Q: Before the apple incident, were Adam and Eve perfect?

Perfect does not always mean very good.

Who cares? And what does it matter now?

Excellent questions. Both address what might not seem relevant to us today.

But we should care and it does matter.

Why?

The condition of Adam and Eve while in the garden of Eden before the apple might reveal God's original purpose and His expectations of humankind into the future.

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
Matthew 5:48

If the original natural state of humankind was perfection, our mission would suggest we strive to return to that state while on earth. Or at a minimum, when we eventually arrive in the new creation – God's eternal kingdom.

But what if Adam and Eve were not perfect?

What exactly does perfect look like?

What makes God perfect?

How does Jesus expect us to become perfect?

And finally, if we do become perfect, what are we supposed to do for the rest of eternity?

In the garden, Adam and Eve enjoyed everything we could hope for – the intimate presence of God, no privation, just pure abundance, all in a state of divine order.

And yet, this was somehow not enough.

What did Adam and Eve lack? It must have been something quite significant if both were willing to risk death for it.

"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."
Genesis 2:17

A WORD ON THE WORD

The Greek word translated as "perfect" is teleios. This word is not the same as the Hebrew word tov which means good, but with the intensifier me'od can mean very good, or exceedingly good. Modern readers often interpret God's declaration that His creation was "very good" as proof that everything He made was perfect. Teleios suggests otherwise. Here perfect does not mean sinless, flawless, or incapable of corruption, but rather complete, mature, whole, or having reached the intended goal.

In the second century, Christian scholar Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that Adam and Eve were created innocent and morally good, but immature. They were in essence children who would eventually need to grow into spiritual adulthood. Both required to learn what it means to be created in the “image and likeness” of God.

In his interpretation of the garden story, Irenaeus argued God did not create perfect humans from the beginning, but instead He gave humanity a destiny.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."
1 John 3:2

In the garden, Adam and Eve’s immaturity may have been unknown to them.

Sin, a deliberate choice to disobey a direct order from God, exposed their immaturity. Sin opened their eyes and destroyed their innocence for they did not possess a mature understanding of God's character. And the distance between themselves, created beings, and an omniscient and all-powerful, all-knowing God became infinite.

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."
Deuteronomy 30:19

How are we to close this gap between us and God? To learn to know who God is?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers to be perfect as God is perfect.

Desperate for encouraging words about this new promise of eternal salvation, Jesus teaches humility, mercy, forgiveness, righteousness, sincere faith, and trust in God.

Then Jesus explains what ultimately must be done.

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
Matthew 5:44

Jesus must have known this would be incomprehensible to nearly all who followed Him.

Love God. Love my neighbor. And now: *Love my enemy?*

Human understanding had reached its limit.

They did not believe they could learn such love. Human nature was too hardened from the reality of life to allow such a gesture to become possible.

Undeterred, Jesus would show them the way. He would surrender His own life out of love for His enemies – those who turned against His Father in sin.

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."
Romans 5:10

According to Jesus, there was only one way for created beings to achieve such a high calling.

God would need to transform their hearts through the Spirit delivering the capacity to love beyond the limits of their own nature.

"...because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."
Romans 5:5

As the crowd thinned, Jesus turned to His remaining disciples.

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."
John 6:67-69

To achieve salvation, does Jesus demand absolute sinlessness? Not according to Scripture.

He does not command the elimination of every possible human imperfection but instead emphasizes completeness, and in particular, the wholeness of love.

He wants us to learn to love like God.

And how do we love like God? By knowing Him.

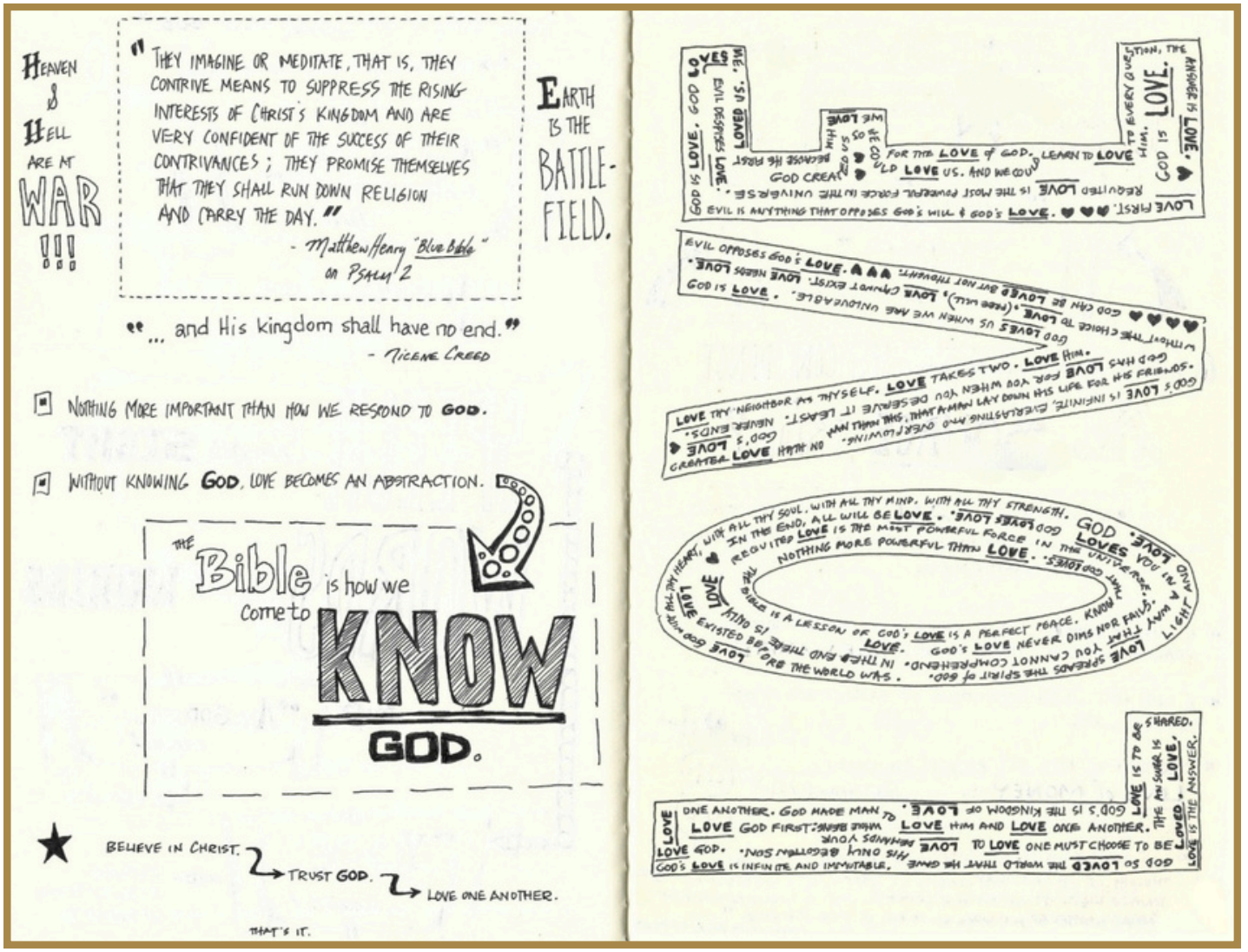
Without knowing Him loving Him is just an abstraction.

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."
1 John 4:8

God is the Infinite Whole – lacking nothing, knowing everything, capable of all things.

As created beings, we strive to become what God originally intended. Can we come to know Him and learn to love like Him, even if it takes an eternity?

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"
Romans 11:33



BoBQ Vol 4 pg 16 & Vol 10 pg 61