

Nine Paradoxes of Moral Agency Derived from “There is no other way”

Unraveled by C.S. Lewis and His Compelling Case for “Oh yes, there was...”

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The doctrine of the Fall in Eden as taught among the LDS people goes something like this: God intended for our first parents to disobey him because that was the only way for them to truly stretch their wings, be able to grow and become like God through the challenges and vicissitudes of mortality, and in fact to express their agency. Perhaps if our parents were always dependent upon God through total obedience, then true moral agency could never have been made manifest, and true joy would have always been elusive; thus we are settled that there was no other way. Further, our doctrine contends, mortality was essential for the fertility that enables the begetting and bringing forth of progeny. Therefore, even though God verbally commanded one thing, He gave (or Eve deduced) divine insight through Lucifer that disobedience was God’s true intent and was the best and only way.¹

The Oxford online definition of paradox is a useful starting point to examine how this one doctrine, among all of LDS theology, has us promoting and rationalizing disobedience to God and disbelieving His words, in favor of justifying Lucifer’s words spoken in the temple:

Paradox: “A statement or proposition that, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems senseless, logically unacceptable, or self-contradictory.”

I suggest that the greatest purpose of the pre-endowment (a name I’m applying to the contextual dramatization of the creation and the Fall, not including and prior to the sacred temple endowment ordinance) is to present to us the test of moral agency just as it was given to our first parents. However, I also suggest that this perspective is largely lost or misunderstood based on the way we mistakenly articulate Adam’s and Eve’s transgressions as the will of God.

My thesis is that the test our parents faced in the garden—a tree representing freedom and life versus an opposing one representing captivity and death— is the same test each of us faces today (2 Ne 2:27). The pre-endowment clearly illustrates that Adam and Eve each had the *full capacity for moral agency—entirely active*—when they first faced the deceiver. Adam used that agency to decline temptation and walk away. Eve also immediately recognized intent worthy of skepticism and scrutiny on the part of the one claiming to be her brother.

Taking God’s words at face value, the scriptures and the temple factually show that *both* of our parents betrayed the explicitly stated will of God, incurring His wrath. *Both* of our parents sinned, seeking wisdom from the father of lies and preferentially obeying his commandments *three and four times each*. *Both* rationalized their actions. Then *both* repented and showed us—their children—how to come back to the fullness of Joy through the foreordained—yet contingent— mediation and rescue by our Savior.

So the re-enactment of that scene for us in the temple is no longer for the purpose of justifying, but instead for continual testing: whom will *I* choose to believe? Whom will *I* follow and obey?

My agenda is to promote the cultural acceptability of speaking openly of Lucifer's lies—made to us in the temple—in the firm confidence in our people that we will individually and collectively recognize the lies for what they really represent, and thus place ourselves in a position to receive great and long-promised blessings from the one true God.

Instead in our tradition, by continuing to believe the face value statements of Lucifer and Eve in the Temple, Eve in Moses 5:11 and Lehi in 2Ne 2:22-25 (all in preference to believing God), objective logic leads to the following self-contradictory, senseless and logically unacceptable conclusions:

Brief overview of the paradoxes of moral agency Resulting from the LDS tradition of the Fall

1) Lucifer is trustworthy and Father is not

2) Garden infertility paradox: Disobedience enables mortality which enables fertility, or otherwise: a blessing is predicated upon *disobedience* — an irrevocably decreed law in heaven is revocable *in this one isolated instance among all time*.

3) The Plan of Salvation is the Plan of Happiness:

By assuming that the Fall was God's will—by assuming God's plan for happiness always required the atonement in order for exaltation to be accomplished—it is an easy step to hold the Plan of Salvation to be synonymous with the Great Plan of Happiness. But the paradox arises in the plain observation that what humanity is experiencing is not, actually, *happiness*. This world is ruled² by a god of chaos, whose scepter is blood and horror.

4) Adam fell that men might have Joy: In Lehi's 2 Nephi 2:25, *Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy*, we have two separate (and individually, *apparently* true) thoughts that are easily conflated as part of the traditional LDS interpretation to mean: *Adam fell that men might have joy*. Is this phrase also true?

5) The paradox of moral agency: one choice or two?

In current teaching, agency is only triggered by the making of a disobedient choice. *Is it really agency if there is no other way?*

6) Paradox of principles: God-like and God-derived eternal principals are timeless and unchanging, independent of events, circumstances, opinions or cultural mores. Eternal principles are unchanging like the fundamental nature of God Himself, who speaks and it is so. God is full of light, integrity and truth.

But all things are temporarily upside-down³ in the Garden of Eden as we interpret those events through the twisted mind of Lucifer: joy through suffering, privation and misery; righteousness through sin; innocence is bad, sorrow and death are good; God is manipulative of Lucifer,

duplicitous to His children, and arbitrary in His punishments; Lucifer tells the truth, accomplishes God’s secret plan and is severely punished for it. Eve has the courage and insight to do what Adam was unwilling or unable to do—is the heroine of agency and fertility—yet she is placed subordinate to Adam and her sorrow is greatly multiplied.

+1 Do I believe God or believe the prophets? This discussion is so obviously contrary to the words of the living prophets!

+2 Who’s behind the tormentor’s mask? Did Father do those horrible things to His own son in Gethsemane, in the likeness of Abraham/Isaac?

+3 The holy Temple is not only the sacred House of the Lord, but is also the secret refuge of Lucifer, where he recites his most favorite and most effective false doctrines over and over without rebuttal.

Detail of the 6 paradoxes of moral agency in the LDS tradition of the Fall Plus 3 that follow directly therefrom

1) Lucifer is trustworthy and Father is not

And I, the Lord God, took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden, to dress it, and to keep it. And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Moses 3:15-17)

God’s commandment to not partake of that specific fruit was spoken in plainness and clarity: “*Thou shalt not eat of it;*”⁴ “*I forbid it.*” Yet, this command is utterly disregarded in our LDS doctrine of the Fall, as a commandment. Instead, it is often ignored or explained away as something God never intended them to obey in the first place.⁵ Disobedience to this commandment is not considered a full-blown sin⁶ but rather a misdemeanor⁷ transgression. We go so far as to rationalize how this commandment was designed and decreed⁸ by God to be disobeyed and then relate how pleased⁹ He was that they did so.

Lucifer’s temptations concerning the requirement to disobey God’s commands, on the other hand, have penetrated every corner of our fundamental doctrines. We take him at his word and not only consider his words as true *because they are spoken in the temple*, but also hold them with such reverence as to keep them secret by strict cultural taboo.

Lucifer’s doctrines cannot be held either secret or sacred for two reasons: first, they are critically important in how we interpret the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden; and second, because it is prophesied that Lucifer’s pretended lordship inside the temple must be revealed, his dark works must be shouted upon the housetops and his lies spoken openly before important events can occur in our lives.

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; *Who opposeth and**

exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (2 Thes. 2:3-4)

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? (Isaiah 29:15-16)

“Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops” (Luke 12:3)

And the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed. (D&C 1:3)

Let’s bring some of Lucifer’s lies into the light of day, and see whether they wilt:

You must partake of this fruit. For that is the way father obtained his knowledge.¹⁰

For LDS people and other Christians, it is extremely important to know that Jesus was ever perfect, unblemished; the innocent and spotless lamb worthy to be offered in sacrifice during the Atonement. The Lectures on Faith¹¹ make it similarly important to understand that Jesus’ Holy Father was always similarly unblemished, being ever righteous from all eternity to all eternity. Just as an unchanging God cannot have suffering turn to rashness, nor love to hatred, nor mercy to cruelty; so it is also true that the unchanging nature of God never experienced cruelty turning to mercy, hatred to love, etc., even if through the actions of *another* savior. We can be confident that “what He was yesterday” in terms of righteousness and of His fundamental character, “he is today, and will be forever.” Neither Father nor Son ever committed betrayal by submitting their will to an adversary. The definitive, conclusive testimony is given us by Jesus himself, with respect to the nature of His Father, in John 5:19-20. Here Jesus clarifies how it is precisely *because* of the Father’s example of perfection that He Himself is able to be likewise perfect:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

Here are two more of Lucifer’s lies that we will explore in greater detail, below.

I want you to take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that your eyes may be opened. You must partake of this fruit in order to comprehend that everything has its opposite: good and evil, virtue and vice, light and darkness, health and sickness, pleasure and pain.¹²

There is no other way!¹³

My hope in beginning this conversation is to ultimately show that *God is trustworthy and Lucifer is not!* The eternally unchanging, righteous character of God should be held inviolate.¹⁴ On the other hand, Lucifer is not to be trusted and his lies ought to be met and challenged. If we lack the courage to discuss his words openly, we concede and allow *by default* his word to stand true.

C.S. Lewis weighs in:

Given that our own experiences are so limited, we often persist in thinking that what is, is what always must be meant to have been. Lewis enlarges our imaginations by fictionalizing an Eden-like temptation scene on another planet, in which an onslaught of temptations is entirely resisted and no fall occurs. In fact, C.S. Lewis's little known space trilogy – "Out of the Silent World," "Perelandra," and "That Hideous Strength" – presents an allegorical look at the Fall and God's purposes here on earth, including an alternate glimpse at mature, unfallen societies.¹⁵ Although not scripture, I believe Lewis's perspective offers an insightful view helping to unravel the paradoxes discussed in this paper. I choose to include his voice, through these characters, as another respected viewpoint in this discussion.

The principal characters and terms, from these books, that I will be referencing are as follows:

Professor Ransom - a Cambridge linguist, visiting the mature, unfallen societies on one planet, and later acting as the Lord's instrument ("called" in our jargon, to the Lord's work) in the world named Perelandra.

Weston – willfully gave his body to be possessed by the devil. Also called the "Un-man".

Maleldil –the one who commanded— the God of all creation, and the Savior of our earth.

The first "Lady" of Perelandra — an Eve-like figure.

The "King" — Adam of Perelandra, but he is absent during the temptation of the Lady.

"Do not inhabit the fixed island" – comparable to the command against the forbidden fruit.

To become "old" is to obtain wisdom and understanding.

Weston's (Lucifer's) voice to the isolated Lady beginning p. 115:

Have you understood that to wait for Maleldil's voice when Maleldil wishes you to walk on your own is a kind of disobedience?

I think I have.

The wrong kind of obeying itself can be disobeying.

The lady thought for a few moments and then clapped her hands. "I see!" She said, "I see! Oh, how old you make me. Before now I have chased a beast for mirth and it has understood and run away from me. If it had stood still and let me catch it, that would have been a sort of obeying-but not the best sort."

You understand very well. When you're fully grown you will be even wiser and more beautiful than the women of my own world. And you will see that it might be so with Maleldil's biddings.

I think I do not see quite clearly.

Are you certain that he really wishes to be always obeyed?

How can we not obey what we love?

The beast that ran away loved you.

"I wonder," said the lady, "if that is the same. The beast knows very well when I mean to run away and when I want it to come to me. But Maleldil has never said to us that any word or work of his was a jest. How could our Beloved need to jest or frolic as we do? He is all a burning joy and a strength. It is like thinking that he needed sleep or food."

No, it would not be a jest. That is only a thing like it. Not the thing itself. But could the taking away of your hand from his—the full growing up—the walking in your own way—could that ever be perfect unless you had, if only once, seemed to disobey him?

How could one seem to disobey?

By doing what he only seemed to forbid. There might be a commanding which he wished you to break.

But if He told us we were to break it, then it would be no command. And if He did not, how should we know?

How wise you are growing, beautiful one, said Weston's mouth. No, if he had told you to break what he commanded it would be no true command, as you have seen for you are right, he makes no jest. A real disobeying, a real branching out, this is what he secretly longs for: secretly because to tell you would spoil all.

I begin to wonder, said the lady after a pause, whether you are so much older than I. Surely what you're saying is like fruit with no taste! How can I step out of His will save into something that cannot be wished? Shall I start trying not to love Him—or the King—or the beasts? It would be like trying to walk on water or swim through islands. Shall I try not to sleep or to drink or to laugh? I thought your words had a meaning. But now it seems they have none. To walk out of his will is to walk into nowhere.

That is true of all his commands except one.

But can that one be different?

You see for yourself that it is different. These other commands of his—to love, to sleep, to fill this world with your children—you see for yourself that they are good and they are the same in all worlds. But the command against living on the fixed island is not so. You have already learned that he gave no such command to my world. And you cannot see the goodness of it. And you cannot see where the goodness of it is. No wonder. If it were really good, must He not have commanded it to all worlds alike? For how could Maleldil not

command what was good? There is no good in it. Maleldil is showing you that, this moment, through your own reason. It is mere command. It is forbidding for the mere sake of forbidding.

But why...?

In order that you may break it. What other reason can there be? It is not good. It is not the same for other worlds. It stands between you and all settled life, all command of your own days. Is not Maleldil showing you as plainly as he can that it was set up as a test—as a great wave you have to go over that you may become really old, really separate from him.

But if this concerns me so deeply, why does he put none of this into my mind? It is all coming from you, stranger. There is no whisper, even, of the Voice saying yes to your words.

But do you not see that there cannot be? He longs—oh, how greatly he longs—to see his creature become fully itself, to stand up in its own reason and its own courage even against him. But how can he tell it to do this? That would spoil all. Whatever it did after that would only be one more step taken with him. This is the one thing of all things he desires in which He must have no finger. Do you think he is not weary of seeing nothing but himself in all that he has made? If that contented him, why should he create at all? To find the other—the thing whose will is no longer his—that is Maleldil's desire.

If I could but know this—

He must not tell you. He cannot tell you. The nearest to that he can come to telling you is to let some other creature tell it for him. And behold, he has done so. Is it for nothing or without his will, that I have journeyed through Deep Heaven to teach you what he would have you know but must not teach you himself?

"Lady," said Ransom, "if I speak will you hear me?"

This man has said that the law against living on the fixed island is different from the other laws, because it is not the same for all worlds and because we cannot see the goodness in it. And so far he says well. But then he says that it is thus different in order that you may disobey it. But there might be another reason.

I think he made one law of that kind in order that there might be obedience. In all these other matters what you call obeying him, is but doing what seems good in your own eyes also. Is love content with that? You do them, indeed, because they are his will, but not only because they are his will. Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless he bids you do something for which His bidding is the only reason? When we spoke last you said that if you told the beasts to walk on their heads, they would delight to do so. So I know that you understand what I am saying.

Lady: Oh how well I see it! We cannot walk out of Maleldil's will: but he has given us a way to walk out of our will. And there could be no such way except a command like this. Out of

our own will. It is like passing out through the world's roof into Deep Heaven. All beyond is love himself. I knew there was joy in looking upon the fixed island and laying down all thought of ever living there, but I did not till now understand.

2) Garden infertility paradox: Disobedience enables mortality, which enables fertility; in other words, a blessing is predicated upon disobedience — an irrevocably decreed law in heaven is revocable *in this one isolated instance among all time.*¹⁶

In the beginning, God promised Adam and Eve joy and rejoicing in their posterity. Was disobedience the only way to get there? Was God *unable* to keep His promise without our parents being disobedient? Did He need or *intend* for them to fall? Did He *design* for their fall? Was He *pleased* with the outcome? Was it “fortunate” for us in any way?

In the pre-endowment, the Father tells the Son, “*If they choose to partake of the fruit, then we will provide a savior for them.*” Although this is clearly a one-way conditional statement, it has led many to speculate and theorize all the bad that might have transpired if our parents had chosen not to be disobedient.¹⁷

We must begin with faith in God and total distrust of Satan. God had the means to realize every promise He gave in the Garden of Eden (1 Nephi 3:7). If not, then He is not a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. If not, He indeed varies from that which He has said.¹⁸

All rationalizations to the contrary rely on the hypothetical *what might have been*. This paradoxical thesis is the single lingering remnant—in fact the original *basis*— of the now-debunked, false Adam-God doctrine,¹⁹ that the fruit of mortality was essential to beget progeny, *even for a god*. The foundation for our Fall doctrine rests with the *suppositions* (2 Ne 2:17) of Lehi after he had studied the brass plates (1 Ne 5:11) and read the objective record of statements from *beguiled* Eve (Moses 5:11). These suppositions are manifest as the speculative rationalizing highlighted below:

2 Ne 2:22,23 And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.

Moses 5:11 (along with Eve’s statement to her husband that we hear recited in the temple, *it is better to pass through sorrow that we may know the good from the evil*) and Father Lehi’s 2 Ne 2:22-23 are commonly cited as the modern revelation informing us as to the true *reason*²⁰ for the Fall: to enable the bearing of children, because, we are told, it is better this way, and if not for these actions, we never should have had seed. D&C 93:24-25 gives us the divinely ordained test of truth we can use to judge what is truth and what is not, including whether Eve’s statements are true, as well as Lehi’s adaptation of those same statements. In both cases, the scripture tells us, the origin is the father of lies:

And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.

Both in the case of Eve's not-yet-repentant rationalizations²¹ and Lehi's suppositions while reading those statements, we find that the hypothetical (what *might* have been different), the speculative/conjectural (what *would* have been different), and the rationalizing (why sin is good or better for *any* reason), each fall well outside the scope of truth: what was, what is, and what is to come. Again, the truth test clearly identifies the source of the falsehoods as the father of lies: he who was a liar *from the beginning*.²²

So if we accept the D&C 93 revelation at face value, then it comes to us to trace the following origins, that, yes, Eve's source was indeed the father of lies, and that she properly used the word "beguiled" to describe his effect on her. She claims no revelation, and we are not singling her out when we say that none is merited.²³ Adam's response in Moses 5:10 is full of the joy of the Holy Ghost witnessing to his hope for redemption, as with Eve, his statement contains a residual element of rationalizing.²⁴

As for Father Lehi, we observe that he anxiously pored over the five books of Moses contained in the brass plates of Laban, including Eve's account just mentioned (1 Ne 5:11). After a wonderful and insightful sermon on the nature of opposition and agency, he attempts to forcibly wedge Eve's paradoxical account into his thought framework. Like Eve, Lehi makes no claim upon revelation or inspiration here as he understandably manifests the natural tendency to strictly believe Mother's words. The word he uses is "suppose" (2Ne 2:17).

This garden infertility paradox is never again manifest in any of the standard works. It is not even picked up by the son to whom Lehi's sermon was directed, nor by the son who faithfully recorded it. Both Jacob and Nephi independently interpreted the fall as being *caused not by any perceived need or intent on the part of the Father, but strictly as a manifestation of the agency of our parents*.²⁵

It is notable that the prophets do not lay the Fall at the feet of Eve, but of Adam. Neither do I point the finger of blame to her. The purpose of this activity is not to understand blame, but to understand the origin of Lucifer's lies that have twisted all the events of the garden in order to malign the one true God and to captivate us with delusions. Shall we choose to interpret both Eve's and Lehi's statements as aberrations — false foundations traced directly to Lucifer's lies? Shall disciples of Christ build important doctrines on these deceptive foundations that go to the core nature of God, the nature of moral agency, and indeed to the Atonement itself?

C.S. Lewis weighs in:

In The Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis seems to have written an entire storyline²⁶ with the intent to convey the importance of a single thought that might come to the rest of us as an *Aha!* moment of recognition: *oh, you mean we are living in Plan-B?* In the story, Lucy had knowingly turned away from Aslan the Lion when he had previously beckoned to her and when she had the opportunity to follow him.²⁷ Now times are dire, and she (finally) actively seeks him on behalf of her siblings and for all of Narnia. He has come to her in this time of great need and gently

chastises her for having ignored him previously. Lewis' inspired creator-figure Aslan speaks to Eve and to *us* through the character Lucy, on the hopeless nature of backward-looking hypothetical conjecture (emphasis in original) as:

“You mean,” said Lucy rather faintly “that it would have turned out all right— somehow? But how? Please Aslan, am I not to know?”

“To know what *would have happened*, child?” said Aslan. “No, nobody is ever told that. But anyone can find out what *will* happen.”

3) The Plan of Salvation is the Plan of Happiness:

2 Ne 2:24 *But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.*

By assuming that the Fall was God's will, we assume that God's plan for happiness *always*— independent of actions of agency—required the Atonement in order for exaltation to be accomplished. We therefore falsely conclude that the Fall was necessary in God's design to create the *need* for the Atonement. Such is the basis to hold the Plan of Salvation to be synonymous with the Great Plan of Happiness.²⁸ But the paradox arises in the plain observation that what we are experiencing as humanity is not, actually, *happiness*: this earth is ruled by a god of chaos, with a scepter of blood and horror. Jesus refers to him as the thief who came to steal and destroy. Shall we instead claim that this world of suffering and sorrow is what God intended for us because Lucifer tells us so inside the temple? Currently on our earth, only 0.2-0.3% of her population²⁹ has any hope of attaining the Fullness of Joy while in, or as a result of, their mortal probation. Great suffering and tribulation occur all over the earth, among peoples who should rightly mock us when we tell them that this is the designed path to Joy. What is the true nature of a god who would design a *primary* plan called happiness with the brutal torture and horrifying murder of an innocent divine being—his own son—as the primary and in fact *only* way?

I propose, rather, that the plan we are experiencing is appropriately named “the Plan of Salvation” – a contingency Plan-B involving high-stakes rescue – and that we have little understanding of the blessings of the Plan-A we chose to forfeit!

The Plan of Happiness is all about Joy — about sharing in the same divine satisfaction and peace that God enjoys because we have chosen to become like him. This is exaltation resulting from righteous moral agency.³⁰ Salvation is required as a detour *because* of the fall of our first parents, who instead *chose* to become like Lucifer by preferentially believing him and following his commandments. We *chose* to become carnal, sensual, devilish and an enemy to God. We *chose* to be disembodied like Lucifer. We *chose* to give away our agency and so to lose our capacity to feel, sense, experience, and act³¹ through the divine gift that is a body.

The rich language of the prophets surrounding the Plan of Salvation is full of loss, predicament contingency, and our utter inability to help ourselves in any way: *snatch, rescue, ransom, probation, redeem, save, recover, restore and grace*. I suggest it is worse than folly— it is blasphemy—to suppose that Father pushed³² us into the very pit that we must be rescued from.

But we need not speculate at all about the intentions of Father prior to the Fall, nor *suppose* His reaction to it. These are all made clear to us in the scriptures, as a primary source reference. Indeed, a grander vision of Plan-A and a sorrowful understanding of Father's perspective on his children's use of their agency is profoundly validated by Enoch's account of his vision of the eternities and his witness of Father as conveyed in Moses 7:29-34:

And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; And thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep? The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency; And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood; And the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them.

In summary, Lehi's v.24 statement should not be taken to mean that everything that happens is according to God's will. The Plan is about agency, not about a micromanaging God. God's will is, in fact, humanity's righteous use of agency. But agency means that God *cannot intervene*, even at the risk of letting us misuse that same gift to our own utter destruction: Enoch observes God weeping and cannot understand why, given that everything Enoch has seen has been a picture of joy fully realized. The vision clearly showed "naught but justice, truth and peace" extending to the very throne of God, from all the millions of other worlds of creation's vast portfolio. Why then does Father weep? Because of how agency was abused, *here*, on this earth: Father had commanded our parents to choose Him (rather than the one who had made himself an enemy); but instead, now our earth not only lacks compassion, but is filled with hatred. The newspapers bear out this simple fact each day. The deep sorrow, fierce anger and indignation Enoch witnessed is consistent with what the Lord tells us in modern revelation regarding our first parents' and our own misuse of the favored gifts of agency bestowed by the hand of the divine, per D&C 59:20,21 (emphasis added):³³

And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion. And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.

In reading Elder Tad Callister's The Infinite Atonement (Deseret Book, 2000) I ran headlong into the paradoxes on p.13, and realized that here, yet again, was another one: the false notion that salvation is equivalent to exaltation. (The paradoxical corollary to the equivalency of the plans of salvation and happiness.) Grace is to salvation what discipleship is to exaltation. One is

entirely free; the other is defined and determined by our effort. One cannot be obtained through any effort of our own, beyond the willful and committed grasping of His outstretched rescuing hand; the other cannot be managed at all without our willingness to *be* His helping hands. One is full of faith, repentance and baptism; the other is the post-baptism pure effort of *discipleship* including the active descriptors of work, service, consecration, “doers of the word”, priesthood, pressing forward with a steadfastness in Christ, enduring, covenant making and keeping.

With this paradoxical assignment of equivalency, we unnecessarily separate ourselves from the rest of Christendom with a false precept that leaves our Christian brothers and sisters scratching their heads over our strange doctrine, and wondering why we consider ourselves Christian at all.

Elder Callister does acknowledge some of the paradox in the traditional LDS view of the Fall in his Chapter 5, *The Fall of Adam*. But I am convinced more than ever that we as a people need to ask the hard questions about what Lucifer tells us in the temple so that we can understand the true nature of moral agency, the truth of events in the garden, the true (desperate) condition of fallen humanity, and the need for redemption. Then and only then will we truly understand what our Lord did for us in the Atonement.

C.S. Lewis weighs in: Perelandra, p. 142, an introspective Ransom:

What was the sense of so arranging things that anything really important should finally and absolutely depend on such a man of straw as himself? And at that moment, far away on Earth, as he now could not help remembering, men were at war, and white-faced subalterns and freckled corporals who had but lately begun to shave, stood in horrible gaps or crawled forward in deadly darkness, awaking, like him, to the preposterous truth that all really depended on their actions; and far away in time Horatius stood on the bridge, and Constantine settled in his mind whether he would or would not embrace the new religion, and Eve herself stood looking upon the forbidden fruit and the Heaven of Heavens waited for her decision. He writhed and ground his teeth, but could not help seeing. Thus, and not otherwise, the world was made. Either something or nothing must depend on individual choices. And if something, who could set bounds to it? A stone may determine the course of a river. He was that stone at this horrible moment which had become the centre of the whole universe. The eldila of all worlds, the sinless organisms of everlasting light, were silent in Deep Heaven to see what Elwin Ransom of Cambridge would do.

4) Adam fell that men might have Joy: In Lehi's 2 Nephi 2:25: *Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy*, we have two separate (and individually, *apparently true*) thoughts that are easily conflated as part of the traditional LDS interpretation to mean: *Adam fell that men might have joy*. Is this phrase also true?

From the temple we understand that Adam partook of the forbidden fruit only because his wife had already done so, and both knew she was going to be cast out leaving him a lone man, unable to procreate *by himself*.³⁴ So the phrase *Adam fell that men might be* accurately reflects Adam's perspective and reasoning when he chose to partake.³⁵ In that sense it is a stand-alone true statement of Adam's mind. Is it also a true statement of the mind of God? That is a choice each of us has to make to fundamentally reconcile the paradox!

“...And men are that they might have joy” is an intuitive, stand-alone truth validated by other primary source scripture (e.g., D&C 93:33). But to conflate the two separate ideas into an illogical³⁶ connection such as to suggest that *Adam fell that men might have joy* is itself paradoxical because it is directly contradicted by Enoch speaking the words of God in Moses 6. Note here the similar construction of the thought in verses 48,49, with Lehi’s statement, to make the two approaches directly comparable, though with incompatible and opposite outcomes:

And he said unto them: Because that Adam fell, we are; and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe. Behold Satan hath come among the children of men, and tempteth them to worship him; and men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are shut out from the presence of God.

So the paradox is that Lehi (and we) *supposed* that by Adam's fall came joy. Whereas Enoch directly conveyed the words of God such that it is clear that by Adam's fall came precisely the opposite: death, misery and woe. And so we find the necessity to choose between a line of thinking that comes to us from God through Enoch and Moses, versus a contradictory line of thinking that comes to us *from Lucifer* to beguiled Eve and thence to Lehi, who claims no divine insight to his supposition.

Lehi should not be faulted, nor should Eve. Mother Eve correctly said she was beguiled. The only knowledge obtained as a result of the Fall, was conveyed by Father³⁷ to the couple as promised— *the knowledge of the very embodiment of Evil to whom our parents were now subservient*: Eve meaningfully expresses this as “*I know thee now, thou are Lucifer, he who was cast from Father’s presence for rebellion.*” We must not disparage Eve as we rationally try to determine the actions of moral agency that properly help us understand the *nature* of that agency, the nature of God and, in fact, the true nature of the Atonement. We instead honor Eve and her husband when we recognize and follow their courageous examples to fully repent,³⁸ to come unto Christ, and to make and keep covenants with God.

C.S. Lewis weighs in: (Perelandra p. 119)

Weston: I have always seen the whole, whereof he (Ransom) sees but the half. It is most true that Maleldil has given you a way of walking out of your own will but out of your deepest will. And what is that? Your deepest will, at present is to obey him, to be always as you are now, only his beast or his very young child. The way out of that is hard. It was made hard that only the very great, the very wise, the very courageous should dare to walk in it, to go on—on without this smallness in which you now live—through the dark wave of his forbidding, into the real life, deep life with all its joy and splendor and hardness.

Listen lady, said Ransom there is something he is not telling you. All this that we are now talking has been talked before. The thing he wants you to try has been tried before. Long ago, when our world began, there was only one man and one woman in it, as you and the King are in this. And there once before he stood as he stands now, talking to the woman. He had found her alone as he has found you alone. And she listened, and did the thing Maleldil had forbidden her to do. But no joy and splendor came of it. What came of it I cannot tell you because you have no image of it in your mind. But all love was troubled and made cold,

and Maleldil's voice became hard to hear so that wisdom grew little among them; and the woman was against the man and the mother against the child; and when they looked to eat there was no fruit on the trees, and hunting for food took all their time so that their life became narrower not wider.

5) The paradox of moral agency: one choice or two?

In current teaching, agency is only triggered by the making of a disobedient choice. *Is it really agency if there is no other way?*

Moral agency was fully in place and active the moment our parents were set before the two trees and the consequences were explained: Joy in life — or — death. But this conclusion only comes when we believe God and disbelieve Lucifer.

The paradoxical doctrine is summarized in Preach My Gospel, The Plan of Salvation (p.49 *emphasis* and [comments] added):

God is the Father of our spirits. We are literally His children, and He loves us. We lived as spirit children of our Father in Heaven before we were born on this earth. We were not, however, like our Heavenly Father, nor could we ever become like Him and enjoy all the blessings that He enjoys without the experience of living in mortality with a physical body.

[Mortality: humanity must sin, suffer and die—in this plan—apparently because that is the process God Himself went through. Lucifer’s blatant lies heard inside the temple: “for that is the way Father gained His knowledge” and “there is no other way” provide bookends to what I claim are delusional rationalizations that we use when believing Lucifer in preference to God. As we continue with p.49, note all the instances of the hypothetical, speculative and conjectural.]

Adam and Eve were the first of God’s children to come to the earth. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, with bodies of flesh and bones. While Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were still in God’s presence and could have lived forever. They lived in innocence, and God provided for their needs.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve their agency. He commanded them not to eat the forbidden fruit, or the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Obeying this commandment meant that they could remain in the garden, but they could not progress by experiencing opposition in mortality. They could not know joy because they could not experience sorrow and pain.

Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and they chose to do so. This was part of God’s plan. Because of this choice, they were cast from the garden and out of God’s physical presence. This event is called the Fall. Separation from God’s presence is spiritual death. Adam and Eve became mortal—subject to physical death, or separation of the body and spirit. They could now experience disease and all types of suffering. They had moral agency or the ability to choose between good and evil. This made it possible for them to learn and progress. It also made it possible for them to make wrong choices and to sin. In addition,

they could now have children, so the rest of God's spirit children could come to earth, obtain physical bodies, and be tested. Only in this way could God's children progress and become like Him.

Astoundingly, the bottom line justification is Lucifer's lie: "There is no other way." As a result of this murderous lie (for he is not capable of anything else – Jn 8:44), we find a theological paradox that God commanded, but there were, in common parlance "technical difficulties" preventing Him from being able to fulfill all the promises of His commandments ("that you may have joy and rejoicing in your posterity"), and that He apparently had some other hidden intent (or plan) beyond the stated plan of moral agency. Commanding one thing and intending the opposite is normally referred to as "duplicity". Since Father is absolutely not a liar, we should immediately adjust our perspective accordingly!

Circular logic in PMG reveals complete misunderstanding of moral agency in that God gave agency, but agency couldn't exist without already having made a bad choice—as if the differing opportunities represented by the two trees themselves were not *the* test. In our official, traditional dogma as stated in PMG, disobeying God somehow made it possible to make wrong choices (i.e., making a wrong choice made it possible to make choices, including other wrong choices).

The philosophical paradox is that in this common LDS treatment, innocence before God in a paradisiacal state was a bad thing. That which is completely 'upside-down' (Isaiah 29:15-16, quoted earlier) is to learn that falling is not failing; but is 'stepping up' instead: shame, sin, suffering, disease, sorrow, misery and death were all planned, intended by God, and to be seen as good things— as mere *opposition*³⁹—for which we should all be truly grateful.

The PMG excerpt above began with pure truth: Truly *God is the Father of our spirits. We are literally His children, and He loves us.* He really did love us enough to give us the moral agency to choose between two legitimate paths, and He expects us to make choices that will result in His ability to bless us without withholding *anything*. But it all rests on the contingent "if":

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. Abraham 3:25,26

C.S. Lewis weighs in: Perelandra Page 145. Ransom's ponderings...

Up to this point the lady had repelled her assailant. She was shaken and weary, and there were some stains perhaps in her imagination, but she had stood. In that respect the story already differed from anything that he certainly knew about the mother of our own race. He did not know whether Eve had resisted at all, or if so, for how long. Still less did he know how the story would have ended if she had. If the serpent had been foiled, and returned the next day, and the next... What then? Would the trial have lasted forever? How would Maleldil have stopped it? Here on Perelandra his own intuition had been not that no

temptation must occur, but that "this can't go on." This stopping of a third-degree solicitation, already more than once refused, was a problem to which the terrestrial fall offered no clue—a new task, and for that new task a new character in the drama, who appeared most unfortunately to be himself. In vain did his mind hark back, time after time, to the book of Genesis, asking "what would have happened?" But to this the Darkness gave him no answer. Patiently and inexorably it brought him back to the here and now, and to the growing certainty of what it was here and now demanded. Almost he felt that the words "would have happened" were meaningless—near invitations to wander in what the Lady would have called an "alongside world" which had no reality. Only the actual was real; and every actual situation was new.

6) Paradox of principles: God-like and God-derived eternal principals are timeless and unchanging, independent of events, circumstances and opinions or cultural mores. Eternal principles are unchanging like the fundamental nature of God Himself, who speaks and it is so, who is full of light, integrity and truth. LDS teaching suggests that this is true always and forever, *except* in the Garden of Eden; but there joy comes only through suffering, privation and misery; righteousness comes from sin; innocence is bad, shame, sorrow and death are good; God is manipulative of Lucifer, duplicitous to His children, and arbitrary in His punishments; Lucifer tells the truth, accomplishes God's secret plan and is severely punished for it. Eve has the courage and insight to do what Adam was unwilling or unable to do—is the heroine of agency and fertility—yet she is made subservient to Adam and her sorrow in labor is multiplied.

Eternal principles *were* in place and in practice in the Garden. But we have to believe God and disbelieve Lucifer.

In 2 Ne 2, above, I have discredited verses 22-25 as aberrant, with the precepts therein originating from the Father of Lies, and never again being validated by other scripture. But in the rest of the chapter, Lehi teaches Jacob a marvelous, incisive version of justice, mercy and the role of agency, indicating the role of the bitter forbidden fruit in opposition to the sweet fruit of the tree of life. Lehi's magnificent teaching of opposition in all things places punishment opposite to happiness (v.10) because the law required punishment for a choice to fall from happiness (v.4-9). In verse 11, we find that opposition means that we can attain true joy *because* there is a legitimate option to choose misery. It does not mean that we are constrained to experience joy only *because* or *after* we have experienced misery. In v.15 we find that the trees themselves provide the opposition necessary to fulfill the requirements of agency, and only the temptation or enticement was necessary to consummate agency.

Lehi goes on to powerfully point out that *temptation is a necessary and sufficient condition* to fulfill the requirements of agency, in v.16:

Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.

This verse ironically contradicts our modern LDS interpretation of the Fall, in which it is rather (falsely) assumed that *committing the act* is essential to consummate agency and enable children.

We can, in fact, validate the ‘necessary and sufficient’ clause of ‘tempt’ within the workings of agency through a second witness in modern revelation:

D&C 29:39-40 And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—Wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment, wherein he became subject to the will of the devil, because he yielded unto temptation.

Continuing with Lehi’s masterful sermon, he properly understands the role of Lucifer in v.17, as well as his motivations in v.18, and then factually represents the actions of our parents in v.19,20.⁴⁰ Verse 21 is so insightful because of his correct portrayal of our current existence in probationary days, clearly indicative of the contingent opportunities of agency, allowing a legitimate choice to fail—and to recover from failure.

19 And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.

20 And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

21 And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

Here our parents were to have died immediately as an *appointed* consequence of their actions (also Alma 42:1-6). They did die spiritually in that same day as they were exiled, per their own choice (also Alma 42:7) and as appointed per the consequences stated by Father Himself. But Lehi uses the words “lengthened” and “prolonged” to refer to the period before they would *also* die physically, specifically so they would have a “probationary” chance to repent (also Alma 42:10). Even though our parents chose to die, our loving Father gave them a break, a second chance, a Plan-B opportunity in which they and we—all lost ones—might repent and return.⁴¹

Skipping over the four aberrant hypothetical verses (22-25), we lose nothing of doctrinal value as we seamlessly⁴² witness Lehi continuing to lay out the Plan of Salvation before us: In v.26 the Messiah comes to redeem all from the Fall, to make us *free* again. In v. 27 this freedom is clarified to mean that (once again, just as when we were originally set before the two trees) we are given the agency to choose between liberty / eternal life or else captivity / misery. This gift of agency is no different for us, the children of Adam and Eve in the temple, than it was for our parents in Eden.

26 And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

27 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

Finally Lehi's sermon to Jacob (and to us!) concludes with a powerful repeated exhortation in v.28,29 that we, this time, take better care of our agency to choose, because this probationary period is our last chance, and the consequences are dire for choosing badly.

28 And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

29 And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

How does this further apply to us? In the most recent releases of the pre-ordination contextual dramatization of the creation and the Fall, we see Eve and/or Adam casting about as if seeking *and receiving* divine authorization to disobey the divine command. Later as sacred covenants are being made while wearing the robes of the Melchizedek priesthood, each temple patron is instructed (there is no other way) to don the green fig leaf apron. In the traditional view, the apron represents the gift of fertility that came as a result of the wrenching but 'necessary' decision to partake of the progeny-enabling fruit. Is that really what it represents?

C.S. Lewis weighs in: Perelandra, p. 130. Ransom observes the interminable temptation of the First Lady of Perelandra.

But of course the hours spent alone with the Un-man [Weston's animated corpse, the tempter] were like hours in the back area. The real business of life was the interminable conversation between the tempter and the lady. Taken hour by hour the progress was hard to estimate; but as the days passed Ransom could not resist the conviction that the general development was in the enemy's favor. There were, of course, ups and downs. Often the Un-man was unexpectedly repulsed by some simplicity which it seemed not to have anticipated. Often, too, Ransom's own contributions to the terrible debate were for the moment successful. There were times when he thought, "Thank God! We won at last." But the enemy was never tired, and Ransom grew more weary all the time; and presently he thought he could see signs that the lady was becoming tired too. In the end he taxed her with it and begged her to send them both away. But she rebuked him, and her rebuke revealed how dangerous the situation had already become. "Shall I go and rest and play," she asked, "while all this lies on our hands? Not till I am certain that there is no great deed to be done by me for the King and for the children of our children."

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The matter was, of course, cruelly, cruelly complicated. What the Un-man said was always very nearly true. Certainly it must be part of the divine plan that this happy creature should mature, should become more and more a creature of free choice, should become, in a sense,

more distinct from God and from her husband in order thereby to be at one with them in a richer fashion. In fact, he had seen this very process going on from the moment at which he met her, and had unconsciously, assisted it. This present temptation, if conquered, would itself be the next, and greatest, step in the same direction: an obedience freer, more reasoned, more conscious than any she had known before, was being put in her power. But for that very reason the fatal false step which, once taken, would thrust her down into the terrible slavery of appetite and hate and economics and government which our race knows so well, could be made to sound so like the true one. What made him feel sure that the dangerous element in her interest was growing was her progressive disregard of the plain intellectual bones of the problem. It became harder to recall her mind to the data—a command from Maleldil, a complete uncertainty about the results of breaking it, and a present happiness so great that hardly any change could be for the better. The turgid swell of indistinctly splendid images which the Un-man aroused, and the transcendent importance of the central image, carried all this away. She was still in her innocence. No evil intention had been formed in her mind. But if her will was uncorrupted, half her imagination was already filled with bright, poisonous shapes. "This can't go on," thought Ransom for the second time. But all his arguments proved in the long run unavailing, and it did go on.*

+1 Do I Believe God or believe the prophets? This discussion is so obviously contrary to the words of the living prophets! (Transitioning to secondary paradoxes that follow from the above.)

Do you really think we have been misled? Isn't this a dangerous discussion potentially undermining the authority of the Brethren and the church? Are you a wolf in sheep's clothing?

No! Not at all. But to the paradox, *I choose to believe God and then follow the prophets.*

We should liken God's words to the North Star. The earth turns about its axis and that axis points to the North Star. It is "True North". Fixed. Invariant.

"Magnetic north" is navigationally useful (especially on cloudy nights) to generally get us in the right direction, but it is not *true* north. The earth's magnetic field lines do not *exactly* line up with the earth's axis. Magnetic north changes as a function of local and regional magnetic fields and historically even flips (reverses) entirely many times over the eons.

We may liken True North to the verified scriptural citations of God's words representing His will. If we want pure truth, we must go to the source. We must look to the North Star.

A compass to detect magnetic north is like the living (and dead) prophets. A prophetic compass is useful to us for local navigation here on earth, and during specific time periods, to get us through life's many storms. God gave us prophets to guide us in our lives and ensure that we are in the proper local, regional and temporal path. But they are human and subject to the limitations of humans. At the times when there is apparent difference between magnetic north and True North, and when it is important, we have to accept that this difference exists and that it is ok, and

* Emphasis in original.

then just go with the North Star in those cases when the North Star is visible, *without throwing the useful compass overboard.*

Once when my son (then a junior or senior in H.S.) overheard my wife and me discuss the topic of the Fall, he asked, *Dad, uh... why do you think you know more about this than the prophets?* I explained that I had asked a different set of questions representing different beliefs and assumptions. As a scientist and a Christian I am convinced that well-founded questions get answered,⁴³ no matter who asks them; On the other hand, questions based on incorrect assumptions always generate stupor. We know what questions the prophets have asked because they have told us. I can think of several examples off-hand:

“We don’t know all the reasons for Lucifer’s terrible success in inciting that rebellion. However, one reason is clear. Those who lost the blessing of coming into mortality lacked sufficient trust in God to avoid eternal misery.”

—Pres. Eyring, Oct ’10

→ When we understand agency to the point that it becomes clear that Father wants us to choose to become like Him, but that He cannot / must not interfere even if we choose the exact opposite; then we can imagine how Lucifer might twist the truth to create situations of fear and doubt. The question I asked was: What was Lucifer’s sales pitch in the heavenly council, so effective in luring 1/3 away? Based on a proper understanding of the nature of agency (including the presence of multiple valid choices, each with associated known and unknown consequences), and also understanding that God does not spontaneously intervene in our actions of agency, I came to the (highly summarized⁴⁴) answer: *“I will not let you fail!”*

Here is another example:

“For reasons that have not been revealed, this transition, or “fall” could not happen without a transgression—an exercise of moral agency amounting to a willful breaking of a law.”

—Elder Oaks, Oct ’93 (The Great Plan of Happiness)

→ The Brethren acknowledge the paradox within our doctrine. Most step carefully around it, intuitively recognizing the abundant logical pitfalls therein, leading to blasphemy. I asked a different question: Should I believe God, or should I believe Lucifer? The answer became apparent that I had to choose. Now I know that the question Elder Oaks asked has had no answer because it is unfounded.

Another important example:

“There in the quiet isolation of the Garden of Gethsemane, He knelt among the gnarled olive trees, and in some incredible way that none of us can fully comprehend, the Savior took upon Himself the sins of the world.”

—Elder Ballard, April ‘04

→ Because of the broad lack of understanding of the Fall and of agency, we collectively have poor understanding of the nature of the Atonement. Who inflicted such suffering upon our Lord?

That enigma leaves many to draw upon the Abraham/Isaac imagery to assume (with certain guilt for even daring to think it) that the Father somehow *did that* to His own son. Alternatively, the uncertainty leaves it to our imagination that somehow Jesus did *it* to himself.

Did Jesus take upon Himself the sins of the world in some unimaginable form of self-flagellation? Or did He take upon Himself the sins of the world in ransom payment to the one who then legitimately claimed our ownership?⁴⁵ Jesus himself was apparently vague. Why? Must we also be vague? Is it important to know? Because ultimately this becomes the most impactful question among all questions of moral agency that we have yet explored. We'll take this discussion to the level of a full-blown paradox, below.

I have cited the above three quotations from anointed Apostles as examples of unanswered precepts, *not mysteries*. They are legitimate questions that go to the very core of our most important doctrines. That our leaders do not know the answers in no way suggests the answers are not to be had, or that we have been misled any more than the wandering children of Israel were misled. It is no paradox to me that the Lord would allow ("suffereth" is JST Paul's word⁴⁶) His anointed prophets and apostles—holders of the keys⁴⁷—to perpetuate the restored⁴⁸ delusions and lies, because all of this is a matter of moral agency and of prophecy. We got ourselves into it. We need to get ourselves out. And no one has even thought to ask for divine help, because we collectively don't realize there is a problem, and we don't know what to ask. We think it was *supposed to be this way*.

C.S. Lewis weighs in: That Hideous Strength, p. 229. In this, the third book of the space trilogy, Ransom here speaks to everyman through the character Jane as they prepare together to battle evil incarnate.

“Do you place yourself in the obedience,” said Ransom, “in Obedience to Maleldil?”

“Sir,” said Jane, “I know nothing of Maleldil. But I place myself in obedience to you.”

“It is enough for the present,” said Ransom. “This is the courtesy of Deep Heaven: that when you mean well, He always takes you to mean better than you knew. It will not be enough for always. He is very jealous. He will have you for no one but Himself in the end. But for tonight, it is enough.”

+2 Who's behind the tormentor's mask? Did Father do those horrible things to His own son in Gethsemane, in the likeness of Abraham/Isaac?

“In our increasingly secular society, it is as uncommon as it is unfashionable to speak of Adam and Eve or the Garden of Eden or of a ‘fortunate fall’ into mortality. “Nevertheless, the simple truth is that we cannot fully comprehend the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ and we will not adequately appreciate the unique purpose of His birth or His death—in other words, there is no way to truly celebrate Christmas or Easter—without understanding that there was an actual Adam and Eve who fell from an actual Eden, with all the consequences that fall carried with it.” Elder Holland (April, '15 conference)

Two things strike me about Elder Holland's statement. First is how vaguely and delicately he referred to the 'fortunate' fall, knowing that therein lies the major logical pitfall with tremendous consequences. The second aspect, which is not only interesting, but highly motivational to me, is the connection he draws between understanding the Fall and understanding the Atonement. The great irony here, is that we do not understand the Atonement. Elder Ballard (quoted earlier) was brutally honest in this fact.

The reason we do not understand the Atonement is because we do not understand the Fall—as betrayal⁴⁹— as a sinful exercising of agency—as conveyance of will and ownership to the adversary, and that hence a *ransom*⁵⁰ was required to save/rescue/release/snatch us from Lucifer's grip in redemption/salvation, which is a second chance at *life* through probationary covenanting and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The question I had asked was: *Who did those horrible things to Jesus in Gethsemane?* When we actively *choose* to assume that God did not intend for our parents to fall, then it becomes quite straightforward to see the inspiration in C.S. Lewis's account⁵¹ of Aslan offering himself as a ransom to free the traitor Edmund from the White Witch, and then it also becomes clear who did those things to the Savior and why it was so brutal, bloody, malicious and horrible.

The Atonement is the grand culmination of the hostile argument over moral agency first initiated in the grand Councils of Heaven: supreme *force* vs. quintessential *will*. Here, in Gethsemane, it takes palpable *form* in a most gruesome manner, insufficiently described by words for breadth, depth, intensity and magnitude.

Jesus Christ was our exemplar in so many ways; it is no surprise that He also set precedents for us to manifest righteous use of moral agency in perfect obedience to the will of His Father. We look to Jesus for the following examples (in our modern jargon) that the use of agency first involves willful acceptance of *responsibility*, then actions and behaviors manifesting *choices*— and finally the mindset of *accountability* to own all the consequences of those choices without use of guilt, blame or fault.

Jesus' approach to responsibility

God loved us so much that He *sent* His Only Begotten Son to offer himself as a proxy ransom in our stead. The familiar words of John 3:16 should be resounding in our heads here, as comfort food in times of need: “*for God so loved the world...*” (See also Jn 8:42.) Jesus was *sent* by the Father to do this work. Yes, Jesus was offered as a sacrifice, but Father's role was strictly to *assign* Jesus to be proxy, asking him to submit himself to the ruthless one demanding the ransom, so that justice might be served with full payment of obligated debt, intending the master of death to be overcome. In turn, Jesus wholly accepted that authority and responsibility, as per:

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. John 8:28,29

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. John 10:17,18

Jesus' approach to choice and actions of obedience

As we read in John's account of Jesus' attitude while in preparation for His great work, we have this remarkable public conversation between Son and Father:

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. John 12:27,28

How tender, the rhetorical question "what shall I say?" This is why He is here and He fully accepted the role. Jesus knew exactly what was in store for him (v.33) and whom He would be facing, per v.31 "*Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*"

Accepting His role and responsibility, Jesus went, but not without trepidation, to face His tormentor: "*the prince of this world cometh... Arise, let us go hence*" (Jn 14:30-31). Jesus, submissively yet confidently, went at the appointed time and to the appointed place for the contest of force against will that would become His Atonement for our sakes.

The negotiation to trade Jesus for us apparently allowed Lucifer to pour out his limitless malice upon our Lord in at least three forms,⁵² likely including spiritual (regret, guilt, despair), emotional/psychological (loneliness, hopelessness, longing) and physical (sickness/illness/disease effects, hunger, thirst, fatigue⁵³) as the required ransom payment. These sufferings in Gethsemane were so real and tangible as to induce blood issuing from every pore. Like a train running downhill at full throttle with nothing to hold her back, the imposed suffering could increase without limit, because Jesus refused to die in order to allay the excruciating torture.

Only after the presumed⁵⁴ negotiated time limit brought a merciful end to that agonizing phase of Jesus' allotted work, He had yet still to face the bitterness of betrayal, the maddening rigged courts, the loneliness of full abandonment, the scorn of public mocking, and finally the intensely physical torture of the scourge, the crown, the nail and the tree. Lucifer's every menacing motive focused his intent to kill: to force Jesus into relenting and to giving in—to subject himself to Lucifer's tool of death—rather than to endure. Praise be to Him that He endured! Else all was lost. We sing of this on Sundays. When He did give up the ghost, it was only because finally it was finished, (Jn 19:30) and He could die on His own terms, so that He could cast down the prince of this world and finally be resurrected, and so also break down death's prison doors.

Jesus' retrospective ownership of accountability

The truly remarkable aspect of Jesus' entire approach is that we know who did those horrible things to him, yet He accepts full accountability, never playing the victim, and never giving Lucifer the least satisfaction—through attribution—for the heinous part he played.

3 Ne 11:10 *Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.*
11 *And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.*

14 *Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.*

Why didn't Jesus identify the one behind the mask? I suggest this is the incomparable prototype for managing moral agency: the purest mindset of accountability *without any hint of guilt, blame or fault*. In other words, He went into the Atonement knowing and accepting exactly what He was in for, and submitting both out of love for us and obedience to His Father. In D&C 19, it sounds like Jesus will be doing the smiting but He does not have to. If we do not repent, we are once again shackled in the bonds of Lucifer, and then we will know the suffering that Jesus knew at the hands of the same malefactor who meted out that earlier vicious punishment! Not even then does Jesus acknowledge Lucifer's role, though it will certainly be in wrath that Jesus allows him to play it, when we have rejected and mocked Jesus' most expensive ransom gift to us, having obeyed not His commandments (D&C 59:21).

D&C 19:15 *Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.*

16 *For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;*

17 *But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;*

18 *Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—*

19 *Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.*

20 *Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.*

Just as Lewis's Aslan the Lion willingly gave himself over as a ransom to be tortured and murdered in the stead of the doomed traitor Edmund, Christ our Savior gave Himself in our behalf. Out of extreme love for the rest of His family, Jesus would suffer Lucifer's malice instead of us.⁵⁵ By prior agreement, as with Aslan, Jesus would do so submissively.

But even Lewis does not realize the full meaning of the Atonement, as most Christians miss the significance of Gethsemane while focusing on Golgotha. Lewis has his White Witch taunt the submissive Lion, then ceremoniously murder him with a knife. This is an allegory of Golgotha. What is missing is an understanding of what God the Father allowed Jesus to submit

to previously at the hands of Lucifer, with the ransom payment allowing Lucifer to attempt to force the Only Begotten Son of God to bend to his will.

In most torture situations, the vindictive purpose is to inflict such pain as to induce the victim to fully acquiesce to the will of the tormentor. The more resistant the sufferer, the greater the infliction of pain—all calculated for maximum effect—certainly without going to the point of death but neither of unconsciousness: malice dictates that the victim must fully appreciate each *exquisite*⁵⁶ sensation. As the level of agony increases and the pain focuses, so does the inner conflict of the sufferer: *give them what they want or endure much more*. The usually out-of-reach hope for an end to the conflict is the hope for death, that the tormented can honorably diminish the pain without surrendering his or her will.⁵⁷

The irony of Gethsemane is that what the torturer *wanted* was for his nemesis to sufficiently long for death that He would plead for that very end. And another irony is that, unlike a mere human victim who longs for death but who cannot choose it, Father had given Jesus the ability to choose to die or choose to live. The infinitely increasing imposed suffering was only matched—then bested—by Jesus’ infinitely increasing love and increasing will to live,⁵⁸ together: *The Passion of our Christ*.

Jesus was no simple victim. Jesus chose to be in that proxy position in the first place out of pure love for us and out of strict obedience to the will of the Father, who also loved us. To choose death was to have sinned against God by giving over His will to the liar and murderer.

The Atonement is the supreme imposition of *force* against *will*, hearkening all the way back to the foreshadowing events in the Grand Council of Heaven in which Lucifer was cast out for attempting to destroy humanity’s agency. There in the Council was manifest merely his first attempt (the first lie: *I will not let you fail!*); which was followed by a further successful temptation in the Garden of Eden (the great lie: *There is no other way but failure!*); and now with hostages at stake and a submissive ransom under his power, twisted to: *I will force you to fail!*

A changed paradigm based on true principles of agency conveys the horrific reality of the Atonement—why it was so grueling and maliciously bloody. It is very important to know that our Father was not behind the torturer’s mask, exacting his awful vengeance upon His Son because of us. Instead, He sent His Son to rescue us from the one who bound us in chains and whose will was bent in malice toward us, but infinitely more so toward the Son. As was Edmund for Lewis’s *White Witch*, we were merely bit part⁵⁹ players, hostage bait to gain access to the One—the Ultimate Ransom.

Infinite and Eternal was the sacrifice, because that was the magnitude of the torment imposed upon Him with an eye to kill—to force Jesus to surrender to Lucifer, to death and to hell itself. Jesus’ unfathomable anguish was more than matched by the boundless extent of His infinite love, His perfect obedience and His will to *endure* without giving in. Praise be to Him!

C.S. Lewis weighs in: [Perelandra](#), p. 120. Choices for the first Lady of Perelandra: the continuing temptation:

He has hidden the half of what happened, said Weston's corpse-like mouth. Hardness came out of it [the Fall on our earth] but also splendor. They made with their own hands mountains higher than your fixed island. They made for themselves floating islands greater than yours which they could move at will through the ocean faster than any bird can fly. Because there was not always food enough, a woman could give the only fruit to her child or her husband and eat death instead—could give them all, as you and your little narrow life of playing and kissing and riding fishes have never done, nor shall do till you break the commandment. Because knowledge was harder to find, those few who found it became more beautiful and excel above their fellows as you excel the beasts; and thousands were striving for their love. There is more. He has not told you that it was this breaking of the commandment which brought Maleldil to our world and because of which he was made man. He dare not deny it.

I will tell you what I say, answered Ransom, of course good came of it. Is Maleldil a beast that we can stop His path, or a leaf that we can twist His shape? Whatever you do, He will make good of it. But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him. That is lost forever. The first King and first Mother of our world did the forbidden thing; and He brought good of it in the end. But what they did was not good; and what they lost we have not seen. And there were some to whom no good can nor ever will come. "You," he said "tell her all. What good came to you? Do you rejoice that Maleldil became a man? Tell her of your joys, and of what profit you had when you made Maleldil and death acquainted."

+3 The holy Temple is not only the sacred House of the Lord, but is also the secret refuge of Lucifer, where he recites his most favorite and most effective false doctrines over and over without rebuttal.

The sacred nature of the Temple makes us reluctant to talk about, let alone question anything said therein, even if said by the father of lies himself. The ordinances themselves are sacred—worthy of great reverence—not secret. But Lucifer's sacrilegious lies are held firmly secret by taboo.

Yet our modern, holy temple is so like the original garden itself—the beautiful garden, House of the Lord—wherein was amazingly allowed even in its midst, the dark tree with the tempter and a sacred purpose: to provide opposition and the reality of joyful exaltation because the possibility for choosing failure, falling, suffering, misery and death. These *also* existed as a legitimate option. And God had promised not to interfere.

The final paradox is so like our interpretation of the first eight: That there really is a moral agency with two legitimate choices. But our limited understanding of what constitutes moral agency also therefore limits our recognition and implementation of the individual test given to each of us in our own lives: The Temple as a reduction to practice. We go there thinking it is all about Adam and Eve, but it is not. It's about us:

Consider yourselves as if you were each, respectively, Adam or Eve.

We have two trees placed in front of us and we too are being presented with a choice of moral

agency: life or death; becoming like God or becoming like Lucifer. Whom to believe? Whom to follow? Whom to obey? Whose marks of loyalty will we wear?

Our parents fell, but that is far less relevant to us *now* than the fact that they set the example for us *how to return* to Christ through repentance and the plan of salvation. Do we understand the price that was paid for our ransom? Have we accepted the ransoming gift? Are we truly Christian? Will we—as did our first parents—exclusively accept the garment given to us by our God to cover our nakedness and symbolize our covenants; or will we—unlike our parents—pick up the fig apron from the ground and place it again in surpassing importance on top of both the garment and the robes? We talk of Christ, we preach of Christ... ..but at the decisive moment when we finally seek access to all that is Holy and approach Him at the veil of His rent flesh⁶⁰ wearing the emblem of obeisance to and ownership by His eternal adversary, will He claim to know us?⁶¹

C.S. Lewis weighs in: Perelandra, p. 148. Ransom is consoled:

"My name also is Ransom" said the Voice.

...So that was the real issue. If he now failed, this world also would hereafter be redeemed. If he were not the ransom, another would be. Yet nothing was ever repeated. Not a second crucifixion: perhaps—who knows—not even a second incarnation... Some act of even more appalling love, some glory of yet deeper humility. For he had seen already how the pattern grows and how from each world it sprouts into the next through some other dimension. The small external evil which Satan had done in [the world called] Malacandra was only as a line: the deeper evil he had done in earth was as a square: if Perelandra fell her evil would be a cube—her redemption beyond conceiving. Yet redeemed she would be.

* * *

Final Summary

In resolving our understanding of the ever-righteous nature of God with the Sunday School logic of the Fall, we typically rely on hypothetical statements in the scriptures combined with vague references to Lucifer's statements made in the temple. May I not attribute such an approach to *the philosophies of Satan mingled with scripture?*

I open this conversation firmly believing in the goodness of our people, and that once we individually and collectively recognize the ridiculousness of accepting Lucifer's doctrine (and also that of insisting on not talking about it), then Paul's prophecy cited earlier indicates we will all be richly blessed. I open this conversation to fundamentally question the one grand exception to the time-honored Christian tradition of believing God and disbelieving Lucifer. In doing so, I also recognize the peril when this conversation hinges on the cultural unwillingness to discuss the aspects of the Fall that only come to us in the pre-ordination endowment presentation. Though it is culturally taboo to discuss anything about the temple, yet I am convinced that the paradoxes cannot be solved unless we can openly challenge "on the housetops," Lucifer's lies and deceits, and offer much needed rebuttal. I claim there are no exceptions to the statement "God is trustworthy and Lucifer is not," and propose that as long as we are culturally silent about the revelatory nature of the learning that comes to us in the Temple pre-endowment script, we will forever live in paradox. But, like Ransom, I am impelled forward with the urgent sense that *this can't go on!*

Approaching the sacred temple experience with a firm resolve that God is trustworthy and Lucifer is not, it becomes very apparent that the purposes for visiting the temple really have nothing to do with sitting passively, watching Adam and Eve partake of the fruit just to rehearse the story. In fact, sitting there and watching becomes an active, participatory experience in testing my own moral agency: Will I choose to sit mesmerized, to listen carefully to Lucifer, wondering what he means and sifting for some perceived nugget of truth in the great cesspool of his lies *because* he is telling them in the House of the Lord? Will I choose to believe Lucifer's beguiling arguments? Will I choose to disbelieve God? Will I then choose to rationalize why it is better this way? Will I then cement my chosen source of wisdom and inspiration by heeding his command to cover my nakedness or my priesthood robes with his mark of ownership?

"No," because I instead choose to believe God at face value, and choose to believe the Lord Jesus Christ when He tells me that there is "no truth" in the one who was "a liar and murderer from the beginning." Do not these statements test my own moral agency, just the same as our first parents were tested? I believe as Nephi that all commandments come to us with the ability for us to be completely obedient.

In expounding nine paradoxes and their impacts, we have been looking largely in the past. How does this affect us individually, in the present? What good is our time spent in this endeavor; indeed, what good is religion at all unless it now reduces to meaningful choices you and I have to make? As exhorted by the prophets,⁶² "*Choose Life!*"

Notes

¹ There will be several examples in this paper, of *intimated* references to Lucifer's statements in the temple, directed to those who have ears to hear because they have been there. I find it disconcerting that we routinely quote or paraphrase Lucifer to justify certain precepts, but that we have a hard time actually attributing the quote to him. Do we not attribute him because most people rightfully do not accept Lucifer as an authoritative source of truth? Is it more acceptable to anonymously quote him because it strengthens or draws on the assumption that every word spoken in the temple must be true *because it is spoken in the temple*, in spite of who is actually doing the speaking? The most recent case of quoting Lucifer to rationalize all the bad that is happening in the world, comes to us in the Sunday pm session of our Oct., 2016 conference, through Elder Evan A. Schmutz (emphasis added):

As we apply our "hearts to understanding," we can increase in our ability to both endure our trials well and learn from—and be refined by—them. Such understanding provides an answer to the ageless question "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

Everyone listening today is acquainted with some measure of loneliness, despair, grief, pain, or sorrow. Without an "eye of faith" and an understanding of eternal truth, we often find that the misery and suffering experienced in mortality can obscure or eclipse the eternal joy of knowing that the great plan of our Father in Heaven really is the eternal plan of happiness. There is no other way to receive a fulness of joy. (God Shall Wipe Away All Tears)

² See, for example, 2 Cor 4:4 (1-6 for relevant context).

³ See Isaiah 29:13-16; 2 Ne 27:27.

⁴ President Packer indicated in the October 2009 general conference that "When the commandment indicates '*thou shalt not...*', we had better pay attention." Does this instruction apply to us but somehow *not* apply to Adam and Eve? (Moses 3:17) Of course it applies to everyone! Our God is infinite and eternal! When He conveys a commandment and a promise, we can absolutely trust Him that it is an eternal principle and that it applies in *all* situations, without rationalization (D&C 82:10).

⁵ *We and all mankind are forever blessed because of Eve's great courage and wisdom. By partaking of the fruit first, she did what needed to be done. Adam was wise enough to do likewise.* (Constancy Amid Change, Russell M. Nelson, October, 1993)

⁶ "I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. ... This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin ... for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 1:114–15).

⁷ Since when is a "misdemeanor" subject to immediate capital punishment? Perhaps it is much more than a misdemeanor after all? What is it then? Since when does God regard or tolerate sin

with any degree of allowance, let alone *promote* its commission? D&C 1:31 *For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance*. See also Alma 45:16.

⁸ “Joseph Smith taught that it was not a “sin,” because God had decreed it (see *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980, p. 63) Elder Dallin H Oaks, The Great Plan of Happiness, October, 1993

⁹ “So we stand, if you want to talk about things on which Mormons stand across the river, if you will, from other Christian faiths, this is one of the most important—that Eve was not an airhead, she was not a murderess. She was, in fact, wise and courageous, and what she did pleased God.” — Valerie Hudson Cassler, “The Two Trees”, FairMormon Conference August 5-6, 2010, Sandy, Utah.

The word ‘pleased’ is a perfectly logical extension of the Fall doctrine taught traditionally by our church leaders. But the word does not show up scripturally in this context, in any way. We must teach the true doctrine of agency and accountability without demeaning our “Glorious Mother Eve” (D&C 138:38,39), for it is she, along with her husband who taught us the principles of repentance, and the way back to Joy (Moses 6:51-62).

¹⁰ An elaboration we hear from Lucifer in the temple, of Moses 4:10-11.

¹¹ See Joseph Smith, Lectures on Faith, Lecture 3rd, The Character of God, from <http://lecturesonfaith.com/3/>

¹² (From memory) We often quote Lucifer as the source of important doctrines, but because of the cultural taboo preventing discussion of anything related to the temple, we refuse to properly attribute to him the actual doctrine. Here is one example, with the next reference providing another: *Adam and Eve transgressed the command to not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By so doing they were no longer in a state of innocence. They began to experience principles of opposition. They began to encounter sickness that weakened their health. They began to feel sadness as well as joy. Through Adam and Eve’s partaking of the forbidden fruit, knowledge of good and evil was introduced into the world... ..The Fall made possible in our lives feelings of both happiness and sadness. We are able to understand peace because we feel turmoil.* Richard G. Scott, Make the Exercise of Faith Your First Priority, October, 2014

¹³ *So much depends, therefore, upon our maintaining gospel perspective in the midst of ordinariness and the pressures of temptation, tribulation, and deprivation. As we come to love the Lord more and more, we can understand, rather than resent, his purposes. He who should know has said that there is no other way.* —Neal A. Maxwell, “Grounded, Rooted, Established, and Settled”, address given at Brigham Young University on 15 September 1981

¹⁴ I reflect here upon the principled words of Elder L. Tom Perry, and hold them to be a basic tenet of common belief.

“God reveals to His prophets that there are moral absolutes. Sin will always be sin. Disobedience to the Lord’s commandments will always deprive us of His blessings. The world changes constantly and dramatically, but God, His commandments, and promised blessings do not change. They are immutable and unchanging. Men and women receive their agency as a gift from God, but their liberty and, in turn, their eternal happiness come from obedience to His laws. As Alma counseled his errant son Corianton, “Wickedness never was happiness.” ([Alma 41:10](#)).

In this day of the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel, the Lord has again revealed to us the blessings promised us for being obedient to His commandments. In D&C 130 we read: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—“And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” Surely there could not be any doctrine more strongly expressed in the scriptures than the Lord’s unchanging commandments and their connection to our happiness and well-being as individuals, as families, and as a society. There are moral absolutes. Disobedience to the Lord’s commandments will always deprive us of His blessings. These things do not change.” (Obedience to Law is Liberty, April Conference, 2013)

¹⁵ Note that Lewis avoids any attempt to describe the hypothetical “what might have been different if only” our parents had not fallen on this world. That would not have been true in any sense, and Lewis points this out several times in the course of the citations I provide. But it is ironic that Lewis understands other worlds better than we LDS, who have at our disposal scriptural proof that in all of the other worlds of creation’s vast portfolio, there was no society-level fall (only a few individuals), and that as a result: truth, justice and peace stretched from those millions of habitations to the very throne of God. See Moses 6:29-33, especially v.31.

¹⁶ See again D&C 130 in note 14. In contrast, in the 2003 *Deseret Book* publication *Eve and the Choice Made in Eden*, Author Beverly Campbell devotes Chapter 3 to the topic “There was no other way”, and details authoritative statements from Brigham Young, J. Reuben Clark, Bruce R. McConkie, Boyd K. Packer, Dallin H. Oaks, Russell M. Nelson, Joseph Smith, all assuming the necessity of disobedience for procreation.

¹⁷ “When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, all that they needed for daily sustenance was abundantly given to them. They had no difficulties, challenges, or pain. Because they had never experienced hard times, they did not know they could be happy. They had never felt turmoil, so they could not feel peace.” Richard G. Scott, *Make the Exercise of Faith Your First Priority*, October, 2014

¹⁸ The unvarying nature of God: Mosiah 2:22; Alma 7:20; Mormon 9:10; D&C 3:2

¹⁹ The basis of the theory is the restored (though false) doctrine that the forbidden fruit is necessary—for even a god—to enable progeny, because mortality is what makes fertility even possible. For a full treatment of the genesis and rejection of the doctrine, see David John Buerger, “The Adam-God Doctrine”, *Dialogue* v15 #1, 1976, p.17.

²⁰ In our culture as in Christianity at-large, we are constantly striving to find *reasons* for everything. “Acts of God” and all of that. What is He up to today? It leads to horribly entangled philosophies and endless discussions on why bad things happen to good people, the meaning and origin of evil, etc. I suggest such thinking reflects that we do not understand what moral agency really is. In other words, in true moral agency only choices govern: our choices, others’ choices, the consequences of all those choices and random events. In my understanding of the scriptures, God is “in charge” only insofar as He gave us the right to make choices, and then own the consequences of those choices. This seems harsh (or else highly exposed with no one clearly “in charge”) until we also understand that He stands by to guide (think of receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost as a choice to accept continual divine guidance), support, strengthen and answer the righteous prayer of the heart. He loved us enough to send Jesus to rescue us—if we ask—when we make bad choices, when we make mistakes, and even when we sin. (Those three things are not synonymous, and only the last one is a factor in the calculation of ‘perfection’.) Agency means that God *cannot* intervene unless someone righteously *asks*.

²¹ Of course neither Eve nor Adam had yet repented. The purpose of the visit by the Angel, (Moses 5:6-8) accompanied by the Holy Ghost at that time was strictly to give our parents hope: Exile would not be forever. Suffering and sorrow would not completely be without the opportunity for Joy. There would be hope through redemption. The command that same day to repent came in conjunction with this contingent, glorious understanding. The commandment was a forward looking expectation, and the blessings of understanding that come as a result of repentance (truth, light) *were yet to be earned*.

²² See John 8:44, and then as modern evidence of this last fact, let the reader compare the final two statements in Lehi’s v.23 (cited in the text) with the similar statement Lucifer makes from his bully pulpit in the temple (also cited in the text), and ask whether we would suggest today that our youth experiment with sin (pick any one) so that they might know righteousness!

²³ D&C 58:43 *By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.*

D&C 1:32,33 *Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

D&C 93: 31 *Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. 32 And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation... 38 Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. 39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.*

²⁴ I suggest that “because of my transgression, my eyes are opened” is a statement of rationalization, mixed in with a joyous vision of his posterity and looking forward to a rescue from their exile. The reason I see this one statement as rationalizing, is that in the presence of

God his eyes had *already* been open. See for example, Moses' account of his interaction with Lucifer, after having been in the presence of God. In Moses 1:14,15 (1-28) Moses describes the discerning power (also v.28) he had been given to see visions of the eternities. Under Lucifer's influence, however, as with Moses, "it is darkness unto me". (See also D&C 93:39) Therefore, I suggest Adam unwittingly attributed the renewed eye-opening joy of his rescue *to his transgression*, rather than to the Holy Ghost, with whom he was not formerly acquainted (Moses 5:9).

²⁵ Jacob had been the direct object of Lehi's aberrant teachings in 2 Ne 2:22-25, yet in his own later teaching, there is no trace of the garden infertility paradox: Properly reading 2 Ne 9:6 with the important comma in the first phrase, Jacob's inverted sentence structure should be taken as "There must be a power of resurrection to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator because death hath passed upon all men..." not the commonly misrepresented reading *without* the comma, "death hath passed upon all men to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator..."

2 Ne 9:6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

Jacob's whole chapter powerfully teaches the true, basic plan of salvation, including the understanding that the Fall places us in the grasp and ownership of Lucifer, which necessitates redemption by repentance and baptism through the power of the Holy One. Then Jacob gives *us* this ominous warning (emphasis added):

2 Ne 9:27-29: But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

In our traditional reading of these verses, we tend to look piously at academics and intellectuals and then at all others outside the church. But if we read carefully and introspectively in v.27, we find that Jacob is not talking to others, he's rather speaking to us! *We* are the ones with the law given. *We* have the commandments of God. *We* are the ones most alike unto Jacob, and he ironically uses the same word to describe our efforts as his father used to describe his understanding of the fall—*suppose*. Is not our common activity of speculating, theorizing, and offering conjecture on the Fall exactly the forewarned activity of setting aside the commandment, *supposing* we know of ourselves? Such *supposed* wisdom is indeed foolishness as we rationalize our first parents' transgression. In so doing, *we* fail the very same test of agency as was given to them!

²⁶ C.S. Lewis in The Chronicles of Narnia, Book 4, Prince Caspian, p.142, Scholastic 1995 (emphasis in original)

²⁷ The way had appeared hard to her and she rationalized that she or someone else knew better than Aslan did. Does this not constitute sin?

²⁸ See, for example how Elder Shmutz applies this precept in the citation of Note 1.

²⁹ Estimations of how many people have been baptized for themselves or by proxy compared to estimations of the numbered posterity of Adam and Eve, from the unpublished manuscript Choose Life: The Principles of Moral Agency

³⁰ In what amounts to a divine mission statement, we get a glimpse of the great depth of time and experience from which God’s planning arises in Moses 1:38

And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words.

then the mission itself in the following verse:

39 For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

There is no suggestion that immortality is planned to be brought about by a horror-filled detour through mortality.

³¹ Even the righteous envisioned by Pres. Smith in his D&C 138 revelation viewed their long separation of their spirits from their bodies as “a bondage” (v.49,50) while awaiting their deliverance. The very reasons we were given a body in the first place make our longing for the liberties that body provided even more acute, when we are deprived of it. Thus it is clear that the term “spirit prison” applies to all—the righteous as well as the wicked—though the time spent is peaceful for the former and is regret-filled torment for the latter.

³² Our own *nonscriptural* language is rather the supposed *designed, planned, intended, (and pleased that they did so)*, directly suggestive of manipulation, cleverness, stratagem and duplicity. These are not descriptors of the god that any of us truly claims to worship. But in the “cunning plan of the evil one”, they are exactly the descriptors of the one who sits in our temples proclaiming himself to be a god. And we do him the great service of believing his words.

³³ The use of the word “extortion” is curious here, only because an objective view of what Eve tells Adam—under command from Lucifer— with respect to why he should eat, may also be considered extortion. This gives pause for thought, how the Lord must have really viewed our parents’ misuse of agency: disobedience, suicide, disloyalty, betrayal, extortion, rationalization and yes, *sin*. “...place cherubim and flaming sword to guard the way of the Tree of Life that they might not partake thereof and live forever in their sins.” (Elaboration of Moses 4:31)

³⁴ This is important insight coming to us from the revealed text of the pre-endowment: Adam hastily obeyed his wife in preference to God (Moses 4:23) without considering any other options

for consultation, and completely ignorant of the principle of D&C 82:10. Definitely not a model we would advocate for contemporary teaching of our youth!

³⁵ In the unpublished manuscript Genealogy of the Lie, I go into much greater detail to show how Lehi intended “Adam” to mean “the man, Adam”, not in any way suggesting that “Adam” referred to the amorphous pair, Adam + Eve. But the readers can see this context for themselves in the prior verses, with the specific individualized references to Adam, Eve, he, her, she, him, they, them...

³⁶ If A implies B and B implies C, then A implies C, right? Normally this would be the case, but the logic applied here falls under the category of enthymeme, i.e., an argument missing its basic premise because that premise is based on a perception (Adam’s limited perspective on the current *transitory* situation) rather than a fact (God’s eternal perspective as He commanded).

³⁷ Moses 7:32 *The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;*

³⁸ The commandment to repent came *after* Adam was visited by the Holy Ghost and given a vision of his redemption (Moses 5:10). Likewise Eve’s rationalizing statement (Moses 5:11) was recorded before either of them were even commanded to repent:

Moses 5:14,15 And the Lord God called upon men by the Holy Ghost everywhere and commanded them that they should repent; And as many as believed in the Son, and repented of their sins, should be saved; and as many as believed not and repented not, should be damned; and the words went forth out of the mouth of God in a firm decree; wherefore they must be fulfilled.

³⁹ Jesus came to *restore* that which was lost:

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

⁴⁰ I have criticized Preach My Gospel for the speculative treatment of the Fall on page 49. But just as Lehi did here, there is also a simple, factual approach to the fall given on PMG page 50, entitled “Teaching about the Fall”. Because the Holy Ghost does not abide in hypothetical/speculative discussions, I do not view the p.50 instruction as ironic, but rather as inspired that this straightforward approach begins with the words: “*When first teaching this doctrine, do not teach everything you know about it. Explain very simply that...*” Clearly there is inspired recognition among some curriculum writers, that those with a Christian spirit will—for good reason—have a very difficult time with our traditional teaching of the Fall.

⁴¹ Alma 42:8 is very significant, in that it scripturally supports the notion that the Plan of Happiness, i.e., “the will of God”, is for us each to exercise our agency in righteousness and to *choose to become like God*: If God were to remove us from the consequences of our choices by intervening to reclaim us from the death which we had chosen instead, then both agency and the

plan of happiness would be void. This chapter beautifully complements 2Ne 2 (*sans* v.22-25!) as a profound exposition in the roles of agency, choice, disobedience, consequence, the need for redemption, and then mercy intervening to provide a ransom for satisfying justice.

⁴² Much has been written of the chiasmic language patterns of 2 Nephi 2. I will leave it to others to map it *without* the aberrant verses. This will also make it easier to map it directly against the complementary doctrines and patterns of Alma 42.

⁴³ In another formulation, we might phrase this more in lines of the circumscribing of all truth into a cohesive whole.

⁴⁴ A much more extensive treatment of agency and of this assessment is yet to be published in Choose Life: The Principles of Moral Agency

⁴⁵ Mosiah 15:6 *And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.*

7 Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

8 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—

9 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

⁴⁶ 2 Thess 2:3-12 gets to the root of the problem. I go into great detail, having recruited a physicist and Greek scholar, Dr. Mary K. LeBlanc, to assist in both clarifying and giving context to the prophetic verses. That detail is in a to-be-published manuscript entitled Genealogy of the Lie: Revealing Paul's Man of Sin. The verses in question are therein summarized as:

The Day of Christ will not come until the man of sin is revealed (v. 3, 6, 8)

who sits in the temple of God (KJV v.4)

proclaiming himself to be god (NIV v.4)

Christ suffereth him to work... (JST v.7)

... the one whom the Lord will destroy by the breath of his mouth and will deactivate (render impotent) by the making visible of his presence (among us) (MKL v.8)

Because we refused to love the truth, God shall send a powerful delusion (NIV v.11)

so that we will believe The Lie (NIV v.9, 11)

⁴⁷ Invariably someone with an agenda to undermine the church will use my words to bray about “fallen prophets” or suggest that “If he really is a prophet talking to God, then this never would have happened in the first place, let alone persisted.”

We know the source of such if/then hypothetical speculation from our discussions of Eve's and Lehi's aberrant speculations. The reason these critical approaches are also false is because this discussion is not about keys. The Keys were restored to the Prophet Joseph, and he was promised by none other than John the Baptist, that they would never again be taken from the earth (see D&C 13:1). Instead it is about our understanding the nature of moral agency and the nature of the One who gave it to us. He is not a corner office micromanager, and His promise, giving agency unto us, implicitly contains our legitimate *right to fail*. Therefore He will absolutely not intercede to prevent our failure, nor steal away any of the consequences thereof. But the Prophet Joseph has also been given all the light and truth necessary to debunk Lucifer's lies if we would each believe it. *It is all canonized in our scriptures.*

So let's instead talk about the fact that we have forfeited blessings and can now claim them. Talk about the fact that the Lord has been waiting for us to turn to Him before He comes to reign, and not the reverse. Talk about how we can now come together on the point of the Fall with Christian brothers and sisters in ecumenical rejoicing, and work together to defeat the adversary. But don't whine about the keys.

⁴⁸ The prophesied "restoration of all things" takes on a larger scope here than ever heretofore imagined, to include the truth spoken by the prophets, *as well as* the delusions! (D&C 27:6; 86:10) The words spoken by the anointed prophet, Father Lehi, in 2 Ne 2: 22-25, even though aberrant, were in fact *restored* as the very basis of the false (and since debunked) Adam-God theory. Though with this particular restoration comes the commensurate responsibility to use our agency in acting in aggressive opposition, per D&C 88, in the verses that describe the commanded obligations *to us*, just subsequent to the famous "hasten the work" verse. See D&C 88:73-79.

⁴⁹ The words of King Benjamin are instructive here, illustrating that to 'list to obey' the evil spirit in direct disloyalty to God actually constitutes primal sin by betrayal.

Mosiah 2:36,37 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

See also D&C 76:25-28. Betrayal was Lucifer's crime against God at the Grand Council. It is also our crime against God when we are in His presence (say, in the temple), know His voice, and then instead 'list to obey' the father of all lies: D&C 76:31 "*Thus saith the Lord concerning all those who know my power, and have been made partakers thereof, and suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy my power—* 32 *They are they who are the sons of perdition, of whom I say that it had been better for them never to have been born;*" Therefore is it any wonder that the scriptures refer in various ways to

the Fall resulting in humanity becoming carnal, sensual and devilish, and an enemy to God? It is not just that we do bad things, but it is first that we became traitors to do so! (Once a friend then a foe: that is the very essence of betrayal.) As Adam and Eve individually betrayed God in following and subjecting themselves to Lucifer, so also do we when we sit in the temple, listen to the pre-endowment, and disregard God's words in order to justify, rationalize and ennoble the actions of Adam and Eve.

⁵⁰ Note that 1:Peter 2:9 other than in the KJV, "peculiar" people is uniformly translated elsewhere to mean people who were acquired, purchased, and belonging to God. (biblehub.com) This is otherwise consistent with the notion of a ransom, such as in:

"JST, Matthew 26:22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and brake it, and blessed it, and gave to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is in remembrance of my body which I give a ransom for you.

Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

1 Cor. 6:19-20 *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

⁵¹ C.S. Lewis, The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, the second in the series of seven of The Chronicles of Narnia, Scholastic Books, 1995

⁵² Three forms referring to the three distinct periods between which our Lord returned to briefly chide His sleepy companions (and indeed, ourselves!), entreating "*what, could ye not watch with me for one hour?*" (Matt 27:37-46)

⁵³ Mosiah 3:7, Alma 7:11, D&C 18:11, D&C 19:18

⁵⁴ I have no source reference for presuming a time limit, just the plain observation that it had to come to a close if Jesus were to endure, and that end must not have come by the devil's request.

⁵⁵ Jn 12:27-31 The hour came that Christ was to be lifted up.

⁵⁶ We have heard this word before, in D&C 19:15, cited earlier in this section.

⁵⁷ This situation can be compared to a closed system in which feedback (increasing level of forced co-operation or decreasing level of consciousness) produces a direct effect on the system output (in this case, the diminishing level of imposed suffering).

⁵⁸ This is like an open system, subject to *runaway* conditions because Jesus alone could not be killed without having specifically chosen that end by an act of His own will. This lack of influencing feedback leads to runaway, limitless torment, and helps explain the *infinite* aspect of His suffering.

⁵⁹ The nothingness of man: Mosiah 4:5,11; Helaman 12:7; Moses 1:10

⁶⁰ See Hebrews 10:

16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh[.]

⁶¹ See Isaiah 29:13-15: *Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?*

⁶² See Deut 30:15-20; 2Ne 2:27-29; 10:23-25; Hel 14:30-31. For a more recent variation on the theme, I accept the challenge of President Monson, which is why, in fact, I am publishing this essay:

May we maintain the courage to defy the consensus. May we ever choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong. As we contemplate the decisions we make in our lives each day—whether to make this choice or that choice—if we choose Christ, we will have made the correct choice.

—President Thomas S. Monson, *Choices*, April 2016