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What is Man?

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Chapter 1 – Man as Related to God, Community, and World

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! —Ps. 8:4-9.

In answering the question, "What is man?" does the Bible take an analytical approach by looking at man in himself and describing the composition of his parts? Or does the Bible take a relational approach by looking at man in the light of his vital relationships? This is the first and most basic area in the current debate on the doctrine of man.

The old approach was analytical. It looked at man in isolation as if the Bible intended to inform us on man's composition. It often attempted to break human nature into its component parts and systematically arrange such biblical terms as *soul*, *mind*, *heart*, *conscience*, *spirit*, and *body*. Hodge reflects this approach when he introduces his presentation on the "Nature of Man":

Man consists of two distinct principles, a body and a soul: the one material, the other immaterial. ...So that in the constitution of man two distinct substances are included.¹

This thought framework views man's uniqueness and value in terms of some special faculty or endowment of human nature. It contends that man is of infinite worth because he possesses an immortal soul. It posits human value in some ontological quality within man himself.

In different sections of the church many scholars are now expressing grave reservations about this approach to the doctrine of man. They say this approach is *imposed* on the Bible. They point out that the Bible does not look at man analytically or in isolation. That is distinctly Grecian. Berkouwer notes that the Bible does not present a systematic study on the parts of man.² Wright also observes that man in the Bible is never an object of independent reflection.³

Berkouwer comments that "it is not possible to synthesize . . . [the biblical expressions *mind*, *heart*, *spirit*, *soul*, *reins*, *conscience*, *body*] into a systematic Biblical anthropology in which the structure and composition of man would be made clear." Then he adds, "It is obviously not the intention of the divine revelation to give us exact information about man in himself and thus to anticipate what later scientific research on man offers."⁴ It is now generally recognized that such biblical words as *soul*, *mind*, *spirit* do not always have a precise, uniform meaning throughout the Bible. They often overlap. Precise systematization can only produce an anthropological hodgepodge. In Scripture the part (bones, hair, blood, bowels) is often used as a figure of speech for the whole.

How then does the Bible answer the question, "What is man?" What does it mean to be human? The Bible always answers this vital question in a relational way.

And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.—Gen. 1:26-29.

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted 1975), 2:42.

² Berkouwer, p.199.

³ G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology As Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952), p.89.

⁴ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.199.

Here is no scientific or analytical description of human nature. Man cannot answer the question, "Who am I?" by looking at himself. He must look outside himself. Man is related to God, to the community, and to the created order. This is what gives meaning and significance to life.

First, being truly human means being related to God. The Bible always depicts man as living in the presence of God. He is inescapably related to God. Whatever denies man's relationship to God dehumanizes him. Says Berkouwer:

Scripture is concerned with man in his relation to God, in which he can never be seen as man-in-himself, and surely not with man's "essence" described as self or person. . . .

We may say without much fear of contradiction that the most striking thing in the Biblical portrayal of man lies in this, that it never asks attention for man in himself, but demands our fullest attention for man in his relation to God. . . .

Scripture never sees man as a being enclosed in himself, an isolated "essence" which can be fathomed in terms of itself alone, but rather shows us man as a being who can never be thought of apart from his continual relationship with God.⁵

The ultimate value of man is not based on any quality within himself. It is based on the fact that he is related to God. Helmut Thielicke says it well:

[Man's] greatness rests solely on the fact that God in his incomprehensible goodness has bestowed his love upon him. God does not love us because we are so valuable; we are valuable because God loves us.⁶

Second, being truly human means being related to others. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'" (Gen. 2:18, RSV). Man is not truly man in himself. He needs woman to supplement and complete him. This principle is true in the broader man-community relationship. Man is a being of community. He needs his neighbor to serve and to love. Love is essential to human existence. As the poet W. H. Auden says, "We must love one another or die."⁷



⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.59-60, 195, 243-4.

⁶ Helmut Thielicke, *Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature - With a Christian Answer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.110.

⁷ Quoted in "Loneliness Can Kill You," *Time*, 5 Sept 1977, p.45.

Man's social life is not an appendix of human existence. It is human existence. Just as the Bible does not consider man in isolation from God, so it does not consider him in isolation from the community. Wright suggests that, in Hebrew psychology, "the greatest curse which can befall a man is that he be alone."⁸ Describing the misery of his people, Hosea compares them to "a wild ass wandering alone" (Hosea 8:9, RSV). Man is inextricably related to persons in the community. Anything which isolates a man from his "own flesh," even if it is religion, is dehumanizing.

An essential part of the work of redemption is to restore man to a proper relationship with others. The church is preeminently a fellowship, not an institution. Christians are not saved as separate islands. They are baptized by the Spirit into the redeemed community. The Corinthian enthusiasts prized the gifts of the Spirit as an individual experience. But Paul saw them as gifts to edify the community (1 Cor. 12-14).

Third, being truly human means being related to the created order. We have a fundamental affinity to the environment. We cannot live apart from the world of nature. From it we receive air, water, food and light. We are subject to the same laws of gravity, motion, molecular action, chemistry and genetics which govern the rest of the created order. Yet man is unique in the created order because God intended him to have dominion over it and to look after it as God's vicegerent. The environment is God's gift to be responsibly used and enjoyed in fellowship with Him. Anything which mars man's relationship to the natural order dehumanizes him. Cut off from God, he cannot live. Cut off from others, he cannot live. And cut off from his relatedness to the natural world, he cannot live.

To be human means having these three relationships. All are necessary to life. All define what it means to be human. We cannot tear off one of these basic relationships from man and say that what is left is truly human. Being human means existing in all three relationships at once. These relationships are not appendixes to human existence. They are human existence. Man is not a creature who happens to have these relationships. He is man only in these relationships.

The true doctrine of man is concerned with the preservation of these three relationships. Naturally, there is priority here. *God is first, others are second, things are last.* But we cannot ignore the human body and man's place in the material order in the interests of "religion." William Temple once remarked that Christianity is the most materialistic of all the great religions. *It is a religion of reality.* How man relates to the material order comes within the scope of the Christian doctrine of man.

Measuring Anthropology with the Plumb Line of Justification by Faith

Luther continually said that the great doctrine of justification by faith must illuminate and test all other articles of the Christian faith. Whatever does not square with this central article is not to be tolerated.

We must therefore bring the truth of justification to bear on our doctrine of man. We need to consider what the gospel has to teach us about the nature of man. Too often we isolate justification by faith as if it were a different area of doctrine altogether. But it is a grievous mistake to discard justification by faith at the door of anthropology, for justification is the great light which illuminates this important subject.

The doctrine of justification before God by the imputed righteousness of Christ means that the believer is saved to life eternal by a righteousness completely outside his own experience. The believing sinner does not stand approved at the tribunal of God by anything he has or anything God has given him, such as repentance, faith, new birth or life of new obedience. He is declared righteous solely for the sake of the righteousness of another. By faith alone he is related – united – to Jesus Christ as the bride is united to the bridegroom. The ultimate significance is not who man is but to whom he is related. God never deals with an isolated believer as he is in himself. God sees him and deals with him in union with Jesus Christ. In himself the believer is poor, helpless and sinful. But in Christ he is rich, strong and righteous.

The imputed, outside-of-me righteousness of Christ has absolute value with God. It *alone* makes the believer precious in God's sight. God finds pleasure in us only through the merits of Christ.

⁸ G. Ernest Wright, *The Challenge of Israel's Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), p.75.

This gospel truth illuminates man's creation and fall. When God made man, he was perfect and upright. He was endowed with excellent qualities and virtues. But although he had substantial reality, his gifts could have meaning only in the setting of his God-given relationships. With all his marvelous gifts, man would be nothing apart from his relationship to God. Genesis tells us that man was only dust. In the garden of Eden the tree of life taught Adam that he had no life in himself. Surely this was a sacrament of his vital relationship to the Creator.

But what did man do? He wanted meaning and significance in his own right. His excellent gifts, instead of leading him to acknowledge his dependence on God, were used to assert his independence. This is man's sin. He always wants meaning and significance in his own right. He even uses God's gifts against God for his own self-validation.

Sin is a denial of reality. If God is to restore the creature to a true sense of reality, He must teach him that the creature can never have meaning or significance apart from his relationship to the Creator. Even the gifts of God have no meaning or significance apart from the person of God Himself.

God teaches this essential truth to man by the gospel. The gospel is what God has done in history, a redemptive act objective to man. God's great saving act which reconciles the world to Himself is not something He has done in the sinner. It was done "without hand" – independent and outside the sinner. If he is to benefit from this saving act, he must go outside himself. In faith he must depend totally on what was done outside his experience, independent of himself.

Moreover, when God justifies the believing sinner, He does it by *declaring* him righteous, not by *making* him righteous. He does not make the sinner acceptable in His sight by pouring righteousness into his heart. He makes him acceptable in His sight by imputing to him the holy obedience of Christ's life and death. The believer is accepted solely because Christ is accepted. He is declared righteous because Christ is righteous. Imputed righteousness means that when salvation is applied, the saving righteousness or merit is still outside *and remains outside* the believer. What was done in Christ outside the believer, and what is now interceded at God's right hand for the believer, has absolute value with God. This alone saves.

On account of Christ's outside-of-me righteousness – His doing and dying which He intercedes for me in heaven – God is able to bestow upon me precious gifts. There is the gift of a new birth in which a transformed life, renewed in God's image, springs forth. There is a new life of holiness or sanctification, manifested in love for God, respect for His commandments, and unselfish, cheerful service to my fellow men. There are the fruits of the Spirit— the imparted righteousness of God's character inwrought in the fabric of the human character. Indeed, all the gifts God imparts are comprehended in the gift of the Holy Spirit, given to all who receive Christ by faith. We will not restrict the Sovereign Spirit by saying that the *charismata* belong only to the apostolic age. He is rich in all the gifts for the prosecution of God's work on earth and for the edification of the church.

These gifts are necessary. No man will be saved unless He is born again, is sanctified and has the Holy Spirit. Yet none of these has any meaning or significance apart from the imputed righteousness of Jesus. They cannot stand in their own right. Separated from the gospel, they are nothing with God. Without the meritorious covering of Christ's imputed righteousness, they are worthless. In reality, of course, the true work of the Holy Spirit is never separated from the imputed righteousness of Christ. But unless there is a constant return to justification by Christ's imputed doing and dying, the gifts of God become like the manna given to Israel in the wilderness. When improperly used, it stank! So all God's gifts turn to corruption and stink if not preserved by imputed righteousness.

The more holy God's gifts are, the more putrid they become when perverted. Human sexuality and marriage are great gifts of God which illustrate this principle. New birth, sanctification and the so-called works and gifts of the Holy Spirit may become the very articles of antichrist to arouse God's anger. Why? Because they are put in the very room of the gospel! They are used to eclipse or displace Christ's imputed righteousness! "That glory cannot be taken away from Christ and transferred to either our renewal or our obedience without blasphemy."⁹

⁹ Martin Chemnitz, tr. Fred Kramer, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p.491.

The worst sin is always the religious sin. People may shout, "New birth!" "Sanctification!" "The Spirit!" But beneath the religious garb may lurk the sin of all sins. As in the first sin, man wants to have significance before God in himself. He refuses to believe that his life has no meaning or value in itself. Only the Creator has that. But man covets God's glory. He uses God's gifts—new birth, sanctification and the Spirit's work in man—in his attempt at self-validation.

Whatever a person trusts in for his salvation, whatever he leans on for his supreme consolation and support, especially in the hour of death, is his God. The sin of man is to put the gift in the place of the Giver, to worship the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

Luther said that whoever does not know justification by Christ's imputed righteousness is ignorant of God and is an idolater. This was a profound insight into the religious sin of man. The truth of justification unto life eternal by an outside-of-me righteousness means that I cannot find ultimate meaning and significance within myself – not even in my religious, born-again, sanctified, Spirit-filled self. The truth of justification teaches that these things have value and can truly exist only on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Thus, the gospel teaches that man's real value, meaning and significance are *relational* – not *ontological* (within ones self). In the light of justification by faith the old, analytical way of understanding human nature is wrong. The Bible is not burdened with a description of man in himself. It does not gratify our propensity to eat from the tree of knowledge. It leads only to the tree of life. Only as a person goes outside himself to God, to his neighbor and to the world can he answer the question, "What is man?"

The Bible's disinterest in what man is in himself gives an insight into the way it approaches everything. Faith is an example. In Romans 3 and 4 Paul mentions the words faith and believe nearly thirty times. But not once does he analyze, dissect and examine faith in itself. Faith is never "in itself." We must go outside faith to understand it. For Paul it is "faith in Jesus," "faith in His blood." Faith is defined by its object. More than that, faith receives value from its object, the imputed righteousness of Jesus. Therefore, faith in itself has no meaning, value or significance. As Calvin said, it is "an empty vessel." No creature – and faith is a creature, for it is created in the heart by God – has any meaning or significance in itself. A creature's meaning, value and significance are always defined by relationship.

The new birth is another example. It is remarkable how little attention the New Testament gives to new birth in itself. There is no analytical description of the new birth. And the psychological phenomenon itself is not analyzed. Christians have written whole books on the new birth. Some have even become best sellers! But we should be more impressed by what the Bible does not say about the new-birth experience than by what it does say. Why? Because the born-again man is preoccupied with the doing and dying of Christ on his behalf (John 3:1-16). He is no longer preoccupied with himself. Faith and the new birth do not speak of themselves. They cry, "Christ!" "Grace!" "The righteousness of Jesus!"

The New Testament describes how the born-again man thinks and acts. He believes in Jesus (1 John 5:1). He loves God and keeps His commandments (1 John 5:1-2). As far as the Bible is concerned, man is not a subject of independent reflection. Neither is faith or the new birth. When we make them subjects of independent reflection, we exhibit the spirit of antichrist, which wants the creature to have significance in itself.

Religious experience is one more example of how the relational context determines the value and meaning of everything. We agree with Alan Richardson when he said, "Subjective experiences, religious feelings, and the like, occupy little place in the theology of the NT."¹⁰ We are not suggesting that faith is only an intellectual exercise. The early Christians were deeply moved by heart religion. But they did not leave any detailed description of their psychological and emotional state. At Pentecost Peter had no interest in describing what it felt like to receive the Holy Spirit. All had one burden – to declare "the wonderful works of God (the Christ event]" (Acts 2:11). The religion of both the Old and New Testament is a religion of recital.¹¹ The entire Bible recites the saving acts of God in salvation history.

¹⁰ Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1958), p.236.

¹¹ Wright, *God Who Acts*, pp.12-13.

Many things can stimulate a good experience – listening to an orchestra, watching a football game, attending a Christian revival, fellowship in the Lion's Club or following an Indian guru and his meditation techniques. All such experiences stimulate our psycho-physical capacities. But the righteousness or unrighteousness of an experience is not determined by whether it feels "heavenly" (devilish things often feel "heavenly") but by what it is related to. If it is related to faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, it can stand approved in the judgment of God. But if a person's experience is the byproduct of faith in Christ's imputed righteousness, he will extol that righteousness and not his experience anyway. No religious experience has any value, meaning or significance in itself. The creature's value is always relational.

In light of the gospel and justification by faith, we must say that scholars are right in returning to Hebraic or relational anthropology. The relational concept throws great light on the doctrine of man. It is revolutionary, but just what the church needs today. How much we have missed by not taking the Reformation principle of justification by faith and consistently applying it to all areas of Christian thought!

CHAPTER 2 – Man as Body and Soul

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. —Gen. 2:7.

Another area of debate on the doctrine of man is the relationship of body and soul. On one hand, those who have adopted an analytical approach have generally held a dualistic view of man. Hodge, for example, in commenting on Genesis 2:7, says, "According to this account, man consists of two distinct principles, a body and a soul."¹² On the other hand, those who embrace the relational approach to man hold that he is essentially a holistic or monistic being. They view human life as an indivisible unity.

Serious objections have been raised to the dualistic view of man:

1. Dualism is essentially a Greek view of man, foreign to Hebrew thinking and the Bible. Berkouwer does not hesitate to call Hodge's dualistic view a faulty exegesis of the biblical text.¹³ He observes that most scholars now agree that Genesis 2:7 does not support the idea of a substantial dichotomy in man's nature.¹⁴ Berkouwer says that a "fairly general consensus of opinion has arisen among theologians" in support of Hebrew holism rather than Greek dualism.¹⁵ He also says, "It appears clearly, then, that Scripture never pictures man as a dualistic, or pluralistic being. . . . There can be no idea of an essential dualism in Paul."¹⁶

The basis of Hodge's dualism is not the Bible but his philosophical assumptions. He makes no effort to conceal this when he argues against those who, adopting the same basic approach as himself, say that human nature is composed of three rather than two distinct substances. He appeals to human rationalism rather than to Scripture when he says, "Consciousness reveals the existence of two substances in the constitution of our nature; but it does not reveal the existence of three substances, and therefore the existence of more than two [substances] cannot rationally be assumed."¹⁷

2. The Bible does use such terms as *soul*, *flesh*, *mind*, *heart*, *spirit*, *conscience*, *inner man* and *outer man*. Thinking they describe component parts of human nature, some have tried to find an orderly system in the use of these terms. The Bible student is often tempted to become more systematic than the Bible. But when he tries to tuck everything into a neat package, he is in grave danger of bending Scripture to fit his carefully arranged system.

This approach to man makes the Bible say something it does not say. Berkouwer observes that it is not possible to synthesize these biblical terms into a systematic anthropology which describes man's composition.¹⁸ It is generally recognized today that biblical words such as *soul*, *mind* and *spirit* do not mean exactly the same thing in every text.

¹² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p.42.

¹³ We use Hodge and Berkouwer merely as classic examples of the two points of view. especially since both are Reformed theologians.

¹⁴ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.215.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.200.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 207.

¹⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, p. 49.

¹⁸ Berkouwer, *Man*, P. 199.



When Paul talks about the sanctification of the body, soul and spirit in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, he is not saying that man is composed of three essential substances any more than Moses and Jesus are affirming four substances when they command us to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength. Biblical language, especially Hebrew, is often repetitive. This repetition does not indicate a precise distinction of ideas. What one Bible writer calls *soul*, another may call *spirit*, *mind* or *heart*. Another may even use the word *soul* to mean physical appetite. In four instances in the Old Testament it is even used for dead body. So the analytical and dualistic approach leads to impossible contradictions.

3. H. Wheeler Robinson points out that the Hebrews made no precise division between man's physical and psychical powers.¹⁹ They assigned psychical functions to such physical organs as the bones, heart, bowels and kidneys. Robinson concludes by saying that such different terms as *heart*, *mind* and *soul* simply present different aspects of the unity of the personality. "The Hebrew idea of personality is that of an animated body, not (like the Greek) that of an incarnated soul."²⁰

Referring to the Hebrew view of man, G. Ernest Wright says:

There was no separation of body and soul, and man was conceived as a unified psycho-physical organism in which the psychical functions of the ego were conceived as finding expression in the various parts of the body.... Certainly the Biblical view of man 'as an animated body and not as an incarnate soul' (H. Wheeler Robinson) is much nearer to modern psychological opinion than is that of the Greeks.²¹

4. Dualism depreciates the body and the material order which God made and pronounced "good." C. S. Lewis said that God must love matter because he made such a lot of it. William Temple calls Christianity "The most avowedly materialist of all the great religions."²² As church history has amply demonstrated, dualism can lead either to a world-denying asceticism or to an indifferent licentiousness. Dualism is dehumanizing because it denies man's essential relationship to the material order. Man is not human apart from this relationship any more than he is human apart from his relationship to God or to the community.

5. Greek dualism generally leads to the Greek idea that the soul is naturally and innately immortal. Berkouwer is clearly embarrassed and hard-pressed to explain how this idea of two separate substances and soul immortality got into some Reformation confessions. We suggest that it would be wise to admit that most Protestants of that era did not entirely forsake the traditional wineskins of Grecian anthropology. Luther more nearly reflects Hebrew holism on this subject than most. But he was not always consistent, as some Lutheran scholars have recently demonstrated.

Today it is increasingly difficult to find competent Christian theologians who support the old idea of a natural immortality. Berkouwer says that using the immortal soul concept to establish the "infinite worth of the soul" is "excluded and made unacceptable by the gospel."²³ Man is of infinite worth not because of what he is in himself, but because of what he is related to. Justification by faith teaches that a righteousness outside of man makes him acceptable and precious in the sight of God. Saying that man's value is in some substance of his nature is like saying that infused grace and personal righteousness justify man unto life eternal. Thielicke points out that the Roman Catholic notion of justification by an infused righteousness and the idea of an immortal soul belong together.²⁴

¹⁹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27.

²¹ Wright, *God Who Acts*, p.88.

²² William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan & co., 1935), p.478.

²³ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.229.

²⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp.196-99.

Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema identifies immortality of the soul with the idealistic anthropology of Plato and Aristotle.²⁵ Kuyper, the great Dutch Reformed scholar, has pointed out that "the concept of dependence in human existence (i.e., man's creatureliness) cannot be combined with the concept of the immortality of the soul."²⁶ In recent years two Dutch scholars, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, have also joined the attack on "the immortality of the soul."²⁷ In Germany, Lutheran scholar Paul Althaus has declared flatly that "the Christian faith knows nothing of an 'immortality of the soul.'" Althaus and C. Stange affirm "that Luther attacked the idea of the immortality of the soul as unchristian."²⁸ Oscar Cullmann's epoch-making essay, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* is well known.²⁹ In his book, *Life after Death*, Lutheran author T. A. Kantonen says:

Since Neo-Platonism was the prevailing spiritual philosophy during the formative period of Christian theology, it is not surprising that many of the Fathers identified the Christian doctrine of eternal life with Platonic immortality. Through the centuries this unscriptural belief continued to permeate Christian thinking and to weld itself with popular animism into such an apparently self-evident and formidable "truth" that it seemed to be a veritable cornerstone of the Christian faith. In the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17) the Roman church indeed proclaimed it to be an official dogma of the church. The Reformers were content with the ancient creeds which teach the "resurrection of the body," not the "immortality of the soul." But so firmly has the latter belief become imbedded in the Protestant mind too that the theologian or the minister who is led by Scripture to reject it is thought to be blasting the rock of ages. Thus when the Swiss scholar Oscar Cullmann, known for his profound interpretation of the New Testament and his positive Christian convictions, published a study in which he pointed out the contrast between the Greek conception of the immortality of the soul and the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, he aroused a storm of protest. He was accused of being a monster who delights in causing spiritual distress, one who offers stones, if not serpents, to people hungering for the bread of life. In the preface to the recent English translation of the study (*Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*) Professor Cullmann states that no critic has even attempted to refute him by scriptural exegesis, which is the whole basis of his presentation, and pleads with his readers to listen to what Scripture has to say. We cannot expect to grasp the Christian view unless we are willing to listen to Scripture even when it contradicts our own cherished wishes and traditional opinions. . . . Man does not have a mortal part, the body, and an immortal part, the soul. He is an indivisible unit, a body-animated-by-soul. As such, whether viewed under the body-aspect or the soul-aspect, he exists solely by his relation to God.³⁰

F. F. Bruce says:

Paul evidently could not contemplate immortality apart from resurrection; for him a body of some kind was essential to personality. Our traditional thinking about the 'never-dying soul', which owes so much to our Greco-Roman heritage, makes it difficult for us to appreciate Paul's point of view. It is, no doubt, an oversimplification to say that while for the Greeks man was an embodied soul, for the Hebrews he was an animated body; yet there is sufficient substance in the statement for us to say that in this as in other respects Paul was 'a Hebrew born and bred' (Phil. 3.5).

For others, including several of his Corinthian converts, disengagement from the shackle of the body was a consummation devoutly to be wished; but if Paul longed to be delivered from the mortality of this present earthly 'dwelling', it was with a view to exchanging it for one that was immortal; to be without a body of any kind would be a form of spiritual nakedness or isolation from which his mind shrank.³¹

This is only a sample of what a host of both conservative and liberal scholars are saying on the question of soul immortality. Thielicke's comment is the most penetrating, however, because he weighs the matter in the light of justification by faith. Man can possess both righteousness and life only by virtue of being related to Jesus Christ.

²⁵ Hoekema, *Doctrine of Man*, p.2.

²⁶ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.248.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.250.

²⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: Macmillan & co., 1964).

³⁰ T. A. Kantonen, *Life after Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), pp. 14-15.

³¹ F. F. Bruce, "Paul on Immortality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24(1971): 457.72.

The Meaning of Soul and Body

Grecian philosophy has had great influence on Christian theology. Too often, Christians have been guilty of trying to read the Grecian idea of soul into the biblical word. But we must not assume the Bible uses the word soul in a Grecian fashion – as a distinct, metaphysical substance capable of separate, incorporeal existence.

Genesis 2:7 is the *locus classicus* of the biblical concept of soul: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nephesh*. Genesis 2:7 simply means that man became a living, breathing creature (see most modern translations of Genesis 2:7). Says *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*:

The word "soul" in English, though it has to some extent naturalized the Hebrew idiom, frequently carries with it overtones, ultimately coming from philosophical Greek (Platonism) and from Orphism and Gnosticism, which are absent in [*nephesh*]. In the OT it never means the immortal soul, but is essentially the life principle, or the living being, or the self as the subject of appetite and emotion, occasionally of volition.³²

The Interpreter's Bible also says that *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7 means "a complete person."³³ *The New Bible Dictionary* says that it is "clear from Gen. ii. 7, the primary meaning [of soul] is 'possessing life'. Thus it is frequently used of animals (Gen. i. 20, 24, 30, ix. 12, 15, 16; Ezek. xlvii. 9)."³⁴

We must not read a presupposed "religious" meaning into the Hebrew word *nephesh*. In many Old Testament texts *nephesh* plainly means the animated, living person. We cannot impose a "spiritual," metaphysical meaning on *soul* where, for instance, a person is represented as saying that his soul desires physical food, water or honey (Prov. 25:25; 27:7; Num. 21:5; Deut. 12:15, 20-21). Because the Hebrews made no sharp distinction between the physical and the psychical, the word soul can have either a physical or psychical emphasis. The whole living person is always in view. The word *soul* can be applied to a person's thinking, emotions, will or action (Gen. 49:6; Deut. 4:29; Job 7:15; Ps. 86:4; Isa. 1:14). Quite often *soul* is used where we would use the word *person* (Lev. 7:21; 17:12; Ezek. 18:4). When the Bible talks about seventy souls going down to Egypt, it obviously means seventy persons. The word *soul* is also used as a synonym for the personal pronouns *I, me, myself* (Judges 16:16; Ps. 120:6; Ezek. 4:14). It can even be used to designate a dead body (Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:6; Hag. 2:13).

H. Wheeler Robinson says that of the 754 times the word *nephesh* appears in the Old Testament, it means principle of life 282 times, it has a psychical meaning 249 times, and it means the person himself 223 times.³⁵

It is interesting to notice that both biblical dictionaries and scholars who have objectively looked at the Hebrew view of man unhesitatingly say that the soul is capable of death. To say this would have been unthinkable in orthodox circles a few years ago. Berkouwer calls attention to the remarks of a Dutch scholar:

Thus Van der Leeuw criticizes the dualistic view of man, which he says is the source of the popular belief in immortality which has infiltrated modern Christianity. Such a view is, he says, Greek rather than Christian, and "in conflict with the essence of the Christian faith." We may make no distinction between body and soul as regards the effects of death. The whole man, according to the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, is threatened by death. There is nothing he can fall back on; "the soul also dies."³⁶

³² George A. Buttrick, ed., art. "Soul," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp.428-29.

³³ George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:494.

³⁴ J. O. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p.1208.

³⁵ Robinson, *Christian Doctrine of Man*, p.16.

³⁶ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.251.

H. Wheeler Robinson has amassed overwhelming evidence to prove there is little or no trace of body/soul dualism in the Old Testament.³⁷ He flatly says the soul "has no existence apart from the body."³⁸ W. David Stacey says, "Incorporeal life for the [*nephesh*] was never visualized. Death afflicted soul (Num. 23.10) as well as body."³⁹ D.R.G. Owen says, "The Hebrews had no idea of the immortality of the soul in the Greek sense. . . . It was impossible for them even to conceive of disembodied human existence."⁴⁰ G. Ernest Wright declares that "the Hebrews had no conception of pure being in spiritual terms apart from material form."⁴¹

When we come to the New Testament, we should realize that Hebrew thought forms are maintained. In most cases, especially in Paul, *soul* (Greek, *psyche*) simply means *life*. A comparison of Mark 8:36 and Luke 9:25 shows that *soul* can mean *self*. Robert Jewett points out that even the most confirmed dualists have to admit that *psyche* simply means *life* in many Pauline usages of the word.⁴²

There may be some accommodation to Greek thought forms in the New Testament, for the apostles had to communicate to a Greek world, using the Greek language. But we should beware of assuming that Jesus and the apostles adopted the essential dualism of the Greeks. One of the very few places which might appear to present a *prima facie* case for dualism is Matthew 10:28, where our Lord says, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." We suggest that Jesus means that since God is the giver of life, only He can take it away in the ultimate sense. Therefore, do not fear him who can end your present mortal life, because it is God who is going to have the final decision whether your life is saved or destroyed. The words of Jesus certainly contradict the notion that the soul is essentially indestructible.⁴³

The soul, then, is the whole person. The body also is the whole person.⁴⁴ Neither soul nor body is a detachable part of man. Soul is man thinking, willing and living. It is the life, the me, the self in its acting and feeling. Body is the same whole person seen from the perspective of his form and substance. In the words of Pedersen, "The body is the soul in its outward form."⁴⁵

Body and soul are like the biblical expressions *flesh* and *spirit*. They do not refer to two parts of man but to the whole man from two different perspectives. The medieval church read *flesh* and *spirit* with Grecian glasses. She understood them to mean the higher and lower nature. This had disastrous consequences for the church's view of piety and salvation. Luther returned to the biblical view that *flesh* means the whole man in his natural, sinful state, while *spirit* means the whole man led by the Holy Spirit.

Berkouwer speaks of "a fairly general consensus of opinion [which] has arisen among theologians" with respect to the Hebraic and biblical view of the holistic, indivisible man.⁴⁶ Luther attacked as "rubbish" the notion that one can tear off a part of man and say, "It lives."⁴⁷ To be man means to exist as a unity of body and soul in the threefold relationship with God, the community and the material order.

³⁷ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1956): idem, *Christian Doctrine of Man*.

³⁸ H. Wheeler Robinson, "Hebrew Psychology," *People and the Book*, ed. A. 5. Peake (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p.366.

³⁹ W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956), p.88.

⁴⁰ D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul: A Study on the Christian View of Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p.177.

⁴¹ Wright, *God Who Acts*, pp.88-9.

⁴² Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1971), p.335.

⁴³ "This statement [Matt. 10:28] is a flat contradiction of the innate indestructibility of the soul" (Kantonen, *Life after Death*, p.17).

⁴⁴ The Hebrews did not have a word corresponding to our use of the word *body*.

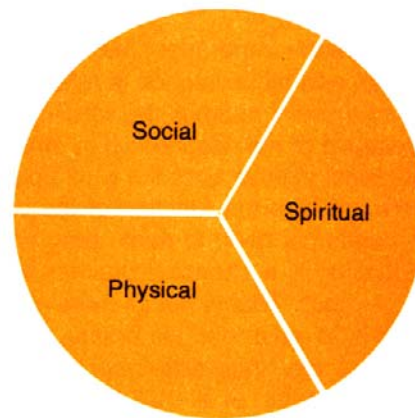
⁴⁵ Pedersen, *Israel*, p.171.

⁴⁶ Berkouwer, *Man*, p.200.

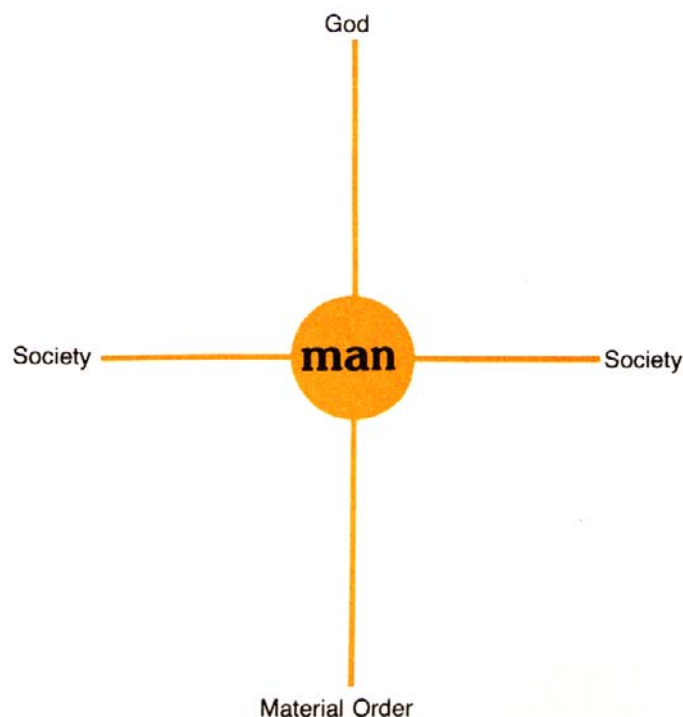
⁴⁷ "Now, if one should say that Abraham's soul lives with God but his body is dead, this distinction is rubbish. I will attack it. One must say, 'The whole Abraham, the whole man, shall live.' The other way you tear off a part of Abraham and say, 'It lives.' This is the way the philosophers speak: 'Afterward the soul departed from its domicile,' etc. That would be a silly soul if it were in heaven and desired its body!" Theodore G. Tappert, ed. & tr., *Luther's Works*, vol.54, *Table Talk* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967], p.447).

The Holistic Man and its implications

Man in relationship to God is the *spiritual* man. Man in relationship to the community is the *social* man. And man in relationship to the material order is the *physical* man. These are not three parts of man, like this:



Rather, the spiritual, social and physical are each the whole man seen from the perspective of his three different relationships:



The spiritual realm embraces the entire life since every part of man and his existence is related to God. In the same way, the social realm is the whole person seen from the perspective of his relationship to others. Finally, the physical dimension embraces the whole person since every act of life involves the function of the physical organism. Man needs his body to think, pray and love his fellow man. Thinking is a chemical process which takes place in the brain cells. That is not all there is to thinking, of course, but it is at least that. No brains, no thought!

This view of the total, indivisible man has far-reaching implications. It means first of all that everything a person does has spiritual, social and physical connotations. Praying is not just a spiritual exercise. The person who prays is a social and physical being, and these relationships are involved in praying. Eating is not only a physical activity. Even nutritionists recognize the social context of eating as an important factor in human well-being. Whether a person eats with thanksgiving and to the glory of God is also important. So we have to be careful when saying that certain activities are physical while others are social or spiritual.

In the following list of activities – eating, praying, celebrating a birthday, studying the Bible, exercising, digging ditches and singing hymns – we cannot make three separate headings and call some physical while others are social or spiritual. Each activity is physical, social and spiritual. The whole life is always physical, social and spiritual at the same time. There can never be a human activity unrelated to God, to the community or to the physical order. This is holism.

If man were not related to God, he could not do one physical thing. ("In Him we live, and move, and have our being" – Acts 17:28.) By the same token, if a person were not related to the material order, he could not pray, study God's Word or do those things we customarily call "spiritual." Again, a man cannot love and serve God unless he loves and serves his neighbor too.

Whatever affects one relationship affects all relationships. When he disobeyed God, Adam disrupted his social and physical relationships. He began blaming his wife, and nature itself rebelled against man's dominion.

The idea that the soul is a jewel worth caring for while the body is a sack of dung deserving only neglect is "Grecian," unbiblical and unchristian. He who neglects his body neglects his neighbor and his God. The state of a person's physical health has more to do with his social and spiritual well-being than many suppose. To injure one relationship is to injure all.⁴⁸

This leads to the subject of death. Death is not something which affects a part of man. It affects the whole man. Death is God's judgment. It is His "No" upon the whole life. No part of human existence escapes the judgment of death. There is no death-proof substance, no spark of immortality within us, which can avoid this disaster. Death afflicts the soul as well as the body. The whole man goes down into the grave. The Bible, of course, speaks of life beyond the grave, of immortality and eternal life. But we receive death (not immortality) from the first Adam. Life and immortality are a gift from the Second or Last Adam (2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Resurrection to future judgment comes because of Christ's atonement. Life is not an inherent property of body or soul. Life is derivative. It is found inherently only in Christ.

The idea that death means separation of soul from body is often imposed on the biblical word *death*. God warned Adam that sin would bring death. We have no warrant to ignore the plain Hebraic meaning of death and arbitrarily impose a Grecian concept of death on the words of the Bible.

Jewish scholar Emanuel Feldman presents an excellent dissertation on the relation of death and uncleanness in Hebrew thinking.⁴⁹ First he shows that the Hebrew word for defilement or uncleanness has the idea of being alien, foreign, strange or estranged. Then he states that according to the law of Moses, death was the "father of fathers of defilement."⁵⁰ He quotes von Rad, who says, "Every uncleanness was to some extent a precursor of the thing that was uncleanness out and out, death."⁵¹ (See Num. 5:2; 6:1-10; 9:7; Lev. 21:1-6; 11:32; Ezek. 44:25.) Feldman shows that the primary characteristic of God in Hebrew religion was that He was the living God. Since death was the opposite of life, it was the opposite of God. To live was to have the potential of a relationship with God, to serve and praise Him. Death separates from life and so from the potential of this relationship with God (Ps. 6:5; 88:11-13; Isa. 38:18-19). As von Rad says, "The dead were excluded from fellowship with Jahweh and were in the highest degree unclean."⁵²

⁴⁸ D. Weston Allen, "How Spiritual Health Is Impaired by Neglect of Physical and Mental Health," *Present Truth Magazine* (1977): 31-37. (Volume 29, On-line version)

⁴⁹ Emanuel Feldman, *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law As Theology* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 2:349

If we are to restore an appreciation of the New Testament proclamation of Christ's resurrection, we must first restore the deadness of death. We must appreciate its radical seriousness as the last stage of man's disease, as the ultimate uncleanness and opposition to God. This is what Christ conquered and bridged for us so that neither sin nor death can separate the believer from fellowship with God (Rom. 8:32-39). In Christ the believer has perfect righteousness and therefore perfect fellowship with God—a fellowship which not even death can affect in the slightest degree because Christ dies no more. Even though the believer dies and awaits his resurrection on the day of God, in Christ he has already crossed over and been resurrected. So even though dead in himself, he is alive in Christ and thereby continues in perfect fellowship with God.

While we confess with Paul that those who die in the Lord are "with Christ" (Phil. 1:23), we need to maintain a sanctified reticence where the Scripture is silent about details. Berkouwer remarks, "It is noteworthy in these and other references in the New Testament that we never encounter an anthropological definition or analysis of what it is that remains after death."⁵³ We can trust God to keep and preserve that which is committed unto Him.

The resurrection of Christ teaches that the restoration of the whole man in bodily existence is the destiny of the Lord's people. It was not a disembodied Christ who appeared and brought joy to the disciples. The blessed hope of the church is the resurrection and the putting on of a somatic (bodily) immortality at the *parousia* (1 Cor. 15). "The blessed hope" is His *coming*, not our *going*.

Redemption is the restoration of man to a right relationship to God, to society and to the material order. This is what it means to be human. We should not embrace dehumanizing views of life after death. Redeemed life means that the whole man is restored to perfect soundness together with his environment. The restoration to life after death must be corporate since man's humanness includes his relationship to the community. Individual eschatology is not "the blessed hope" of believers. Salvation means the restoration of man to a restored community and to a restored environment as well as restoration to perfect fellowship with God.

CHAPTER 3 – Man as Creature and Person

The Bible teaches that man is a creature. He is made by God and preserved by God (Neh. 9:6; Acts 17:25, 28; Matt. 10:29-30). Creaturehood means absolute dependence on God. Man lives solely because God lives. If God should stay His hand for a moment, human life would cease. God is no absentee landlord who made the world as a clock, able to run of itself when wound up. Life is derivative – constantly derivative – and all talk of man's natural immortality is out of place. The creation account in Genesis teaches that, in himself, man is only dust. Unless he eats from the tree of life,⁵⁴ he cannot continue to live.

Creaturehood also means that man, along with everything else in the created order, is under the jurisdiction of law (Rom. 3:19). God is a God of law, and He rules His created domain by law. Everything from the stars in their courses to the smallest mote floating in the summer breeze operates within the boundaries of law. Law governs the movement of planetary bodies, the growth of plants and the habits of animals. There are laws of motion, sound and temperature, laws of chemical action and reaction, laws of mathematics, physics and heredity. Man is subject to these laws too. He has nothing to do with arranging them, because the laws of life are *givens*.

Law was not ordained to restrict human happiness but to guarantee man's freedom (Ps. 119:45; James 2:12). Without law, existence would not only be precarious and unpredictable, but impossible. We would have no freedom to take one foot off the ground or to plan an hour ahead unless we could be sure that all objects are subject to gravity and that each hour measures sixty minutes. We can plan and act because we live in a structured universe governed by law.

⁵³ Berkouwer, *Man*, p. 264.

⁵⁴ Evidently a sacrament of Christ.

Like everything else, man must live within the given boundaries of existence or perish. We must live within a small temperature range. The body must function within a fine acid-alkaline boundary. There is a limited atmospheric zone around the earth. Just as there are obvious physical boundaries, so there are social and spiritual boundaries. We are not "free" to grasp whatever we want or to violate the rights of others. We are not left to determine for ourselves what is morally right and wrong any more than we are left to determine the laws of gravity or genetics. The existence of boundaries means that we are finite and have definite limits. Freedom is not found in defying our finitude but in accepting it and living gratefully within the boundaries of law.

The Bible also teaches that man is a person. While creaturehood means that man is absolutely dependent on God, personhood means he is at the same time relatively independent. God is a person, and since man has been made in God's image, man is also a person. In his creation he was endowed with power akin to the Creator – individuality, creativity, power to think, chose and do.

To be a person means not only to be conscious but self-conscious. To be a person means to be able to transcend the environment and be a creature of option, a being of choice. A person is not a robot whose course is thoroughly predetermined. He has the power of self-determination.

We said that man, along with the rest of the created order, is governed by law. But in one important respect man is different. The heavenly bodies are governed by physical laws. Animals are governed by laws of instinct. Only man can make a self-conscious decision to say "Yes" or "No." Man alone knows moral law. He is a creature morally responsible for his decisions. At his creation man was given the choice of serving God in the free service of love or of working at cross purposes with his Creator.

Recent years have seen the rise of philosophies which regard man as wholly *environmentally determined* (Marx, Freud, Skinner). All human behavior is said to be the predictable and inevitable consequence of factors outside a person's control. Some behaviorists claim that crime is entirely the result of unfavorable environment and that criminals should not be punished as if responsible for their actions. But while environment and heredity are important factors in influencing human behavior, man is also a creature of option. He is responsible for his choices. A philosophy which ignores this reduces man to an *it* dehumanizes him. Reforms in the environment have failed to reduce aberrant human behavior. As long as people place the sole blame on external factors, they will continue endless protest marches and blame everyone but themselves. "If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness, in the land of uprightness he deals perversely and does not see the majesty of the Lord" (Isa. 26:10, RSV). Because man is a person, he is culpable for his wrong behavior. There is never any excuse for sin.

Maintaining the Tension between Creaturehood and Personhood

In addressing man the Bible sometimes reminds him of his creaturehood. At other times it addresses him as a person and reminds him of his responsibility. These two aspects – creaturehood and personhood – must be held together.

Focusing on one to the exclusion of the other gives a distorted picture of man in his relationship to God.



God addresses man as a creature. He is said to be clay in the hand of the Potter. God is sovereign. He has the right to deal with a creature as He pleases. Romans 9 is an example of this. The Bible often tells us that man is only dust, animated by the breath of God. If God takes that life principle away, man returns to dust. Assyria is likened to an **axe** in the hand of God. What presumption for the axe to challenge the One who uses it! (Isa. 10:15).

Yet for all this, a one-sided emphasis on man's creaturehood is a distortion of the biblical picture. For God also addresses man as a person. When God speaks to man – and in God's very act of speaking to man – man becomes a creature of option. If God does not speak to man, he ceases to be a creature of option. Outside fellowship with God, man is not truly human.

We suggest that this is an answer to the age-old controversy over "*free will*". Man is a creature of option solely because God speaks to him. When he refused to listen to God speak, man became a sinner. And if the matter were left there, all talk about *free will* in the religious sense⁵⁵ would be out of place. In himself the only "freedom" the sinner has in isolation from God is the "freedom" to sin. This is the "freedom" of the prison and the "freedom" of one taken captive by the devil at his will (2 Tim. 2:26). But God did not leave the matter there. He has taken the initiative, and in Jesus Christ He has opened communication with fallen man. He speaks to man once again in the gospel of Christ. In the hearing of the gospel, the fallen sinner once again becomes a creature of option in the religious sense. Apart from the gospel's coming to the sinner in the power of the Holy Spirit, man has no option to obey God.

The Bible addresses man as a person: "Choose you this day whom you will serve," "Return unto Me," "Refuse the evil," "Follow Me." Here God does not deal with man as if he were a stone without a voice in his ultimate destiny. God addresses him as one who shall decide his ultimate destiny.

The creaturehood and the personhood of man must be held both together and in tension. When theology stresses creaturehood and subordinates personhood, a hard-faced determinism surfaces and man is dehumanized. All history is then subsumed under "supralapsarian decrees" which, we might add, were not made in heaven but in Holland. God Himself is forced to fit the rigid canons of human logic – a system of rational theology regarded as necessary to protect the sovereignty of God! When personhood is stressed to the exclusion of creaturehood, man is deified and God's sovereignty is compromised. The Lord is left standing helplessly in the wings as if man had the power to veto the plans and purposes of God.

Let us take specific examples of how both creaturehood and personhood must be kept in proper tension:

1. If creaturehood alone is stressed in the matter of sin, God appears as if He planned that man should sin. This thought is intolerable – even though Luther may have once suggested it. Sin is sin because man is a person. He is solely responsible for it. Yet because man is a creature, he is dependent upon God even for the power to sin. We have to say, therefore, that sin is included in God's permissive will.⁵⁶ Sin proves that man, as God created him, is a creature of genuine option.
2. Because man is a creature, salvation must be wholly of God. He alone takes the initiative in human salvation. But because man is also a person, he is called to choose the free salvation, to repent and believe.
3. The biblical doctrine of election is closely linked to the concept of divine initiative in salvation. But a doctrine of election which eliminates a meaningful choice on man's part is false. Those who hold a one-sided view of election may confidently ask, "Who has the final say in whether a person is saved – God or man?" But like many either/or questions, this is really a nonquestion. Man is a creature. He is therefore saved through God's gracious election in Christ. Man is also a person. He is thereby saved by faith and by making his calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Says Reformed scholar Leonard Verduin:

It is unfortunate that the adjective *unconditional* has been used with the concept of election. If by *unconditional* election is meant divine behavior not induced by merit in the object, then the adjective may be allowed to stand; but it remains a fact that it is theologically inadvisable to describe the process whereby men arrive at the modality of savedness as in any of its aspects *without condition*. All God's promises come with conditions that must be met, and this is true also of the thing known as election. Israel enjoyed the benefit of election; but there was a condition stipulated. As a matter of fact, Israel failed in regard to the condition and as a result lost its election. The same may be said of Judas, whose election as a disciple was canceled because of mala performance. In any event, the theological concept of election, or of predestination, must not be allowed to cancel out man's peculiar endowment as a creature geared to option.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ We do not deny that the unbeliever has a certain free will in a psychological and civil sense. He may decide what he has for breakfast or whether or not he obeys the law of the land. But he cannot choose when he will be converted to God.

⁵⁶ God permitted man to sin.

⁵⁷ Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God. The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 98-9.

4. The same principle holds true in the matter of the biblical doctrine of covenant. Man is a creature. The covenant, therefore, must be unilaterally issued. This is why the covenant can be called a command, a promise or even a will and testament. Whether made with Adam or Israel, the covenant relationship with God is pure gift. The human party, however, has a say in whether the covenant will be gratefully accepted or rejected. Since man is a person, the covenant is bilateral in operation.

5. When considering the divine miracle of regeneration, we must hold creaturehood and personhood together. Since man is a creature – and a sinful creature at that – regeneration must be God's act. The regenerate are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Yet since man is also a person, God will not violate man's individuality by treating him like a stone, with absolutely no say in what is done to him. Hodge represents regeneration as a work which God does secretly and unconsciously in the elect sinner. But this grace is outside of and apart from the means of grace in the Word of God. It smacks of a divine "zapping," with God "irresistibly" whisking sinners into the kingdom by the scruff of the neck.

6. The old controversy about whether man is regenerated to faith or regenerated by faith is probably futile. Both sides are partly right and partly wrong. Because man is a creature, he must be quickened to believe. Because he is a person, he must be born again by⁵⁸ his own responsible act of believing (1 Peter 1:22-23; 1 John 5:1). In the same way, it is true to say that faith comes by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit comes by faith.

7. The whole matter of sanctification must be considered in the light of the creature/person paradox. Since man is a creature, God must sanctify him (Ezek. 20:12). Holiness is guaranteed to man in God's covenant promise (Heb. 8:10-12; Ezek. 37:26-28). God works in the believer both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Without Christ the Christian can do nothing (John 15:5). Whatever good a Christian does, he humbly confesses that it is all due to grace at work in him (1 Cor. 15:10). "Not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20) is the modest testimony of the believer. Yet we must guard against a one-sided, exaggerated view of sanctification. Since man is a person, he is called upon to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). He is exhorted to pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14), to purify himself (1 John 3:3) and to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). He is called to strive, endure, wrestle and fight. Believing, obeying, loving and godly acts are often said to be his own. We should not try to be more spiritual than the Bible. There is no such thing as sanctification by faith alone or by faith "without the deeds of the law." Sanctification without a living, active walking in the way of God's commandments is as empty as a flour barrel with both ends out.

It is not correct to say that Christ or the Spirit within me believes and obeys for me in the same way as Christ lived for me. That work 2,000 years ago was substitutionary. It was His work alone, and therefore it has infinite value with God. But the work of the indwelling Spirit is not substitutionary. He does not come to make human activity unnecessary. The idea that the Holy Spirit uses the believer like a glove or wears him as a suit does not do justice to the believer as a person. Union with Christ does not rob the believer of his individuality and meaningful activity. The Spirit does not come to negate humanity but to restore it and to call all the human faculties into active exercise. In union with Christ, the human partner is truly free. Although empowered and motivated by Christ, the life of holiness is really his own.

Sanctification can easily slip into a refined pantheism when the personhood of the believer is lost. The act of the creature becomes indistinguishable from the act of the Creator. Deity is said to do everything the believer appears to do. Some teach that the deeds of surrendered lives are really the deeds of God Himself. The distinction between Creator and creature is lost. This happens in most kinds of perfectionism. It becomes a refined form of "Christian" pantheism.

God does not propose to use us as one would use a thing. To be a person means to be free. God is as much interested in our freedom as in our salvation. In fact, they are one. He gives us freedom to exercise our individuality. Those who seek guidance by signs, promise boxes or inner voices are denying their personhood.

⁵⁸ We use the word "by" instrumentally and not meritoriously, just as the New Testament talks about justification by faith.

8. The biblical doctrine of perseverance must also be viewed from the twofold perspective of creaturehood and personhood. Because we are creatures, God must keep us from falling (Jude 24). But the *perseverance* of the saints is reduced to the *preservation* of the saints unless we look at the other side of the paradox. There is preservation, of course. But since believers are persons, God calls upon them to keep the faith and endure to the end. Reaching the "celestial city" is not a matter of God's preservation or of our perseverance. Neither does it depend partly on God's preservation and partly on our perseverance. It all depends on God's preservation. And it will not be without man's total perseverance.

CHAPTER 4 – Man as Image of God

And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.—Gen. 1:26-28.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. —Gen. 5:1-2.

The Old Testament explains very little about the image of God. Some have sought to find the image of God in an aspect of man's nature. Those with a dualistic view – which honors the soul and dishonors the body – have sometimes said that the soul alone is made in the image of God. Or they have said, like Calvin, that the body only shares this image through its union with the soul. Luther, on the other hand, definitely included the body in the image of God.

Those who reject the dualistic view of man must hold that the whole man is made in the image of God. Form as well as spirit is included in that image. Says Berkouwer:

It is very noteworthy, in this connection, that there has been increasing reluctance to exclude man's body from the image of God—an exclusion generally supported previously, when theologians sought the content of the image in man's "higher" qualities, in contrast to the "lower" bodily qualities, which should not be considered in connection with the image. . . .

This dualism between body and soul played a not unimportant role in the delimitation of the image of God....

Scripture's emphasis on the whole man as the image of God has triumphed time and time again over all objections and opposing principles. Scripture never makes a distinction between man's spiritual and bodily attributes in order to limit the image of God to the spiritual....

The image of God is something which concerns the whole man.⁵⁹

Instead of viewing the *substance* of human nature as it is in itself, it is more profitable to see the image of God in the relationships which constitute man's essential existence. These relationships are threefold – with God, with the community and with the created order. We could also include man's relationship with himself. As a person, he is not only conscious but self-conscious. He is self-reflective.

First, image and likeness pertain to man's relatedness to God. Adam is called "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). The connection between the image and sonship is explicitly stated in Genesis 5:3: "When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (RSV). The people of Israel are called sons of God (Deut. 1:31; 8:5). Paul even reminds pagans that they are God's offspring (Acts 17:28).

Man's responsibility to God and conscious fellowship with God is a reflection of God's fellowship with man and of God's love for man. . . . Man has been created as a self, capable of responding to God, of answering God, of loving God – capable of being an "I" over against God's "Thou." . . . Man is capable of self-consciousness and of self-determination.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Berkouwer, *Man*, pp.75-7, 117.

⁶⁰ Hoekema, *Doctrine of Man*, P. 33.

Since man was made in God's image, His prime reason for existence and his prime responsibility are to reveal God's glory in all his thinking, speech and actions.

Second, man was created to image God in his relationship to others. It was Karl Barth who first emphasized this aspect of the image of God. He pointed out that the image of God is mentioned each time male and female are designated. Barth suggests that man's conscious fellowship with his fellow men is a reflection of the intra-Trinitarian fellowship of the Godhead. In the New Testament the believer's relationship with others figures prominently in the doctrine of the image of God. The believer is frequently exhorted to behave toward others as God behaves toward him. He is to love as God loves, to be merciful as God is merciful and to forgive as God forgives. Godlikeness is seen in the believer's relationship with others more than in anything else.

Third, man was to image God in his dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). The created order was to be subject to man as man himself was subject to God. Man was to rule the earth in harmony with the purposes of God. This included a responsible use of the world's resources for good rather than for evil.

In summary, the image of God is to be seen more in terms of relationships than in terms of the substance of human nature.

The Image of God in the New Testament

The New Testament has much to say about the image of God – first, in respect to Jesus Christ; second, in respect to the believing community.

Jesus is presented as the new Adam of the new covenant. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), "the express image" of the Father's person (Heb. 1:1-3). He is the ideal man, man as man was meant to be. God is well pleased with this man (Matt. 3:17). He is the obedient subject of God, the unwearied servant of man and the absolute Lord of the created order.

In regard to believers, the Spirit changes them into the divine likeness "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18, RSV). The likeness or image of God is said to consist in "true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24, RSV). In a parallel scripture believers are said to be "renewed in knowledge" after the image of God (Col. 3:10). Paul declares that God's people were predestined "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus exhorts His disciples to be kind and merciful like their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16, 48; Luke 6:35-36). The apostles frequently exhort believers to forgive as God has forgiven them (Col. 3:13). John appeals to believers to walk, to be pure and to love and live in this world as Jesus Christ (1 John 2:6; 3:3; 4:11, 17).

While the emphasis on imaging God falls on character (righteousness, holiness), the body is not excluded. Not only is character expressed through "the deeds of the body," but even the body will at last be glorified and fashioned "like His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21, RSV). "We shall be like Him" in every way – in outward form and inward spirit (1 John 3:2). "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Here is implied sonship, likeness in character and a reflection of the divine image which bears God's own signature of approval.

The Image of God – Lost or Marred?

Whether the image of God has been lost by the fall of man has occasioned much discussion and some disagreement in the history of Christian thought.

Irenaeus made a distinction between the *likeness* of God and the *image* of God. This distinction was incorporated into Roman Catholic theology. Aquinas argued that likeness to God consists in the supernatural gifts of sanctifying grace such as love, hope and righteousness, given to man in creation. He said that the image of God consists in the natural gifts of human nature. Aquinas said that, in the fall, man lost his likeness to God but not the image of God. This distinction between likeness and image is artificial and unwarranted. Hebrew language is often repetitive for the sake of emphasis or fullness of thought, not for the sake of expressing differences in the qualitative makeup of man.

In Protestant thought the fall not only *deprived* man but *depraved* him. According to Luther the image of God was lost in the fall. But according to Calvin that image, though frightfully marred, was not wholly obliterated. Calvin was not expressing reservations about the Reformation view of man's radical sinfulness. He wanted to show that man in his fallen state remains man and still bears witness to his original relation to God. This does not make his sin less culpable. He is more culpable because he sins in spite of his inward sense of God.

Others have tried to harmonize the views of Luther and Calvin. They make a distinction between the image of God *essentially* and *existentially, substantially* and *functionally*, or in what is called the *general* and the *special* sense. Accordingly, they say that man has lost the image of God in one sense but not in the other. Such distinctions are generally not found in Scripture.

In some sense fallen man bears God's image.⁶¹ Although that image is well-nigh obliterated, marred and defaced, man is still God's creature and bears His superscription. Although dehumanized in many respects, man has not lost his humanness. Whether he acknowledges it or not, man is still related to God. He cannot avoid his responsibility to God. All men bear in their hearts the sense of God. There are no true atheists. Fallen man still lives in community and often exhibits a "civil righteousness." In his amazing technological and scientific progress, he also exhibits a capacity to exercise dominion over the earth even though that capacity is often marred by rapacious greed and indifference to the needs of others. Thus, in his threefold relationship, fallen man still bears witness to the original image of God.

CHAPTER 5 – Man as Sinner

Orientation

Most errors on the doctrine of salvation stem from an inadequate doctrine of sin. Luther once said:

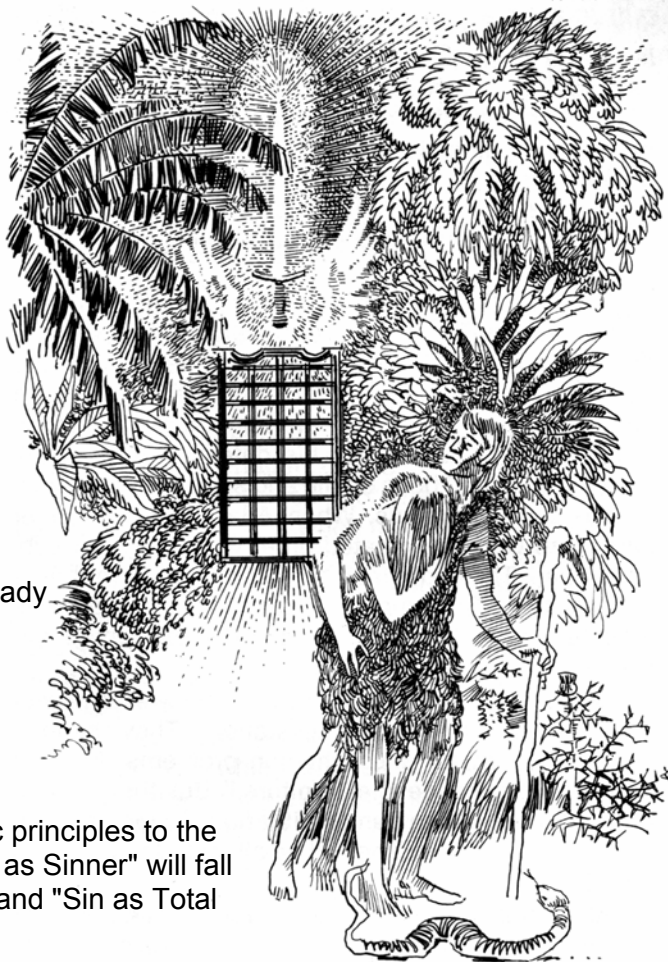
Ignorance of sin of necessity brings in its train ignorance of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, and of all things. For let no one think that he will become a theologian or a good reader or hearer of Holy Scripture if he minimizes the evil of original sin or does not correctly understand it.⁶²

Our doctrine of sin (hamartiology) [Greek: *harmartia* – sin] is directly related to our doctrine of man (anthropology). If we have an inadequate or faulty doctrine of man, we will have an inadequate or faulty doctrine of sin.

We should remember the two main points we have already covered in the doctrine of man:

1. Man is defined by his relationships. Man's meaning and value are relational.
2. Man is a holistic being. Human life is an indivisible unity.

Our present task is to apply these relational and holistic principles to the doctrine of sin. This means that our discussion of "Man as Sinner" will fall naturally under two main headings: "Sin as Alienation" and "Sin as Total Depravity."



⁶¹ "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man" (Gen. 9:6). "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God" (James 3:9). "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor. 11:7).

⁶² Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 3:1301.

Sin as Alienation

We have found that man is defined by his relationships. To be truly human means to be rightly related to God, to others, and to the world. It means to exist harmoniously in this threefold relationship as God intended.

Since man is essentially a relational being, he cannot find meaning, value, or significance in his own existence. He must go outside himself to find his meaning, value, and significance. A truly human existence is an auterocentric (other-centered) existence. Man was created to go out of himself to live in God and his neighbor. This going out of oneself for the other is what the Bible calls love.

Man as sinner is not man in his healthy, normal state. Instead of going out of himself to the other, he is curved in to himself. He tries to find value, meaning, and significance within himself. The worst sin is always the religious sin because, in this, man tries to use the gifts of God for his own self-validation. As a sinner, man is not truly human. He is dehumanized. This curving in to himself has disrupted man's God-given relationships. Sin is a condition of estrangement and alienation.

If being truly human means being rightly related to God, others and the world, then sin is being wrongly related to God, others and the world. It is a disruption of man's God-given relationships. Sin is a condition of alienation.

Man is alienated from God (Col. 1:21). When the Bible speaks about man as sinner, it speaks of him as a sinner "before the Lord." Sin is a religious concept. It is what a man is "in the sight of God." Sin is always "sin against God" (Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4). It is a violation of man's relationship with God, a break in communion. Instead of finding his value in his being related to God, man has tried to find it in himself—even in his God-given gifts. In this he has worshiped (given supreme worth) to the creature rather than to the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

The holistic principle of human existence means that man cannot disrupt one relationship without disrupting all relationships. This is illustrated in the Fall. When man disrupted his relationship with God, he disrupted his social and environmental relationships. Adam blamed his wife for his defection (Gen. 3:12). Beasts which had been docile and submissive became vicious and dangerous. When Adam was no longer subject to God, the created order was no longer subject to him. The earth itself began to bring forth thorns and thistles. Thus man's alienation from God was reflected in man's alienation from his fellow man and from his environment.

Sociologists and ecologists are now wrestling with the problem of human alienation. They cannot, however, overcome these human problems. At best, they can "rearrange the furniture." But they cannot basically change the human situation. As long as man is alienated from God, he will be alienated from others and the world.

Alienation from God also leads to alienation of man from himself. Because he is human, he has a relationship with himself. He is not only conscious but self-conscious. He reflects upon himself and passes judgment upon himself. He sees himself as he would like to be and feels he ought to be. And he also sees himself as he actually is. The sinner sees that he is not what he ought to be, so he accuses, condemns, and rejects the self which he actually is. This is the function of the human conscience.

This self-alienation fractures the wholeness (health) of human life. It enters into and poisons all human relationships and affects all human behavior. It even has a profound influence on man's philosophical assumptions, on his thinking about himself. He alienates body from soul and thinks of himself as two instead of one. He isolates religion and spirituality from his concrete existence and makes a vast separation between what he calls "sacred" and what he calls "secular." He isolates sexuality from the wholeness of life so that it becomes nothing but an unwholesome physical encounter.

Sin is a change in man's God-given relationships. It is not a change in the essential properties of human nature. In the fall the substance of human nature was not changed. Man did not acquire new powers or faculties. They were perverted and put to wrong use. This means that the substance or stuff of human nature is not sinful. The Lutheran Formula of Concord correctly refutes the theory of Flacius which identified sin with the actual substance of human nature. Sin is *accidental* and not an *essential* property of human nature. It is a foreign element which has infected human nature, and is not to be confused with human nature itself. It is clear from the Bible that this infection is a demonic element (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8) which renders man less than truly human.⁶³

Man cannot be understood in isolation because he is man only in his relationships. The Bible has no burden to describe the actual composition of human nature. When we ask the question, "What is man?" the Bible directs us to his essential relationships. We can only understand what man is when we see what he is related to. So also, sin is not some bacillus we can isolate and look at in itself. Its existence is a mystery. The Bible gives no description of its composition. Sin is not some disease which floats in the air. It is something which has perverted and distorted all human relationships, especially man's relationship to God. Sin, therefore, must be defined relationally. We will now do this from several different perspectives.

Sin as a Breach of the Covenant.

The God-man relationship is based on a covenant. This is a divinely arranged treaty or compact which specifically defines the terms of the partnership or fellowship between God and man. The privileges and obligations of each party are legally defined. The Bible presents the character of both God and man in the light of the covenant. God is always loyal and faithful to His covenant (Dan. 9:4; Luke 1:72). He never forgets His covenant or fails to carry it out with undeviating fidelity (Ex. 2:24; Ps. 89:34; 105:8). On the other hand, man the sinner is man the covenant-breaker. His fidelity to the covenant is like the morning cloud which soon vanishes (Hosea 6:4). "For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant" (Ps. 78:37). The whole history of Israel is one of forgetting and forsaking the covenant (Ps. 106:13, 21; 1 Kings 19:10, 14). Sin is the transgression of the covenant (2 Kings 18:12; Ps. 78:10; Jer. 11:2-10; Ezek. 16:59-60; Hosea 6:7; 8:1). Breaking the covenant is a breach of fellowship and a rupture of communion. It is a breach of faith, a condition of estrangement, and alienation from God.

Sin as a Breach of the Law.

If we are to think like the Bible writers, we must think of man's violation of his personal relationship with God in a concrete, dynamic way. The covenant is a legal conception. It spells out the concrete terms of the God-man relationship. The God of the Hebrews is preeminently the God of law. The law of God stipulates the kind of behavior required of those who live in covenant fellowship with Him. A person is said to be righteous if his concrete existence fulfills the obligations of his covenantal relationships. Sin is the opposite of righteousness. It means to fall short or to miss the mark imposed by covenantal relationships.

As far as the Bible is concerned, breaking the commandments of God – disobeying the express word of God – and breaking the covenant are the same.

The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. – Isa. 24:5.

And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. – 2 Chron. 34:31.

. . . because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them. – 2 Kings 18:12.

They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law. – Ps. 78:10.

Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant, and trespassed against My law. – Hosea 8:1.

⁶³ This distinction between sin and the substance of human nature is important for a true understanding of the incarnation of Christ.

The apostle John is true to his Old Testament heritage when he declares, "Sin is the transgression of the law ["lawlessness," RSV] (1 John 3:4). So is the Westminster Catechism when it defines sin as any lack of conformity to the law of God in act, disposition or state.

In defining sin we must hold together the concepts of violation of a personal relationship and transgression of the law. We must not try to play one off against the other as some do. In certain circles it has become fashionable to represent the old orthodoxy and the new by the following contrast:

Old Orthodoxy

**Sin is transgressing the law,
breaking a code of conduct.**

New Orthodoxy

**Sin is violating a personal
relationship, a break in
communion.**

The purpose of making this contrast, of course, is to downgrade the impersonal and legalistic nature of the old orthodoxy in favor of a more personalistic religious approach. But to the men who wrote the Bible it was unthinkable to make a dichotomy between relationship and behavior. Much less could they set one off against the other in an either/or proposition. Law does not have any significance apart from God. It is always "the law of the Lord" (Ps. 1:2). It is the revelation of His will and the transcript of His character. Sin, therefore, is not a mere breaking of some legal code of conduct. It is a matter of despising the word of the Lord. Lawbreaking is covenant-breaking. God is personally offended and insulted "because they [sinners] have transgressed the laws . . . broken the everlasting covenant" (Isa. 24:5).

If we talk about sin as a violation of a relationship apart from any reference to the objective expression of God's will, sin is relativized and defined by each person's subjective experience. People can talk about having "a beautiful relationship with the Lord" while committing the most outrageous sins. For example, *The Wittenburg Door* published an interview with a self-confessed homosexual clergyman.⁶⁴ He justified his deviant lifestyle, and when asked about the Ten Commandments, replied, "Sin . . . is separation from God." This is true enough, but he flatly refused to have sin defined by the Ten Commandments. This illustrates what happens when men refuse to relate an abstract definition of sin to the concrete law of God. All relationships of human existence are defined by law. Unless the church stands on the law of God and calls sin by its right name, every sort of abomination can creep in clothed with the ornaments of Christ's sanctuary.

In Luther's day antinomians arose claiming that the law of God which defines sin had been swept aside by Christ. They even claimed this was true to Luther's theology. In his treatise, *Against the Antinomians*, Luther replied:

It is most surprising to me that anyone can claim that I reject the law or the Ten Commandments. . . . I myself, as old and as learned as I am, recite the commandments daily word for word like a child. . . .

Or does anyone imagine that there can be sin where there is no law? Whoever abolishes the law must simultaneously abolish sin. If he permits sin to stand, he must most certainly permit the law to stand; for according to Romans 5 [:13], where there is no law there is no sin. And if there is no sin, then Christ is nothing. Why should he die if there were no sin or law for which he must die? It is apparent from this that the devil's purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law but to remove Christ, the fulfiller of the law.⁶⁵

To think relationally means we must go outside of man to define what man is. And it means we must go outside of human behavior to define what sin is. This is stated simply and forcefully by Lutheran scholar Edward W. A. Koehler:

⁶⁴ *The Wittenburg Door*, no.39 (Oct.-Nov. 1977).

⁶⁵ Martin Luther, *Against the Antinomians*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan & Helmut T. Lehmann, American ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 47:109-10.

The Bible defines sin as "the transgression of the Law," as "anomia," lawlessness (1 John 3:4). No deed, word, thought, or desire are in themselves sin, but become sin by being at variance with the Law of God. To eat the fruit of a tree seems to us a rather innocent matter, but since God had forbidden it, it was a sin to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:17). When Saul spared Agag, the king of Amalek, and the best of the sheep and oxen for sacrifice, it looked like a humane and pious thing; yet God had commanded him to destroy Amalek utterly, and so it was a sin to spare them (1 Sam. 15). When at the exodus from Egypt the children of Israel borrowed jewels of silver and of gold from the Egyptians (Exod. 12:35, 36), without returning them, it was not a sin, because God expressly commanded them to do this (Exod. 3:22). Whether or not anything is a sin is not determined by what we think, or how we feel, about it, but solely by this: does it or does it not agree with the Word of God? Sin is not a physical, but a moral condition, and it consists in this that a given act, behavior, or condition of man is not what God wants it to be; it is nonconformity with the will of God. Thus, to sin means to do what God forbids (Gen. 2:17), or not to do what He enjoins (James 4:17), or not to be as He wants us to be (Lev. 19:2). Hence, with respect to the Law, sin is a departure from its rule; with respect to God, sin is disobedience to His will.

Every departure from the Law is sin, whether this be great or small, known or unknown, intended or accidental, or even when it is against our will (Rom. 7:19). The question whether anything is or is not sin, is not determined by our personal opinion, our knowledge, our intention, or our will, but solely by this one fact, whether or not it is in agreement with the will of God. Our personal attitude may aggravate or mitigate our guilt, but it does not change the nature of the act or the conduct as a transgression of the Law. Even the good intention and purpose one may have, will not change an unlawful act into a lawful one (1 Sam. 15:1-26). We cannot sin to the glory of God (Rom. 6:1).⁶⁶

We are not suggesting that we abandon the abstract definitions of sin. We need them too. Otherwise we may run to the opposite error and make sin appear as simply the transgression of a legal code of conduct. The violation of our relationship with God, expressed by disobedience to the law of God, must be seen as pride, selfishness, idolatry ("the lust for divinity" – Luther), rebellion, unbelief, ingratitude and enmity against God. These are abstract definitions of sin. But unless they are related to the concrete law of God, these abstract definitions can mean something different to everybody. What one calls pride, another may call dignity. Selfishness may well pass for prudence, or unbelief for broadmindedness.

When the creature refuses to submit to God's concrete commandments and chooses his own way, he manifests pride, selfishness, unbelief, rebellion, idolatry, ingratitude and hostility toward God.

It is not enough to talk about sin in an abstract way if sinners are to realize the gravity of their state of alienation and lostness. It is too easy for us to identify a right relationship with God with good feelings. Because "that which is rightly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15), the law of God must define a right relationship. The law should be used to make plain the concrete nature of the sinner's estrangement. To be out of harmony with God's law is to be out of harmony with the Lawgiver.

Sin as Guilt and Pollution.

Guilt and pollution are two different aspects of man's sinful condition. Like justification and sanctification, they should be distinguished but never separated. It is well known that while Roman Catholic theology sees sin mainly as pollution, Protestantism sees sin primarily in terms of guilt. While this may oversimplify the difference between these two streams of thought, it does pinpoint a very important aspect of the Catholic/Protestant debate.

If we think of sin chiefly in terms of a disease (pollution), salvation is reduced to healing the disease (sanctification). This illustrates what we said in the orientation. A faulty doctrine of sin leads to a faulty doctrine of salvation. If we are to arrive at a correct doctrine of sin and salvation, we need to think clearly and biblically about guilt and pollution.

There are always two aspects to human relationships:

1. Every important human relationship has a *legal* aspect – for example, marriage, sonship, citizenship, business partnership, church membership, club membership. Man's relationship with God is no exception. It is based on a binding legal arrangement called a covenant.

⁶⁶ Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, pp.62-3.

2. Then there is the existential or *vital* aspect of the relationship. The legal aspect of a marriage relationship may be good and secure, but the vital level may be marred by friction or difficulty. The justified believer has a right relationship with God which admits of no degrees because it is legally perfect. But on an existential or vital level he does not yet relate to God in perfect faith and unflinching love.

The whole field of sin and salvation is often obscured because we fail to distinguish between our relationships on the legal and vital levels. For instance, someone may say, "Justification means being restored to a right relationship with God." If this means being adopted into the family of God and being made a citizen of His kingdom – a sonship and citizenship which are perfect and admit of no degrees – it is correct. But "right relationship" may also mean loving God, praising God, and enjoying God as we should. This is sanctification – the vital relationship – and it should be distinguished from the legal relationship.

Sin is a matter of a wrong relationship, and this wrong relationship exists on both a legal and a vital level. This is why we must speak of sin as both guilt and pollution. Guilt means demerit before the law. It is a legal conception. It has to do with a person's standing before the law. Sin is often spoken of in terms of debt (Matt. 6:12; 18:32; Col. 2:14). Man owes perfect righteousness to the law – in nature as well as in action. When he has not discharged this debt, he is guilty. To be guilty before the law means to be liable to the penalty of death (Rom. 6:23).

We could express this another way by saying that the law defines the ideal relationship with God, neighbor, and the created order. When man falls short of this ideal relationship in any way, he is guilty before the law. He forfeits the blessings of the covenant and incurs its curses. Guilt may be defined as man's legal standing of alienation. The guilty are legal aliens from the kingdom of God. They are legally estranged and enemies of God. We use the word *legal* not in a pejorative sense, but meaning lawful, rightful, just, proper, according to the rule of righteous law.

We must not only distinguish guilt from pollution. We must also distinguish the fact of guilt from the feeling of guilt. Fact and feeling are not the same. Real guilt is objective. It exists quite apart from a person's sense of guilt. A person may stand guilty before God's law but feel no guilt at all. On the other hand, he may feel guilty but not be guilty before the law of God. On this point of guilt, therefore, it is important that a person should not inquire of his feelings but of his standing before the objective law of God. Doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists frequently refer to the great problem of guilt in human health. But they generally mean guilt in the psychological sense rather than in the biblical sense.

The sense of guilt results from the function of the human conscience. Because man is self-conscious, he is able to reflect upon himself. He sees himself in two different ways. He sees the self as he would like it to be and feels it ought to be. This is the only self he feels he can approve and accept. But he also sees the self as it actually is. When there is a gap between the two (the "ought" and the "is"), he is torn apart. He cannot approve and accept the self as it actually is. He sits in judgment upon it. He accuses and condemns it. He indulges in self-contempt and self-rejection. This causes self-alienation. Because he is ashamed of his real self, he may resort to masks and masquerades. He may create an image to hide his real identity. Material affluence, titles, degrees or religious profession may be used to mask his real self. But all this proves he is alienated from himself by his own conscience. Because he cannot truly accept and love himself, he cannot truly accept and love others. Self-alienation is reflected in alienation from others. He is driven to use others and the material world to seek status for himself and to prove he does not merit the verdict of his conscience. But then his conscience accuses him of his selfish use of others and the environment to gain status for himself. And so he is swept into a vicious and bitter whirlpool of alienation.

In the first step toward deliverance from the sense of guilt, the person sees his true guilt. Then faith in the gospel of Christ's atoning blood brings the verdict of justification from the highest court in the universe. When the sinner believes that this supreme court has acquitted and accepted him, he can acquit and accept himself. The conscience, like the lower court, bows before the verdict of the higher court. The conscience will never be satisfied until the believing sinner claims the verdict of the higher court (Heb. 9:14; 1 John 3:19-21).

The Christian is not one who never feels any guilt. The knowledge of God's law in the face of the holiness of Christ gives him an acute sense of his own sinfulness (Rom. 3:20). The gap between what he ought to be and what he is is not bridged by his life of new obedience even though he strives in the strength of the Spirit to be all that he ought to be. In fact, the tension between the "ought" and the "is" intensifies. But the Christian knows how to deal with the sense of guilt. By faith, and that continually, he applies the blood of Christ to the conscience. He bedecks himself with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own. Thus covered, he is able to look the law of God in the eye without shame.

Besides guilt, there is also the pollution of sin. Sin is not only a legal debt. It is represented as a reigning power which has taken possession of human nature. Our predicament is not just a matter of being burdened with a legal debt we cannot pay. We are stricken with a mortal disease for which we can find no cure (Isa. 1:5-6; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:14-25; Eph. 2:1-3). While guilt is the sinner's legal alienation, pollution is the spirit of alienation which has become a reigning power in human nature. Through his alienation from the kingdom of God, man has become the subject of Satan's dominion. As the lawful prey of Satan, he has been infected with the spirit of pride, rebellion, unbelief, selfishness, idolatry, ingratitude and hostility toward God. This spirit of alienation which controls human nature is not an essential property of human nature. It is a demonic element which has infected it.

. . . in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. – Eph. 2:2-3, RSV (see also 1 John 3:8).

When we follow Paul's presentation in the book of Romans, we find he deals with the problem of human guilt (justification) before he deals with the problem of healing the disease (sanctification). As guilt is objective, so is the remedy. Christ hung on the cross to pay the believing sinner's debt to divine justice (Rom. 3:25). Faith in the blood of Christ changes the sinner's legal relationship to God. God's imputation of righteousness for the believer's justification is not in itself a change within the sinner but a change in the way the sinner is regarded. Imputed righteousness is divine love in action. It is divine love accepting the unacceptable and ascribing excellence and value to those who confess they have nothing but degradation and shame.

This free gift of justification by the righteousness of what Another has done raises the question of practical ethics. Can the believer continue living in sin as if holiness of life were now irrelevant? (Rom. 6:1). Does God just count the believer holy and leave him enslaved to his unholy disease (moral condition) as he was before? We suggest that Paul links sanctification to justification in a way we generally overlook. In Romans 6:14 he declares, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." What he means is that when guilt is dealt with by forgiveness and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the power of the disease is broken. Sin remains in the regenerate. But it will not reign where guilt is taken away by faith in the blood (Rom. 6:2).

According to Paul the power of sin stems from guilt and not the other way around. In Roman Catholic theology the sinner is said to become acceptable to God by the healing of the disease. But in Pauline and Reformation doctrine healing stems from being acceptable to God by the merit of the atonement.

We say again that the power of sin stems from guilt and not the other way around. This is why justification must take precedence over sanctification. Guilt means that the sinner is legally estranged from God. Being legally estranged, he is given over to the control of Satan's kingdom. The law of God actually consigns him to the prison house of sin (Rom. 11:32-33; Gal. 3:22). Sin in itself is not powerful. It gains its strength from the law of God (1 Cor. 15:56). Says the apostle, "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead (Rom. 7:8).

Let us suppose a man is sentenced to hard labor. He is bound to miserable servitude by the law. So it is with the sinner. The law or justice of God hands him over to the bondage of a cruel master. The power which binds him to this service is the omnipotent law (Rom. 7:1-6). The way to come to terms with the enslaving power of sin, therefore, is to come to terms with the just demands of God's law. The sinner cannot meet those demands by anything he can do, not even by the Spirit's work in him. God has consigned him to the prison of disobedience until faith comes (Rom. 11:32-33; Gal. 3:22).

When faith lays hold of the doing and dying of Christ, the law is satisfied. It no longer binds the sinner to the service of sin. Sin therefore loses its power over the justified.

Justification by grace ends the believing sinner's legal estrangement from God. It is a verdict for the believer and against the kingdom of Satan. By the decree of the Judge the believer is no longer an alien. He is adopted into the family of God. As long as he was a lawful subject of Satan's kingdom, sin had dominion over him. But in justification he is made a lawful subject of the kingdom of God. This gives God the right to give him His Spirit and to bring him under His charge and authority. Deliverance from the power of sin is therefore the effect of God's justifying verdict.

Sin as Universal.

Sin is common to all except Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:10-23; Heb. 7:26; 1 John 3:5). Not only have all sinned, but all keep falling short of God's glory.⁶⁷ The prophets, apostles and saints of all ages confess themselves to be sinners (Ps. 143:2; Eccl. 7:20; 1 John 1:8). It is important to realize this corporate nature of human sin. We are so inclined to think each individual lives his life in isolation as a separate island. This is not true. There is such a thing as race solidarity. We share a common heredity. Our lives are inseparably linked with others and would be impossible without others. Others, such as parents, children, lawyers and governmental officials, act for us and do many things on our behalf. We depend on others to build our bridges, print our newspapers, fly our transport and do countless things without which life could not continue. In a very real sense the race is one, and God deals with the race as one. He has consigned all to sin and pronounced that there is none righteous.

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.—Rom. 11:32

But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.—Gal. 3:22.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.—Rom. 3:10-12.

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). Just as we see our own image reflected in water, so we may see our own sinful hearts reflected in the life of every other sinner. We cannot reproach any man for anything of which we are not also guilty (Rom. 2:1). Wesley said, "Never did every sin appear in the . . . vilest wretch that ever lived. But look thou into thy nature, and thou mayest see all and every sin in the root thereof."⁶⁸ This is frightful yet true. Though not in the flower but in the root, the sin of all men is in each of us. The law of God takes note of it and condemns us for it except we hide in the imputed righteousness of Christ. Just as by faith we believe we are righteous in Christ, so by faith we must believe we are sinners – and such radical sinners as God's Word declares us to be. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). The disordered environment of the world in which we live answers to the disordered nature we possess. Accidents, disease, frustration, futility and death are all about us. We live with them continually and suffer in our identification with the fallen environment. Yet we should see that God in His great mercy has given us an environment best suited to our condition. We suffer less in such an environment than we would suffer if the environment were perfect. We may picture for ourselves a perfect world where nothing disrupts or disappoints. But were it given us and we were the only imperfect thing in it, it would be unbearable torment. A perfect environment would intensify our suffering. God has made us as comfortable as possible.

This may give us some insight into the sufferings of Christ. His holiness, the refined sensibilities and perfections of His holy nature, made contact with a fallen world and life in a disordered environment a matter of great suffering for Him. Discord, disharmony, pain, disease and human sin were unspeakably painful to Him. He suffered in proportion to His holiness.

⁶⁷ In Romans 3:23 the original Greek uses both the past and the present continuous tense.

⁶⁸ John Wesley, Sermon, Bristol, Aug. 17, 1757, in *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 9:462-64.

We do not become sinners because we have sinned. We sin because we are sinners. Sin entered the race through the fall of Adam, who was the head of the race. "By one man sin entered into the world. . . . By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:12, 19).

There are three opinions which deny the full force of our sinful inheritance:

1. There is the Pelagian opinion, which says that children are born amoral – that is, neither depraved nor sanctified. The Scripture, however, declares we are conceived and born in sin.

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.—Ps. 51:5.

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.—Ps. 58:3.

The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.—Gen. 8:21.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh.—John 3:6.

We . . . were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.—Eph. 2:3.

2. There is the opinion which says Adam separated the race from God and the Holy Spirit, and therefore we are deprived of the Holy Spirit in consequence of Adam's sin. Like most heresy, this is not wrong in what it affirms. It is wrong in what it denies. Man the sinner is not just *deprived* but *depraved*. Adam sold the race to an alien power. In consequence of the fall, human nature is not only bereft of the Holy Spirit but infected by another spirit, even the spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). All men are tainted with positive evil and corrupted with the tendencies of pride, unbelief, selfishness, idolatry, rebellion and hostility to God.

3. There is the opinion which says that man inherits a corrupted nature but not the guilt of Adam's sin. In this theory it is sometimes said no one is guilty before the law until he actually commits sin. Or it is said a person is guilty before the law only because of his inherited depravity.

Even though this third view moves toward confessing the universal nature of sin, serious objections must be brought against it.

In the first place, this view is erroneous because it makes guilt spring from pollution rather than pollution from guilt. The logical end of this approach is to say that salvation comes by gaining the victory over sin.

In the second place, this view does not do justice to Romans 5:12-19. Paul is not here talking about the depravity of nature inherited because of Adam's sin. The context is our legal predicament rather than our moral disease. The apostle is talking about judgment, condemnation and justification. It is in Romans 7:14-25 that Paul moves on to discuss sanctification and man's moral disease.

In the third place, if Romans 5:12-19 deals with inherited pollution, Catholicism is right. For if condemnation comes by inheriting an evil nature, justification must come by an inward moral renewal. But this is not Paul's point in Romans 5:12-19. Just as we were condemned by the unrighteous act of Adam, an act in which we had no part, so we are justified by the righteous act of Jesus Christ, also an act in which we had no part. If the righteousness of the second Adam is imputed to us, it seems inescapable that the sin of the first Adam is imputed to us. On the other hand, if we were condemned by the transmission of his corrupt nature to us, we would be justified by the infusion of Christ's new nature into us. This, of course, is the soteriology of Romanism, and it is contrary to the Pauline doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness.

Our involvement in guilt by the sin of another is admittedly a difficult doctrine. It is offensive to our nature. There is only one doctrine more offensive, and that is the related doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness.

It is beyond doubt that there is nothing which more shocks our reason than to say that the sin of the first man has rendered guilty those, who, being so removed from this source, seem incapable of participation in it. This transmission does not only seem to us impossible, it seems also very unjust. . . . Certainly nothing offends us more rudely than this doctrine; and yet, without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves.⁶⁹

However, if we understand that guilt is our legal standing, it helps us understand how the guilt of Adam is inherited. When Adam sinned, he did so as the covenantal head of the race. He acted for his posterity. If he obeyed, the blessings of the covenant would be theirs. If he disobeyed, the curses of the covenant would be theirs. Like the Hittite suzerainty treaties, the curses of the covenant fall on the children of the unfaithful vassal.

When Adam renounced his allegiance to God, he became a member of Satan's kingdom. It was inevitable that all his children would be born as legal aliens and enemies of the kingdom of God and therefore lawful subjects of His wrath. Let us suppose a young American citizen were to renounce the American flag and become a citizen of a foreign country. The children born in his house subsequent to his legal alienation from America would not be Americans but foreigners. This is not a biological inheritance (for the children might even look like Americans). It would be a legal inheritance. If America were at war with this foreign country, the children would be legal enemies of America.

Real guilt is not a subjective feeling. It is a person's legal relationship to God. By the sin of Adam all are born as aliens of the kingdom of heaven and enemies of God Himself. By inheritance they are wrongly related to God. They are born under a broken covenant and are subjects of His wrath quite apart from inheriting an evil nature. The evil nature is not the cause of God's curse but the result of it.

Therefore the children of Adam share his guilt and its consequences. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned [in their representative]" (Rom. 5:12).⁷⁰

Sin as a State As Well As an Action.

By now it should be clear that sin is not just what we do. It is more especially what we are. We commit acts of sin because we are sinners. We are born into the estate of the kingdom of Satan and are in a wrong legal relationship with God. As long as we are aliens, everything we do is sin. All our devotion, piety and religion are sin. Besides this legal alienation from God, we are infected with the spirit of alienation. By nature we are sinful. This is why Paul refers to our natural state as "the body of this death" or "sinful flesh" (Rom. 7:24; 8:3). If the law of God does not curse and condemn our nature, why does the apostle call it "sinful"?

Some people say the sinful nature does not make us sinners before God unless we give way to the sinful nature and commit an act of sin. They say the law of God does not demand a sinless nature, only sinless deeds. They then turn around and say Christ too had the sinful human nature common to all men, but He successfully resisted its tendencies and so committed no act of sin. This argument says too much. If the holy law of God does not curse and condemn man's sinful nature, if it does not demand holiness of nature as well as actions, then why call that nature "sinful flesh" or "sinful nature"? A thing is not sinful unless it is contrary to the law of God. It should also be apparent that if Christ must fulfill the law and satisfy all its demands on our behalf, His human nature must be as holy as the law requires.

It is true there is no condemnation for those who are "in Christ." Although they share the polluted nature common to all men and are often distressed because of it (Rom. 7:14-25), yet for Christ's sake this sin which is in them and merits their damnation is not imputed to them (Rom. 4:8). As long as they keep the faith and do not allow sin to reign over them, they are not condemned for what in itself is worthy of condemnation.

⁶⁹ Pascal, Pensees, cited in Dallas M. Roark, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p.174.

⁷⁰ The second half of this text is not talking about all sinning after the example of Adam. The "and so" of Romans 5:12 means that the first part of the text – "by one man sin entered into the world" – is being restated.

This is why the saints recognize that all they are and do is pleasing to God only through the imputed righteousness of Christ. Their most pious and devout deeds, including their prayers and praise, are defiled with the corrupt taint of the flesh. Unless covered with the righteousness of Christ, it would render them worthy of death and destruction.

Holiness not only means separation from evil and separation to God. It also means wholeness and completeness. It is what its family of words suggests: *holy, wholesome, hale, health, healthy*. That which is less than wholeness of human life is what the law of Moses calls defilement or uncleanness. The whole man in all his relationships was made in the image of God. Anything which falls short of that image, anything which mars the wholeness of human life, is sin. To praise God with any less fervor and ardor than the sinless seraphim is sin. Surely we owe as much praise to God as do those angels! But none of us gives it. That is sin. To live in any less than an ideal relationship to God, others and the world is sin. To fail to improve every moment of time and to develop our capacities to their fullest potential for the glory of God is sin. To ill treat our body or our environment is sin. To be less than the perfect image of God as God intended us to be is sin. Therefore sin is more what we are than what we do.

Sin as Total Depravity

When a person sins, the whole person sins, and the whole person will die for that sin unless he shows repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The gnostic element at Corinth thought the "spiritual" Christians could commit fornication without sinning. According to them the body was not the real man. Whatever the body did was supposed to be irrelevant. Not so, replied Paul. All must stand in judgment on their total existence. When sin is committed, the mind and the body are always participants.⁷¹

This holistic principle has vital implications:

It means that man is a sinner in the totality of his existence. Being a sinner in one area means he is a sinner in every area. There is not one part of his existence which he keeps intact and uncontaminated by sin as if he could stand before God, saying, "At least this part [my good intentions] is free from sin." There can be no such thing as plumbing beneath the sinful crust to discover the intrinsic good of human nature. The Bible does not deny that fallen man may have some good qualities or gifts. But they are all tainted and corrupted by sin. For instance, a sinner may have the good qualities of determination, ambition, imagination, creative genius and leadership. But he perverts these gifts by using them to glorify himself. Even the "good" is used in the service of evil. Good traits of character do not mitigate man's evil but aggravate it. He uses these gifts as an excuse for not repenting and giving his allegiance to God. His worst sin is the perversion of his good. He uses what are really the gifts of God to fight against God. The holistic view of man means the Reformers were right when they spoke about man's total depravity.⁷² Man is a sinner in the totality of his existence.

We have already seen that being human means to be related to God, to the community and to the material order. The holistic view of man means we cannot disrupt one relationship without disrupting all relationships. For example, when man first alienated himself from God, he became alienated from his human partner. Guilt caused Adam to blame his wife (Gen. 3:12). The Babel builders' isolation from God resulted in their isolation from one another (Gen. 11).

More than that, when man rebelled against the dominion of God, the created order rebelled against the dominion of man. The beasts became unsubmitive. The earth brought forth thorns and thistles. Instead of worshiping and serving the Creator, fallen man began to worship and serve the creature (Rom. 1:25).

Whoever wrongs God wrongs his neighbor and the environment too. And whoever lives in a wrong relationship with his environment sins against his neighbor and his God. This means that ecology and health are moral questions. Yet we Christians have often been guilty of limiting piety to our own private experience with the Lord.

⁷¹ We do not use mind and body here to mean two parts of the person. By mind we mean the thinking willing whole person. By body we mean the physical expression of the whole person.

⁷² Total depravity does not mean a sinner is as bad as he can be. It means there is no part of man's existence which has not become contaminated with sin.

A person may go to the doctor with a physical complaint when he really needs reconciliation with his brother and with his God. He may go to the priest or pastor for spiritual counsel when the source of his problem is overwork, overeating or the want of a good night's sleep.

Holism means we cannot violate one relationship without violating all. This is why the Bible can say, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Righteousness, which is a right relationship (to God, neighbors and things), must be kept whole, intact and wanting nothing in every area, or it ceases to be righteousness altogether. There is no such thing as being partly righteous before God anymore than being partly sinful before God.

Holism means that fallen man can lay no claim to righteousness before God in any area of his existence. He is totally a sinner.

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.— Isa. 1:5-6.

Holism is the negation of perfectionism – the notion that believers may in this life receive enough "grace" to enable them to arrive at a state of personal sinlessness. Perfectionism can be supported only on dualistic premises. This is made clear in John Wesley's doctrine of perfectionism. He argued for the possibility of perfection on the grounds of a dichotomy of soul and body.

Some perfectionists admit that believers retain the sinful nature throughout this life but argue that by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it is possible, even mandatory, to attain a sinless character before Jesus comes. But holism means that if a person is sinful in one area of existence, he is sinful in every area of existence. The essential unity of man means we cannot seal off a sinful nature in an isolated vacuum. There is an inevitable communion of the nature with the person. If the nature is sinful, so is the person. If there is one area or relationship which fails to reflect God's image fully, the whole man falls short of God's image. To fall short of God's glory is sin (Rom. 3:23). This is why the imputed righteousness of Christ must remain paramount. We can never reach a point in our fellowship with God where such fellowship does not rest entirely on the forgiveness of sin. Throughout life the saints must confess they are sinful mortals. They can approach a holy God only "by blood and incense." There must be Christian character by the impartation of the Holy Spirit. But apart from imputed righteousness it has no value with God.

Luther declared that the regenerate are *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and sinful). At first (in his Lectures on Romans) he said they were partly righteous and partly sinful. But when his theological position fully developed, he said the believer is totally righteous and totally a sinner. The Reformation doctrine of total depravity is not just a description of unbelievers. It is what every man except Jesus Christ is by nature. Believers, of course, do not make their sinful nature an excuse for sinful conduct. The sinful nature does not rule and dominate their lives as it does in the ungodly (Rom. 6:14; 8:1-17). Yet because the flesh always hinders them from doing what they would (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), they perfectly fulfill the law only by the forgiveness of sins. Even their good is contaminated with human imperfection. There is not one thing they do of which it can be said, "This deed or this phase of character is without sin." Unless God forgave what was still lacking in their most excellent virtues, unless Christ's imputed righteousness covered the human corruption which still clings to their holiest duties, they would be damned rather than blessed for their splendid attainments.

Remove imputed righteousness from the saints and they are not a whit better than the greatest sinner. For what does it advantage a man who must reach the stars if he stands on Mount Everest? Will he not be as pathetically short of his goal as the man in the valley? Unless the imputed righteousness of Christ bridges the abyss which exists between the divine Majesty and the best in poor mortal existence, all alike must be cast into hell.

Holism means that as long as we are in this world, identified as we are with this old eon, we are always totally a sinner. But by identification with Jesus Christ we are at the same time totally righteous by a righteousness completely outside ourselves. Such are the implications of relational and holistic thinking.

(Concluded)

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