

**RODERICK A. GRACIANO**

**CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ**

An in-depth look at the truths  
that will define our eternal destiny...

**REDEMPTION**

**By**

**JESUS**

**And The Restoration Of All Things**



Psalm 119.105

**TIMOTHY MINISTRIES**

# **Redemption By Jesus**

## **And The Restoration Of All Things**

An In-Depth Look At The Truths  
That Will Define Our Eternal Destiny

UNABRIDGED VERSION

RODERICK A. GRACIANO  
with PASTOR CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ

2022-2025

## Dedication

**To the friends of Timothy Ministries**, a wonderful group comprised of family members, colleagues, personal friends and a few strangers. In manifold ways, you have each contributed to making it possible for me to follow my calling and enjoy my “dream job” for fifty years. My sincere hope is that you will be encouraged and your faith strengthened by the contents of this book.

Roderick A. Graciano, Lakewood, WA, January 2026

**To Flor, my beloved wife, and to my three dear children: Esdras, Hadasha, and Esteban.** I have walked with you through every paragraph of this book. Your questions refined the way I presented the content to the church, and your enthusiasm for what God will do led me to love more deeply the hope we have in our blessed Redeemer. May God use this book to form in you a robust faith and an ever-increasing love for Him.

Carlos S. Martinez, Cabo San Lucas, BCS, January 2026

**But above all,  
to our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s “beloved Son, in whom we have  
redemption.”**

Colossians 1.13-14

## Permissions

© 2025 by Roderick A. Graciano, Carlos Samuel Martínez and Timothy Ministries. Reproduction of any part of this document entitled *Redemption By Jesus* in commercial works is strictly prohibited unless explicit permission is obtained from Timothy Ministries for such use (please inquire by writing to roderick@tmin.org). Timothy Ministries HEREBY GRANTS PERMISSION to quote from and reproduce this document in noncommercial works so long as the following notice is included with the quoted material: “©2025 by Timothy Ministries, www.tmin.org, used by permission.”

## Abbreviations: General

AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , [designating a year or period] after Christ's birth
ANE	ancient Near East, ancient Near Eastern
BC	[designating a year or period] before Christ's birth
C.	circa, around OR century
Ch.	chapter
Cf.	compare [with]
Eng	English
Esp	Spanish
Et al.	and others
Fem.	feminine gender
Ff.	following pages
Grk	Greek language
Heb	Hebrew language
Lat	Latin
Lit.	literal, literally
Ms, Mss	manuscript, manuscripts
P.; pp.	page, pages
Perf.	perfect tense
Pl.	plural
Sing.	singular
V.; vv.	verse; verses
Vol., vols.	volume, volumes

## Abbreviations: Written Works

DSS	<i>Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , Edited by Orr, 1915
LBD	<i>The Lexham Bible Dictionary</i>
MBIOS	<i>Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin</i> by Graciano
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> , Edited by Schaff
NSHERK	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i>
NT	The New Testament
OT	The Old Testament
PRE	<i>Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary Of The Old Testament</i>

## Abbreviations: Bible Versions

**NOTE:** Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible passages quoted in this work are from *The New American Standard Bible* (abbreviated in this document as NASB95), © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

ASV	<i>The Holy Bible, American Standard Version 1901</i>
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible, English Standard Version</i> , © 2016 Good News Publishers
GNT	<i>The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition</i> , © 2011–2013 Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature
HCSB	<i>The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version</i> , © 2009 Holman Bible Publishers
KJV	<i>The Holy Bible: King James Version</i> , Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version, © 2009 Logos Research Systems
LBLA	<i>Santa Biblia: La Biblia de Las Américas Con Referencias Y Notas</i> , © 1998 Casa Editorial para La Fundación Bíblica Lockman
LES	<i>The Lexham English Septuagint</i> , © 2012 Lexham Press
LXX	The Septuagint ( <i>Septuaginta</i> , ancient Greek version of the OT), © 1979 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
NASB95	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIrV	<i>New International Reader's Version</i> 1st ed., © 1998 Zondervan
NIVO	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 1984 International Bible Society
NLT	<i>Holy Bible: New Living Translation</i> , © 2015 Tyndale House Publishers
RAG	Translation by the author, © 2025 Roderick Graciano
RV95	<i>Reina Valera Revisada (1995)</i> , © 1998 Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas
TEV	<i>The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation</i> , © 1992 American Bible Society (formerly <i>Today's English Version</i> )
TNK	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures</i> , © 1985 Jewish Publication Society

# Abbreviations: Biblical & Apocryphal Books

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Is	Isaiah
1Co	1 Corinthians	Jas	James
1En	1 Enoch	Jdg	Judges
1Jn	1 John	Jdt	Judith
1Ki	1 Kings	Je	Jeremiah
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Job	Job
1Pe	1 Peter	Joe	Joel
1Sa	1 Samuel	Jn	John
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Jon	Jonah
1Ti	1 Timothy	Jos	Joshua
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jub	Jubilees
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jud	Jude
2Jn	2 John	La	Lamentations
2Ki	2 Kings	Le	Leviticus
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Lk	Luke
2Pe	2 Peter	Mal	Malachi
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mk	Mark
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mt	Matthew
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mic	Micah
3Jn	3 John	Na	Nahum
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Ne	Nehemiah
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Nu	Numbers
Ac	Acts	Ob	Obadiah
Am	Amos	Php	Philippians
Col	Colossians	Phm	Philemon
Da	Daniel	Pr	Proverbs
Dt	Deuteronomy	Ps	Psalms
Ec	Ecclesiastes	Re	Revelation
Eph	Ephesians	Ro	Romans
Es	Esther	Ru	Ruth
Ex	Exodus	Sib	Sibylline Oracles
Eze	Ezekiel	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Ezr	Ezra	So	The Song of Solomon
Ga	Galatians	Tt	Titus
Ge	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Hab	Habakkuk	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hag	Haggai	Zec	Zechariah
Heb	Hebrews	Zep	Zephaniah
Ho	Hosea		

# Contents

<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>PERMISSIONS</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS: GENERAL</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS: WRITTEN WORKS</b> .....	<b>IV</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS: BIBLE VERSIONS</b> .....	<b>V</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS: BIBLICAL &amp; APOCRYPHAL BOOKS</b> .....	<b>VI</b>
<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>XII</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION: THE ANCIENT SOLUTION TO BONDAGE AND PROPERTY LOSS</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. GOD HAS OUR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART AND NO ULTERIOR MOTIVES.</b> .....	<b>7</b>
TWO THINGS ABOUT GOD’S CHARACTER.....	7
A COUNTERINTUITIVE ASPECT OF GOD’S LOVE .....	10
THE CONSUMING FIRE .....	11
<b>2. EVERY DESCENDANT OF ADAM EXCEPT JESUS WAS BORN WITH A SIN PROBLEM.</b> .....	<b>13</b>
WHAT IS SIN? .....	13
THE PENALTY OF SIN .....	13
SIN’S ORIGIN AND HUMAN FALLENNESS .....	14
WHY WON’T GOD OVERLOOK SINS.....	24
IS AN EXPIATORY SACRIFICE REALLY NECESSARY? .....	24
<i>Excursus On The Kingdom Of God</i> .....	<i>26</i>
<b>3. WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES FROM OUR OWN SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.</b> .....	<b>37</b>
OUR IMPAIRED NATURE CANNOT KEEP ITSELF FROM SINNING.....	37
OUR OWN GOOD WORKS CANNOT BALANCE OUT OUR SINS.....	38
WEREN’T ISRAELITES SAVED BY ANIMAL SACRIFICES? .....	40

EVEN OUR OWN DEATH CANNOT EXPIATE OUR SINS.....	40
<b>Excursus On The Gospel .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>4. GOD GRACIOUSLY ADDRESSED THE HUMAN SIN PROBLEM THROUGH HIS SON JESUS. ....</b>	<b>51</b>
WHAT IS THE GRACE OF GOD?.....	51
GOD’S WAY OF REDEMPTION INVOLVES A BLOOD SACRIFICE.....	51
<b>Excursus On The Word Atonement .....</b>	<b>52</b>
THE REDEMPTION PRICE PAID .....	81
LINGERING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEATH OF JESUS .....	82
<b>Excursus On Paradise .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>5. JESUS JUSTIFIES BELIEVERS AND RECONCILES THEM TO THE FATHER. ....</b>	<b>114</b>
WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS? .....	114
SUMMARIZING THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION .....	122
DOESN’T GOD DEMAND PERFECTION? .....	130
ETHICAL CONDUCT ANCILLARY TO RELATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS.....	137
DIDN’T PAUL INSIST THAT NO ONE IS JUSTIFIED BY WORKS? .....	137
IF GOOD WORKS DON’T JUSTIFY, NOR SECURE ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD AND THE CHURCH, WHY DO THEM? .....	142
<b>Excursus On Legalism .....</b>	<b>143</b>
IS JUSTIFICATION THE SAME THING AS SALVATION? .....	149
HOW DOES CHRIST’S RESURRECTION RELATE TO OUR JUSTIFICATION? .....	151
HOW DOES A PERSON COME TO HAVE JUSTIFYING FAITH? .....	154
<b>Excursus On The Earliest Christian Creedal Statements.....</b>	<b>175</b>
I BELIEVE; MUST I ALSO REPENT? .....	181
I’VE REPENTED; MUST I ALSO BE CONVERTED? .....	193
I BELIEVE AND I’VE REPENTED; MUST I ALSO BE BAPTIZED? .....	196
IS JUSTIFICATION THE CULMINATION OF OUR REDEMPTION? .....	209
<b>6. WE CAN BE BORN AGAIN INTO GOD’S FAMILY, AND HAVE ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION. ....</b>	<b>210</b>
THE SOLUTION FOR FALLENNESS.....	210
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BORN AGAIN?.....	211

AS A WORK OF GOD, IS <i>REGENERATION</i> SYNONYMOUS WITH <i>JUSTIFICATION</i> OR <i>SALVATION</i> ?	214
WHAT SHOULD A PERSON DO TO BE BORN AGAIN?	215
IF NEW BIRTH IS THE SOLUTION FOR HUMAN FALLENNESS, WHY DOESN'T GOD REGENERATE EVERYONE?	223
ASSURANCE OF OUR NEW BIRTH, CALLING, AND ELECTION	224
DENIALS OF ASSURANCE	242
SHOULDN'T ASSURANCE COME FROM THE GOSPEL ITSELF?	246
ASSURANCE OF BEING KEPT FROM APOSTASY	249
FALSE ASSURANCE	257
<b>7. JESUS WILL VICTORIOUSLY LEAD HIS PEOPLE TO A GLORIOUS DESTINY</b>	<b>271</b>
RESTORING THE <i>FAMILIA DEI</i>	271
THE GLORIFICATION OF THE REDEEMED	356
Excursus On The Scandal Of Silence About Rewards	363
Excursus On What The Redeemed Take Into The Next Life	371
Excursus On Ancient Scrolls And Seals	394
Excursus On The Day Of The LORD	428
Excursus On The Coming Eschatological Monarchy	452
THE FINAL REBELLION, THE DEVIL DESTROYED	493
THE FINAL JUDGMENT, DEATH DESTROYED	497
REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED	504
BACK TO THE PRESENT: APPLYING WHAT WE'VE LEARNED	510
<b>APPENDIX 1: HUMAN NATURE AND THE FALL</b>	<b>523</b>
THE NATURE OF THINGS	523
THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS	523
THE RELEVANT BIBLICAL TERMS	525
THE ENSLAVEMENT OF HUMAN NATURE	534
IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS	538
<b>APPENDIX 2: THE PROTO-EVANGEL</b>	<b>549</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: DID JESUS DESCEND INTO HELL?</b>	<b>560</b>

THE ORIGINS OF THE TRADITION .....	560
THE MEANING OF THE TRADITION .....	561
THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TRADITION IN THE REFORMATION AND IN THE PRESENT .....	564
EVALUATING THE ESSENCE OF THE CREEDAL STATEMENT .....	567
THE APPEAL TO 1 PETER 3.19 .....	573
THE APPEAL TO MATTHEW 12.40 .....	574
THE APPEAL TO REVELATION 1.18.....	575
THE SABBATH REST OBSCURED BY THE TRADITION.....	576
CONCLUSION REGARDING THE TRADITION OF THE DESCENT .....	578
<b>APPENDIX 4: AN ORDO SALUTIS.....</b>	<b>580</b>
<b>APPENDIX 5: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE AQEDAH, THE BINDING OF ISAAC.....</b>	<b>581</b>
INTRODUCTION: LET THE READER UNDERSTAND .....	581
THE AQEDAH IN ITS ANCIENT NEAR-EASTERN SETTING .....	583
THE AQEDAH IN ITS FAMILY SETTING .....	595
THE AQEDAH IN THE LIGHT OF ITS NARRATIVE DETAILS .....	597
THE AQEDAH IN THE LIGHT OF ITS COVENANTAL AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE.....	603
THE AQEDAH'S PASTORAL IMPORTANCE.....	607
<b>APPENDIX 6: PARALLELS BETWEEN THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT AND THE ULTIMATE EXODUS .....</b>	<b>611</b>
<b>APPENDIX 7: INTERPRETING BIBLICAL NUMERALS .....</b>	<b>617</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>624</b>
ANCIENT NEAR EAST & BIBLE BACKGROUND.....	624
APOCRYPHA & PSEUDEPIGRAPHA.....	626
APOLOGETICS & THE AQEDAH.....	627
ARCHAEOLOGY & ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS.....	628
CHRISTOLOGY & THE GOSPELS .....	629
COMMENTARIES, EXEGETICAL SUMMARIES & HANDBOOKS.....	630
COVENANTS.....	637
CREEDS & CATECHISMS.....	638

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY & CHURCH FATHERS.....	639
ESCHATOLOGY.....	640
GREEK SCRIPTURES.....	643
HEBREW SCRIPTURES, ARAMAIC TARGUMS & DEAD SEA SCROLLS.....	644
HERMENEUTICS .....	645
PERIODICALS.....	646
RABBINICAL & JEWISH PERSPECTIVES.....	647
REFERENCE BOOKS & MISCELLANEOUS .....	649
SERMONS.....	655
THEOLOGY (GENERAL).....	655
<b>INDEX .....</b>	<b>662</b>

# Preface

Every theologian feels the need to emphasize certain aspects of the great doctrines of the Bible, aspects which he feels have been overlooked or misunderstood in his own time. In the best cases, those emphases are eye-opening. In the worst cases the emphases distract from the central truths of the given topic. We hope that the particular emphases appearing here and there in this book may be of the former and not of the latter. In any case, I, Roderick, take full responsibility for the emphases in this work, as well as for errors of any kind that may have snuck their way into the final draft.

To my friend and fellow laborer in Christian ministry, Carlos Samuel Martinez, goes the credit for inspiring this theological study, for providing many of the questions that form the framework of the narrative, and for providing countless insights, theological and practical, in connection with the main topic and its many aspects. His insights frequently generated material that would not have appeared in this work without his prompting.

We have both prayed our way through this project, and unhesitatingly acknowledge that if any part of this book results in benefit to the church of our Lord Jesus, then all the credit for that goes to Him and to His Holy Spirit.

In this treatise, several things may seem peculiar to the reader:

1. We have used the nouns *man* and *men*, and the masculine pronouns *he*, *him* and *his*, more or less as Scripture does, in statements requiring a generic, inclusive term for a human person of either sex (see, for example, the pronouns *he* and *his* in the opening sentence of this preface).
2. In English, we write God's personal name, the Tetragrammaton יהוה, as *Yahveh*. The V in this spelling, in place of the W of *Yahweh*, reflects the modern Hebrew pronunciation, *were the name to be pronounced* by a Hebrew speaker.
3. When giving the pronunciation of Greek words, we do so according to the conventions of Modern Greek.

## Introduction: The Ancient Solution To Bondage And Property Loss

If a citizen of ancient Israel became impoverished, he could sell himself into servitude. Depending on the poor man's abilities, he could potentially sell himself for enough money to pay off his debts. The downside of the arrangement was that he would have to work like a hired hand for an Israelite master for up to six years (Dt 15.12) or for a foreign master for up to 49 years (Le 25.47-54).

Similarly, an impoverished Israelite could sell the land divinely allotted to his family in Joshua's time.<sup>1</sup> In this case, he could lose the dominion over his property for up to 49 years, until it reverted to him in the 50th year, the year of jubilee (Le 25.10,13,28). If he happened to sell his property very soon after a jubilee year, he likely would not live long enough to regain it in the next jubilee. Depending on the man's circumstances, his family line might lose that portion of their ancestral lands forever.

The Mosaic law graciously provided a solution to the potential problems of long servitude and permanent property loss by its **rules of redemption**. The biblical word *redemption* refers to the act of redeeming, and to *redeem* simply means "to buy back." In the ancient Israelite world, if the man who had sold himself or his property somehow regained the means to redeem, that is, to *buy back* his own freedom and property, he had the right to do so (Le 25.23-27,49). However, if the man was unable to redeem himself or his property, the law prescribed that a near relative, a kinsman (in Heb a *goel*) who had the means, could redeem both man (Le 25.47-52) and property (Le 25.24-25; cf. Je 32.7-8), thereby restoring his poor relative's freedom and dominion. The kinsman would thus be recognized as a *redeemer*.

A poignant provision in the Israelite laws of redemption had to do with the case of a widow who had no surviving male heir. Such a widow, if impoverished for lack of husband or sons to work her land, could sell her land directly to a kinsman

---

<sup>1</sup> See Nu 34.13-15; Jos 18.10.

redeemer (the *goel*), and live by the fruit of her land as the redeemer restored it to productivity for his own profit. The added proviso, however, was that the kinsman redeemer had to marry the widow, in the hopes of raising up a male heir, who would resume ownership of the land in the name of the original family line. The Bible describes this kind of redemption in the romantic book of Ruth.

Of course, the words *redeem* and *redemption* are also used figuratively, in various scriptural contexts referring to *rescue* as from enemies, oppressors or even from death.<sup>2</sup> Most relevantly for the entire human race, the Bible also uses the idea of redemption in connection with sin: *to be redeemed* can mean *to be rescued from the tyranny or consequences of sin*.<sup>3</sup> If we follow this theme in the Scriptures, a cosmic drama opens up before us. We realize that Adam and Eve sold our race into bondage to the Serpent (the devil) and surrendered man's dominion over the earth to that evil taskmaster. Like the truly impoverished Israelite of old, the human race has never had its own means to redeem itself. Man's efforts to redeem himself by keeping God's laws has only brought death to anyone attempting to establish his own righteousness in that manner. No, the law has left us all destitute like helpless widows (Ro 7.4-5). By the principles of divine justice, we need a kinsman redeemer who can pay the redemption price that humanity itself could never afford. Such a redeemer must be a human descendant of Adam, else he could not qualify as a kinsman. Yet, he must be something more than human, else he would be as impoverished and impotent as the rest of mankind. Thankfully, God has provided just such a kinsman Redeemer. As Job confessed, millennia ago, **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."**<sup>4</sup>

So, we can all rejoice that a Redeemer has been provided for us. However, we mustn't forget that since the word *redeem* means "to buy back," the idea of cost is inherent in the idea of redemption. Nothing can be redeemed without the

---

<sup>2</sup> Ex 6.6; Ps 69.18; 72.14; 103.4; 106.10; Ho 13.14; Mic 4.10.

<sup>3</sup> Is 44.22; Ro 3.24; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7; Col 1.14; Tt 2.14.

<sup>4</sup> Job 19.25.

redeemer incurring a cost, and the Redeemer that God has provided for mankind was not exempted from this reality.

This book has emerged from an in-depth study of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who was willing to incur an incomprehensible price to redeem human beings. We have looked carefully into His role as Redeemer, and into the redemption that He has — *and is* — accomplishing. We have distilled the observations and insights from our study into a narrative that documents the primary benefits to God and man that accrue from the redemption, and that also explains how a person can receive Christ's redemption and begin to experience its benefits. In the course of this treatise, we will touch on many topics familiar to people living in a Christian culture, including the topic of regeneration (new birth), a phenomenon that intersects with our redemption, but that lies within the more general sphere of God's works of *salvation* (see "The Salvation Of God" diagram below).

We note that the Bible word *salvation*, in this context, speaks of a benevolent agent intervening for someone or something in a situation of danger, risk or other serious need. In Scripture, *salvation* is a comprehensive term, and can apply to nation, property, body or soul. This book focuses on how **God, through His Son Jesus Christ, our kinsman Redeemer, saves fallen people from sin and death, and brings them into a familial and royal relationship with Himself.** The redemption described in this treatise, then, is *a particular kind of salvation*. As such, it has multiple components, including, substitution, expiation, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, and more, all of which we will examine in due course. **Facets of our redemption to which we will give special attention, however, are the *familial and royal*.** We will look closely at these facets of redemption because, along with everything else forfeited in the Garden of Eden, our first parents lost (1) their pristine familial intimacy with God *and* (2) their kingly dominion of the earth.

As to the loss of the former, mankind has always yearned for a restoration of the idyllic, Edenic family of God, and has often attempted to restore it by human effort, *without* a Redeemer. However, only the heavenly Father Himself, through

His redeemer Son, is able to restore what theologians call the *familia dei*. No coterie of human idealists can ever launch a utopian experiment that will fully satisfy the human heart, or long keep itself from decaying into a means of selfish fulfilment for the few. Thankfully, as the following chapters will explain, the Trinity has been progressively restoring the *familia dei* over the course of millennia, through the phenomenon of the *covenants*.

As to the loss of the latter, Christian scholars and theologians have given scant attention to the redemption of mankind's original grant of coregency "over all the earth" (Ge 1.26). It seems that few Christian authors, through the centuries, have remembered that the biblical phenomenon of redemption includes the restoration of one's sovereignty over his land, not just the liberation of his own person. Though some now "see dominion as the defining characteristic" of "what it means to be made in God's image,"<sup>5</sup> little is ever said about how that dominion — and thereby the divine image — is to be fully restored. Christian theology books say much about an individual's redemption from sin and the oppression of Satan, less about the redemption of an individual's physical body (Ro 8.23), and almost nothing about the redemption of mankind's dominion over all the earth — *and yet biblically speaking, Christ's work of redemption is not complete until those he has purchased for God with His blood once again "reign upon the earth"* (Re 5.9-10). Of those scholars who have addressed this matter, some have reduced the redemption of mankind's dominion to Christian stewardship (tithing),<sup>6</sup> others to a postmillennial dream of social improvement in the world as people and their institutions finally submit fully to "the inherent power of the gospel."<sup>7</sup> Then there are the aggressive theories of the Christian Reconstructionists and their dominion theology,<sup>8</sup> proposing that, "society will be reconstructed by the Law of God as preached in the gospel and the Great Commission." The

---

<sup>5</sup> *Lexham Survey of Theology*.

<sup>6</sup> W. Clyde Tilley, "A Biblical Approach to Stewardship," in *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987).

<sup>7</sup> Aiken, Charles A. "Christianity and Social Problems," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 3, no. 9–12 (1892).

<sup>8</sup> Also known as theonomy, also essentially a postmillennial teaching.

**already/not yet** aspect of God’s redemptive works, that is, the progressive fulfilment of God’s purposes, plans and promises, teaches us that there is indeed a sense in which the redeemed “reign in life” now,<sup>9</sup> and are indeed responsible to aid the poor and downtrodden,<sup>10</sup> and to positively influence the world’s institutions in every manner that is consistent with our central mandate of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.<sup>11</sup> However, theologians and commentators have lost sight of the fact that God’s grant of dominion over “all the earth” was to *sinless humanity*. The Postmillennial and Reconstructionist expectation that the church in this age, by law and gospel, will bring about the redemption of mankind’s dominion of the earth will fail, for the simple reason

that not-yet-glorified saints are unfailingly fallible, and — as history has amply shown — they remain vulnerable to the corruption of power. No, the full redemption of mankind’s royal status over all the earth, (and humanity’s full recovery of the divine image) awaits the *parousia* of the King, who will first redeem the bodies of His saints in resurrection and transformation, and then bring “all rule and all authority and power” into submission under Himself and His sinless, glorified saints.<sup>12</sup>

**S**o, please come in, Lord Jesus, and dine with us (Re 3.20). As we study these great truths, be present with us in the person of your Holy Spirit, and feed us as the Bread of Life that You are (Jn 6.48), because we ask it in Your name. Amen.



---

<sup>9</sup> Ro 5.17; cf. Mt 10.1; 28.18-20; Lk 10.19; 2Co 10.3-5.

<sup>10</sup> Gal 2.10; Jas 1.27.

<sup>11</sup> Mt 28.29-10; Lk 24.45-47; Ac 1.8.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ro 3.23; 1Co 15.24.

# The Salvation Of God

**REGENERATION**  
Jn 3.3,5; Eph 2.5;  
**SANCTIFICATION**  
Ro 15.16; 1Pe 1.2

Grain in time of famine

Healing for the sick

Rain in time of drought

Victory in war  
2Ki 5.1

## REDEMPTION

### The Saving Work Of Jesus Christ

#### SUBSTITUTION

**RANSOM - BEARS INIQUITIES - MADE A CURSE**  
Mt 20.28; 1Ti 2.5-6; Is 53.4-6,8; Ro 3.24; 1Co 1.30; 1Pe 3.18

#### EXPIATION - PROPITIATION

Le 16.22; Dt 32.43; Da 9.24; Jn 1.29; Ro 3.25; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7;  
Heb 2.17; 1Jn 2.2; 4.10; Re 5.9

**HEALING of SHALOM - DELIVERANCE** FROM SIN, GUILT,  
Ps 51.14; Is 53.5; Ro 5.1; Col 1.13,20; 1Th 1.10; 2Pe 2.9  
**TEMPTATION, DOMAIN OF DARKNESS, WRATH TO COME**

#### JUSTIFICATION

Is 53.11; Ro 3.24; Tt 3.5-7

#### RECONCILIATION

Ro 5.1,10-11; 2Co 5.18-21; Col 1.20-22; 1Pe 2.25

#### ADOPTION - SANCTIFICATION

Mt 25.34; Jn 1.12; Ac 26.16-18; Ro 6.5; 8.14-16,23; 1Co 1.30; Ga 3.26; 4.5; Eph 1.5,11; 5.26; Tt 3.7; Heb 2.10-11; 10.10,14; 13.12; 1Pe 1.1-4; 1Jn 3.1-2

#### SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

2Co 1.22; Eph 1.13; 4.30; 1Jn 4.13

#### DEVIL DEFEATED - SAINTS GLORIFIED

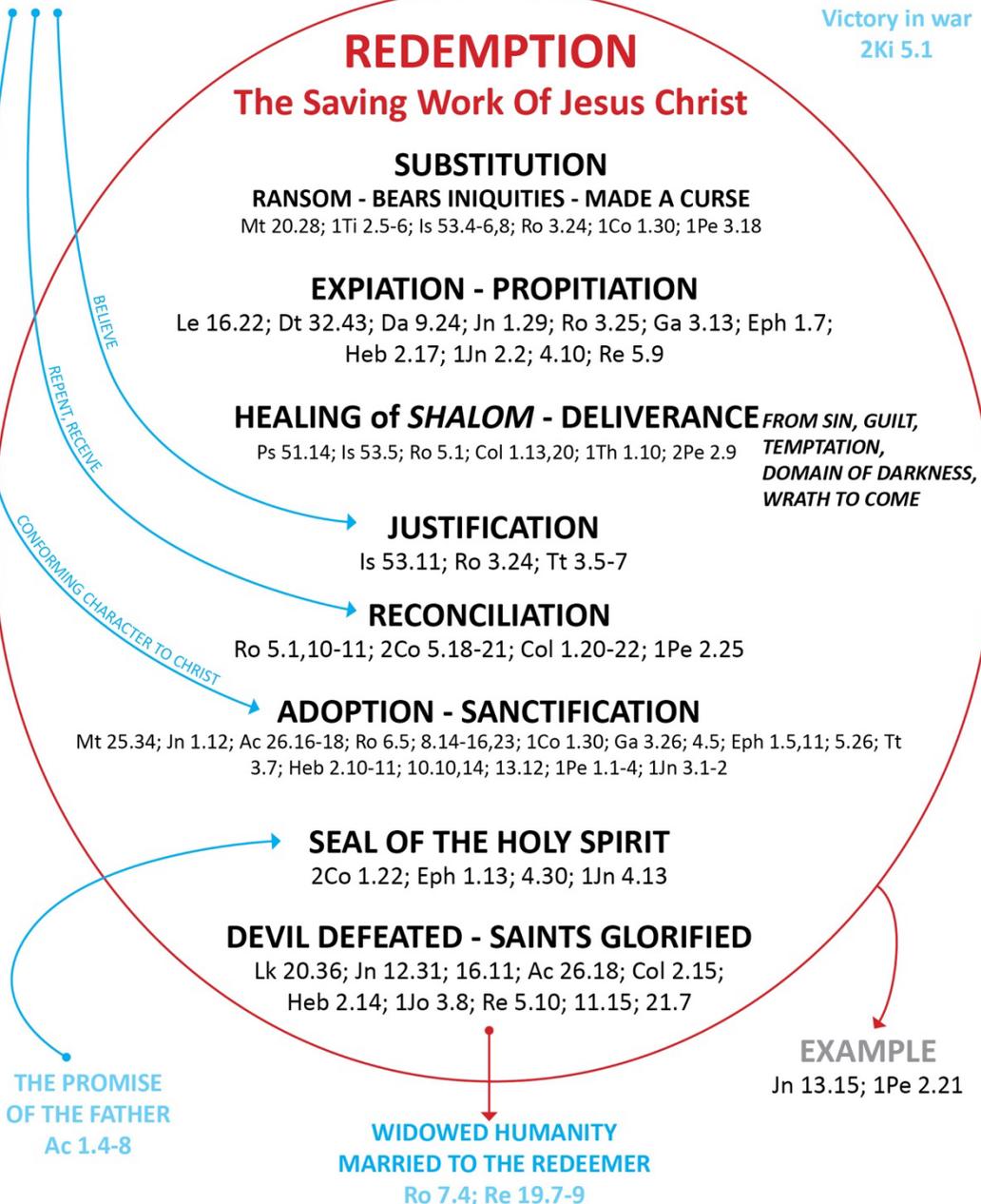
Lk 20.36; Jn 12.31; 16.11; Ac 26.18; Col 2.15;  
Heb 2.14; 1Jo 3.8; Re 5.10; 11.15; 21.7

#### EXAMPLE

Jn 13.15; 1Pe 2.21

**THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER**  
Ac 1.4-8

**WIDOWED HUMANITY MARRIED TO THE REDEEMER**  
Ro 7.4; Re 19.7-9



© Roderick A. Graciano, 2021

# 1. God has our best interests at heart and no ulterior motives.

## Two Things About God's Character

If you were to read the whole Bible from beginning to end, when finished, what would you say were the most important two things to know about God's character?

**T**he apostle John didn't have the 66 books of the Bible all in one convenient volume like we do, and so would never have read it "from cover to cover" like we can. However, he was the longest surviving of the original disciples of Jesus, and was an ardent student of the Scriptures. He knew all or most of the books that our Bible contains today, and himself wrote four of the final ones. He may have never read all 66 books of the Bible in the order that we have them now, but he certainly meditated at length on the overarching themes and messages of the entire scriptural corpus. In the latter part of John's life, God gave him the privilege of writing the final gospel,<sup>13</sup> and what we might call the "famous last words" of the Bible, that is, his epistles and the book of Revelation.<sup>14</sup> John's words carry profound significance because of the copious antecedent revelation that informs their content.

Therefore, we will find it beneficial to contemplate *all* that John shared as he approached the end of his life and the completion of the Bible. However, in this chapter we single out *only two things* that he said, and these relate to God's eternal character. In his first epistle, John made a point of telling his readers that:

- ◆ God is light (1Jn 1.5)
- ◆ God is love (1Jn 4.8,16)

The succinct simplicity of these statements veils their profundity. What do they really mean?

---

<sup>13</sup> Probably between the years AD 70 and 90.

<sup>14</sup> John's last works were probably written between AD 90 and 100.

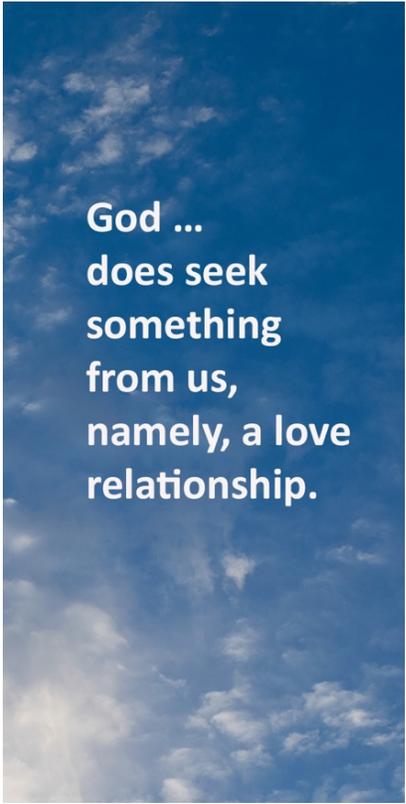
Consider the statement *God is love*. It implies that love is inherent to God's nature, such that He is love personified. John helps us understand this truth further by characterizing the *love* of which he speaks. He wrote, "We know love by this, that [God's Son] laid down His life for us...." (1Jn 3.16, ). In other words, **love is inseparable from who God is, and His love is *self-sacrificing love***. That is, the love that emanates from God's eternal character is the opposite of the so-called "love" that is self-seeking and has ulterior motives for its shows of affection.<sup>15</sup> As we contemplate this, we realize that the consistent proposition of all John's writings, the proposition that God's love is altruistic, rings true because God is eternal and almighty. If God loves, then He loves *without needing anything in return*.

This fact, that God loves without needing anything for Himself, helps us understand John's other point, that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1Jn 1.5). It means that God is truthful in everything He says about Himself and about His plans and purposes for us. When He expresses His loves for us, He does with no hidden motive or agenda tucked away in a secret pocket of darkness. God's character thus contrasts sharply with the character of those who *say* they live in the light, pretending to love, but in reality, hate their brother. John wrote that such a person "is in the darkness until now" (1Jn 2.9-11), pretending to be something they are not. God is not like that, however: He is love, and the love He expresses is absolutely truthful and always desires the very best for those He loves. How wonderful! God's love is the love for which all our hearts yearn. It is the love that brings security, peace and joy, and it is available to us through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, to say that God loves without *needing* anything in return, does not negate the fact that He does *desire* something. **He does seek something from us, namely, a love relationship**. Nevertheless, that He doesn't *need* anything from us lends credence to the Bible's consistent teaching that God loves us prior to

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 1Co 13.4-5, "Love [Grk, ἀγάπη] ... is not self-seeking ... ," NIVO.



**God ...  
does seek  
something  
from us,  
namely, a love  
relationship.**

our loving Him; if we love God it's "because He first loved us."<sup>16</sup> This is why Jesus could teach,

... love your enemies ... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, if we intend to act like children of God, we will love even our enemies, because He expresses His love even to the unrighteous, by providing their most fundamental needs for physical sustenance. Much more than that, as the apostle Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5.8). God does not wait until people become righteous, or do something that pleases Him, before He loves them; He loves people because He is love.

This wonderful truth should astound us by its contrast to the way pagan religions, from antiquity to the present, have characterized their gods. As Paul Copan and Douglas Jacoby explain,

... the biblical depiction of a God who desires to know his creatures clashes strongly with the pagan concept of divinity. Pagan gods and goddesses, such as the Greek and Roman ones we learned about in grade school, do not love us. The Norse myths present a similar scenario, as do the Celtic, Inuit, Mesoamerican, and gods of other religions — in fact, all pagan religions. One gets the impression that the gods of the ancient Near East don't particularly like humans — let alone desire a relationship with them.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> 1Jn 4.10, 19; cf. Jn 3.16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Mt 5.44-45.

<sup>18</sup> Copan, Paul; Jacoby, Douglas. *Origins: The Ancient Impact and Modern Implications of Genesis 1-11*, p. 50, (Morgan James Publishing; Kindle Edition).

## A Counterintuitive Aspect Of God's Love

Something that may at first cause us consternation, though, is that God's wrath against evil is an expression of His love.<sup>19</sup> This connection between God's love and His wrath may seem counterintuitive, but when the Scriptures speak of God smiting the wicked, the recipients of His wrath are usually those who had harmed or threatened God's people. In other words, **God's wrath frequently has the purpose of protecting those whom he loves.** For example, in the book of Revelation, when God in His wrath sees to the destruction of the wicked entity called "Mystery Babylon," Scripture says,

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."<sup>20</sup>

The passage goes on to explain,

"... in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."<sup>21</sup>

The apostle Paul put it this way, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians,

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire ....<sup>22</sup>

We see that wrath pours forth from our heavenly Father when He must protect the children He loves. The Israelites were grateful for this protecting wrath, and sang,

Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> As Chris Thurman writes, "I know it's hard to think of God's wrath this way, but God is righteously angry about sin because He loves us." Or as Arthur T. Pierson wrote, in *Many Infallible Proofs*, p. 284, that in the teaching of Christ, "God's anger was seen to be, not a [vindictive and cruel] passion, but a principle — the eternal hatred of wrong, which corresponds with the eternal love of right, and which is only another aspect of love."

<sup>20</sup> Re 18.20.

<sup>21</sup> Re 18.24.

<sup>22</sup> 2Th 1.6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Ps 104.35.

It was because God loved Israel that He poured out His wrath upon Egypt in the ten plagues (Dt 7.8), and it's because God loves followers of Jesus today that He will bring fiery judgment upon their unrepentant persecutors (cf. 2Ti 4.14). No wonder Solomon wrote that,

Love *is* strong as death,  
Jealousy *is* fierce as Sheol,  
Its flashes *are* flashes of fire,  
A flame of Yahveh.<sup>24</sup>

The flame of Yahveh is the fire of His love. When God's love is jealous (= zealous) to protect His children in Zion, His wrath is ready to break out like fire against their enemies (Zec 8.2).

## The Consuming Fire

God's children are not the only object of His love, however, and therefore it is not only on their behalf that His wrath blazes forth. God also loves all His own virtues of truth, faithfulness and goodness, and above all He loves His Son.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, anything that is contrary to faithfulness and goodness (such as sin and suppressing the truth, Ro 1.18), and anything that is contrary to God's purposes for His Son, is subject to destruction by God's wrath. This is why Scripture describes God as "a consuming fire" (Dt 4.24; Heb 12.29), and why He has manifested Himself on different occasions as a smoking furnace, a flaming torch, or a fiery cloud.<sup>26</sup> **From eternity to eternity He is love personified, and so He is forever and always opposed to everything that jeopardizes what He loves.** Thus, when God went before the Israelites into the promised land, the Canaanite nations were consumed before Him because of the Canaanites' wickedness (Dt 9.3-4). At a later time, when wicked king Ahaziah sent a captain with fifty soldiers to arrest

---

<sup>24</sup> So 8.6b, RAG.

<sup>25</sup> Ps 91.14; Mt 3.17; 17.5; Jn 3.35; 5.20; Col 1.13; 2Pe 1.17. As Sam Storms writes, "one may speak of *divine wrath* as a function of *divine love*! For God's wrath is His love for holiness and truth and justice." *Attributes of God*, § Wrath, part A.

<sup>26</sup> Ge 15.17; Ex 13.21; cf. Eze 1.4; Da 7.9-10.

God's beloved prophet Elijah, fire descended from heaven and consumed that captain and his soldiers, and a second captain and his fifty after that (2Ki 1.9-12)! As king David wrote of the Lord in Psalm 21.8-9,

Your hand will find out all your enemies;  
Your right hand will find out those who hate you.  
You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;  
The Lord will swallow them up in His wrath,  
And fire will devour them.

Indeed, anyone who acts against what God loves by unrepentantly committing sin will find that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10.31).

This should concern every human being who has not yet experienced redemption by Jesus, for as the apostle Paul wrote, **we have all "sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Ro 3.23). Obviously we all want to be among those who are *protected* and *vindicated* by God's fiery love, and not among those who are *consumed* by His holy wrath. So, we must resolve our sin problem without delay, if we haven't done so already!

Thankfully, since God is light and God is love, that is, since He has our best interests at heart and no ulterior motives, we know that He is predisposed to help us address our problem with sin. But ... we need to back up a bit. We've repeatedly mentioned sin, and quoted Paul's declaration that "all have sinned," but what is sin exactly? And how did it become a universal problem for mankind?

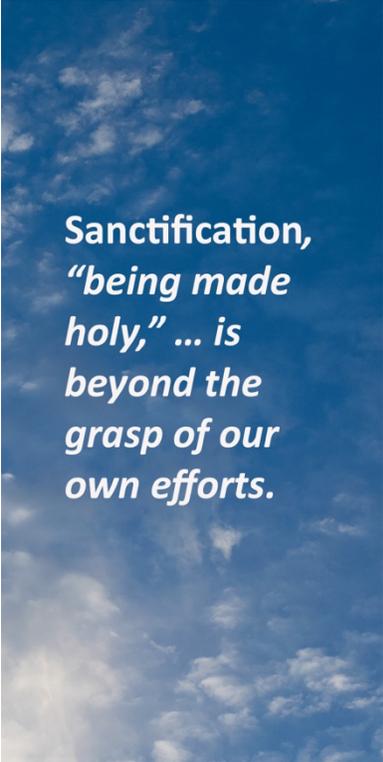
## 2. Every descendant of Adam except Jesus was born with a sin problem.

### What Is Sin?

**S***in* refers to humanity's general enmity toward God, and to specific acts expressive of that enmity. The Heb and Grk Bible words translated by our word *sin* have their roots in the ideas of **going wrong** or **missing a mark**. So with regard to specific acts, near synonyms for *sin* in the Bible include *transgression*, *unrighteousness*, *iniquity*, and *doing evil*. The Bible regards as sin any thought or action (or inaction) that is contrary to the laws, will, and character of God. Any act contrary to what God loves is sin. Furthermore, any prioritizing of self above the will of God, and any action that ignores or violates God's right to direct our lives is *sin* (1Jn 3.4).

### The Penalty Of Sin

The Bible sums up the penalty of sin with one word: *death* (Ro 6.23). We must understand, however, that the death which results from the commission of sin is multifaceted.<sup>27</sup> Sin initiates and exacerbates a progressive physical, moral, psychological, intellectual and relational death in the human being. Our moral deadness makes us "unholy" (cf. 2Ti 3.2), alienates us from our holy God (Le 11.45; cf. Josh 24.19) and leaves us in desperate need of what the Bible calls **sanctification**, "being made holy," the attainment of which is beyond the grasp of our own efforts.<sup>28</sup>



Sanctification,  
"being made  
holy," ... is  
beyond the  
grasp of our  
own efforts.

---

<sup>27</sup> Roderick describes the different aspects of death that result from sin in his book, *Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin*, Part III: "Understanding Human Fallenness."

<sup>28</sup> We will see in ch. 7 that the Christian has some responsibility in the process of his own sanctification, but that sanctification is impossible for anyone apart from the gracious, working of God.

Furthermore, sin robs our lives of meaning and purpose. Finally, if we are not rescued from its grip, sin guarantees our condemnation when we face our Creator, the Consuming Fire!

## Sin And Human Fallenness

### *The Origin*

The emergence of sin in our universe is shrouded in mystery, but the Bible connects it to the prideful rebellion of one of God’s angels.<sup>29</sup> Having lost his citizenship in God’s heaven, that angel, now known as “the devil and Satan” (Re 12.9) but called “the Serpent” early on (Ge 3),<sup>30</sup> entered the Garden of Eden, man’s first home, with the intent to destroy the human race while it consisted of only two persons, Adam and his wife Eve. The devil had no right to kill, nor even to touch Adam and Eve,<sup>31</sup> but he knew that God had given the man a commandment which would result in death if broken. So, the devil approached Eve, who had only heard about God’s commandment second-hand, and attacked her with inuendo and lies. He seduced her into breaking the commandment herself and then induced her to involve Adam in the violation. **We refer to this first sin of humanity and its consequences as “the fall.”**

When our two progenitors chose the devil’s counsel over God’s command, death ensued, as they had been warned. Adam and Eve’s bodies did not suddenly drop dead, but their whole constitution suffered a fatal impairment. The biblical evidence suggests that this impairment involved a detachment of God’s Holy Spirit from their human nature.<sup>32</sup> When this occurred, Adam and Eve *began to die* in all

---

<sup>29</sup> Is 14.12-15; Eze 28.13-17. We speculate that envy of humanity’s destiny entered into Lucifer’s rebellion.

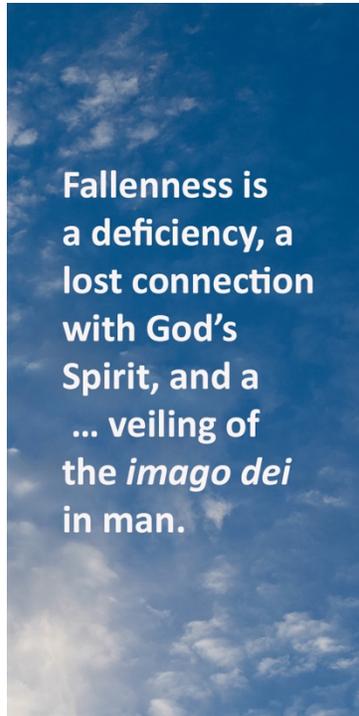
<sup>30</sup> The devil was first called the Serpent (שָׁדָד) because of his whispering, hissing speech, not because of his appearance. Whispering speech would soon become associated with divination, cf. Isa 8.19. See Gesenius and Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, pp. 544-545.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Job 1.12; 2.6.

<sup>32</sup> For a deeper exploration of human nature, and how it was affected by the fall, see **Appendix 1: Human Nature And The Fall.**

the ways listed in the preceding section: physically, morally, psychologically, intellectually and relationally. They found themselves in a pitiable condition we describe as “fallen.” Tragically, this condition has been inherited by all their descendants — except Jesus Christ.

### *What Fallenness Is*



Over the centuries, theologians have speculated much about the essence of human fallenness and how it is passed down through the generations. Biblically speaking, however, fallenness is not a substantive thing like a disease that is conveyed by means of a germ, but is instead the lack of a thing. **Fallenness is a deficiency, a lost connection with God's Spirit, and a consequent veiling of the *imago dei*, the divine image in man.**<sup>33</sup> Our parents “pass down” this deficiency to us, only in the sense that they are unable to genetically bequeath to us that which is now missing from the human constitution. Man was created “in the likeness of God” (Ge 5.1), but fallen Adam was only able to father children “in his own likeness, according to his [own] image” (Ge 5.3).<sup>34</sup> The difference manifests itself in fallen humans as a lack of spiritual vitality, a distortion of their God-given aptitudes, *and* an inability to consistently choose and do what is right and good. **Thus, human fallenness is a spiritual deadness that has left us susceptible to sin, to our own unrestrained drives and impulses, and to the devil's compulsions.**<sup>35</sup> Compare the following diagrams:

---

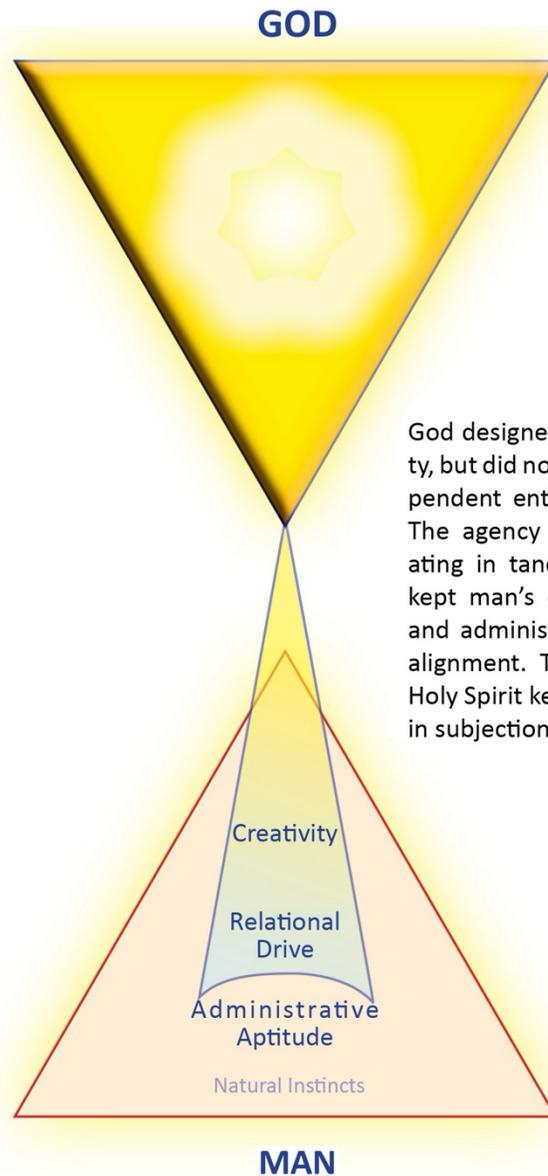
<sup>33</sup> With the veiling of the *imago dei*, fallen man cannot reflect his Creator as he ought. In contrast, the divine image is still perfectly visible in the ideal “son of man,” Jesus Christ (2Co 4.4; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3; 2.7).

<sup>34</sup> Ge 5.3 does not imply that the *imago dei* is absent in Adam's posterity (see Ge 9.6; 1Co 11.7; Jas 3.9), but only that Adam, in and of himself, was not capable to reproducing it in his sons.

<sup>35</sup> Jn 8.34; Ro 7.5; Eph 2.1-2; cf. Jn 8.44.

## ORIGINAL STATE OF CREATED MAN

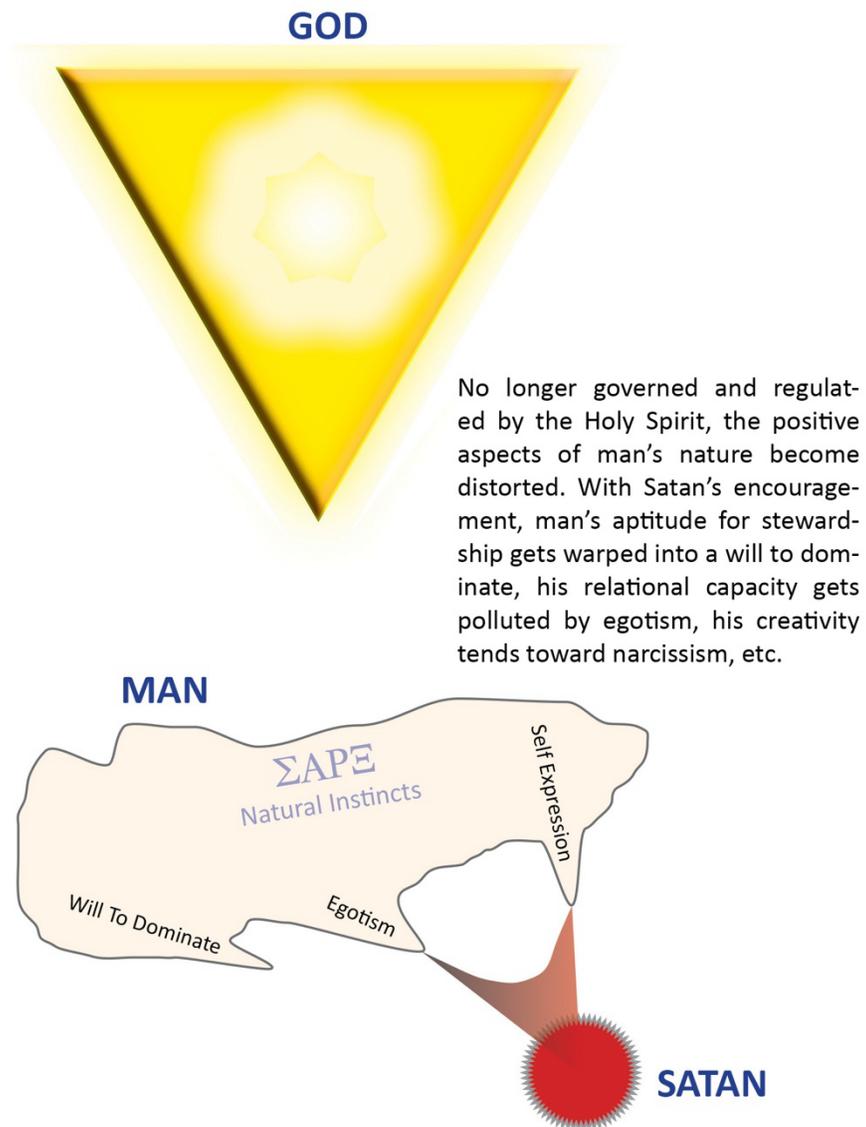
A vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit is an integral component of man as the *imago Dei*. As a creature, man is also endowed with natural instincts that enable him to maintain his physical life on earth. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to man and draws man's faculties toward God, aligning those faculties so that the whole man reflects his Creator, and is clothed in divine light.



God designed man to have individuality, but did not design him to be an independent entity having self-sufficiency. The agency of the Holy Spirit, operating in tandem with human nature, kept man's creativity, relational drive and administrative aptitude in proper alignment. The same working of the Holy Spirit kept man's physical instincts in subjection to his spiritual drives.

## CURRENT STATE OF FALLEN MAN

**B**y submitting himself to the Serpent, man broke his vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit. Relative to his original design, man is no longer whole. He is denuded of the divine light and deprived of God's palpable presence. Man's faculties are no longer properly aligned by the Spirit, but are now perverted by the overwhelming pull of his now ascendant natural instincts, "the flesh," and by Satan's blinding deceptions. The *imago dei* in fallen man is veiled such that he cannot reflect God's glory as he ought. Spiritually dead, insofar as his responsiveness to God, man is also dying physically, and is judicially under condemnation.



None of what we have just described should be interpreted to mean that our natural drives are inherently bad; we affirm the opposite! God endowed human beings with *good* physical and emotional drives so that we would have the necessary instincts to thrive together on planet Earth. It's only because we're born lacking the spiritual power to govern those physical and emotional impulses that they become a problem. They get into the driver's seat of our lives when we're born and steer us into all kinds of trouble. From the earliest moments of our lives, we cannot help but feel and think, first and foremost, about what our *self* wants, in order to satisfy our good, *but out of control*, physical and emotional cravings.

In other words, it is due to the lack of an inner “impulse regulator” — not to our physical and emotional drives being inherently evil — that we are born selfish. Tragically, the opportunistic devil and his minions exploit our lack of inner spiritual guidance and control, and add their urgings (usually imperceptibly) to our own selfish cravings. Therefore, without societal deterrence we are apt to live overtly self-centered lives; without divine intervention, we will remain selfish at heart even if we hide it well from the people around us and even from ourselves.

## ***Problems That Stem From Fallenness***

### ***We Forget About God***

When our physical and emotional impulses control us, and the “god of this world” blinds us (2Co 4.4), we forget about God and ignore His agenda for our lives. This breaks the greatest of God's commandments, which is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk 12.30). This commandment is the reasonable dictate of our Creator, since He brought us into existence for His own purposes. As the apostle Paul reminded the Roman Christians, “from [the Lord] and through Him and to Him are all things” (Ro 11.36). Likewise, to the Corinthian believers he wrote, “there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him ...” (1Co 8.6). People already in heaven cry out this same truth, saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all

things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created” (Re 4.11). **Our obligation to love and honor God is inherent in the simple fact that He created us**, but we so easily forget this. Jesus had to remind even the Pharisees of this obligation, and they were the arbiters of Jewish religious practice! In Jesus’ famous saying, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22.21), the implication was that just as the coin for paying taxes had Caesar’s image on it, and so should be given back to Caesar, in the same way whatever has God’s image stamped upon it should be given back to God. The only thing in all creation explicitly said to bear God’s image is mankind. Jesus tells us that we must give ourselves back to God.

However, we must give ourselves to God not *solely* because He created us. We also owe our whole lives to Him because He purchased us “with His own blood,” as the apostle Paul so graphically stated (Ac 20.28). On this basis, Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians, saying, “you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1Co 6.20). To the Romans he put it this way: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Ro 12.1). We realize, therefore, that floating along complacently on the current of our selfish drives and impulses, while withholding from our Creator the sacrifice of ourselves, compounds the debt that we already owe Him (cf. Mt 6.12a). But that’s not the only problem that ensues from the selfish bent of our fallen state.

### ***We Start Wars***

While we were still working on this treatise, the news broke that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Evidence points to the selfish ambitions of one man, Vladimir Putin, as the impetus for this war (characterized as the biggest war in Europe since WWII). There are political, economic and military factors that point to pride and fear as part of Putin’s motivation, but they still add up to his selfishness pulling the trigger. Currently, Putin’s selfishness has created a living hell for countless innocent civilians, and apart from our God’s gracious intervention, the number of casualties for both sides in this conflict can only continue to climb.

We might think that a selfish man starting a war is an aberration, and not related to the spiritual fallenness shared by all humanity; after all, not everyone is so bellicose. But Vladimir Putin is no aberration. The selfish impulses that start wars between nations are the same unrestrained urges that start conflicts between neighbors, friends and family members. The Bible puts it this way:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.<sup>36</sup>

Notice the phrase, *pleasures that wage war in your members*. This phrase refers to those out-of-control hungers and impulses at work in the members of our physical bodies. Notice also the words *lust* and *envious*. These words refer to the selfish physical and psychological drives that come forward and cause harm when our God-given instincts are not brought under spiritual control. Each of us have the potential within ourselves to plunge our world into a war, but even more so when we act under the witting or unwitting compulsion of an external and malignant spiritual power!

### ***We Act Under The Devil's Compulsion***

As we've hinted above, fallen human beings are *not* apt to think that they are influenced by evil spirits! Even when a fallen man is confronted about his ignobility by the disapprobation of others, or by more direct consequences of his actions, he takes comfort in the belief that at least he is his own boss, at least he lives autonomously without letting anyone tell him what to do. He imagines that at the end of his life he will say, in the words of the Frank Sinatra song, "I did it my way."

However, autonomy is impossible for fallen man, because the spiritual realm abhors a vacuum. The idea that spiritual interlopers are somehow barred from the steering wheels of our souls is just another deception to which our spiritual deadness leaves us vulnerable. We are mistaken if we think that, while our own spirit lies all but dead in the trunk, some other "higher faculty" of human

---

<sup>36</sup> Jas 4.1-2.

nature comes forward to take the driver's seat; our incapacitated spirit is the "higher faculty"! We imagine maintaining the control over our own life by sheer power of will, but this does not happen. Instead, the "god of this age," the spirit of evil, comes into the spiritual void of our impaired constitution to stimulate and guide the base instincts of our flesh, to blind our minds, and to distract us from the redemptive overtures of God's grace (2Co 4.4, NIVO).<sup>37</sup>

The devil with his minions steers the souls of fallen men, *and he has had the right to do so*. Satan's authority over fallen men derives from the fall itself, briefly described above: Adam and Eve despised God's authority and shifted the allegiance of the human race over to the deceiving Serpent. As Augustine put it, man "joined the faction of the fallen angels."<sup>38</sup> Thus, Jesus said to the hypocritical seekers of His day, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (Jn 8.44 NIVO), and John affirmed the wider principle that all who habitually practice sin demonstrate thereby that they are "of the devil" (1Jn 3.8).

Obviously, not all fallen people are demonized to the extent of the Gerasene man who was driven mad by Legion (Lk 8.26-33). The passages quoted in the preceding paragraph do not imply any such a thing. Rather, as the apostle John wrote, "... the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*" (1Jn 5.19). That is, Satan assumes the right to afflict all unredeemed persons, and *influences their lives*, whether subtly or overtly. Not everyone abandons themselves to that evil influence, but no fallen person can escape it entirely. Instead, fallen people yield to it unwittingly in what seem like the most human of behaviors, such as jealousy and ambition (Jas 3.14-15). However, when a person *does* embrace the demonic impulse, he soon finds himself in the grip of an overpowering compulsion to evil. The spiritual deadness of fallen humanity is catastrophic; if people yield to Satan's exacerbation of their selfish lusts, it becomes horrific (see Eph 2.2-3).

---

<sup>37</sup> See more about God's grace at the beginning of ch. 4.

<sup>38</sup> In *The City Of God* 14.15.

## ***God Intends Something Far Better***

But war and oppressive manipulation by the devil are not God's intention for humanity. **We must understand that failing to address our sin and fallenness jeopardizes our participation in a far more wonderful plan.** We will look extensively into the destiny that God has planned for His people in chapter 7, but while we are thinking about human fallenness, let us share a preview, a brief summary of what the Bible tells us about the destiny of those who have been, and will have been, redeemed from their fallen state. We want to whet our readers' appetites for learning about a plan that is so much better than capitulation to the selfish pursuit of personal autonomy.

God's plan for His people far surpasses our countless "happy ever after" fairy tales, *while fulfilling all their best elements!* In God's plan for His people, there is a Prince,<sup>39</sup> a royal wedding,<sup>40</sup> and a golden city.<sup>41</sup> The love and joyous fulfillment that awaits the inhabitants of that city will totally eclipse the shallow infatuation and temporal happiness imagined in worldly romances. After all, the heirs of God's heavenly destiny will not only enjoy everlasting fellowship with one another, but more importantly, the loving company of their Creator and of the human-divine Savior who has forever tied His destiny to theirs. Together, God and His people will embark upon an adventure that will span heaven and earth, *and then a new heaven and earth.* God's planned adventure will so enthrall His people that the sorrows *and pleasures* of this present life won't even come to mind (Is 65.17)!

We reiterate, though, that anyone who chooses to continue living selfishly, insisting upon his own autonomy,<sup>42</sup> and refusing to face his problem with sin and

---

<sup>39</sup> Is 9.6; Da 9.25; Ac 5.31.

<sup>40</sup> Ps 45; Re 19.7-9.

<sup>41</sup> Heb 11.16; Re 21.10-21.

<sup>42</sup> It may seem that we over emphasize fallen man's prioritization of personal autonomy. After all, globally speaking, don't most people submit themselves to the god or gods of one religion or another? Yes, humanity's innate religious impulse dictates that most people adhere, at least nominally, to some form of religious observance. However, if a man's religion does not call upon him to repent (Ac 17.30), and if it does not address the fundamental problem of his

fallenness, is liable to cheat himself out of this glorious destiny. Left unaddressed, a person's fallenness, and the sins that emanate from it, will not only ruin his life in the present (whether precipitously or by attrition), but will ultimately bring him to a state of fathomless regret when he meets his Maker, the Consuming Fire. Thankfully, redemption from ruin and regret has been made possible by the one human being whose nature was never impaired by fallenness and whose character was never twisted by sin.

### *Why Jesus Wasn't Fallen*

Jesus successfully remained in control of His physical and emotional drives and impulses throughout His entire life, even though He was tempted to give in to them, just like we are (Heb 4.15). Though tempted like us, He was not born fallen like us, but was instead born physically and spiritually whole. How so? His mother did not pass down spiritual vitality to Him — she needed a Savior like everybody else (Lk 1.46-47). Jesus' mother, Mary, godly as she was, could not bequeath spiritual wholeness to Jesus, because she herself was born with the same spiritual deficiency as the rest of humanity.<sup>43</sup> Her inability, in and of herself, to birth “unfallen” children is apparent from the occasional bad attitudes of her other sons.<sup>44</sup> However, Jesus did not need the missing component from Mary. He was born spiritually whole, full of spiritual vitality, because His Father is God. It was God Who first created a spiritually vibrant human nature in Adam, and it was impossible for God to not share His own spiritual vitality with His Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is good news, because it was through this one un-fallen man that God would provide a solution for our pressing problem of sin.

---

fallen condition (cf. Eze 18.31; 36.26-27), it surreptitiously allows him to remain the captain of his own soul, or at least to maintain the illusion that he remains at the helm of his life.

<sup>43</sup> Contrary to the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that Mary was born without any stain of original sin. This idea was invented by some English monks between AD 1121 and 1130, and was made an official doctrine by Pius IX in 1854. See Hastings et al., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

<sup>44</sup> Mk 3.21; Jn 7.3-5.

## Why God Won't Overlook Sins

### *Because Of His Character*

Many have asked, “If nothing is impossible for God, why can't He just overlook our sins?” The answer is: nothing is impossible for God except acting contrary to His own eternal character and nature. For example, because He is the God of truth, God cannot lie. Since God is also love, He cannot allow people to inflict evil upon one another unchecked. Any adult understands that people who are not held accountable for doing wrong will only perpetrate ever worsening atrocities. We have also observed, what God has always known: moral evil brings about increasing degrees of death, both for those who commit it and for those upon whom it is inflicted. Therefore, **God cannot overlook evil in a world He intends to bless with abundant life** (cf. Jn 10.10).

### *Because Of His Plan For His Son*

Of course, instead of overlooking evil, God could simply annihilate all sinners in the first instant of their first transgression. To completely rid His world of all those who sin and cause death would be an act consistent with His loving character, and He very nearly did this with the flood of Noah. However, God has a plan for creation, and that plan has deeper objectives than simply keeping evil out of the world. His plan centers upon His Son, and it involves a great redemption — a redemption that allows Him to *not destroy all sinners*, but a redemption that is nevertheless *incompatible with overlooking sins*. For that redemption to proceed, **the sins of mankind must, at some point, be expiated**, that is, covered and removed (we will look more closely at the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4).

## Is An Expiatory Sacrifice Really Necessary?

The expiation of human sin was not absolutely necessary, in the sense that God had *no external obligation to redeem mankind*. As already stated, God could annihilate all sinners in the first moment of their transgression. At the fall or at the flood, He could have righteously allowed the entire human race to perish as a result of their sins, just as He allows the rebellious angels to perish without any hope of

salvation (2Pe 2.4). However, because of God's of plan to provide a suitable bride for His Son (more on this in [chapter 7](#)), and in view of His attributes of both love and justice, there is a sense in which there is an inherent necessity *within* the Godhead to justly redeem at least a part of humanity.<sup>45</sup> **God's plan to justly redeem sinners is what makes an expiatory sacrifice on mankind's behalf truly necessary.**<sup>46</sup> However, the magnitude of humanity's collective affront against God makes the necessary expiation beyond any mortal person's ability.

---

<sup>45</sup> As Leon Morris wrote, "the salvation that was wrought in Christ is something that proceeds from the loving heart of the Father," *The Cross In The New Testament*, p. 369. Our point is that the impetus for redemption and for the requisite expiatory sacrifice was all internal to the Godhead; neither man nor angels twisted God's arm to get Him to act for man's salvation. Morris' specific point about the Father's love is welcome in opposing the false view that "a loving Son ... [won] salvation for men from a just, but unrelenting, Father."

<sup>46</sup> As determined from long ago (Lk 22.22; 24.26; Ac 2.23; 4.27-28).

## Excursus On The Kingdom Of God

**The kingdom of God**, also called the kingdom “of Heaven” or “of the heavens,” is a subject that will enter more and more into our study of redemption. While this topic comes to the forefront in the book of Daniel (2.44; 7.13-14) and in the synoptic gospels (Mt 4.17; etc.), it nevertheless constitutes a thematic stream that flows through the whole of Scripture. When we follow that stream to its source, it takes us back to the Garden of Eden (that Paradise we will say more about when we describe the tabernacle in [chapter 7](#)). When we follow the stream to its end, it takes us to the Day of the LORD (a subject we will also delve into in [chapter 7](#)).

### *Essence And Original Expression*

Fundamentally, **the kingdom of God is the rule of God**. Therefore, biblical references to “the kingdom of God” can refer to God’s sovereign rule over all of creation.<sup>47</sup> However, passages that speak explicitly about the kingdom of God (or of God ruling as king) usually refer to the sovereignty of God *as it affects the world of humanity* (Da 4.2-3,34-35; Re 11.15-17; 15.3). More specifically, when the OT prophets wrote about the kingdom of God, they often had *a restored Davidic dynasty* in view.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the hope of a *restored* Davidic reign reflected not only the moral and practical collapse of the Davidic rule in Israel’s history, but also the rejection of God’s divine rule by Israel and the rest of humanity.

However, the kingdom of God existed at the beginning of creation, before anyone had even thought of rejecting God’s rule. The biblical story of God’s kingdom begins with the brief information given in the book of Genesis about God’s perfect rule over the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. In the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ps 47.2; 98; Is 6.5; 1Ti1.17; cf. Je 46.18; 48.15; 51.57. Got Questions Ministries summarizes this idea:

Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. Several passages of Scripture show that God is the undeniable Monarch of all creation: “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103.19).

<sup>48</sup> God saw the Davidic kingdom as “My kingdom,” 1Ch 17.11-14. For the prophetic expectations, see Is 9.6-7; 11.1-5; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 17.24-25; 22.2-4; 23.5-6; 30.8-9; 33.14-26; Eze 34.23-30; Ho 3.5; Am 9.11-12. This OT theme is reflected in NT expectations: Mk 11.10; Lk 1.31-33; Ac 15.15-17; cf. Ac 1.6.

garden, before Adam and Eve sinned, not only did God and humanity dwell together in a perfect familial relationship, the *familia dei* mentioned in [the Introduction](#) of this book, but they also lived and worked together in a perfect kingdom. The LORD God was king and lawgiver, both de jure and de facto. At the same time, the man and his wife ruled over the earth and its animals as God's vicegerents (Ge 1.26; 2.19). Under God's authority, they also cared for the garden (Ge 2.15-17).

### ***Current And Historical Distaste For Kings***

Now, in many modern countries, like the United States, people don't like the idea of having a king. Some nations still have a beloved king and queen (who often only serve as figureheads alongside a democratic style of government). Other countries, however, have autocratic kings not particularly esteemed by their subjects. So, the question arises, "What's the difference between an autocratic king and a dictator?" Some autocratic kings *are* tantamount to dictators, but to answer the question:

- **A dictator** is generally someone who has seized control of a country by force or intrigue, and has assumed the absolute right to dictate the laws while having no political interests beyond selfish ones.
- **A king**, on the other hand, is in principle someone who assumes the leadership of a nation on the basis of mutual benefit between sovereign and citizens. In a smaller monarchy, the king may have extensive family connections with his subjects, and those relationships instill in him a concern for the people's well-being.

The pre-fall Garden of Eden had the character of a small monarchy. A family connection existed between sovereign and subjects, since Adam was the son of God by virtue of his creation (Lk 3.38). God ruled as king on earth in the person of His Son, the eternal Word and agent of creation, described in John 1.1-3. This was the One whom early Christian theologians called the *Logos Asarkos*, the pre-incarnate Word, who would later "become flesh" and dwell among us as Jesus Christ (Jn 1.14). In Eden, as in all His pre-incarnation manifestations, the *Logos Asarkos* appeared in tangible, human-like form, even though his body did not yet consist of the same material as ours. He was able to do what flesh-and-blood people do, from walking and wearing clothes to performing surgery. As Creator He brought the earth into existence, and then as king, He formed His first human

subject, Adam, “of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Ge 2.7). He also planted the garden and placed Adam in it (Ge 2.8,15). He later built Eve from organic material taken from Adam’s side (Ge 2.21-22). As divine king, the *Logos Asarkos* remained near His subjects, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Ge 3.8). Far from being an autocrat with selfish interests, the divine king of Eden concerned Himself with the well-being of His subjects, even when there was only one (Ge 2.18). Furthermore, while there was not yet any such thing as a constitutional monarchy nor any human assembly to propose laws to which even the king should submit, the LORD God acted, as always, according to the immutable “law” of His own nature. Because the divine king is love and truth personified,<sup>49</sup> **there has never since been a more benevolent government than the monarchy that was the Edenic kingdom of God.**

Still, after mankind fell into a state of sin, it became natural for human beings to rebel against all rule other than that of their own selfish impulses. Fallen human beings do not wish to submit to any government, no matter how benevolent it may be — they do so, but only because they must.<sup>50</sup> Fallen people do not desire external government, they desire autonomy; every individual wishes to rule himself without having to submit to anyone else. After the fall, this commitment to autonomy eventually led to ubiquitous wickedness and chaos in the primeval world. This devolution was inevitable because autonomous man cannot help but serve his own depraved inclinations as well as the promptings of Satan, the “god of this world.”<sup>51</sup> The resulting calamitous moral disintegration finally compelled our good and holy God to bring the judgment of the flood upon mankind (Ge 6.12-13).

### ***God Rebuilds His Government By Covenant***

When the human race started over with Noah and his sons, God began to rebuild both the *familia dei* and His earthly kingdom through a relational instrument called a *covenant* (we will say more about God’s use of covenants in [chapter 7](#)). In time, Noah’s descendants through a particular family line, the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so increased in number as to constitute a nation, the nation of

---

<sup>49</sup> Ex 34.6; Ps 25.10; 31.5; 40.11; 115.1; 117.2; Is 65.16; 1Jn 4.8; 5.20.

<sup>50</sup> The final proof of this will be demonstrated in the Gog and Magog invasion that will occur *after* a thousand years of God’s ideal rule over mankind (Ps 2; Eze 38-39; Re 20.7-10).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. 2Co 4.4; Pr 17.11.

Israel. As a nation, Israel became willing (thanks in part to the oppression they suffered under the government of Egypt's Pharaoh) to accept life under God's rule. Using Moses as a mediator, **God instituted a government for Israel that we call a covenantal theocracy.** A theocracy is a system of government in which God is recognized as king, while priests and prophets rule in His name.<sup>52</sup> In a covenantal theocracy, the covenant bond provides assurance that God will do His part to bless the people as His adopted kindred, while they do their part to honor Him as their king, by worshipping Him and keeping His statutes. In this theocracy, God initially reigned through the mediation of Moses as His prophet. After the passing of Moses, the day-to-day governing of the people was done by the priests and prophets who taught and directed the people, sometimes through the elders and leaders of Israel's tribes and clans.<sup>53</sup> **As groups and individuals within the nation of Israel embraced God's rule over their lives, and as God dealt directly with those who violated the covenant, this covenantal theocracy served as a powerful expression of God's kingdom on earth.**

#### ***Birth Of The Covenantal Theocratic Monarchy (CTM)***

Even so, the Moses-mediated covenantal theocracy was not a *flawless* expression of God's kingdom, because many people did not allow God to write His laws on their hearts,<sup>54</sup> and they all too readily violated the laws that God had written for them on stone tablets. Therefore, after the Israelites had settled in the promised land, they suffered more and more calamities for failing to uphold their part of their covenant with God. In time, the people decided that their lives would be better if, instead of a theocracy, they could have a monarchy like the other nations around them. So, they asked Samuel, the leading prophet-priest of the time, to give them a king (1Sa 8.4-5). This request by the people did not catch God by surprise. God had always intended to reestablish a monarchy for His people, this time under a *human king*, and had made provision for this eventuality in the law (Deut 17.14-20). However, God had also always known that Israel struggled with submitting to Him (1Sa 8.6-8; 10.19), and that the people needed to learn the difference between life under a human king and life under a divine king.

---

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ex 19.5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Ex 18.25-26; Nu 10.1-4; 30.1; Deut 1.9-18; 5.23-28; 27.1; 31.9,28.

<sup>54</sup> Contrary to the exhortation of Deut 32.46.

So, God directed Samuel to appoint Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, as Israel's first human king, *and* to tell the people what it would cost them to have a man rather than God ruling over them (1Sa 8.10-18). Nevertheless, **Israel's government remained an expression of the kingdom of God**, because it did not transform from a covenantal theocracy into a *secular* monarchy, but into a *covenantal theocratic* monarchy (henceforth CTM) in which king and people remained in covenantal relationship with God and with one another (1Ch 11.3). The offices of the priests and prophets also remained in place, to check and balance the power of the human king.

### ***The Immutable Requisite Of A Divine King***

As the biblical story progresses, we discover that, while God *did* intend a man to rule as king over His people, He *did not* intend just any man to serve as that king. No mere man holding the office of king could bring about the reestablishment of a truly Edenic monarchy, not even with the help of priests and prophets. The king that God had in mind would have to combine in his own person the best human qualities of the great kings David<sup>55</sup> and Solomon,<sup>56</sup> and at the same time would have to *be God*.<sup>57</sup> **A full restoration of both the pristine Edenic family and the ideal kingdom of God would require the presence of God Himself, walking and reigning among His people in human form.**

By the time the political sovereignty of the old Davidic dynasty came to its end during the Babylonian exile (c. 586 BC), a few of the Jewish people had come to understand that the just and righteous king who would restore kingdom *might be divine* (cf. Jn 1.15; 11.27; 12.34). After all, some of the prophets had spoken of that coming ruler as though he might be the LORD God Himself (Is 9.6-7; Mic 5.2). Still, such an idea was hard to comprehend. How could the coming king be *both* human and divine? Nevertheless, little by little, with the help of Jesus' own teaching about Himself, and the subsequent teaching of His apostles, we now understand that Jesus Christ, the awaited Messiah and King of God's kingdom, is both truly human and truly divine (Heb 1.1-12).

---

<sup>55</sup> Je 23.5; 30.9; 33.15; Eze 34.23-24; 37.24-25; Ho 3.5.

<sup>56</sup> Is 11.1-5; cf. Mt 12.42.

<sup>57</sup> Is 9.6-7; 24.23; Mic 4.7; 5.2-4.

### ***The Eschatological Kingdom***

Israelites in antiquity may have lacked understanding about *the nature* of the coming king, but they eventually set aside all doubt about his lineage. With help from the prophets, Israel came to know that the messianic king would be a descendant of king David. By the first century, the Jews (and even some Gentiles), had begun to refer to the hoped-for messianic ruler as the “Son of David.”<sup>58</sup> They generally believed that this messianic Son of David would unveil himself in a royal coming (*parousia*) that would restore political sovereignty to Israel (cf. Ac 1.6). They expected this restoration to bring “this age” to a close and inaugurate “the age to come” (Mt 24.3; cf. Mt 12.32).

In “the age to come,” according to the popular understanding, the Davidic Messiah would lead the nation of Israel into a golden era of Edenic peace and prosperity. If anyone gave thought to how the Gentile nations fit into this popular hope, they probably focused upon the expectation of “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (Lk 1.68-74). Only a few, like aged Simeon, thought of the Messiah as “a light of revelation for the Gentiles” (Lk 2.32). Not even the disciples of Jesus understood, at first, that there would yet ensue a period of Gentile ascendancy in the land (“the times of the Gentiles,” Lk 21.23-24) before Israel’s “golden age.” The Scriptures reveal, however, that the glorious day for Israel will come, when the Davidic king will reign from Zion, not only over Israel but over all nations, and will restore not only Judah but the entire cosmos to its Edenic state. That still future expression of God’s kingdom in its global fullness is what we refer to in this book as **the eschatological kingdom of God**.<sup>59</sup>

### ***The Kingdom Of God And The New Covenant***

Few of Jesus’ contemporaries anticipated that the Messiah would be divine, and almost none imagined that there would be a lengthy interval between Messiah’s coming and the eschatological fullness of His kingdom. The lack of understanding in both of these matters was tied to a third blind spot having to do with the connection between the Messiah and the New Covenant. First-century Jews

---

<sup>58</sup> Mt 22.41-46; 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; cf. Psalm of Solomon 17.21, of c. 40 BC, “See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel.”

<sup>59</sup> The term *eschatological*, comes from the root ἔσχατος, meaning, “extremity, limit, end.” The **eschatological kingdom of God** will be realized after the *end* of our present age.

seemed unaware that the Messiah would arrive as the Messenger and Mediator of God's New Covenant (Mal 3.1-4; Heb 9.15; etc.). Since any post-fall expression of the kingdom of God on earth, including the eschatological kingdom, is of necessity a *covenantal* kingdom,<sup>60</sup> the disciples of Jesus should have been as excited about the imminent establishment of the New Covenant as they were about the coronation of the messianic king. However, even after Jesus told them explicitly that He was establishing the New Covenant with His outpoured blood (Mt 26.27-28), the focus of the disciples remained on their hoped-for restoration of "the kingdom," i.e., the arrival of the kingdom of God in its eschatological fullness, with Israel in political ascendancy (Ac 1.6).

Israel's subjugation under a succession of pagan empires had undoubtedly kept the hope of the eschatological kingdom simmering in the Jewish mind. The first-century oppression by the Roman government seems to have brought the hope of a restored Davidic dynasty to a full boil, at least among the more zealous Israelites. It appears that Jesus' countrymen were confident in their covenant status, and apparently content with the provisions of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, but they desperately desired to see the fulfilment of the prophecies about the coming Davidic kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

So, first John the Baptist and then Jesus made the kingdom of God the focal point of their proclamation. "Repent," they preached, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>62</sup> In what sense was the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, at hand? John explained, "I am the voice Isaiah predicted, telling you to prepare the way for Yahveh, the LORD God!"<sup>63</sup> In other words, the kingdom of God was near in the sense that the divine king of that kingdom was arriving. Once having arrived, Jesus announced not only that the kingdom of God was near (Mk 1.15), but that it had, in fact, come (Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20).

However, the more we study the canonical Gospels, the more we realize that the Jewish people of the first century had submerged whatever knowledge they had of the New Covenant beneath their hope in the *external aspects* of the

---

<sup>60</sup> We will clarify this principle with our in-depth look at covenants in [chapter 7](#). For now, please see Is 55.3; Eze 34.23-25; 37.24-28.

<sup>61</sup> Is 9.6-7; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 23.5-6; 30.7-10; 33.15-22

<sup>62</sup> Mt 3.2, 4.17.

<sup>63</sup> Roderick's paraphrase of Jn 1.23, which quotes Is 40.3.

eschatological kingdom. **For this reason, much of what John the Baptist and Jesus taught about the kingdom of God was *corrective*.** John the Baptist directed the people of Israel back to their covenant calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and away from thoughts of raising an insurrectionist army. Jesus, in His turn, also taught the *spiritual realities* of the kingdom, many of which overlap with elements of the New Covenant. Jesus taught, for example, that the subjects of the kingdom were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, not armed zealots (Mt 26.52).

### ***The Kingdom Of God Is Already And Not Yet***

What then is the current state of the kingdom of God? A glance at the current state of our world tells us that the kingdom of God is obviously ***not yet*** here in its eschatological glory. So, we remind ourselves that the realization of the kingdom of God among human subjects, in all its phases, past, present and future, required the eventual establishment of the New Covenant. The establishment of the New Covenant, in turn, required the New-Covenant sacrifice, the final expiation for sin that would propitiate the Father.<sup>64</sup> Jesus Christ accomplished and fulfilled all these requirements with His first coming. Now, with further teaching from Jesus and the apostles, we understand that **the eschatological culmination of the kingdom of God also awaits *the second coming of Christ* (His *parousia*).** At that time, King Jesus will transform the redeemed by giving them immortal sinless bodies. He will also completely remove Satan and his minions (the chief opponents of God's rule) from the human domain (more on all this in [chapter 7](#)).

Nevertheless, with all that Jesus accomplished with His first coming, many aspects of the future eschatological kingdom have become a present reality, at least incipiently. As the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles implied, the kingdom of God took a giant step forward and entered a new phase with the first arrival of the "son of David." **It's as if the future fullness of the eschatological kingdom had in some measure overflowed into the present.** Therefore, we can say with Jesus that the kingdom of God is ***already*** here among us (Mt 12.28; Lk 17.21), even if it is ***not yet*** revealed in its full eschatological glory.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> See more about the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4.

<sup>65</sup> See the table following this excursus. For an extensive treatment of viewpoints regarding both the already present and still yet future aspects of the kingdom of God, see George Eldon

In the present time, therefore, wherever people, both Jews and Gentiles, have submitted themselves to the rule of King Jesus, wherever Christian believers love God and neighbor, wherever Holy Spirit's miracles of provision, healing or deliverance occur, there we can see a manifestation of the kingdom of God. We see this manifestation most readily in the organized church, but also in more informal groups that are fully committed to Jesus and His word in the Scriptures (Jn 8.31-32). However, this is not to say that the visible church, nor any Christian organization, provides a perfect picture of God's rule. To the contrary, and much to our grief, Christian organizations throughout history have shown as great a propensity to act contrarily to God and His word as the nation of Israel ever did. Therefore, whether Jew or Gentile, we still long for the ultimate peace and righteousness that will prevail when our King returns and rules in person from Jerusalem. He will rule with both love and grace, but also with a rod of iron, so as to set all things right on our planet (Is 11.4; Ac 3.21; Re 19.15).

Until then, those whom God has graciously drawn to Himself seek out the fellowship of faithful servants of Jesus. They do this so that together they may enjoy the countless benefits of the kingdom of God that King Jesus has already made available to His subjects by His redemptive sacrifice. However, for those who have not yet been born again<sup>66</sup> and converted<sup>67</sup> to Jesus in humble dependency, the kingdom of God and its benefits remain out of reach (Mt 18.3; Jn 3.3). For those still unrepentantly pursuing personal autonomy, exclusion from the kingdom's blessings remains one of the grievous consequences of sin.

---

Ladd's, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. Ladd also provided much helpful insight regarding the kingdom of God in his *A Theology of the New Testament*.

<sup>66</sup> For an explanation of what it means to be born again, see ch. 6.

<sup>67</sup> For an explanation of what it means to be converted, see ch. 5, the section entitled, "I've Repented; Must I Also Be Converted?"

## The Already/Not Yet Aspects Of God's Kingdom

<b>Already</b> In "This Age" <sup>68</sup>	<b>Not Yet</b> Until "The Day Of Redemption" <sup>69</sup>
Davidic king enthroned in heaven (Heb 8.1)	Davidic king enthroned in Zion (Ps 2; 110)
Kingdom of God established, inaugurated (Mt 4.17; 12.28; cf. Eph 2.19-20; Heb 10.19-20)	Kingdom presented whole to the Father (1Co 15.24; cf. Mt 6.10)
Believers bow to Jesus as king (Jn 1.49)	Every knee will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord (Php 2.9-11)
Believers made righteous (Ro 5.1)	Believers receive all the hoped-for blessings of righteousness (Ga 5.5; cf. Col 1.3,27), <sup>70</sup> chiefly the presence of Jesus (1Ti 1.1; Tt 2.13)
By grace through Christ, the righteous reign in life (Ro 5.17; Lk 10.19)	The redeemed reign with Christ over the nations (2Ti 2.12; Re 2.26-27)
Jesus and believers cast out demons (Mt 12.28)	Satan bound and removed from humanity's domain (Re 20)
All things subjected judicially to Christ (Eph 1.20-22)	All things fully subjected to Christ in the world to come (Heb 2.8-9)
Many Israelites believe (Jn 2.23; 7.31; 10.42).	All Israel saved (Ro 11.26)
Believers saved (Eph 2.8)	Salvation completed (Ro 5.9; 1Th 5.8)
Believers "have redemption" in Christ, redeemed spiritually (Eph 1.7)	Redemption complete, including redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)
Believers children of God and have received spirit of adoption (Ro 8.15; 1Jn 3.2)	Adoption completed with redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)

<sup>68</sup> 1Co 2.6.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Eph 4.30.

<sup>70</sup> See Stott, *The Message Of Galatians*, p. 134.

Believers know God (Jn 17.3; 1Jn 5.20)	Believers have full knowledge of God (1Co 13.12)
Believers sealed with Holy Spirit of Promise (Eph 1.13; 4.30)	Believers receive their inheritance (Eph 1.13-14)
Healing available for the sick (Jas 5.14-15)	No more pain or death (Re 21.4)
Material needs provided by God (Mt 6.33; Php 4.19)	“Unfailing treasures in heaven” (Lk 12.33)
Followers of Jesus rewarded (Mk 10.29-30)	Believers receive full reward at Christ’s coming (Re 11.18; 22.12; cf. 2Jn 8)
Believers betrothed to Christ (2Co 11.2)	Believers participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Re 19.7-9)
Believers being glorified (2Co 3.18)	Believers resurrected in full glory (1Co 15.42)
Believers sanctified (1Co 1.2)	Sanctification entirely accomplished (1Th 5.23)
Believers becoming conformed to Christ (Ro 8.29; 2Co 3.18)	The redeemed fully like Christ (1Jn 3.2)
Believers citizens of heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12.22)	Heavenly Jerusalem visibly present (Re 21.2)
Death judicially abolished by Christ’s death and resurrection (2Ti 1.10; cf. Heb 2.14-15)	Death eliminated from the universe (Re 20.14)

# Appendix 1: Human Nature And The Fall

## The Nature Of Things

All things have a nature. We learn this fact by osmosis, as we listen to how people use the word *nature* in conversation. We understand that even a rock has a nature, in the sense that it has a set of physical properties that distinguishes it from other things, including other kinds of rocks. Most often, though, when we hear the mention of something's nature, the context has to do with a living thing<sup>1100</sup> and the comment refers to something deeper than — *though not unrelated to* — its physical properties. The nature of a living thing, we have learned, determines aspects of its typical behavior. For this reason, we have a particular interest in human nature, and present the following investigation into what the Bible tells us on the subject. To begin our investigation, however, we must define what we mean by the phrase *human nature*.

## The Nature Of Human Beings

### *What Do We Mean By Human Nature?*

In everyday speech, and even in theological writings, we use the phrase *human nature* to express a variety of vague notions. However, when we speak with philosophical precision, *human nature* refers to **the whole complex of species-specific potentialities with which a human being is conceived**.<sup>1101</sup> We speak of potentialities, because human nature does not consist of the actualization of human qualities but precedes them. For example, all human beings have the potentiality of grammatical speech, but if a member of our species is born with defective vocal chords, we do not reject him as non-human. We see him as having a human nature, like the rest of our race. We see him as fully human, only vocally impaired. Likewise, a human fetus in its mother's womb has a human nature, even

---

<sup>1100</sup> The Eng word *nature* derives from Lat adjective, *natus*, "born."

<sup>1101</sup> As opposed to the potentialities of a horse or a housefly. Cf. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, ch. 8, part 3.

though only a fraction of its human potentialities have already been actualized (including the potentialities of an effective circulatory system and a responsive nervous system). Furthermore, if we hold to the biblical teaching of creation (contra Darwinian evolution), we can infer that **the God-given natures of living creatures are immutable**, and that therefore, when we speak of *human nature*, we refer to something that is not susceptible to change.

We further clarify our definition of *human nature* by distinguishing between *nature* and *character*.<sup>1102</sup> **Character is a person's psychological and moral disposition, and unlike nature, character is mutable.** In other words, two dogs, obviously with the same canine *nature*, may have very different *characters*, one friendly and gentle, the other mean and aggressive. The friendly dog can have his character changed by mistreatment, and the mean dog can likewise be gentled by love and patience; these changes would not alter the fundamental canine nature of either dog. Similarly, the Bible recognizes individuals as having differing characters, and calls for change in the characters of those who are manifestly foolish or sinful. Significantly, Scripture constantly admonishes for radical change in the lives of sinners *without ever suggesting that they should become something other than human, or that they should recover a lost humanity*.<sup>1103</sup>

### ***Human Nature And Our Propensity For Sin***

With these definitions and distinctions in hand, we can proceed with our biblical investigation into *human nature*. We have no interest in mere speculation on the subject. Furthermore, though we inquire into the general phenomenon of human nature, we have a particular concern to discover whether or not human nature is *sinful*. We know that human nature as created by God was good (Ge 1.31), but the sinfulness of all human beings but Jesus Christ indicates that something fundamental within man changed after the fall. Either human nature has changed — in a stunning departure from the divine design of nature as immutable — or

---

<sup>1102</sup> We sometimes use *personality* as a near synonym for *character*.

<sup>1103</sup> The Bible does not speak as we do when we decry the “inhumanity” of individuals or groups, though it does speak of certain behaviors as unnatural, that is, “against nature” (Ro 1.26).

something associated with human nature has been altered.<sup>1104</sup> This troubling thought begs the following questions:

1. Since only the Creator integrates natures into living creatures, did God, after the fall, replace Adam's good nature with a different *not-so-good* one?
2. If God did not install a different nature in Adam after the fall, did the devil or sin itself somehow transform good human nature into a sinful nature?<sup>1105</sup>
3. If, after the fall, man's original nature was neither replaced by God, nor transformed by some other power, how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining a good nature?

Before we can respond biblically to these questions, we must briefly survey the biblical terms relevant to our topic.

## The Relevant Biblical Terms

The Bible is our supreme source for understanding human nature. Nevertheless, tracing the Bible's teaching on this subject is challenging for reasons including: (1) the lack of any doctrinal passage that explicitly defines *human nature* and identifies its qualities; (2) the polyvalence of the relevant terms (that is, the use of a potentially relevant word to mean different things), and (3) the occasional lack of distinction in Scripture between the ideas of *nature* and *character*. Therefore, as with all biblical terms, we must interpret Bible words that might refer to "nature" by their usage in specific contexts.

### γένος (*ye·nōs*)

We recognize our English word *genus* in this Grk term, which translates the OT Hebrew word מִינִי (mēn), *kind*. In the OT, we could translate this word as *species*, and in the food laws it is used taxonomically, without reference to *nature* as such.

---

<sup>1104</sup> A similar inquiry could be made into Lucifer's metamorphosis. Created perfect, he became unrighteous (Ez 28.14-15). How that could happen without a change in his God-given nature is shrouded in mystery, and certainly beyond the scope of our present study.

<sup>1105</sup> Setting aside Darwinian theory, and assuming that God created man as *Homo sapiens* from the beginning, did man after the fall somehow become *Homo peccator*, something other than human?

It has a similar usage in Matthew 13.47 that refers to “fish of every **kind**.” The NT also uses this term to speak of family descent. Related to this nuance it can refer to *ethnicity* or to a nation of people (γένος is unhappily translated *race* in Mark 7.26, Acts 7.19 and 1Peter 2.9 by the NASB95). With reference to a demon in Mark 9.29, it seems to refer to *character*, in differentiating one *kind* of evil spirit from another.

### εἰκών (ē·kōn)

This word, familiar to us as the English word *icon*, means *image* or *likeness*, and by extension can refer to *an idol* (Da 3.1; Re 13.15). The term εἰκών takes us back to Genesis 1.26-27 and is used strategically in Luke 20.24-25, Romans 8.29 and other New Testament passages to teach about man being created — and in Christ *recreated* — in the image or likeness of God. For our present topic, we recognize that *image* is something distinct from *nature*, though it can refer to aspects of both nature and character. When we speak of two acquaintances, and say that one is the *image* (or the “spitting image”) of the other, we do not mean that they share the same *nature* (in a technical sense), because that is obvious. Instead, we mean that the two look or act very much alike.

On the other hand, Colossians 1.15 tells us that the Son of God is “the image of the invisible God,” and in this case it was *not* always obvious that the incarnate Son and the invisible God share the same essential nature. Yet, the following verses, Colossians 1.16-17, indicate that they do. Therefore, we might think that Paul here used “image” to mean *nature*. In this passage, however, the point the apostle made with the word *image* is that in Jesus Christ we can *see* the divine character and at least some aspects of the divine nature. As the NLT puts it, “Christ is the **visible** image of the **invisible** God.”<sup>1106</sup>

We must be clear: the word *image* does not express the idea of *the whole essential nature*. After all, images on coins portray only a person’s head or bust, and convey almost nothing of the person’s character or nature. Similarly, when God created man *in His own image*, He did not duplicate the whole of His *divine*

---

<sup>1106</sup> Emphasis added.

*nature* in man. Nevertheless, the fact that God created man distinctively in His own image, implies that God created man with *some* potentialities that also exist in the deity. In other words, God gave man some capacity for experiencing His communicable attributes such as rationality, relationality, and creativity, along with a sense of morality and justice, and an administrative aptitude. These potentialities do represent components of human nature.

### θεότης (the·ō·tēs), θειότης (thē·ō·tēs), And θεῖον (théōn)

These terms refer to the state, nature or character of deity. Thus, the LXX uses θεῖον, the adjective, in reference to the *divine* law, *divine* will, *divine* providence, etc. In Colossians 2.9, Paul used the noun, θεότης, to speak of “the fullness of *Deity*,”<sup>1107</sup> and in this instance it can be understood as “God’s nature” (HCSB and NIrV). Likewise, in Romans 1.20, the noun can refer to the “divine nature” (NASB95 and others), or the “Godhead” (KJV), or “deity” (RSV). Once more, in Acts 17.29, Paul used the noun to affirm that the “Divine Nature” (NASB95), or the “divine being” (ESV), or the “deity” (NRSV), does not consist of “gold or silver or stone” like the idol images formed by people.

### καρδία (kar·dē·ā)

We recognize this Grk term as underlying our Eng *cardiac*, and in Scripture it can refer to the physical organ, *the heart* (as in the LXX of 1Sa 25.37). However, normally in the Bible *heart* refers to a person’s center of consciousness, the seat of the thoughts, will and emotions. We can often translate καρδία with the Eng word *mind* if we think of mind as involving not only thoughts and emotions, but also motives, desires and conscience. The human καρδία or *heart*, in its common biblical sense, can be “hardened” or “softened,” worsened or improved. Evil thoughts and actions emerge *from it*, such that God called apostate Israel to acquire a new καρδία, in Heb לֵב (lāv, Eze 18.31; 36.26). However, ideas and fears can also be put *into it*, and it is with the καρδία that a person believes the gospel (Ro 10.9-10).

---

<sup>1107</sup> So the NASB95 and other versions.

### μορφή (mōr·fē) And σχῆμα (schē·mā)

These terms refer to the form or appearance of something (see Job 4.16 and Is 44.13 in the LXX; see 1Co 7.31 and Php 2.7 in the NT). They may hint at underlying character or nature, but strictly speaking, they refer to *form*, whether physical or metaphysical. The NIVO committee was hasty in translating μορφή with *very nature* in Philippians 2.6. They could not translate the same term consistently in the next verse, and had to add a footnote: “or *in the form of*.” While we agree that the pre-incarnate Christ Jesus *did exist* in “the very nature of God,” the NIVO risked implying that after His incarnation Christ Jesus *did not exist* in the very nature of God.<sup>1108</sup> Our standard versions do better by consistently translating this term as *form* in both Philippians 2.6 and 2.7. The preincarnate Son existed in the *invisible form* of God, and in His incarnation took upon Himself the *visible form* of human likeness.

### μορφόω (mōr·fō·ō) And σύμμορφος (sēm·mōr·fōs)

The verb μορφόω, cognate of the preceding noun μορφή, expresses the idea of *forming* something. In our Bible this word only appears in Galatians 4.19, where Paul speaks of Christ “being formed in” the Galatian believers. Since aspects of Christ’s divine nature, like omnipotence and omniscience, cannot be infused into finite creatures, Paul’s apparent meaning in this passage is that he labored to see the moral-spiritual *character* of Jesus formed in the believers. This is consistent with Paul’s teaching that God is conforming us to the image (εἰκῶν) of His son, that is, to the *character* of Jesus. The verb itself, though, like the related adjective σύμμορφος, has nothing to do with the idea of *essential nature* nor even with *character*. The words only refer to something being *formed* or *conformed*.

### ὁμοιοπαθής (ō·mē·ō·pa·thēs)

In this compound Grk term, we see the basis for our words having to do with homeopathy. In its two biblical occurrences (Ac 14.15; Jas 5.17), it is well translated in the KJV with the phrase, “like passions.” Newer translations, however, including

---

<sup>1108</sup> The NLT takes a similar risk.

the NKJV, tend to translate with *like nature* or *a nature like ours*. This latter translation seems warranted in Acts 14.15, which recounts how the apostles insisted to a crowd of idolators that they, Barnabas and Paul, were “merely human beings” (NLT) and not gods. However, it seems superfluous in James 5.17 to say, “Elijah was a man with *a nature like ours*.” Instead, emphasizing his like aptitude for fear and uncertainty, with the phrase “like passions,” seems more meaningful. In 4 Maccabees 12.13, the term is used to speak of men of like *feelings*, and in Wisdom 7.3 to speak of “the *kindred* earth” upon which all little children stumble and fall. It seems best to retain the KJV rendering of this term in its biblical instances, and since it speaks only of having “like passions,” it contributes only indirectly to our goal of understanding the Bible’s doctrine of human nature.

### *σάρξ (sarks) And σαρκικός (sar·kē·kōs)*

This word, together with its Hebrew counterparts, has a vast semantic field in Scripture. In its strict literal sense, it denotes the soft tissues of animals and humans, that is, *flesh*. By extension, however, it can refer to the *physical body*, *humanity*, or to *all living creatures*. It can also refer to the physical, weak, and limited aspects of human personality. The apostle Paul used *sarx* extensively to refer to **the controlling principle that opposes the spirit within fallen human beings**. In this usage *sarx* relates entirely to earthly and physical impulses. As the driving force in a person’s mind, it cannot help but give rise to a selfish personality, if not somehow restrained. According to the apostle Paul, there is *nothing good* in the *sarx* as a ruling principle for human character (Ro 7.18). Let us be clear, though: for Paul, *sarx* did not denote *human nature* but the driving force *behind* human nature in its fallen state.

### *σπέρμα (sper·mā)*

Familiar to us as our English word *sperm*, this word in Scripture always speaks of *seed*, whether of plant or animal, and by extension often means *child* or *descendant*. For our present topic, this word only concerns us as it appears in 1 John 3.9:

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His **seed** abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Because this verse affirms that it is *God's* seed that is within the born-again believer, we know that we are not speaking of seed in its fundamental and literal sense. The RSV translates with, "God's nature abides in him," and the NIV says, "God's very nature remains in them." Likewise, the TEV (*The Good News Translation*) says, "God's very nature is in them." Since the word *σπέρμα* never means *nature* elsewhere in Scripture, we question this interpretation in 1 John 3.9. Because the preceding verse has to do with destroying "the works of the devil," it makes better sense to recognize John's use of *σπέρμα* as a reference to Genesis 3.15 (LXX) and to God's prophetic Seed who would crush the serpent's head. That prophetic Seed came as Jesus Christ to strike the fatal blow against the devil, and He now comes to dwell in believers in the person of His Holy Spirit.<sup>1109</sup> Assuming, then, that *σπέρμα* in 1 John 3.9 refers to God's Son Jesus, we *can* say that "God's very nature" is in the believer, but only in the sense that Jesus Himself is abiding and working in the believer. We certainly cannot interpret this verse as implying deification of the believer or the infusion of any of God's *incommunicable* attributes into the nature of the believer. The word *σπέρμα* does not mean *nature* and cannot convey the theological idea of *infusing divine nature* into believers.

### **ὑπόστασις (ē·pō·sta·sēs)**

The basis for our English word, *hypostasis*, this noun has meanings as diverse as *a project* and *a ground for hope*. Relating to our present topic, however, we find it in Hebrews 1.3 referring to God's *essential nature* as truly appearing in Jesus Christ.<sup>1110</sup>

### **φύσις (fē·sēs), φυσικός (fē·sē·kōs) And φυσικῶς (fē·sē·kōs)**

The noun *φύσις* and its cognate adjective and adverb are important for this investigation but they are quite polyvalent. They can express the diverse ideas of:

- *Species* (Jas 3.7)
- *Native*, i.e., *natural* with regard to a species in view (Ro 11.19-24)

<sup>1109</sup> Jn 14.17; 15.4-5; 1Jn 2.27; 3.24; 4.12-13,15-16.

<sup>1110</sup> Cf. Ps 8.8.48(47) in the LXX.

- *Instinct* (Ro 2.14; 2Pe 2.12; Jude 1.10)
- *Cultural norm* (1Co 11.14)
- *Divine character* (2Pe 1.4)
- *Natural* (in contrast to *perverted*, Ro 1.26-27)
- *Ethnic heritage* (Ga 2.15)
- *Essential nature* (Ga 4.8; in this instance Paul uses φύσις to deny that pagan idols have the essential nature of deity)
- *Cultural-moral character*; Eph 2.3

Sadly, φύσις in Ephesians 2.3 is translated *nature* in all our standard versions. We would translate Ephesians 2.3 as follows:

Among whom we ourselves all formerly conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, continually doing the desires of the flesh and of *our own* reasonings, and we were **by character** *deserving* of wrath, even like the rest.

This verse employs the familiar idiom, *son of* or *children of*, used to express character or merited destiny. It's an idiom Paul used repeatedly in Ephesians. The “children of wrath” of Ephesians 2.3 are roughly equivalent to the “sons of disobedience” in Ephesians 2.2 who are also deserving of wrath, according to Ephesians 5.6 (cf. Col 3.6). All of these verses in their contexts are about evil *character* that is outwardly manifest and sometimes demonically motivated—they are not about *essential nature*.

We see that the φύσις word family can have relevance for our study of *essential nature*, but each term from this group must be carefully interpreted according to context.

### ψυχικός (psē·kē·kōs)

Sharing the same root as our English *psychological* and *psychic* terms, this word has to do with the life force or soul (ψυχή). The apostle Paul used it to contrast the purely *natural* with the *spiritual*, whether speaking of mind or body (1Co 2.14; 15.44,46), and James used it to contrast heavenly wisdom with the *natural* and *demonic* wisdom of selfish people (Jas 3.14-17). Jude 1.19 uses this word to speak of wicked people and their *worldly-mindedness* (NASB95) or *sensuality* (KJV) or

habit of following their *natural instincts* (NLT, NIV). This word, then, can refer to any aspect of humanity considered as earthly apart from the influence of the divine Spirit. In this capacity, it speaks of the human condition (of body and mind) apart from God. The term's usage tells us implicitly that human nature apart from God is in deep trouble, but it does not refer explicitly to *human nature* as such.

### ***What Do We Learn From These Terms?***

From a perusal of these biblical terms at least loosely connected with the idea of a living entity's *nature*, we find that:

1. Scripture rarely speaks of something's *nature* in the modern sense of species-specific *essential nature*. However, in the few instances that it does, it uses the terms *ὑπόστασις*, *φύσις*, and *θεότης* or *θειότης*, *but only with regard to divine nature*. Regarding *human nature*, Scripture says very little directly, but implies something vitally important by affirming that man is created in the image (*εἰκῶν*) of God.
2. The biblical authors were much more interested in *character*, touching upon it with the terms *εἰκῶν*, *γένος*, *μορφή* with its cognates, and *φύσις*. As stated above, the Bible recognizes individuals as having differing characters, and calls for change in the characters of those who are manifestly foolish and sinful.
3. The prophets and apostles also express vital interest in the *heart* (i.e., the person's center of consciousness). They also concerned themselves with the driving principles that direct the heart, which in turn directs a person's character. The two great driving forces in this regard are the flesh (*σάρξ*) on the one hand, and the *Spirit* (possibly equivalent to "God's seed," in 1Jn 3.9) on the other.

**The biblical evidence, then, indicates that it is man's *character* that has been corrupted since the fall, rather than his *essential nature*.** In saying this, we do not deny that phenomenologically, that is, from the perspective of our own observations of humanity, the corruption of man's *character* is tantamount to the corruption of his *nature*. We also recognize from

the biblical evidence that man's *character* has been universally and thoroughly corrupted ultimately because of some disabling "disconnect" of the Spirit's governing influence over human *nature*.

Nevertheless, the biblical distinction between the impairment of man's *nature* and the corruption of his *character* has important implications. The first of these is that **human nature still bears the divine image**, as implied in Genesis 9.6,<sup>1111</sup> and as pointedly affirmed by Jesus in His "render unto Caesar" saying (Lk 20.24-25). Thus, human nature retains the qualities of the divine image mentioned above:

- rationality,
- volition,
- relationality,
- creativity,
- sense of morality and justice,
- administrative aptitude.

The moral sense expresses itself in the conscience and an instinctive impulse to keep God's laws (Ro 2.14). The moral sense working with rationality and relationality contributes to humanity's "incurable" religious impulse and need to worship, such that Paul can affirm that human nature is still capable of knowing and perceiving enough about God so as to be without excuse for failing to honor and give thanks to Him (Ro 1.19-21).

Second, so far as we can tell from Scripture, **human nature has remained stable, and thus intrinsically good in its design and intended purpose**. It's external governance has changed, but this does not warrant characterizing man's nature as a "sinful nature."

### *Answering The First Two Questions*

These implicit truths answer the first two of our opening questions:

---

<sup>1111</sup> The perfect verb, *has made*, in Genesis 9.6 expresses a settled reality (NIV84, NIV, NIV), as opposed to simply a past event.

1. **Did God, after the fall, replace man’s good original nature?** *No.* Scripture provides implicit evidence that man retained his original nature by affirming that man yet retains the divine image. At the same time, Scripture presents no explicit evidence indicating that man received a different nature after the fall. Consider also the sheer absurdity — if not blasphemy — of imagining that God would remove Adam’s good nature and replace it with a sinful one, thereby making Himself the Creator of *sinner*s by nature. Surely we can dismiss the idea of God replacing man’s original nature with a different one.
2. **Did something else transform man’s good nature into a sinful nature?** *No.* The biblical evidence that the sin problem has more to do with man’s *character* than with his *nature*, implies that human nature has remained unaltered.<sup>1112</sup>

At the same time, it is clear that since the fall, and apart from redemption, human nature is severely hindered in actualizing its *good* potentialities. Human beings constantly violate their consciences and fail to keep God’s laws. There is only One Who actualizes *all* of His good potentialities (Mt 19.17), and He is not a fallen person. In contrast to that One, everything that fallen human beings “think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood” (Ge 8.21, NLT). So, we must still answer the third of our opening questions:

3. If, after the fall, man’s original nature was neither replaced by God, nor transformed by some other power, **how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining his good original nature?**

---

<sup>1112</sup> Contra Augustine who wrote that by the first two people “so great a sin was committed that by it the human nature was altered for the worse, and was transmitted also to their posterity, liable to sin and subject to death.” A little further on, he creatively attempted to explain why “other sins do not alter human nature” (*The City of God*, Book 14, chapters 1 and 12).

## The Enslavement of Human Nature

Scripture describes the current problem of man's nature as an enslavement, that is, as a spiritual bondage, captivity and oppression. Jesus explicitly identified the problem of enslavement in John 8.34:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

Notice that in this saying, Jesus did not specify some *part* of the sinning person as enslaved, but implied that the whole person, including his nature, was in bondage. If, however, man's sinful *character* is attributable to the enslavement of the whole person (including their nature), we must ask, "to whom?" or "to what?" are fallen people enslaved?<sup>1113</sup>

### *Enslavement To Sin Itself?*

The wording of John 8.34 implies that the sinner is enslaved to sin itself. Genesis 4.5-7 seems to point in the same direction: "... sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you but you must rule over it."<sup>1114</sup> The apostle Paul also spoke of enslavement to, and mastery by, sin (Ro 6.6-7,12-14,16-22). However, though Scripture has occasionally personified sin, as though it were a living entity, we find no indication that sin exists independently of people and evil spirits, nor do we find any suggestion that human accountability will be lessened on the basis that sin "made me do it." Sin is either an abstract idea without any discrete existence, or it is the state or act of a personal being. Phenomenologically, we have all *felt* enslaved by our sins, but there must be something concrete behind the sinful drives and impulses that compel us.

### *Enslavement To Satan?*

Jesus pointed to the devil as the one whose desires sinners are compelled to pursue (Jn 8.44). The idea that human nature is enslaved to Satan makes sense in light of

---

<sup>1113</sup> The genitive phrase, "slave of sin," probably employs a genitive of relationship, expressing only that the sinner is a slave in relationship to sin. However, it could employ a genitive of product, *a slave producing sin*, or a genitive of producer, *a slave made so by sin*. The point is that "slave of sin" does not unequivocally identify the slave's master.

<sup>1114</sup> Notice, "you must rule over it"; you must act consistent with your God-given nature to rule.

our first parents having turned from allegiance to the Creator, and thereby having given their allegiance to the Serpent. This reality of human enslavement to the devil is mentioned by Paul (2Ti 2.26), and is implicit in passages like 1 John 3.8, “the one who practices sin is of the devil,” and 1 John 5.19 (NRSV), “...the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.” It is also consistent with passages that speak of Satan as the ruler or god of this world (Jn 12.31; 14.30; 2Co 4.4) and as the one “working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2.2), and as the one from whose dominion people must turn (Ac 26.18; cf. Col 1.13).

Still, we suspect that for Satan to enslave us and rule over our actions, he must have some handle by which to manipulate us. Scripture gives no hint that we will escape accountability because “the devil made us do it.” Instead, it points us to that driving principle that the apostle Paul referred to as “the flesh” (σάρξ), mentioned above.

### *Enslavement To The Flesh*

The term *flesh* (σάρξ), when used in reference to humanity in its fundamental and general sense, only points to the physicality or frailness of human persons (e.g. in Mt 26.41; Lk 24.39). However, even the general usage of the term hints at a distinction between *flesh* and *spirit* (Jn 3.6), and points to the problem that occurs when *flesh* rules the inner person (Jn 8.15; Ro 6.19). Paul, addressed the distinction and the problem directly, describing unbelievers as in *a state* of fleshliness (literally, “in the flesh”), which involves sinful passions aroused in connection with bodily organs (Ro 7.5). If we crystalize what Paul means by this usage of *flesh* (σάρξ), it appears that **the flesh in this sense is the whole complex of human drives and hungers ungoverned by God’s spirit** (Ga 5.16). The drives and hungers are not intrinsically evil, but good; they were integrated into human nature to enable human thriving in the physical environment of this world. However, these good drives and hungers, unleashed and ungoverned by the Spirit, have no limiting switch — unless it’s one that is highly unreliable! For example, everyone who has tried to lose weight knows that the human digestive system has a built-in limiting system that tells us when

enough food has been consumed and the mouth should stop eating, but we also know that the limiting switch in our mind is defective. We find that it requires us to utilize all manner of psychological tools, and even pharmaceutical devices, in the attempt to keep food consumption under some semblance of control. If our hunger for food and for other diverse pleasures (including our hunger for human intimacy), are not somehow brought under control, they corrupt the whole human character.<sup>1115</sup> Fallen persons, without the Spirit of God, can indeed be characterized as enslaved by the “flesh” (2Pe 2.18-19).

### *Answering The Final Question*

So, returning to the third of our opening questions, **how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining his good original nature?** — we can now formulate an answer:

Since the fall, human beings are bent toward sin because human nature has been enslaved both by Satan and a fleshly mind, each hostile toward God.<sup>1116</sup> Satan takes advantage of the drives and impulses that are built into human nature but left ungoverned by the Spirit. Though enslaved to all kinds of selfish and devilish impulses that pervert the mind and will, human nature remains intrinsically good in its divine design and purpose, and the image of God remains stamped upon it. This amalgam of a good nature and anti-God masters, explains why, on the one hand, all people sin and fall short of God’s glory (Ro 3.23), but, on the other hand, human nobility still occasionally shines through, even if feeble and tarnished. Enslaved human nature produces Hitlers and humanitarians, and all manner of sinners in between. Nevertheless, for all those whose nature is in bondage, even their good works are tainted by selfish motives and cannot expiate their sins before a holy God. Human nature is good; it’s the enslavement of that nature, and the

---

<sup>1115</sup> Ga 5.17, 19-21; Eph 2.3; 2Pe 2.10.

<sup>1116</sup> Ro 8.7; cf. Lk 8.12; Ac 13.9-10; Eph 6.11-12; 1Th 2.18; 2Ti 2.26; Re 12.9.

consequent restraint upon its good potentialities, that explains humanity's bent toward sin and the universal corruption of human character.<sup>1117</sup>

## Implications And Applications

### *Jesus Shared Our Nature*

Affirming the abiding goodness of *human nature*, in spite of the utter corruption of *human character*, allows us to affirm the true humanity of Jesus without casting doubt upon His sinlessness. We must realize that positing a “sinful human nature” leads to a Christological problem. We can exhibit that problem with two syllogisms (based on the unbiblical presupposition of a sinful human nature):

Human nature is sinful.  
Jesus had a human nature.  
Therefore, Jesus had a sinful nature.

Or:

Human nature is sinful.  
Jesus did not have a sinful nature.  
Therefore, Jesus did not have a human nature.

The problem is summarized well by Adam Harwood, whom I quote here at length:

The problem with affirming that people inherit a sinful *nature* is that if human nature is essentially and inherently sinful, then Jesus (who was truly human and divine) would have been a person whose human nature was sinful. However, Scripture is clear there was no sin in him. Not only did Jesus not sin, but he also was not sinful in any way. If one affirms that human nature is essentially and inherently sinful *and* one denies that Jesus's human nature was sinful, then one would be affirming that Jesus's human nature was not truly human — a

---

<sup>1117</sup> Stephen Charnock described the tension of fallen man's ability-inability in terms of faculties lacking moral goodness and a lute with untuned strings: “In Adam, by creation we were possessed of [certain faculties]. In Adam, by his corruption, ... we have not lost the physical but the moral nature of these faculties; not the faculties themselves, but the moral goodness of them.” And, “Sin hath untuned the strings, but did not unstring the soul; the faculties were still left, but in such a disorder, that the wit and will of man can no more tune them, than the strings of an untuned lute can dispose themselves for harmony without a musician's hand.” Charnock, *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 172.

conclusion which would fail tests for orthodoxy that have been in place since the early ecumenical councils. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for human sin because he was both truly divine and truly human. **The property of being sinful is common to fallen humanity but not essential to authentic human nature. Though it might be proper to refer to my human nature as corrupted and twisted, this is different than arguing for the existence of a thing called an inherited sinful nature.**<sup>1118</sup>

Jesus, as God the Son and simultaneously a true son of Adam, not only serves as the perfect Redeemer for fallen humanity, but also as the perfect example of a person whose human nature is directed fully and unceasingly by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ shows us what true humanity is, what God intended a human being to look like in nature and character.

### *How To Describe Humanity's Sinful State*

Since all Christians agree that human nature was created good, and since Scripture does not warrant the idea that human nature (as distinct from human character) has ever been sinful, we should not use the phrase “sinful nature” nor “evil nature” with reference to human beings. To do so raises unnecessary theological questions and causes unnecessary confusion. Nor should we incautiously speak of “the corruption of our [whole] nature,” without clarifying our meaning.<sup>1119</sup>

When we wish to refer to the sinful state and actions of humanity, we should speak of the corruption of human *character* rather than the corruption of human nature. If we refer specifically to the woeful, post-fall state of human *nature*, we can biblically speak of it as *captive* or *enslaved*, or *in bondage to sin*. This

---

<sup>1118</sup> Adam Harwood, “A Critique of Total Depravity,” emphasis added.

<sup>1119</sup> *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, in its brief entry on *sarx* provides us with an example of scholarly use of the phrase “human nature” in an incautious manner (as is often the case when scholars expound a traditional view regarding which they expect no disagreement). The entry says that *sarx* is used “in Paul’s writings, for sinful human nature as it exists apart from relationship with God.” What is troubling are the citations offered, namely, Ga 5.17,19 and Eph 2.3, which neither define *flesh* nor mention *nature*.

terminology of enslavement will direct the mind to the importance of Biblical redemption in its aspect of buying back the freedom of a person in servitude.<sup>1120</sup>

Subscribing to the abiding goodness of human nature does not jeopardize the doctrine of total depravity. That doctrine does not affirm that man is totally sinful or “as sinful as he can possibly be,” but only that *the totality* of man’s faculties, including his will and his reason are corrupted by sinfulness. We see, therefore, that at least with regard to its central idea, the doctrine of total depravity does not require the presupposition that human nature has become sinful *in itself*. Though human nature after the fall remained intrinsically good in its design and intended purpose, its state of bondage and the consequent depravity of human character still leaves man incapable of saving himself.

### ***Human Bondage Calls For Redemption In The Present***

Our understanding of the human condition inevitably shapes our approach to evangelizing those who are yet unbelievers. A biblical understanding of the state of fallen man’s nature and character encourages us to emphasize people’s need for right-now, this-life redemption. They don’t just need to know that “they’ll go to heaven when they die”; they need to know that they are a slave in a prison they cannot see, and the urgency of being set free *now*. Consider two metaphorical scenarios:

SCENARIO 1: An unregenerate man is being chauffeured in his Cadillac limo by two mild-mannered drivers who take turns driving and opening the doors. They are driving the man to the Pleasure Palace where all manner of carnal delights are available. While the man sits comfortably in the back seat, his cell phone rings, and he answers. It’s his Christian friend John. John says, “I know you’re busy but I’d like to bless you. In the next five minutes I can do one of two things for you. **Either I can hack your car’s electronics and kill the ignition system so that your drivers can’t take you to bad places, or I can share with you how to receive**

---

<sup>1120</sup> Cf. Olshausen, et al., “The term ἀπολύτρωσις, *redemption*, ... Paul generally employs this form (Eph 1.7,14; 4.30; 1Co 1.30) since the ἀπό expresses the idea of making free more strongly than the simple λύτρωσις. At the foundation of this word lies the figure of *slavery*, from which man must be redeemed by a ransom (whence ἐξαγοράζω is used, Ga 3.13, 4.5), in order to attain to freedom,” *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 542.

**forgiveness for your sins so you'll go to heaven when you die."** Which will the man choose?

SCENARIO 2: An unregenerate man is locked in the trunk of his Cadillac limo that is careening down the road at 120 mph. Two insane creatures are in the front seat of the car wrestling for control of the steering wheel and gas pedal. The man in the trunk is being thrown about as the car zig-zags, hits bumps and sometimes goes airborne. The man gets a phone call, and answers his cell. It's his Christian friend John. John says, "I know you're busy but I'd like to bless you. In the next five minutes I can do one of two things for you. **Either I can hack your car's electronics and kill the ignition system so that your car will coast to a stop and your drivers can't keep endangering your life, or I can share with you how to receive forgiveness for your sins so you'll go to heaven when you die.**" Which will the man choose?

Thankfully, the redemption that God has provided through Jesus Christ does not limit the salvation seeker to only one kind of kind of rescue, either for this life or the next. The gospel, properly understood, offers redemption in this life as well as the forgiveness that opens the door to blessedness in the next. The problem occurs when we preach an empty shell of "the gospel," and imply to our audience that people can receive assurance of the forgiveness of their sins without having to repent nor replace the drivers at the steering wheel of their lives. It also occurs when we preach therapeutic moralism in a way that implies that the bondage of human nature and the corruption of human character are fixable if we only apply ourselves to the problem with enough willpower.

We must preach and teach the biblical assessment of both human nature and human character. We must do so with clarity, and thoroughness. We must stop referring to "sinful human nature," lest people assume we are describing a problem with no solution. Instead, we should preach about human nature enslaved, and do so in such a way as to help people understand the immediate relevance of the Good News about how they can be set free by the Son (Jn 8.36). In our preaching we should make full use of the Bible's passages about God and Christ as Ones who

deliver the oppressed and set the prisoner free *in the present*.<sup>1121</sup> The fact that many of these passages had specific application for ethnic Israel or had reference to external circumstances rather than to spiritual enslavement, does not diminish what they reveal about our Redeemer's inclination to deliver those in bondage of whatever kind, and those oppressed by whichever tyrant.

### *Fallen People Need A New Birth And A New Lord*

Human beings, after the fall, do not need a *new* nature, but they most certainly need a *redeemed* nature. That is, they need to have their nature bought back and liberated from its bondage to sin, the devil and the flesh. Thus, though the corruption of fallen humanity centers in their character rather than in their nature, the fact that the essence of fallenness relates so directly to *nature*, explains why Scripture articulates the solution for our fallenness in terms of birth and creation, the very phenomena during which *nature* is normally embedded. The release of human nature from its bondage is accomplished by way of a new birth of the Spirit (Jn 1.12-13; 3.5-6; Tt 3.5) that is equivalent to a new creation of the inner self (2Co 5.17; Ga 6.15; Eph 4.24; Col 3.10) and is tantamount to a personal resurrection (Ro 6.4-11).

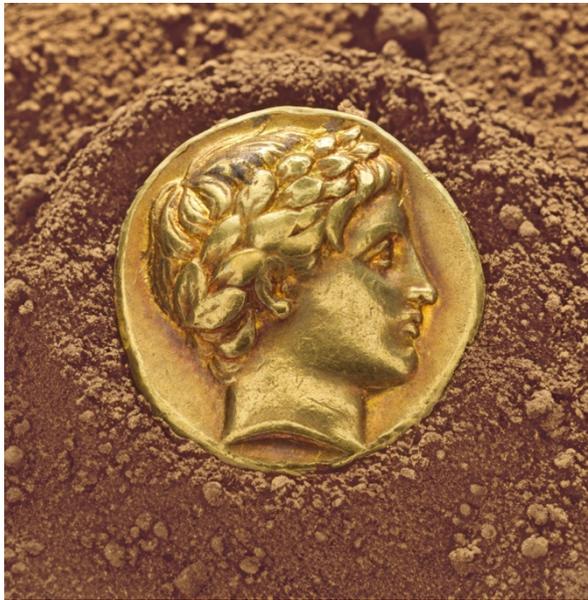
Integral to the liberation of human nature from its old masters is the installation of a new Lord at the "steering wheel." There is no redemption of the human person that leaves human nature autonomous. There are only two possibilities: man's nature is ruled by the devil and its own misdirected desires, or it is ruled by Jesus Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit. No one can presume to have escaped their fallen state, the enslavement of their nature and the corruption of their character, apart from the direct and abiding involvement of Christ Himself working within them by His Spirit (Eze 36.26; Jn 14.23; Col 1.27). Thankfully, with the new birth of the Spirit (Jn 3.5-6), comes the gift of faith that receives Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, with the Spirit of Jesus at the steering wheel of human nature, the rebuilding of the character begins.

---

<sup>1121</sup> Ps 68.6; 72.12-14; 102.19-20; 103.6; 146.6-8; Is 42.6-7; **61.1**; **Lk 4.18**; 13.12-16; **Ac 10.38**; 12.6-9; 16.25-26 ff. Cf. the responsibility of God's people to imitate Him in this regard, Isaiah 58.6.

## *God Values Human Beings*

God's willingness to sacrifice His own Son should leave no doubt regarding the value that He places upon human beings (Jn 3.16-17). Why does God so love the world of humanity? If there is a reason, then one aspect of it is that human beings are made in His own image and still retain a nature that is good in its design and purpose. Not that these things constitute human merit. What is valuable in fallen man consists only of what God Himself put in man. Fallen man is like a dirt clod in which someone hid a gold coin. The clod is passive and can claim no credit for the gold within, but God sees the gold reflecting His own image.<sup>1122</sup> God values the clod for the gold inside. So much so that he will hold accountable the man or beast that murders a human being, precisely because "in the image of God He made man" (Ge 9.5-6).



If we subscribe to the abiding goodness of human nature, we can and should preach the spiritual deadness of the human dirt clod (apart from Christ) while at the same time proclaiming the innate value of fallen humans. Never has the

---

<sup>1122</sup> Were there no gold, that is, if human nature were indeed intrinsically sinful and corrupt, would God still deem mankind worth saving? If there is an answer to this question, we cannot discover it in this short study.

Christian message regarding the inherent value of *all* human beings been more needed than today. Though racism and prejudice have existed since deep antiquity, the threat to communities and nations from those ready to view other ethnicities as sub-human remains unabated. Though abortion, infanticide and the sexual enslavement of children have existed since at least Greco-Roman times, never has the world exterminated the unborn, nor trafficked children in the systematic way that it does today. Also, as a new phenomenon in Western society, we are beginning to see the deadly consequences of educating several generations in a Darwinian worldview that implicitly tells our children that they are biological accidents, with no objective meaning or purpose, and ultimately no meaningful value. Think of the adolescents who are cutting themselves “just to feel something,” and the teenage felons committing adrenaline-rush crimes, justifying their actions by telling themselves that nothing really matters anyway, but secretly wishing for significance and to just be noticed by somebody. Think of the white-collar embezzlers and swindlers who are intelligent enough to realize that from a Darwinian point of view, there is no objective right or wrong, nor any objective reason to care about what happens to the poor fools they’re defrauding. Preaching the biblical message of the innate value of all human life will not solve all these problems, but it can help stanch the life-draining wound within our circle of influence. And it cannot help but complement our proclamation of the gospel: “Jesus died for our sins, not because we are morally worthy, but because we are innately so valuable to Him that He seeks our redemption!”

### *We Can Appeal To Human Nature*

#### *Aspects Of God’s Image Still Discernable In Human Nature*

The fact that human nature remains intact after the fall, to the extent that we can still perceive aspects of the divine image even in the unregenerate, provides us with an additional rationale for calling fallen people to faith and repentance. We can remind unbelievers of the evidence of their original nature, stamped with the image of God. We can press their responsibility of rendering “to God the things that are

God's" (Lk 20.25). We can preach the reasonableness of desiring a redemption that will allow one's character to become that for which human nature was designed.

The evidence that the divine image remains in fallen man includes the following qualities:

1. Rationality,
2. Volition with respect to abstract options (animals make instinctual choices about immediate realities),
3. Relationality,
4. Creativity,
5. Administrative aptitude,
6. Conscience, morality, justice, instinctive keeping of the law (Ro 2.14), the recognition of certain human crimes, abuses and perversions as *unnatural*,
7. The impulse to restore and beautify.

Contrary to the Darwinian doctrine that man is essentially no different from other animals, we can affirm human uniqueness and humanity's unique call to know and love the Creator.

### ***Culpability For Living Contrary To Our God-given Nature***

We can also affirm the inexcusable culpability of living contrary to our God-given nature. We do not have to confuse people by affirming, on the one hand, that God will hold us accountable for sinning, while admitting, on the other hand, that sinning is consistent with our "sinful nature." Notice the logical tension that Brauch feels on this point:

We are sinners by nature ... [and just] as Scripture affirms the total depravity and helplessness of human beings, it also affirms that God holds humans morally accountable for their sinful choices that are consistent with that nature. ... God will hold individuals accountable for their acts in this life — despite their sinful nature ....<sup>1123</sup>

---

<sup>1123</sup> Brauch, *Flawed Perfection: What It Means to Be Human and Why It Matters for Culture, Politics, and Law*, p. 30-31.

No, on the contrary, God will hold individuals accountable for their deeds that were *incompatible with* their good nature, and that veiled the divine the image of God they were created to reflect. We can sound this warning confidently.

We realize that some of our readers may feel that we are splitting hairs at this point. Did we not just explain that in consequence of our nature's bondage to sin *our human character* has been corrupted? Whether it's our nature or our character that has been corrupted, isn't our sinful behavior nevertheless "in character" with our inherited human condition, and therefore hardly blameworthy?

The *practical* distinction is admittedly subtle. We must understand, however, that our sinful behavior is blameworthy simply for its affront to our holy Creator, regardless of whether we consider it is an expression of our "sinful nature" or our "corrupted character." The *theological* distinction is more important. The proposition that human nature remains good (though impaired), and that therefore it is our character that is "sinful," removes all possibility of impugning God for giving Adam and his posterity a "sinful nature" that no one could hope to rise above. This keeps the responsibility upon the sinner for his sins, and precludes the complaint, "Why does God still find fault? For who can act contrary to their nature?"<sup>1124</sup>

### ***The Oughtness Of Living Consistently With Our Nature***

We can also confidently echo the unbeliever's own conscience. All people have a sense of what they ought and ought not do. We can and should use this fact in our evangelism. We should not let the depravity of human *character* blind us to the still present receptors, embedded in every person's *nature*, that are capable of perceiving God's truths. The Greeks whom the apostle Paul addressed on Mars Hill gave no credence to the Hebrew Scriptures, but Paul did not hesitate to call them to repent **on the basis of what they knew intuitively about God and about their obligation to seek Him** (Ac 17.24-30). The noble aspects still discernible

---

<sup>1124</sup> To borrow Paul's phrasing in Ro 9.19.

in human nature are enough to underscore that all people *ought* to be and do better, and not continue to yield to their fleshly instincts. It is *this tension* — between the oughtness of being better and the impossibility of being better by human strength and will — that the gospel so wonderfully addresses for those still held captive (Jn 8.36).

### ***Christian Character Must Contrast With Fallen Character***

If we appropriately exhort unbelievers that they are obligated to live in a manner consistent with their God given nature, how much more should we press this truth upon our fellow believers. Here in the United States, many have observed that divorce and moral problems are as common among church people as they are among non-church people. Friends have shared with me about how they have been financially defrauded by “Christian” businessmen. The common excuse of unbelievers for avoiding church attendance is that “the churches are full of hypocrites.” This current reality is diametrically opposed to what the church’s testimony to the world should be, as the New Testament epistles and the Revelation’s letters to the seven churches make painfully clear.

The reasons for the current spiritual crisis in the American church are complex, but perhaps one small part of the problem has to do with the tendency in some congregations to unguardedly emphasize Christians’ continuing status as “sinners,” albeit “saved by grace.” Is this the New Testament’s emphasis? Does the Bible depict believers as **sinners** who labor to do what is right, or as **saints** who sometimes stumble? “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves,” wrote the apostle John (1Jn 1.8), but we are no longer sinners in the same sense that we were prior to our regeneration. The apostles describe the believers’ sinfulness in the past tense. We “were slaves of sin” but “became obedient from the heart” (Ro 6.17). “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, ...” (1Co 6.11). We “were once darkness, but now ... light in the Lord” (Eph 5.8). We were “dead in [our] wrongdoings” but now “made alive” (Col 2.13). “You were continually straying, but now you have returned” (1Pe 2.25).

It appears that the distinction we have observed between immutable nature and mutable character should caution us as to how we speak about ourselves as Christians. In a true sense, we are no longer sinners but righteous (Ro 5.19), if our faith and new birth are authentic. This reality makes sense of the many biblical passages that contrast the sinners with the righteous and godly. Yes, there is a sense in which we remain sinners by virtue of the fact that we still sin; Paul spoke of himself as the chief of sinners in the present tense (1Ti 1.15). We must be clear in our preaching, though, and not speak of believers as still being sinners in the same sense that they were before being redeemed and set free by Christ. We do not want to encourage the trending belief that the Christian life need not differ from the non-Christian life of our surrounding culture.

**Quote**  
... you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.

— Morpheus to Neo, in the Warner Brothers film, *The Matrix*