
Sin and Desire

Note the bolded words in the following sections of Scripture.

Genesis 2:8 and 9

⁸The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden;¹ and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is **pleasing** [*chamad*] to the **sight** [*mareh*] and good for food;² the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 3:5 and 6

⁵"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your **eyes** [*ayin*] will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶When the woman **saw** [*raah*] that the tree was good for food, and that it was a **delight** [*taavah*] to the **eyes** [*ayin*], and that the tree was **desirable** [*chamad*] to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Here are five words of interest in these verses.

chamad—"pleasing" (Gen. 2:9) and "desirable" (Gen. 3:6)—used in positive and negative contexts. In a "good" sense ([Psalm 19:10a](#); [Song of Solomon 2:3](#)) and in a "bad" sense ([Prov. 1:22](#); [6:24,25](#))—in negative contexts it may be translated as "covet" ([Exod. 20:17](#)). This word equates to the Greek word *epithumia* which likewise can be translated as "desire" or "lust" depending on the context.

mareh—"sight" (Gen. 2:9)—most frequently translated as "appearance" (48x NASB). It can refer to the act of seeing but also refers to appearance, that is, what can be seen with the eyes ([Gen. 29:17](#); [39:6](#) NET: "well-built and good looking"). In Gen. 2:9, the phrase could read, "every tree that is pleasing in appearance."³ This noun comes from the verb *raah* that occurs in Gen. 3:6 (noted below).

ayin—"eyes" (Gen. 3:6)—is used in a wide variety of literal and figurative expressions. It is most often translated as "eye" or "eyes" (440x) and "sight" (277x) (NASB). *mareh*, as mentioned above, can emphasize the appearance, what is outward (objective), whereas *ayin* can emphasize the response to what is seen (subjective). These are not necessarily the only defining characteristics of the two words.

raah—"saw" (Gen. 3:6)—is used in a wide variety of circumstances. It is most often translated as "see" (410x), "saw" (310x), "seen" (153x), and "look" (71x) (NASB). It occurs seven times in Genesis 1 in the phrase, "God saw [*raah*]" (Gen. [1:4](#), [10](#), [12](#), [18](#), [21](#), [25](#), [31](#)). It has a figurative sense that means to think, perceive, or to understand, like the expression, "I see what you mean."

¹ *Eden*, עֵדֵן, proper name, of a territory, 16x—Strong's: The same as *eden*, עֵדֵן, (masculine); Eden, the region of Adam's home -- Eden. [Cambridge](#): Eden in Hebrew means "delight," or "happiness;" and the Israelite naturally associated this meaning of the word "Eden" with the dwelling place of the first man and woman, because this auspicious name seemed appropriate to the Garden of Jehovah. Hence we find the Garden of God spoken of as the place of fertility, beauty, and delight: [Isaiah 51:3](#), [Ezekiel 28:13](#); [Ezekiel 31:8-9](#); [Ezekiel 36:35](#), [Joel 2:3](#). [Benson](#): Although the word eden signifies delight and pleasure; and undoubtedly the situation of the garden was extremely delightful, yet it is here the name of a place...

² "good for food [*maakal*]" implies that the body-soul man God placed in the garden needed food to sustain his body.

³ NET [note](#): Heb "desirable of sight [or "appearance"]." The phrase describes the kinds of trees that are visually pleasing and yield fruit that is desirable to the appetite.

[taavah](#)—“delight” (Gen. 3:6)—most often translated “desire” (14x NASB); used of good and bad desires. Examples of “bad” desires: [Psalm 10:3](#); [78:29](#), [30](#); examples of “good” desires: [Psalm 10:17](#) and [21:2](#). In Gen. 3:6, though apparently desirable, this fruit was not to be eaten.⁴

These five words highlight appearance, seeing (both literally and figuratively), and desire (wanting). There is an emphasis on the sense of sight, as well as thoughts and emotions.

In Genesis 2:9, we read that the garden of Eden had trees that were pleasing to the sight or pleasing in appearance. The trees were probably strong, lush, and fruitful; not weak, dried up, and fruitless. According to Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” We assume that these trees were not only pleasing in God’s sight but also pleasing in the sight of the people He placed in the garden. What is implied by the combination of these five words is that it’s not just that something can be seen and that someone can see it but that there is a response or reaction to what is seen—a thought, a judgment, or an emotion is prompted by what is seen. In these two records, it is evident that the people God placed in the garden had the capability to literally see trees but also to see them as pleasing in appearance, that is, to appreciate the appearance of the trees. All mankind still has this capability. If a person sees a fruit tree loaded with fruit, it is a “pleasing sight” as opposed to seeing a withering and barren tree. This becomes significant when we consider other capabilities God “built-in” to the man and woman when he made and formed them. It should be obvious that a person does not need spirit to “see” (experience) a tree as pleasant in appearance (to enjoy the sight); or to “see” another person as attractive in appearance.

The Hebrew word [chamad](#) is translated as “pleasing” in Genesis 2:9 and as “desirable” in Genesis 3:6. To find something pleasing or to find something desirable are two subtly different capabilities. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was presented to Eve by the serpent in such a way that she not only noticed it as a “delight to the eyes,” that is, it was “pleasing” in appearance, but also as something “desirable,” that is, she wanted to eat its fruit. It wasn’t just that she appreciated its appearance, but she wanted its fruit. What she “saw” (perceived, thought of) as desirable was that that fruit would make her wise. The serpent cunningly lured her and convinced her that she was “missing out” on something. At this point, her capability to see something as pleasing became a desire to have something that God had forbidden. This sort of misdirected desire is the root of all kinds of fruitless living ([Mark 4:19](#)). We know that Eve acted out her desire and ate. In the N.T., this would be described as “walking by the flesh.” The desire for gain in various forms is constantly promoted in this world and leads to destruction ([Proverbs 1:19](#)). There are countless records of warning in Scripture along these lines.

Though the word itself does not seem to occur in Scripture in the sense in which we generally think of it, “curiosity” is perhaps an aspect of desire. Curiosity is not inherently good or bad. God intended this capability for good, but as the old saying goes, “curiosity killed the cat.” In the sense of wanting to know, it can be seen in Gen. 3:9 as well as many other places in Scripture. Wanting knowledge or wanting to be wise is not inherently evil. It’s a question of what knowledge do I want, how am I pursuing it, and why (positive examples—see [Psalm 86:11](#) “unite my heart;” [Psalm 25:1](#) “lift up my soul (ESV: I direct my desire to You);” [Col. 3:1 and 2](#)). To be curious/desirous to have a growing knowledge of God, growing in wisdom, ought to have been preferred by Eve to grasping for a knowledge of good and evil—grasping to be wise.⁵ The “fear of God” is the beginning of wisdom—that is, humility with respect to God. The serpent enticed Eve with the same thing that enticed him, that is, being like God ([Isaiah 14:14](#)) as

⁴ See also [avah](#).

⁵ Per NET [notes](#), there are a couple legitimate ways to translate Gen. 3:6: “You will be like divine beings who know good and evil” or “You will be, like God himself, knowers of good and evil.” [My note: “knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4) is equated with “being wise” (Gen. 3:6).]

opposed to being humble before God. This has been and continues to be a strong enticement among mankind in this world influenced by the devil.

To desire something, a person must have some knowledge or information about that something. Eve would not have had a desire for the forbidden fruit if the serpent had not provided certain information to her. In this case, the information was not fully truthful but deceptive in nature. The serpent had an evil intent in mind and used persuasive information to appeal to Eve. Had Eve never heard that there was something to be gained by eating from that tree (i.e., to be like God), she would never have had a desire to eat from it. This principle still holds true. If a person has no knowledge of something, they cannot have a desire for it, either good or bad. For example, if a person has never heard of ice cream, they cannot have a desire to eat ice cream. Since Adam's disobedience and expulsion from the garden, there is an abundance of evil knowledge in the world and all people are "weak" (Matt. 26:41 and Mark 14:38).

The following verses from James describe this process of desire turning to sin.

James 1:13–15

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust [*epithumia*]. ¹⁵ Then when lust [*epithumia*] has conceived [*sullambanó*], it gives birth [*tiktó*] to sin [*hamartia*]; and when sin [*hamartia*] is accomplished [*apoteleó*], it brings forth [*apokueó*] death.

Here are some words of interest in this section.

epithumia—"lust"—occurs in both positive and negative contexts (positive: [Luke 22:15](#); negative: [Mark 4:19](#)); correlates to the Hebrew word *chamad*.

sullambanó—"conceived"—Thayer: **b. to conceive, of a woman** (often so in the Sept. for הָרָה); see [Luke 1:24](#), [31](#), [36](#); [2:21](#).

tiktó—"gives birth"—to bring forth, bear, produce (fruit from the seed); properly, **of women giving birth**; see [Luke 1:31](#); [Matthew 1:21](#), [23](#), [25](#).

apokueó—"brings forth"—to bring forth from the womb, give birth to; carries the same sense as *tiktó*, namely **giving birth**; only other occurrence [James 1:18](#) (note NIV, "give us birth," Holman, "gave us a new birth").

The figurative language used in this section is striking. Desire (after "interacting with evil knowledge") "conceives" and "gives birth to" "Sin," she in turn "gives birth to" "Death."

Note the phrase "by his own lust." The capability to desire was built-in to man by God. When this capability is misdirected or abused, it is called "lust," which is "over" desire or "out of bounds" desire. It is not a different capability.

The words *sullambanó* and *tiktó* occur together in [Luke 1:31](#) cited above, "...you will **conceive** in your womb and **bear** a son." First, there is conception and then there is giving birth. Here is the NET version of James 1:15.

James 1:15 (NET)

¹⁵ Then when desire [*epithumia*] **conceives** [*sullambanó*], it **gives birth** [*tiktó*] to sin, and when sin is full grown, it **gives birth** [*apokueó*] to death.

Though there are two different Greek words used for "birth" in this verse, the meaning is essentially the same. What we have in this verse is "desire" [*epithumia*] being personified as a woman conceiving and

then giving birth to “sin.” “Sin” is also being personified since it is not literally a baby. Then, when this “baby” matures, she gives birth to “death.”⁶ This sounds similar to [Romans 5:12](#).

It is obvious that the capability to find things pleasing and to desire can be misdirected, as turned out to be the case with Eve. It’s also obvious that this capability can lead to obsession—being covetous. This was certainly not God’s intended purpose for this capability, but along with this capability came the possibility of abuse. The first example of “out of bounds” desire occurred with Eve. Ever since, the god of this age has played no small part in encouraging the abuse of this capability. There is no Scriptural indication that this capability has been somehow corrupted because of the action of Adam and Eve. The capability has not changed but through the influence of the world, along with the people in it, and no other internal moderating influence, “out of bounds” desires have and continue to abound.

How “desire” was impacted by the disobedience of Adam is worth considering. Being expelled from the garden, Adam’s survival depended on the “sweat of his brow.” In other words, if Adam did not work hard, he and his family would die. This circumstance would obviously impact what “desires” a person might (or might not) have. So, it might be accurate to say that the capability to desire was not corrupted, but mankind’s circumstance—his condition internally and externally—certainly had and currently has an impact on desires.

The following verse describes escaping this world dominated by corrupting desires.

2 Peter 1:2–4 (ESV)

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption [[phthora](#)] that is in the world [[kosmos](#)] because of sinful desire [[epithumia](#)] (KJV, NASB: “lust”).

2 Peter 1:4 (NET)

...you may become partakers of the divine nature after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire.⁷

The significant point is that the gift of holy spirit is an enablement that makes it possible for a person to not be dominated by ungodly, corrupting desires. In conjunction with a renewing of the mind, this is the only way in this world to be genuinely “strong” (more often referred to as being “mature”). This same concept is communicated in the following verses.

Romans 13:14

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision [[pronoia](#)] for the flesh [[sarx](#)] in regard to its lusts [[epithumia](#)].

Galatians 5:16

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire [[epithumia](#)] of the flesh [[sarx](#)].

In Romans 13:14, “provision” is “forethought,” that is “thinking ahead” about satisfying ungodly or unrighteous desires, i.e., desires of “the flesh.” Rather than thinking about how to fulfill ungodly and unrighteous desires, those born again are to think according to their new identity in Christ and “think

⁶ Both “desire” and “sin” are feminine. “Death” is masculine.

⁷ [NET](#)—see note 20 regarding the word “escape.”

ahead” to godly and righteous desires. “Walk by the spirit” in Galatians 5:16 involves both the renewing of the mind and the recognition of and response to the gift of holy spirit.

Both these verses could be read as if “flesh” had its own desires, especially given the NASB translation of Romans 13:14. However, there is no “its” in the text. The Berean Literal of the latter part of the verse reads, “make no provision for the desires of the flesh,” which is similar to Galatians 5:16 (“the desire of the flesh”). The “flesh” is not some part of each of us that has its own desires that is distinct from us. The desires of the flesh might be contrary to what we would really like to do, but the desires of the flesh are our desires. If “the flesh” is read as some part of us that has its own desires, it would be a personification of “the flesh” *as if* “the flesh” is some sort of evil entity living in each of us. Particularly in Romans chapters 6 and 7, these desires (lusts) are spoken of as if there is another entity alive and well within each of us. “Sin” is personified as this entity “dwelling” and “reigning” in each of us. Obviously, not all desires are evil. The concept being portrayed is that those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ are “new” in that all have been “freed from Sin” and they also have the gift of holy spirit. This is characterized throughout the Church Epistles as the “old man” versus the “new man.” The “new man” submits to Righteousness, while the “old man” submits to “Sin.” The “old man” and “new man” are not literal “men” living in us and it is easy to understand that Scripture is talking about “way of life.” The “desires of the flesh” is another reference to the concept of the “old man.” In a figurative sense, there are two “men.” We either promote the “character” of the “old man” or we promote the “character” of the “new man.” What is being portrayed in Romans 7 is the “old man” being incapable of overriding the “desires of the flesh.” Eve epitomized this problem, even though she had spirit. She “walked” by her senses, her emotions, her feelings. What we now call the “old man.” What begins in Chapter 8 is a presentation of an aspect of the “new man” who has the gift of holy spirit. Through the renewing of the mind and acknowledging and responding to the spirit, a person can live out the “new man” character. In Chapter 7, everyone who is only body and soul is only capable of expressing the “old man” character which is “weak” in the broadest sense of the term. In Chapter 8, the one who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ has an added capability, which coupled with the renewing of the mind, enables the person to demonstrate the character of the “new man” and to be “strong” in the broadest sense of the term.