

# **Grace Above Knowledge**

David Stansfield

Heathmont, Victoria

March 2008

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Evil and the Tree of Knowledge .....	2
Logic .....	3
Introducing the Truth Statement .....	3
The Truth Statement Applied to the Judgement of Evil .....	6
Story.....	9
The Climax of Evil.....	11
Jesus Christ and the Climax of Evil.....	13
Agape and the Tree of Knowledge .....	14
Conclusion .....	15
Bibliography .....	16

## Introduction

The essay expresses the phrase ‘Grace above knowledge’ in both ‘logic’ and ‘story’ forms. The word ‘Grace’ connotes the whole story of God’s relationship with people, and the pinnacle of ‘Grace’ was the public Passion of Lord Jesus Christ. The word ‘knowledge’ refers to all knowledge from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and subsequent references to ‘the tree of knowledge’ are shorthand for ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ The essay predominantly focuses on the human knowledge of evil (rather than of good) in order to clarify the first principles of the judgement of evil. There is only minor reference to death, the role of the Holy Spirit, of prayer and suffering, and of the significance of *sarx* or fallen humanity.

Discussion opens with the observation that the human capacity to identify evil is dependent on people having eaten from the tree of the knowledge. A generic two-stage model for the human judgement of evil is proposed. The ‘logic’ and ‘story’ forms make frequent references to this model.

The ‘logic’ form of ‘Grace above knowledge’ is articulated. At the heart of the ‘logic’ form is a concise truth statement that undermines the human judgement of evil. The application of the truth statement to a moral example suggests that the most appropriate human response to a moral dilemma is always *agape*. Loving tears in the face of a moral dilemma well expresses the action – or the result of the action – of ‘Grace above knowledge.’

The ‘story’ form of ‘Grace above knowledge’ is then articulated. At the heart of the ‘story’ form is the analysis of Jesus’ Passion and resurrection in contrast with the polar-opposite events at the tree of knowledge. In relation to Jesus’ Passion, recent and well-founded exegesis of Romans shows that a God-intended, Torah-guided, never-to-be-repeated moral climax of evil occurred on the cross. In contrast with the moral climax of evil, Jesus’ *agape* stands as the public revelation of an ‘above moral’ principle.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that the phrase ‘*Agape* above moral’ is synonymous with ‘Grace above knowledge.’

## Evil and the Tree of Knowledge

The human capacity to identify ‘something’ or ‘another’ as evil is dependent on people having eaten from the tree of the knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:16-17 (NRSV) reads, ‘And the Lord God commanded Adam, ‘You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’’ As the story goes, Eve and then Adam ate from the tree of knowledge, and ‘the eyes of both were opened’ (Gen 3:6-7). The origin of the judgement of evil deserves emphasis because two major events are taking place at the tree of knowledge. First, for the first ever time, people had the capacity to identify evil and to respond to the knowledge of evil.<sup>3</sup> Second, the reign of sin and death had begun.<sup>4</sup>

The human judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge is a two-stage process. The first is the stage (a) identification of evil (hereafter referred to as ‘stage (a)’), and is not a prerequisite to the second stage.<sup>5</sup> The second is the stage (b) action or response to the knowledge of evil (hereafter referred to as ‘stage (b)’ (refer Figure 1 - *Judgement of evil*). This broad two-stage process encompasses all human judgement of evil after the tree of knowledge, and points out that all actions in response to the identification of evil are first dependent on the tree of knowledge. That is, before eating from the tree of knowledge, stage (a) was impossible because

---

<sup>2</sup> There does not need to be evil in order for people to identify evil. False accusation is possible.

<sup>3</sup> The reverse follows that if people had not eaten from the tree of knowledge, then people would be unable to identify evil in the world, because people had no understanding of evil.

<sup>4</sup> Some may say that the Genesis story of the tree of knowledge is myth and therefore an unsuitable place for serious Biblical reflection. However, St. Paul substantially integrates the story of Adam’s role at the beginning of the reign of death into the Romans Epistle (Rom 5:14). The importance given to the reference to Adam in Romans will depend on whether the exegete considers the Epistle to be a scattered and illogical systematic theology (at one extreme), or a ‘symphonic masterpiece’ (at the other extreme). N.T. Wright’s considers Romans to be a ‘symphonic masterpiece,’ having a mature and logical argument that is developed throughout the epistle (see Wright, 1993: n.p.). Wright’s ‘symphonic’ reading of Romans amplifies the importance of the reference to Adam in Romans 5:14, by showing the significance of the reference to the overall argument of the Epistle.

<sup>5</sup> Stage (a) is not a prerequisite to the second stage because people can judge evil without the identification of evil, especially when judgement is positive. For example, if there is suspicion of evil, but the person acts or responds with *agape*, then the person has proceeded directly to stage (b).

people did not have knowledge of evil. After eating from the tree of knowledge, the judgement of evil was made possible, and indeed, the two-stage process occurred immediately: ‘Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves’ (Gen 3:7). Adam and Eve identified their own nakedness as evil at stage (a) and then covered their nakedness at stage (b).<sup>6</sup> As this example suggests, far from being limited to infrequent and isolated events, the judgement of evil is a regular and ongoing human activity – including the judgement of nakedness,<sup>7</sup> and the associated course of action.

The two-stage process of the human judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge:

- a) Identification of evil,
- b) Action or response to the knowledge of evil.

**Figure 1 - Judgement of evil**

## Logic

### *Introducing the Truth Statement*

The following truth statement, that ‘God is greater than your knowledge of evil,’ both undermines and redefines the two-stage process of the human judgement of evil. Before describing the affect of the truth statement, there are three points of note and clarification. One, the truth statement is a stable, timeless and undisputable fact. Two, the phrase ‘your knowledge’ does not single out the reader individually, and is replaceable with ‘all human knowledge’ or, ‘our knowledge.’<sup>8</sup> Three, the phrase ‘knowledge of evil’ refers to the knowledge of evil in the most general sense possible, as the knowledge of evil from the tree of knowledge – the source of the knowledge of evil. The truth statement undermines the two-stage process of the human judgement of evil in two ways. First, and most obviously, human knowledge of evil is less than God’s knowledge of evil. In other words, humans merely have incomplete knowledge

---

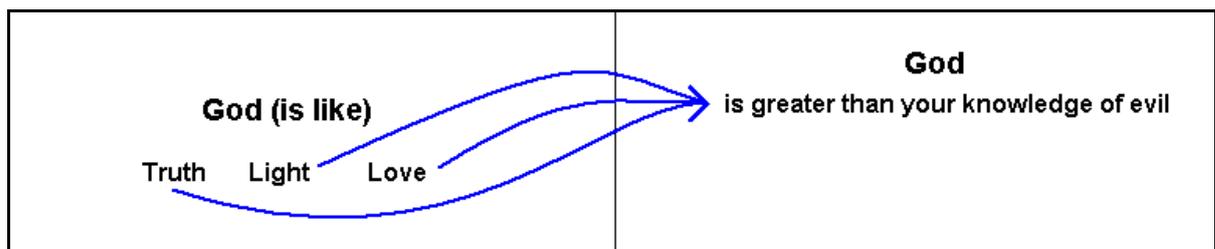
<sup>6</sup> In the essay, there is no distinction made between ‘wrong’ and ‘evil,’ or ‘right’ and ‘good.’

<sup>7</sup> Not to say, of course, that nakedness is evil.

<sup>8</sup> Including written knowledge and knowledge possessed in the mind.

of evil, whereas God is all knowing. Second, the person and work of God is greater than the person and work of humans with the knowledge of evil.<sup>9</sup> Both of these points will be explored in more detail below. The second point is more complex, and its importance to the process of the human judgement of evil is clearer through substituting various one-word metaphors for the word ‘God.’

The substitution of one-word metaphors for the word ‘God’ provides the truth statement with additional bearing and shape. Three common one-word metaphors to describe the God as revealed in Jesus Christ,<sup>10</sup> are ‘Love’ (1 Jn 4:7-21), ‘Truth’ (Jn 1:14, Jn 14:6), and ‘Light’ (Jn 8:12, 1 Jn 1:5). Therefore, for instance, the truth statement may become, ‘Love is greater than your knowledge of evil’ (refer Figure 2 – *Metaphors for God and the Truth Statement*). In this form, and particularly because the word ‘Love’ is a verb, it may be clearer how human knowledge of evil is subordinate to the person and work of God. For example, whereas people may have knowledge of evil, and may act or respond in a ‘non-*agape*’ way, the action of God’s *agape* is greater.<sup>11</sup> Another variation of the truth statement is, ‘Truth is greater than your knowledge of evil.’ As will be demonstrated in an example below (refer *The Truth Statement Applied to the Judgement of Evil*), these truth statements are important to maintain in heart and mind when contemplating or undertaking the judgement of evil.



**Figure 2 – Metaphors for God and the Truth Statement**

<sup>9</sup> This simplified sentence is hard to improve without discussing sinful human nature and the complex passage of Romans 7:21-8:4. Wright’s audio commentary of Romans is helpful in explaining how to read the Epistle and how to grasp the ‘birds-eye’ view of the Bible-story that Paul describes, including the Spirit and *sarx* antithesis (see Wright, 1993: n.p.).

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of the phrase, ‘the God as revealed in Jesus Christ,’ see Wright, 1992: Preface xv.

<sup>11</sup> The word ‘greater’ remains undefined. The statement perhaps begs the question, ‘greater for what?’ An appropriate answer to the question is, ‘greater for advancing the kingdom of God.’

The truth statement is complemented by one of the opening lines of the book of Proverbs, which states, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge’ (Prov. 1:7a). In the New Interpreters Bible, Van Leeuwen describes this verse as the ‘motto’ of the book of Proverbs: ‘The great phrase ‘the fear of the Lord’ grounds human knowledge and wisdom in humble service of Yahweh... The book of Proverbs is meant to teach humans wisdom. But the fear of the Lord relativises human wisdom’ (Van Leeuwen, 1997: 33). The truth statement that ‘God is greater than your knowledge of evil’ has a logical importance that deserves to be matched with an appropriate response of the heart. Here, the respectful fear of the Lord is an important human emotion for the application of the truth statement to the judgement of evil. To fear the Lord includes fearing the depths of the Lord’s knowledge. Recalling the one-word metaphor of ‘Truth’ for the word ‘God,’ the motto for the Proverbs may become, ‘The fear of Truth is the beginning of knowledge.’ Since God’s knowledge of evil is greater than your limited knowledge of evil,<sup>12</sup> upholding this variation on the proverbs motto serves to clear the way emotionally for new knowledge. Upholding the motto is vital because for any judgement of evil, God’s capacity for stage (a) is greater than your capacity for stage (a). An emotional fear of God’s stage (a) as being greater than your stage (a) should entail, at minimum, a fearful and humble desire to bring your stage (a) closer to God’s stage (a) through the getting of more knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

The truth statement is also complemented by Jesus’ summary of the law and the prophets. Quoting the Shema of Israel from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41, Jesus says, ‘‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’ (Mt 22:37-40).<sup>13</sup> A

---

<sup>12</sup> The word ‘your’ is used here for the parallel to the truth statement. As already mentioned, the phrase ‘your knowledge’ is not intended to single out the reader individually, and may instead be replaced with ‘all human knowledge’ or, ‘our knowledge.’

<sup>13</sup> Although discussion here is beyond the scope of this essay, the Holy Spirit enables and empowers Christians to *do* the law Jesus has summarised in Matthew 22:37-40, with the law now being written on

deep commitment to loving God, even before moving to the second commandment to love your neighbour, is a substantial challenge in the face of the truth statement that ‘God is greater than your knowledge,’ because, particularly for the person contemplating stage (a) of the judgement of evil, a deep love of God is synonymous with engaging emotionally and faithfully with the fearfully acknowledged fact that God is greater than your knowledge of evil. As will now be demonstrated, the fear of the Lord, as well as Jesus’ command to love God and one another, together insist on a deep commitment to God that has special relevance to the ‘Love’ and ‘Truth’ variations of the truth statement.

### ***The Truth Statement Applied to the Judgement of Evil***

With the ‘Love’ and ‘Truth’ variations of the truth statement, as well as the ‘motto’ of the proverbs, and now Jesus summary of the law,<sup>14</sup> there are only two appropriate courses of response to a moral predicament of any kind (refer *Figure 3 – The Moral Dilemma*). The first is related to the stage (b) action or response to the knowledge of evil. Since ‘Love is greater than your knowledge of evil,’ it follows that the most appropriate action or response to any moral dilemma is *agape*, unconditional love. This fits with Jesus advice not to resist and evildoer, but to ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ (Mt 5:38-45), as well as Jesus summary of the law and the prophets. This means therefore, that in response to a moral predicament such as murder, the most appropriate response is *agape*. Vital here, but beyond the scope of this essay, is the Christology of Christians sharing the vocation of the Lord Jesus to take evil upon themselves, and yet to respond with Grace.<sup>15</sup> If, however, the Christian cannot fathom that *agape* is the most appropriate action or response to all moral

---

the heart, even though Christians may not possess the written law ancestrally (Rom 2:13-15). Wright, in his Romans commentary, explains the dynamics of this reality in a robust way when other commentators sometimes struggle (Wright, 1993: n.p.).

<sup>14</sup> Implicit also in the argument which follows is Jesus’ general advice of direction in life, to seek first the kingdom of God (Mt 6:33).

<sup>15</sup> A prayerful and Spirit-enabled vocation which Paul refers to in Romans 8:22-23. ‘We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.’ In articulation of this point in context, I am thankful of Wright’s audio commentary of Romans (Wright, 1993: n.p.).

dilemmas, including murder, then he or she should pursue the second course of action – the minimum course of action. This remaining course of action is the stage (a) identification of evil with due respect to the fact that ‘Truth is greater than your knowledge,’ as well as the ‘motto’ of the proverbs, and Jesus summary of the law.<sup>16</sup>

At the heart of ‘Grace above knowledge’ is how the affirmation, ‘Love is greater than your knowledge of evil,’ most applicable to stage (b) of moral judgement, gives a very particular bearing to the truth statement that ‘Truth is greater than your knowledge of evil,’ which is most applicable to stage (a) of moral judgement. It is known in advance that the greatest response at stage (b) must be *agape* because, ‘Love is greater than your knowledge of evil.’ Therefore, it follows that the application of ‘Truth is greater than your knowledge of evil’ to stage (a) must result in the response of *agape* at stage (b). Any response to stage (a) which does not reach this conclusion is violating the truth statement that ‘God is greater than your knowledge of evil.’ The crucial point is that as one continually seeks truth at the stage (a) identification of evil – and without dismissing the vital, Christian vocation of sacrifice, suffering and groaning in the power of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Rom 8:22-23); it will be revealed with certainty that *agape* is the most appropriate (b) action or response (refer Figure 3 – The Moral Dilemma). For example, consider again the moral predicament of murder. As one fearfully seeks truth about the situation of the murderer, new knowledge will be discovered which will do away with the identification of the ‘something’ or ‘another’ as evil. Here, three critical traits of the person undertaking stage (a) of moral judgement, closely related to the fruit of the Spirit identified by St. Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, are knowledge, joy and empathy. In brief, with knowledge, and with wise openness to hearing new knowledge, one may contemplate the rich circumstances of the murderer that God understands, beginning for example with the social background of the murderer and their psychological

---

<sup>16</sup> Although it has already been noted that explicit discussion of the Holy Spirit is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important here to note the fruit of the Spirit as important qualities for being able to patiently suspend the identification of evil and instead seek Truth. Paul says, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things’ (Gal 5:22-23).

problems.<sup>17</sup> In addition to knowledge, joy coupled with empathy enables one to contrast ones own joy and love for life with the joylessness in the broken life of ‘the accused,’ in a way which may well evoke ‘loving tears.’<sup>18</sup> The stage (a) of moral judgement must move from the identification of evil, to the knowledgeable and joy motivated empathy of ‘loving tears.’<sup>19</sup> Importantly, the resultant stage (b) of ‘loving tears’ is not irrelevant to judgement and justice, because Jesus Christ is Lord. ‘Loving tears’ of judgement parallel the Passion of Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>20</sup> who is also the Chief Justice of the International Court of Justice.<sup>21</sup> The Passion of Jesus Christ, in contrast with the ‘climax of evil’ perspective of the cross, is now the subject of the story form of ‘Grace above knowledge.’

---

<sup>17</sup> These are just two of the many examples of new knowledge which may contribute to understanding the rich circumstances of the murderer that God understands.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Loving tears’ is a helpful metaphor for articulating the emotion and mind of a joyful person, perhaps well informed by knowledge, witnessing with empathy and with sadness, the life of a broken and joyless person. The tears may be internal, but they are a far cry from either suspicion, doubt, anger or hate.

<sup>19</sup> Again, the argument is that to deny the process of moving from the identification of evil to ‘loving tears,’ is to deny the fact that ‘God is greater than your knowledge.’

<sup>20</sup> See below, *Jesus Christ and the Climax of Evil*.

<sup>21</sup> The title of ‘Chief Justice of the International Court of Justice’ is an equivalent modern Christological title recognising the multi-dimensional significance of being ‘Lord’ in the first-century.

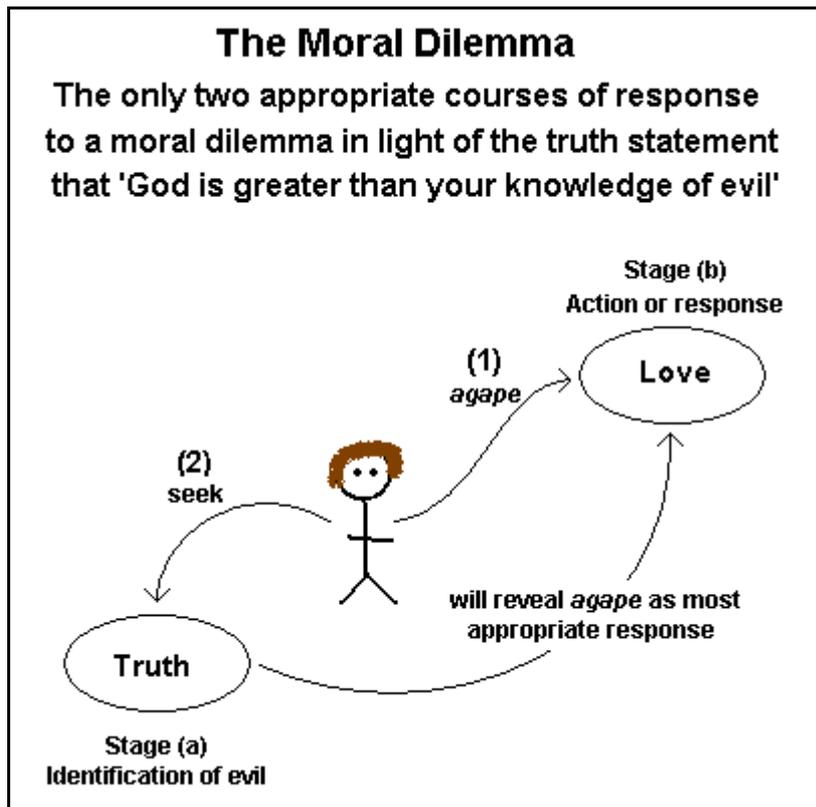


Figure 3 – The Moral Dilemma

## Story

The Bible story of God's loving relationship with people came to a 'super-climax' in Jesus' public revelation of 'Grace above knowledge' during the Passion.<sup>22</sup> As pointed out above, the capacity to identify 'something' or 'another' as evil began when Eve and then Adam ate from the tree of knowledge (refer *Evil and the Tree of Knowledge*). At the very same time, the accuser's reign of sin and death entered God's good creation (Rom 5:12). It was only after a long era of the reign of sin and death, including through the call of Abraham and the giving of the Law to Moses, that God reversed death for the first ever time in the resurrection and public revelation of Jesus Christ. In pointed summary, the knowledge of good and evil began at the same time as death; and Jesus Christ was there (with *agape*) at the reversal of death. A question that deserves due consideration is that if the polar-opposites of (1) death and (2) life

<sup>22</sup> The phrase 'Super-climax' comes by joining Wright's translation of Rom 5:20b, 'But where sin increased, grace also superabounded,' with his climax of evil perspective of the law (see below).

(resurrection) occurred at the opposite ends of the era,<sup>23</sup> was there likewise an equivalent, symmetrical and polar-opposite public revelation of the (2) for the (1) tree of the knowledge of good and evil?<sup>24</sup> Tension for an answer to the question is elevated by the recently articulated view of N.T. Wright that a God-planned climax of moral evil occurred on the cross (Wright, 1993: n.p.). From the perspective of the climax of evil on the cross, the question becomes, if the polar-opposites of (1) death and (2) life (resurrection) occurred at the opposite ends of the era, was there likewise an equivalent (2) *at the God-planned climax of evil* for the (1) tree of the knowledge of good and evil? For an illustration of the question, refer Figure 4 – *The Eras*.<sup>25</sup> The articulation of this equivalent, symmetrical and polar-opposite public revelation of the (2), as assumed to exist for the (1), is the basis of the story form of ‘Grace above knowledge.’

---

<sup>23</sup> The ‘opposite ends of the era’ are the start of ‘Act II’ (the fall), and the end of ‘Act IV’ (walking around Palestine in the shadow of Jesus) or the beginning of Act V (beginning with Easter). On the hermeneutical model of the Bible as a five-act play, still unfinished, see e.g. (Wright, 2005: 170-71). Note that, with inaugurated eschatology, there is difficulty in saying whether life (resurrection) occurs at the end of ‘Act IV’ or at the end of ‘Act V,’ for example, Wright says, ‘John has allowed ‘resurrection’ themes to be heard at several points in the body of his gospel.... The new life which will be consummated in the resurrection itself works backwards into the present, and is already doing so in the ministry of Jesus’ (Wright, 2003: 440).

<sup>24</sup> An obvious answer is, ‘the tree of life,’ but since there are so few explicit references to ‘the tree of life’ in the Bible (The King James Version has three references to ‘the tree of life’ in Genesis 2:9, 3:22 and 3:24; three in Revelation 2:7, 22:2 and 22:14; and four references to ‘a tree of life’ in Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:20, 15:4.), that answer will remain on hold. And besides, how is ‘the tree of life’ opposite to ‘the tree of knowledge?’ Another obvious answer is, ‘the Holy Spirit.’ Nevertheless, an underlying aim of the essay remains, which is to explore and probe the significance of the tree of life or the Holy Spirit to the human judgement of evil enabled through the tree of knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> For more detail about Wright’s hermeneutical model of the Bible as a five-act play, still unfinished, see e.g. Wright, 1992: 121-43, Wright, 2005: 170-71, or Wright, 2005b: n.p.

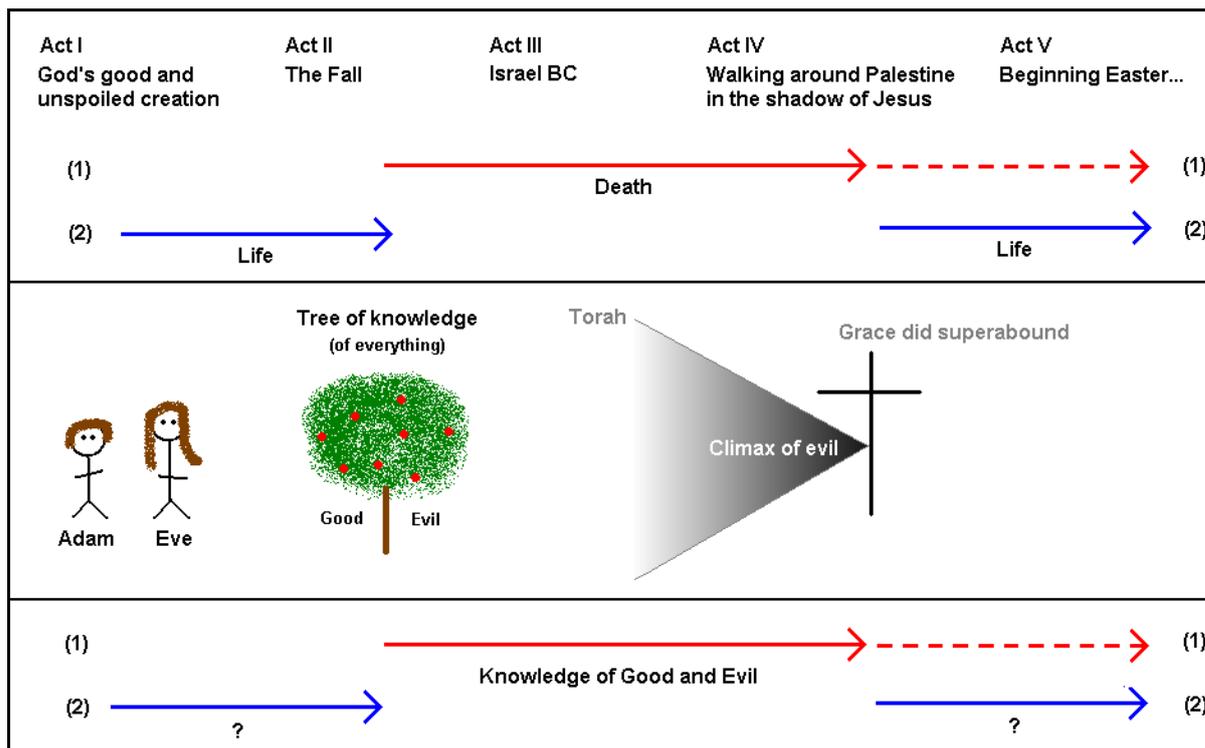


Figure 4 – The Eras

### ***The Climax of Evil***

Extraordinarily, it is rarely articulated by theologians that a never to be repeated climax of evil occurred on the cross.<sup>26</sup> Although it may seem obvious that a climax of evil occurred on the cross simply because God's only son was killed, debate would stir if it were said that God planned Jesus' death. However, the real weight of trouble comes when it is said by theologians such as N.T. Wright that the written Torah of ethnic Israel was always Messiah-centred and was always designed and intended to concentrate evil onto Israel (represented in one person by the Messiah) for God to deal with the problem of evil himself in and through Jesus the Messiah (see Wright, 1993: n.p.). Here, closely related to Wright's perspective on the written Torah, is his exegesis of the Greek phrase *dikaiosynē theou*, which has been 'misunderstood in the history of exegesis' (Wright, 1993: n.p.). Whereas Wright translates the phrase as

<sup>26</sup> Wright notes of the Gospels, 'When... we read the gospels in the holistic fashion in which, arguably, they deserve to be read, we find they tell a double story... They tell the story of how the evil in the world – political, social, personal, moral, emotional – reached its height; and they tell how God's long-term plan for Israel (and for himself!) finally came to its climax. And they tell both of these stories in and as the story of how Jesus of Nazareth announced God's kingdom and went to his violent death' (Wright, 2006: 47-48).

‘the covenant faithfulness of God,’ and is supported by robust historical research on Palestinian Judaism,<sup>27</sup> other exegetes of the phrase find themselves entangled in a doctrine of justification by faith, not entirely misleading, but at odds with history nevertheless (see e.g. Wright, 1997: 95-133).<sup>28</sup> For example, in contrast to N.T. Wright, Martin Luther suggested that because people could not keep the Torah, God scrapped that plan (instead of being faithful to the covenant?) and gave people justification by faith instead (Wright, 1993: n.p.). Any suggestion that the *purpose* of the Torah was to concentrate evil onto Israel evaporates with Luther’s exegesis of Romans.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, John Calvin never really took seriously God’s always Christ-centred plan (Wright, 1993: n.p.). For hundreds of years, no theologian other than Wright had articulated how in Romans, St. Paul is saying that an always God-intended, Torah-guided, never-to-be-repeated moral climax of evil occurred on the cross. Rather than engagement in this debate,<sup>30</sup> the ‘story’ form of ‘Grace above

---

<sup>27</sup> For example, the historical research of Ed Sanders’s in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. In the preface, Sanders mentions how one of his six aims is, ‘to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship’ (Sanders, 1977: xii). That was the view of works righteousness, which said that ethnic Israel was concerned with justification by works – getting right with God by the doing of good moral works.

<sup>28</sup> For a variety of interpretations of the phrase *dikaiosynē theou*, excluding, however, the interpretation of N.T. Wright, see for example, Fitzmyer’s Romans commentary (Fitzmyer, 1993: 253-68).

<sup>29</sup> For instance, in his commentary on Romans, Luther comments of 5:20, ‘The words, ‘that the offence might abound’ do not denote purpose, but result’ (Mueller, 1982: 98). Contrast Wright, on Romans 5:20-21: ‘As Paul says in 2:17-20, reflecting the attitude he himself would have had before his conversion, the Torah provides the form of knowledge and truth. It is the thing that, above all, enables Israel to escape the entail of Adam’s sin, to be different from the pagan world around. Not so, he says here. When Torah came in, its effect – apparently its deliberate effect – was “to increase the trespass” (Wright, 2002: 530-31).

<sup>30</sup> A helpful entry point to explore the debate is the passage of Romans 10:4 where Paul says, ‘For Christ is the end of the law...’ Seeing how commentators explain the phrase ‘the end’ is a rapid insight to how they understand the role of the written Torah. Fitzmyer comments, ‘Here, the Greek ‘*telos nomou*’ is disputed and can mean either (1) termination, cessation; (2) last part, conclusion, last act; or (3) goal, purpose, *finis*’ (Fitzmyer, 1993: 584). As Fitzmyer notes, and in contrast to Wright, many scholars adopt meaning (1) as ‘the termination of all human striving to achieve uprightness in the sight of God through legal observance,’ including the NEB, Augustine, Althaus, Bammel, Bultmann, Dodd, Gaugler, Gutbrod, Käsemann, Lagrange, Lietzmann, Linss, Martin, Michel, Mussner, Pesch, Robinson, Sanday and Hedlam, and Schlier (Fitzmyer, 1993: 584).

knowledge' is based on Wright's exegesis of Romans – including the phrase *dikaiosynē theou*; rather than the prevalent alternative points of view.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Jesus Christ and the Climax of Evil***

At the 'moral' climax of evil on the cross, Jesus judged with *agape*, and did not accuse people with the knowledge of good and evil. Not only is it rarely articulated that the climax of evil occurred on the cross, the fact is rarely held in contrast with Jesus *agape* for the purposes of articulating a moral, or in fact, an 'above moral' principle relevant to life on earth. Recalling the two-stage process of the human judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge, the opportunities for the stage (a) identification of evil reached their climax on the cross. Jesus was faced with the greatest moral dilemma that there has ever been, and there will ever be. However, despite what must have been an enormous tension to appeal to the tree of knowledge – to identify the 'something' or 'another' as evil at stage (a), and then to respond with some form of accusation – the tree of the knowledge does not seem to influence Jesus' stage (b) action or response. For example, Matthew 27:12-14 reads, 'when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you? But he gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.' When betrayed by Judas, 'Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do'' (Mt 26:47-50). Or, in Luke's account, 'Jesus said to him, 'is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'' (Lk 22:48). When crucified, 'Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing'' (Lk 23:34). At the never-to-be-repeated climax of false accusation, betrayal, and violence, Jesus' stage (b) action or response was from a heart of *agape*.

Lord Jesus has set the perfect benchmark for the stage (b) action or response to evil,<sup>32</sup> and this may be demonstrated through an example of melting steel. If steel does not

---

<sup>31</sup> Not to say that the story form expression of 'Grace above knowledge' is not open to revision pending improved exegesis of Romans, but that decisiveness in exegesis helps with moving forward to an articulation of 'Grace above knowledge.' That a climax of evil occurred on the cross amplifies the 'moral' significance of Jesus' response of *agape* (see below).

<sup>32</sup> That is, Jesus has set the benchmark for all his subjects to respect and follow.

melt at 500 degrees Celsius (e.g. Jesus *agape* on the cross), and if, say, 500 degrees Celsius was a once-off maximum temperature (e.g. the climax of evil), then it follows that steel will not melt at 400 degrees, 300 degrees, etc. Since the maximum temperature will never again be reached, it follows that steel will never melt. However, this example is inadequate because whereas sin abounded, grace superabounded (Rom 5:20b). This is like saying, ‘we know steel will never melt, because at the unrepeatable maximum temperature when steel was most likely to melt, steel became stronger.’ There is no basis whatsoever for any subject of Lord Jesus to ever lower his benchmark for the stage (b) action or response of *agape*.

### ***Agape and the Tree of Knowledge***

*Agape* represents the equivalent and symmetrical polar-opposite (2) for the (1) tree of the knowledge of good and evil – an ‘above moral’ principle. Although the ‘tree of life’ and the ‘Holy Spirit’ may be the proper names that connote the full dimensions of the polar-opposite (2), *agape* is an important representative of the (2) for four reasons. One, *agape* is ‘unconditional love,’ and God (and therefore the Holy Spirit) is love. Two, *agape* fits with the definitive conclusion of the ‘logic’ form of ‘Grace above knowledge’ of ‘loving tears’ as being the most appropriate stage (b) in the face of a moral dilemma.<sup>33</sup> Three, *agape* was the stage (b) of Jesus Christ at the climax of evil. Four, it is quite clear how *agape* contrasts the judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge: just as life (or resurrection) is the opposite of death, so *agape* is the opposite of the judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge. That is, to always respond with *agape* is never to undertake a stage (b) action or response motivated by an accusation from the tree of knowledge. For example, to respond with *agape* towards a murderer completely cancels the option of executing a murderer based on an accusation from the tree of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Or, for example, to respond with *agape* is to completely cancel the option of launching an attack on an enemy based on an accusation from the tree of knowledge. *Agape* is an ‘above moral’

---

<sup>33</sup> Noting the way in which the ‘logic’ form of ‘Grace above knowledge’ involves the transformation of the stage (a) identification of evil to the stage (b) action or response of ‘loving tears,’ if the person has not already responded with a stage (b) of *agape* by default.

<sup>34</sup> Not to say that the murderer should not be incarcerated to prevent additional harm, but that any decision to incarcerate the murder should come from a heart of unconditional love.

principle in the human judgement of evil because *agape* cancels out every ‘non-*agape*’ stage (b) action or response that appeals to the tree of knowledge for justification.

## Conclusion

The essay has expressed the meaning of the phrase ‘Grace above knowledge’ in both ‘logic’ and ‘story’ forms. The focus was on the human knowledge of evil, and on clarifying the first principles of the human judgement of evil. There was only minor reference to death, the role of the Holy Spirit, of prayer and suffering, and of the significance of *sarx* or fallen humanity.

The human capacity to identify evil is dependent on people having eaten from the tree of the knowledge, and the human judgement of evil enabled by the tree of knowledge is a two-stage process. The two-stage process encompasses all judgement of evil after the tree of knowledge.

The ‘logic’ form described how a concise truth statement undermines all human judgement of evil not from a heart of *agape*. The application of the truth statement to a moral example suggested that *agape* is always the most appropriate human response to a moral dilemma. ‘Loving tears’ in the face of a moral dilemma well expresses the action – or the result of the action – of ‘Grace above knowledge.’

The ‘story’ form explored Jesus’ Passion and resurrection in contrast with the polar-opposite events at the tree of knowledge. Recent and well-founded exegesis of Romans was selected, in which a God-intended, Torah-guided, never-to-be-repeated moral climax of evil occurred on the cross. Jesus’ *agape* at the climax of evil has set the benchmark for the human response to evil, and stands as the public revelation of an ‘above moral’ principle.

## Bibliography

- Fitzmyer, J. A. (1993). *The Anchor Bible, Romans, a new translation with introduction and commentary*. New York, NY: DoubleDay
- Mueller, J. T. (1982). *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, by Martin Luther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Sanders, E. P. (1977). *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. London: SCM Press
- Van Leeuwen, (1997). In *The New Interpreters Bible* (Vol. V). Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press
- Wright, N.T. (1992). *The New Testament and the people of God, Christian origins and the question of God, vol. 1*. London: Fortress Press
- Wright, N.T. (1993). *Romans in a week*. [Sound Recording]. Regent-Audio.
- Wright, N.T. (1997). *What St. Paul really said*. London: Lion Hudson
- Wright, N.T. (2002). In *The New Interpreters Bible* (Vol. X, pp. 393 – 770). Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press
- Wright, N.T. (2003). *The resurrection of the son of God, Christian origins and the question of God, vol. 3*. MN: Fortress Press.
- Wright, N.T. (2004). *Paul for everyone, Romans, part 1: chapters 1-8*. London: SPCK
- Wright, N.T. (2005). *Paul: fresh perspectives*. London: SPCK
- Wright, N.T. (2005b). *Scripture and the authority of God*. London: SPCK
- Wright, N.T. (2006). *Evil and the justice of God*. London: SPCK