obey it. Therefore, it is not always wrong to disobey an order, but it is wrong to refuse to obey an order that is good. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a creation that is good, since God had knowledge of good and evil. Hence He says: "Indeed ! The man has become like one of us. If, therefore, possessing the knowledge of good and evil is good and if what God has is a good, it would appear that the prohibition to prevent man from making use of it is not a righteous one. Such is their argument. But, if they were to realize the real significance and force of the word 'knowledge as they should The Lord knew who belong to him/ 'that is, He knew those surely among whom He dwells and walks, who were made one out of so many then certainly these people would know that knowledge is not to be interpreted merely as superficial comprehension, but as the carrying out of what ought to be accomplished. Man ought to obey the command. A failure to obey is a violation of duty. The man, therefore, who disobeys falls into error because violation of duty is a sin. Even if these people should agree to a modified meaning of the word 'knowledge' and consider that an imperfect comprehension of good and evil was prohibited, in that respect, too, there is a violation of duty in not complying with the command. The Lord God has made it clear that even an imperfect comprehension of good and evil should be prohibited.

(31) Another problem: The man who does not know good and evil differs in no respect from a little child. A judge who is just does not consider a child to be guilty of crime. The just Creator of the world would never have found fault with a child for his lack of knowledge of good and evil, because a child cannot be charged with a violation of a law. In the preceding passage, however, we have said that, once you accept the fact that there is a knowledge that is imperfect, then knowledge of good and evil may be taken in two senses. It is certainly false to hold that the man who does not know good and evil is not different from a child. If it is wrong to maintain that such a man does not differ from a child, then Adam is not to be thought of as a child. If he was not a child, then surely he is liable to sin, inasmuch as he is not a child. If he is subject to sin, then punishment follows the sin, because the man who cannot avoid sin is reckoned to be liable to punishment. It can even happen that the person who has no knowledge of good and evil may not be a child: Tor before the child knew good and evil, he refused the evil/ Again we read: Tor before the child knew to call his father and mother, he will receive the strength of Damascus and the toils of Samaria. Perfect, therefore, is the man who performs a good deed even if he has not attained the knowledge of good and evil, just as many are a law to themselves' even before they know the Law. Was the Apostle before he learned: Thou shalt not lust, quite unaware that concupiscence was a sin? On this point he says: 'I did not know sin save through the Law. For I had not known lust unless the Law had said, 'Thou shalt not lust.'" Even a child can become by the law of nature perfect in that respect before he knows that concupiscence is a sin or admit the sin of concupiscence. Hence, God willed that man know the nature of evil in a superficial fashion lest, being imperfect, he may be unable to avoid evil. By not obeying a command we are subject to blame. We are thus led to admit our error. Again, if we are referring to a very profound knowledge of good and evil which in itself makes for perfection A little child is not, like a grown-up, immediately to be chastised, because he has not yet reached a capacity to understand.

(32) Again, more criticisms crop up. There is the objection that a person who does not know good and evil is unaware that disobedience to a command is in itself an evil, nor is he aware that that obedience to a command is itself a good. Hence it is argued that the person who is in this respect ignorant is deserving, not of condemnation, but of pardon. What we have already maintained above presents a ready solution to this problem, Man is capable of realizing that the utmost deference should be given to

his Maker because of what God had already conferred on him, namely, the fact that God had breathed on him and that he was placed in the Garden of Delight. Wherefore, if he was ignorant of the meaning of good and evil, nevertheless, since the Creator of such mighty things had declared that one should not eat of the tree of good and evil, loyal adherence should be given to Him who gave the command. It was not a question of technical knowledge, but of fidelity. He certainly was aware that God was in a position of preeminence and, as such, heed should be paid to His command. Although he did not understand the precise significance of the commands, he was conscious of the fact that deference should be paid to the person of the Commander. This conviction on his part stemmed from nature. He was as yet incapable of discriminating between good and evil. Wherefore the woman answers the serpent: 'Of the fruit of all the trees in the garden we shall eat, but of the fruit in the middle of the garden, God said, you shall not eat of it. She knew, therefore, that the command must be obeyed. Hence she said: We shall eat of every fruit which the Lord ordered, but God has given an order that one should not eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden, lest he die. Wherefore, she who knew that the command should be obeyed was surely aware that it was wrong not to comply with the command and that she would be justly condemned for her refusal to obey.

(33) One more point. The circumstances connected with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were such as to convince us that both good and evil were recognized. We are led to believe from the evidence of Scripture that such was the case: 'When they both ate, their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked,' that is, the eyes of their mind were opened and they realized the shame of being naked. For that reason, when the woman ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she certainly sinned and realized that she had sinned. On realizing this, she should not have invited her husband to share in her sin. By enticing him and by giving him what she herself had tasted she did not nullify her sin; rather, she repeated it. Certainly it stands to reason that she did intend to lure the person whom she loved to share in her punishment. She should be expected to ward off from one who was unaware of it the danger of falling into a sin of which she had knowledge, Yet this woman, knowing that she could not remain in Paradise after the Fall, seems to have had a fear that she alone would be ejected from the Garden. Hence, after the Fall, they both went into hiding. Being aware, therefore, that she would have to be separated from the man she loved, she had no desire to be deceived.

(34) Another point. Knowledge of evil does not make evil. An act is necessary to complete its conditions. There is no immediate connection between the knower of what is evil and the doer. He is guilty who does what he knows to be evil. Either anger or cupidity is the customary means of arousing a person to perform an evil act. It does not necessarily follow that one who has knowledge of evil, unless he is the victim of anger or cupidity, will do what he knows is wrong. To repeat what we have said, the incentives to sin are anger and cupidity. To these we may add extreme fear, which itself may give rise to cupidity, inasmuch as everyone is anxious to avoid what is the cause of his fear. With reason, therefore, have we established that the incentives to the other vices are anger and cupidity. Let us consider, then, whether Eve was aroused to wrong-doing by these incentives. She was not angry with her consort. She was not a victim of cupidity. Again, she merely erred in giving her husband to eat of what she had already tasted. Cupidity had been, at first responsible for her error in inducing him to eat and it was the occasion for the subsequent sin. This can be explained in the following way. She was unable to desire what she had already eaten and, after eating she acquired a knowledge of evil. She ought not, therefore, have made her husband a partaker of the evil of which she was conscious; neither should she have caused her own husband to violate the divine command. She sinned, therefore, with forethought, and knowingly made her husband a participant in her own wrong-doing. If it were not so, what is related of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would be found to be in error, if it were established that, after she ate of that tree, she was without knowledge of evil. But, if what Scripture

says is true, cupidity was the motive of her act. Many, however, are of the opinion that she should be excused for the reason that, because she loved her husband, she was afraid that she would be separated from him. They offer this as grounds for her cupidity: namely, that she desired to be with her husband.

Chapter 7

(35) Still another problem arises. From what source did death come to Adam? Was it from the nature of a tree of this sort or actually from God? If we ascribe this to the nature of the tree, then the fruit of this tree seems to be superior to the vivifying power of the breath of God, since its fruit had drawn into death's toils him on whom the divine breath had bestowed life. If we maintain that God is the responsible cause of death, then we can be held to accuse Him of inconsistency. We seem to accuse Him of being so devoid of beneficence as to be unwilling to pardon when He had the power to do so, or of being powerless if He was unable to forgive. Let us see, therefore, how this question can be resolved. The solution, unless I am mistaken, lies in the fact that, since disobedience was the cause of death, for that very reason, not God, but man himself, was the agent of his own death. If, for example, a physician were to prescribe to a patient what he thought should be avoided, and if the patient felt that these prohibitions were unnecessary, the physician is not responsible for the patient's death. Surely in that case the patient is guilty of causing his own death. Hence, God as a good physician forbade Adam to eat what would be injurious to him,

(36) Another point. To know what is good is better than to be ignorant of it. It is fitting that a person who knows what is good know, also, what is evil, in order that he may know the means to avoid it and, by taking the necessary precautions, that he may act with discretion. Again, it is not sufficient to know merely what is evil, lest, although you know what is evil, you may find yourself deprived of what is good. It is best, therefore, that we know both so that, since we know what is good, we may avoid evil. Again, from the fact that we are aware of evil we may give our preference to the charm of what is good. Moreover, we ought to know both so that our knowledge may be profound and so that we may put in practice what we know, act and acknowledge to be in perfect balance. Besides, Scripture points out that more is expected of him who has general knowledge of both than of him who is ignorant of them. Knowledge of what you cannot achieve or avoid is a grievous thing. Grievous, too, is knowledge which is not put into practice and into operation to its fullest extent. Without knowledge of what is harmful or beneficial to a patient and without the power of being able to utilize to the best advantage that knowledge, a physician is likely to act in such a way as to lose his reputation. Hence, knowledge is not salutary unless it is put into practice in the best possible way.

(37) Still another point. Not without reason was the tree of knowledge of good and evil grown in the middle of the Garden, and the prohibition against it was unnecessary if it was grown for each and every man. This tree was designed for the use of just one man, who received the command that he make use not only of that tree, but of the other trees besides. You can find many, even countless, instances in which a person can, because of ignorance of procedure, suffer real harm. Wealth itself will be found to be unprofitable to a rich man if he refuses to act in a generous fashion toward the poor. He may shut out the needy and deprive them of assistance and, because of his superior powers, he may extort for his own purpose what belongs to another. The very possession of beauty and of physical charm is more likely than deformity to lead one to vice. For that reason, therefore, does anyone desire to have children who are unsightly rather than handsome? Or desire their offspring to be poverty-stricken rather than well-to-do? There are many instances of this sort which are not to be ascribed to the lack of wisdom in the giver, but to the person who misuses the gifts. The fault lies not so much in the person who makes the gifts as in the person who makes use of them.

Chapter 8

(38) Another problem. Did God know that Adam would violate His commands? Or was He unaware of it? If He did not know, we are faced with a limitation of His divine power. If He knew, yet gave a command which He was aware would be ignored, it is not God's providence to give an unnecessary order. It was in the nature of a superfluous act to give to Adam, the first created being, a command which He knew would not at all be observed. But God does nothing superfluous. Therefore, the words of Scripture do not come from God. This is the objection of those who do not, by interposing these questions, admit the authenticity of the Old Testament. But these people are to be condemned out of their own mouths. Since these same persons concede the authenticity of the New Testament, they must be convinced by evidence to believe in the Old. If they see that God is consistent in His commands and in His deeds, it is clear that they must concede that both Testaments are the work of one Author. The following example should convince them that a command to one who will disobey is not something superfluous or unjust. The Lord Himself chose Judas, one who, He knew, would betray Him. If these men think that he was chosen unwisely, they restrict the power of God. But they cannot hold this opinion, since Scripture declares: For Jesus knew who it was who should betray him. These defamers of the Old Testament should therefore hold their peace.

(39) Possible objections on the part of the Gentiles who do not admit this evidence stand in need of a response. Since the Gentiles demand a rational explanation, here is the reason why the Son of God either gave a command to one who is going to disobey it or has chosen one who is going to betray Him. The Lord Jesus came to save all sinners. He was bound to show concern even for the wicked. Accordingly, He was bound not to disregard one who was to betray Him. He wished that all might take note that in the choice even of His betrayer He was offering a sign for the salvation of all of us. No injury was done to Adam in that he received a command, or to Judas because he was chosen. God did not lay it down as a necessary consequence that one should disobey and the other should betray Him. Both could have abstained from sin if they had guarded what they had received. Hence, although He knew that all the Jews would not believe, He stated: 'I have not come except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel/ The fault is, therefore, not in the one issuing the command; the sin is rather in the one who disobeys. God's intent was this: He wanted to show to everyone that He willed to give freedom to all mankind. I do not mean to maintain that He did not know of the disobedience to come. Rather, I contend that He did know, but that He should not for that reason be subject to reproach for a betrayer who met death. God should not be accused of being the cause why both lapsed. In fact, both stand convicted and condemned, because one received a command not to fall into sin, and the other was enrolled among the Apostles in order that he, as the result of kindness, might change his intention to betray. At some time in the future when the other Apostles would be found wanting, he might well become a source of comfort to all. In effect, there would not exist any sin if there were no prohibition. Without the existence of sin there would be no such thing as wrong-doing or, perhaps, even virtue, which could not have any cause for existence or for pre-eminence without the aid of unrighteousness to offset it. What is sin, if not the violation of divine law and the disobedience to heavenly precepts? Not by the ear, but by the mind, do we form a judgment regarding injunction from above. But with the Word of God before us we are able to formulate opinions on what is good and what is evil. One of these we naturally understand should be, as evil, avoided, and the other we understand has been recommended to us as a good. In this respect we seem to be listening to the very voice of the Lord, whereby some things are forbidden and other things are advised. If a person does not comply with the injunctions which are believed to have been once ordained by God, he is considered to be liable to punishment. The commands of God are impressed in our hearts by the Spirit of the living God. We do not read these orders as if they were recorded in ink on a tablet of stone, Hence, in our own thought we formulate a law: For if the Gentiles who have no law do by nature what the law prescribes, those

having no law of this kind are a law unto themselves. They show the work of the law written in their hearts. There is something, therefore, like the Law of God which exists in the hearts of men.

(40) These same people raise another objection. Instead of that command which we said was established in the mind of man, they would maintain that this very impression in our minds by God was itself the prescription of a divine law. The question is raised: Did the Creator of man know that man would fall into sin and so implanted those opinions of what is good and evil in the mind of man or was He unaware that this would happen? If you concede that He did not know of it, you attribute to God something alien to His majesty. If, on the other hand, you maintain that, although God was aware that man would sin, He impressed in man's mind a realization of what is good and evil, so that he would be unable, because of the admixture of evil, to live forever then in one case you imply that God was not prescient and in the other that He was not beneficent. From this the conclusion is reached that man was not the creation of God. We have already stated that these men maintain that God had not imposed a command. Now they say that man was not created by God, because God did not create evil. Man, on the other hand, had a mental conception of evil, inasmuch as he was enjoined to abstain from evil. In this way they venture to assert that there were two gods: one who is good; the other, the Creator of man. We must follow the lines of their own logic in formulating our reply. If they hold that man was not made by God, because man is a sinner, and if they recoil from conceding this point, lest a good God may not seem to the creator of sinners (because they do not believe that God is good who made a sinner) then let them declare whether this artificer of man has in their opinion also been made by God? If, as they state, this artificer of man was created by God, how can it be possible that a God who is good is also the agent of evil? If the creator of a sinner is not good, then more serious implications result if we postulate the maker of him who is the artificer of a sinner. A God who is good is bound to prevent the birth of him who shall have to introduce the substance of sin. But if they maintain that this artificer was not created, than the problem arises as to whether a God who is good could or could not in any way prevent the growth of evil. If such a God cannot do this, then He is powerless. Inasmuch as such inconsistencies follow our line of argumentation and since the heretics get involved here, also, let us attempt a solution of the problem of why God allowed adversity to enter into this world through an artificer who either did or did not spring from Him, although He had the power to prevent it.

(41) Accordingly, while still holding that the God who is good and the one who is the artificer are one and the same, let us make clear what are the provinces of each. We should at the same time try to meet the objections of those who raise such a question as this: How is it possible that a God who is good has permitted not only adversity to enter this world but has allowed it, too, to be in such a state of disorder? In truth, this objection would be valid only if this evil so affected the nature of our soul and the secret places of our hearts that riddance was impossible and if, again, this poison had left such deep wounds in our hearts and souls that medication was of no avail. In fact, this grievance of theirs could be more aptly expressed by stating that, although God is omnipotent, He has permitted man to die. But since God in His pity has reserved for us the means of obtaining remedy for our sins and still has not rid us of all possibilities of contagion, then let us reflect on the following points. Would it be an unjust and unreasonable act if God, fearful, as it were, of man's frailty and mortality, permitted us to be tempted in such wise that, through penitence for our sins, grace compounded would return once more to our hearts? Again, would it be unjust if man, conscious and fearful of his own frailty (since he found that he could so easily deviate from the orderly path of divine commands) and fearful, too, lest he let loose these heavenly mandates which like a helm guide his soul would it be unjust if man should finally attribute the recovery of the helm to divine pity and by his safe return acquire some grace as well?