

Lead 360- Session II: Christian Beliefs in the Trinity & Humanity

Review:

In our first session we introduced the study of Christian theology and considered our first major Christian belief: God. We emphasized the importance of Christian theology for identifying, reflecting upon and living out daily Christian beliefs. We also dealt briefly with theological method and identified the Bible as our norm and authority for doing Christian theology. We saw how helpful Christian history can be for understanding these beliefs, and how essential a contextual (cultural) understanding of our day is for communicating persuasively the truth claims of biblical teachings.

Then we briefly outlined the Christian belief of God, beginning with questions about his reality before turning to his qualities such as His transcendence (his beyondness) and immanence (his nearness), and we saw how important it is to keep these in healthy theological tension. Understanding Who we worship and what He is like reassures our faith and trust in God. Then we looked at the Christian belief in God as Creator. Creation is a trinitarian, free, gracious act of God. We affirmed that God created reality without using pre-existing matter--that He is totally distinct from the created order though He graciously chooses to work in and within it, supremely for our redemption in Jesus. We also looked briefly at the question on many believers' minds (and unbelievers too) of how can we intelligently embrace trust in an all-knowing, loving, powerful God in this kind of world so full of evil and suffering? While we did not come up with neatly-packaged, definitive answers, we did affirm trust in a personal, creative, redeeming, faithful God. We can have hope, meaning and purpose in this world and life because God is present and accounted for in our kind of world, supremely in the cross/resurrection of Jesus and that God seeks to draw us unto Himself to redeem us and the creation. We can affirm His sovereignty because we believe He has *not* finished redeeming us and the rest of creation yet, but that He will in the consummation of history. (This is not to deny the finished work of God's salvation provided in the cross of our Lord; it means to say we as believers know pain and suffering and death as unbelievers do.) We do indeed "live between the times" of Christ's first coming and His final (second) one.

Thus, while many of our specific questions may still beg for clearly packaged responses, we have plenty of belief markers along the way which offer us spiritual assurance: God is, He is loving and all-knowing and all-powerful and ever-present but all that only makes sense for the person responding in faith and repentance who is willing also to take up the spiritual journey and pilgrimage made possible by the same Holy Spirit who drew us to the Lord in the first place. This Creator-Redeemer God is utterly trustworthy for life and eternity.

Today we study the Christian beliefs of the Trinity and humanity. How can we understand the greatest mystery within Christianity – the belief that God is triune? Humility is certainly important when we study this belief, but perhaps we can understand more than we think. Secondly, what do Christians believe about humanity and why?

What does it mean to be created in the “image of God?” Where, when, why and how do we get our individual soul? Are we two parts or three parts as human beings? What is original sin and where does human freedom (if it does) fit in all that? For what sin(s) are we accountable to God: ours, Adam/Eve’s, both, or neither? What are the results or consequences of human sin? Once again, our theological quest is not to locate final answers but to try to make sure we are asking the right questions and are turning to the One who has in His strong, trustworthy hands the final answers, and that which at least in part He has made intelligible and livable to us through His self-revelation, presence and power.

Part I: The Christian Belief in the Trinity

I. Introduction

The Trinity has made headlines in the publishing world the past few years. The *Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown falsely credits Emperor Constantine in the 4th century for coining the Christian belief of Trinity. More recently, William Young, wrote another blockbuster fictional novel in which he allegorically portrays the Trinity as very approachable and understandable. Young has an African-American woman named Papa in the role of God, a Middle-East man playing Jesus, and an Asian woman as the Holy Spirit. Some see such characterizations as blasphemous and heretical, others claim the novel has opened their eyes for the first time to a relational triune God. Personally, I think Young does a good job with a fictional novel that does not pretend to be a theological clarification of the Trinity. Rather, he writes a story that conveys how personal the Triune God is and how he compassionately wants to relate to us. Not all will agree, but I think we can rejoice that his novel is drawing many people to at least be open to God belief and to the mystery of the Trinity. Even before the media perked interest in the Trinity, there were more books written by theologians on the Trinity in the last three decades of the 20th century than since the early church. Belief in the Trinity has indeed caught public interest.

What does the Bible and our Christian heritage have to say about the Trinity? God is one, as the great Jewish affirmation says (Deut. 6:4), yet he is also three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each of these 3 *is* God (notice “is”). How biblical is this belief, how important is it, and does it really make any sense? These of some of the main questions we try to answer.

This belief is THE distinctive feature of Christianity. This does not mean that other pivotal beliefs like Christ’s divinity, atonement or resurrection are not important, rather these beliefs themselves rest their case with the God who is triune. We can certainly say it is the key Christian belief that distinguishes Christianity from all other religious beliefs. Like Christianity, Judaism and Islam are strictly monotheistic. Other religions like Hinduism have multiple gods. Christianity claims to be monotheistic *and* trinitarian, believing in one God who is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Or as we sing, “God *in* 3 persons, blessed Trinity.”

The term “trinity” is not found in the Bible. We need to admit that early on but don't let this fact mislead you into thinking this belief is unbiblical or unimportant. The belief of the Trinity is *implicitly* taught in the Bible and is *explicitly* realized in Christian experience. Let's try to unpack what this means. To say this belief is an implicit teaching of Scripture means God's self-revelation of his three-in-oneness is not logically explained in the Bible, but it is there for those who have willing eyes to see it. We can see Trinity in the baptismal formula of Matt. 28:19, in the doxology of 1 Cor. 13:13 and many, many other places in the Bible where the three persons of the Trinity are named. But there is no biblical explanation of that three-in-oneness. In fact, there are over a 100 such references in the Bible that we could call trinitarian, though the word “trinity” is not used. Rather, these verses speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in some relational way.

Where this belief becomes explicit is in God's historical revelation of himself as triune. As early as the 2nd century, a church teacher named Tertullian spoke of the Trinity as God in three persons, but it required a heretical misunderstanding of the trinity in the 4th century for Christian leaders to affirm this belief as biblically true and essential to the Christian gospel. In other words, the early Christians concluded that the Trinity is a belief that explains how salvation takes place in history. The Father God gives His Son in order that the Holy Spirit may draw us to God to be saved. It is God who saves through the Son and by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we cannot understand nor experience salvation apart from a triune God.

As we trace the historical development of this belief, we will see that attributing deity to Jesus, the incarnate Son raises the pivotal question "How is God One if Jesus Christ is the Son of God (deity)?" Thus, the “trinitarian debate” inevitably begins with Christology: Who is Jesus in relationship to God? The Church, after fierce debate over several centuries, concluded nearly unanimously that Jesus *is* God. Next, by the year 381 AD, the Church reached the theological conclusion based on intense biblical study and debate that the Holy Spirit *is also* God.

This belief, while indispensable, is also the **most difficult to try to explain**. It is easily the most mysterious of Christian beliefs but this does not mean it is unintelligible or makes no sense. It may at times seem that way. Alister McGrath tells the story of a church service in Northern Ireland in the late 1950s. He remembers one dull morning in worship when the congregation was reciting the Athanasian Creed, affirming their belief in “the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.” He says he still recalls the thundering voice of that slightly-deaf farmer by his side, who boomed out, “The whole blame thing’s incomprehensible!” This great belief is mysterious but not illogical or unintelligible. The reason it is so difficult for us to understand is that it delves into such a deep study of the nature of God himself. Thus, deep humility is required. This is no place for interpretive arrogance. We should not try to oversimplify this great belief but neither should we shy away or ignore it due to its complexity. If someone asks me if I can explain the Trinity, I readily say "No," but if they'll give me a chance, I'll try to explain why this belief is important and what we *can* say because of the self-revelation of the Triune God.

There are two extremes to avoid in trying to understand this belief: one is to **overstate God's oneness to the exclusion of his threeness**. An example is the Unitarian Church which follows a long tradition of strict monotheism. Jesus is regarded as a great moral teacher but not God. Unitarianism rejects Christ's deity. Another example is the Jehovah's Witnesses. They reject belief in the Trinity claiming it is unbiblical, was inspired by the Devil and was developed by pagan influence on the early church. They claim trinity belief is false because the Almighty God is a "separate, eternal and all-powerful being". And I agree that He is! Trinitarians believe that too. Jehovah's Witnesses think literally, thus they misunderstand and think what is claimed is that God the Father is the Son. Trinitarian Christianity believes that while God is one Person, he is also tri-personal. Trinity does not mean three separate Gods but one God *in* three persons, but they are not three persons as we are aware of three individual persons. Jehovah's Witnesses also believe that besides the one true God, there are many "creatures" who are to be recognized as "gods" under this one God.

The other extreme is to overstate **the threeness of the Trinity**. To do this is to come up with 3 separate gods instead of affirming the tri-personal unity of the Godhead. Mormonism falls into this mistake of tritheism, of seeing God as 3 separate individual gods, and I would also say so do many Baptists unintentionally. The belief in the trinity is based on neither poor math nor absurdity. It is really the true story of how the ONE God has revealed himself in history and Holy Scripture IN three persons.

II. Christian Consensus on the Biblical Teaching

Leonard Hodgson, theologian at Oxford Universal, has observed that the Trinity was lived and experienced *before* it became a theological belief. Perhaps the most shocking verse in the Bible to those of Jewish faith is Thomas' affirmation in John's gospel of the newly resurrected Jesus as "My Lord and My God!". Worship of Jesus was added to that of worship of God with the growing awareness that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit also meant that the Holy Spirit is also God. Light can be enjoyed and appreciated without the necessity of explaining it unless someone comes up with an explanation of how light works that does not square with what is known about light. Several heretical developments occurred starting by the end of the 1st century which more than anything else jumpstarted the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Misunderstanding how light works is one thing but distorting Trinity belief is quite another.

1. Early formulations in patristic Christianity

Logically, we would think that trinitarian thought developed with the monotheism of the Old Testament. But it really began as early Christian theologians studied Scriptures that would later be recognized as canonical and thought about the relationship of Jesus to the Father. The deity of God was assumed and not debated. Monotheism was accepted without question. That's what made it so difficult for some to consider Jesus as divine as the heavenly Father is divine. If Jesus Christ is deity as God the Father is deity what happens to monotheism?

Key early church theologians contributed to a growing trinitarian understanding: Irenaeus referred to the early Christian consensus by speaking of trinitarian belief of God as Creator, Christ's incarnation for our salvation and also the work of the Holy Spirit. In the early part of the 3rd century, Origen spoke of a common deity between Father and Son. He often referred to Jesus as the "eternally begotten Son of the Father". He also spoke of the Holy Spirit as having equal deity with the Father and the Son. Tertullian in the 2nd century was the first to coin the Latin description *trinitas* – referring to the one God in three persons. Even the chief Roman critic of Christianity, a man named Celsus ridiculed Christian worship of Jesus "as a god".

2. Early *misunderstandings* of the relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father which still persist.

Several specific misunderstandings of God's threefoldness developed within Christian circles in the early centuries, most of them insistent on protecting monotheism yet show respect to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. All of these attempts which were deemed heretical were all formally rejected because of the various ways they distorted the Trinity. Yet they still reappear occasionally even today. Negatively, they helped the Christian Church to understand what Trinity does NOT mean and showed Christian leaders the urgency of affirming what it DOES mean.

The first was a belief about God that goes by the name of **modalism**. The key teacher who came up with modalism was Sabellius. His idea was that the persons of the Trinity are not distinct persons but actually modes of revelation, that is the One God reveals himself in three modes or ways but not in three persons. For example, Sabellius conceived of the Trinity as similar to an actor on stage wearing three different masks representing three different characters. Modalism fails the biblical test because it is not true to the biblical descriptions of events like Jesus' baptism where the voice of the Father affirms the Son while the Holy Spirit comes upon him in the form of a dove. Likewise, we see Jesus praying to the Father and also promising the disciples in John 14-16 the coming of the Holy Spirit as the same kind of Comforter as He is.

Another misunderstanding was known as **subordination**. Heresy of Subordinationism says Jesus and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father—there is no equal deity of the persons. Many Christian leaders found Greek philosophy to be helpful in understanding God's revelation of himself. But here is a case where it misleads. A form of Greek philosophy thought of God as a supreme being who has a hierarchy of being to communicate with the world. Only God was supreme and these lesser beings were subordinate to him as the supreme reality. The heresy of subordinationism among Christians appeared in two forms: adoptionism and Arianism (Arius). Adoptionism was first expressed by Paul of Samosata whose job as bishop was taken away in 3rd century; he claimed Jesus was a prophet and messiah who was adopted as son by God the Father. The Unitarian Movement followed suit in the 18th century with its denial of the Trinity as well as some today who think of Jesus only as "the human face of God" or a moral teacher or simply God's "representative but deny Jesus is God.

Arianism named after a church leader in Alexandria, Egypt, called Arius developed the 2nd version of subordinationism. He became the catalyst for the famous Council at Nicea when he protested Bishop Alexander's sermon on the Trinity. Arius affirmed Christ's divinity to a point – that the Logos entered Christ before Creation and then creation occurred through the Son – but he did not see Christ as preexistent or eternal and by no means equal with God. Rather, he insisted that Christ was a “divine creature” – higher than us but lower than God and in no way sharing the same substance of deity of God. He has a beginning said Arius, "there was a time when Jesus was not." Arius found a lot of Scripture in defending his position of non-negotiable monotheism. He cited Prov. 22:8 which proved to him that the "wisdom" which God used to create the universe was none other than a created Jesus who in turn created the world. He cites verses from Jesus himself, "My Father is greater than I" to prove Jesus' subordination to the Father means that he does not share equal deity with the Father. He took verses regarding Jesus' voluntary and temporary subordination to the Father and ignored those in which Jesus says, "My Father and I are One." Jehovah's Witnesses are heirs of Arius today. They claim Jesus is the incarnation of Michael the archangel.

The most helpful early theologian at this point was Athanasius, who explained in his book *On the Incarnation of the Word* that Jesus "became human that we might become divine". The huge problem with both forms of adoptionism is that without both the deity and the humanity of Jesus, our salvation goes begging. The best adoptionism can do is come up with some form of legalism or moralism as a substitute for atonement, neither of which comes close to being adequate. The theological understanding of Athanasius was quite helpful to the bishops who gathered at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Athanasius came up with a theological trump card against Arius: if Jesus is not God, then who saves us? Only God can save, and if Jesus is *not* God, He is not our Saviour. The council agreed with Athanasius. Dan Brown is not historically correct in giving credit to the Emperor Constantine for coming up with the orthodox view of the Trinity. Nicea was the culmination of a trajectory of early church understanding about God as Triune. Nicea affirmed Jesus as equal in deity to the Father. It would take another heresy and another council later in the 4th century to develop a biblically supportable understanding of the Trinity by affirming the Holy Spirit's deity as well. Even by then, not all were fully satisfied with the orthodox conclusions.

By the latter part of the 4th century the Christian Church had dismissed major misunderstandings or distortions of the Trinity. Many like Augustine who wrote more theological treatises about the Trinity than anyone else stressed the need for theological humility when we approach this important Christian belief. Augustine liked to tell the story on himself of his walking along the shore of the Mediterranean and noticing a little boy dipping water with a spoon into his bucket. "What are you doing son?" "I'm emptying the sea," said the little boy. Augustine chided him, "ha, what makes you think you can do that?" The boy responded, "well, I hear you're writing a book on the Trinity!" It was this same Augustine who said once, "try to understand the Trinity and you'll go crazy; but if you deny it, you become a heretic and may lose your soul." When I became a Christian at age 12, I'm not sure if I had even heard of this central Christian belief. But since having studied Scripture and personally experienced the triune God, if I choose to deny the truthfulness of this belief, I do indeed have a problem on my hands.

What is really at the heart of believing that God is a Holy Trinity according to the Scripture?

3. The heart of trinitarian belief in the Bible

The bold sense that Jesus and the Holy Spirit share equal deity with God the Father but neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit “are all there is of God” is based in biblical revelation, Christian experience and theological understanding. Believing in the oneness of God is not compromised by believing in the full deity of the Son and Spirit. No one Scripture verse (not even the KJV 1 John 5:7, which is not in the best manuscripts) “explains” the Trinity; instead, there is a pervasive pattern of trinitarian revelation in Scripture (many, many verses strongly demand it) but it is made real and believable in Christian experience. Scripture, experience and heresy (the wrong ways to think of God) all came together in the doctrinal formulation that is both mysterious and intelligible. If it is not primarily based in Scripture, then Trinity talk is nothing but fancy speculation. On what grounds can we claim belief in the Trinity is biblical?

God's Oneness (Unity) is the place to start because that is where the Bible does, yet be reminded even in Genesis 1, God creates, the Spirit moves upon the waters, and the Son is both the agent of Creation and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The Bible teaches us these things. Daniel Migliore says, "In the gospel story, God is active as 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Holy Spirit,' as the source, the medium and the effective promise of liberating and reconciling love. To this beginning point, trinitarian theology must return again and again. When Christians speak of God as eternally triune, they simply affirm that the love of God is that is extended to the world in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is proper to God's own life" (*Faith Seeking Understanding*, 61).

Our Bible gives 3 major building blocks of Scripture which support this belief: Scriptures supporting belief in one true God, belief in Jesus as Lord, and the experiencing the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. First, there is the **rigorous Jewish monotheism** in O.T. and N.T. The famous Shema in Deut. 6:4: *Listen Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.* The first of the 10 Commandments in Ex. 20:3 insists: *Do not have other gods besides me.* Warnings about idolatry abound throughout the O.T. The N.T. stresses the reality of monotheism as well: James 2:19, *You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe--and they shudder.* 1 Cor. 8:4, *About eating food offered to idols, then, we know that 'an idol is nothing in the world,' and that 'there is no God but one.'* 1 Tim. 2:5, *For there is one God and one mediator between God and humans, a man, Christ Jesus.* Nothing upset the Jewish opposition to Jesus more than his claim he had been sent from God and that He was God's presence in the flesh (John 8:13-59). When Jesus told them *before Abraham I was* at that moment they picked up stones to kill him for committing blasphemy. Heb. 1:1-3 and many other Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of who God is.

Thus, the **second building block** is that **Jesus is "Emmanuel, God with us"**. When the disciples heard His words and saw the miracles of Jesus, they knew Jesus had to have come from God. No one could say or do the things he did if he had not come

from God. Yet following the resurrection of Jesus, it was the one famous for doubt, Thomas, who specifically called him "God". Paul in his great hymn of Christology in Phil. 2:5-13, spoke of Jesus *as sharing the same substance of Father* and as Lord before whom every knee shall bow. The high Christology of the book of Hebrews, especially 1:1-3 suggests strongly He is God incarnate. His divine qualities and work constantly are interpreted by his followers Jesus is God incarnate. Over a period of four centuries, the Christian Church came to affirm the truthfulness and necessity of the Trinity. Jesus' self-consciousness is clear in his claim, *he who has seen me has seen the Father*. He spoke of His work as doing the work of the Father: he forgave sin, raised the dead and spoke with the authority of God himself.

(3) The **third** building block of understanding of the Trinity for the Christian Church was the gradual affirmation of the **deity of the Holy Spirit**. The clearest demonstration came on the day of Pentecost when God revealed himself through the **person** of the Holy Spirit. You could say this was the moment in salvation history when the Spirit of God who moved upon the waters in creation received his first name as Holy Spirit. We find interchangeable references, example Acts 5.3-4. There are Scriptures which stress the Holy Spirit sharing both the qualities and the work of God (John 16.8-11; 1 Cor 12.4-11). We find Scriptures which clearly indicate the Holy Spirit's equality with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28.19; 2 Cor. 13.14; 1 Pet. 1.2). John's Gospel expresses the equality of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, as the indwelling Spirit, the ongoing presence of divine reality on earth (John 14:15-17).

Thus we can affirm that Trinity belief is fully confirmed in Scripture. It is clearly a biblical teaching although it requires "trinitarian eyes" to see its *implicitness*. The orthodox councils dealing with the heresies of the 4th century AD, asserted the biblical and practical reality of the Trinity. Although they tried to use Greek metaphysics to communicate the theological meaning of the Trinity, they did so in the safeguards of biblical teaching. All of their theological formulas had to pass the bar of Holy Scripture. These dedicated Christians stressed there is a co-equality of deity of each person in the Godhead. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternally divine. This they could affirm as true because of the teachings of Scripture and God's triune self-revelation in history. The Scriptures clarified and confirmed their trinitarian experience of the triune God.

III. Making Sense of the Trinity

The biggest challenge we face in trying to understand traditional trinitarian belief besides small brains is the limitations of human language. During the first four centuries of Christianity, Christian leaders used language and ideas borrowed from Greek philosophy and thought as they tried to communicate this great belief. This explains why it is difficult for those unfamiliar with this Greek cultural and philosophical background to follow their reasoning.

The classic theological formulation was offered by some theologians who are named the "Cappadocian fathers" so-called because they lived and worked in the region of Cappadocia, modern Turkey. Their names are Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of

Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea. Their theological achievement was to speak of the Trinity as consisting of God as one "essence" (*ousia*) but three "centers of consciousness" or "independent realities" (*hypostaseis*). This was their way of affirming that the three trinitarian persons share the same will, nature, and essence. Yet each also enjoys special properties and engages in unique activities (Grenz). It is important to keep in mind that "persons" did not convey the individual sense of person for them as it does for us today. The Cappadocian theologians used ideas of mutual sharing, suggesting that the work of one person in the Godhead is the work of each. There is distinctiveness of functioning but commonality of divine essence. Yet all 3 persons are involved in God's self-revelation as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

There is a Three-in-Oneness (Triunity) often discussed as the Social Trinity. God discloses Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in some kind of relational unity - His revelation always involves God, Christ, and Spirit in some order. The one God is not an undifferentiated, solitary oneness, but a multiplicity - the three members of the Trinity: Father, Son, Spirit. He is eternally three persons. God is also a diversity-within-unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternally different from each other and carry out different tasks in the one divine program. The Father is the originator. The Son is the revealer. The Spirit is the completer or effecter. The work of the triune God follows a specific order: the Father acts, through the Son, by the agency of the H.S.) Sum: The three members of the Trinity are an eternal unity-in-diversity. Father, Son, and Spirit together comprise the one divine reality and share the one divine essence (Grenz).

All this theologizing surely makes our heads swim. Can't we make things simpler by using **analogies** to illustrate how the Trinity can be more easily understood? Maybe you've heard someone say the Trinity can be illustrated by water: liquid, ice or vapor, or as a tree: roots, trunk, branches, or an egg: shell, white, and yolk, plus many others. Do these really simplify things for us or do they slip off into unintended heretical misunderstandings? The illustrations I just mentioned all invariably lead to some kind of tritheism. Augustine who wrote more about the Trinity than any other early Church theologian preferred to use psychological analogies from our human makeup such as memory, intelligence and will. He liked to stress the unity of God before talking about the distinctive persons within the Trinity. Thus, today some think of the Trinity like one person being a husband, father, and employee. This line of thinking invariably slips into the heresy of modalism, overstating the unity and distorting the distinctiveness of the persons. In modalism there is no genuine self-revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the distinctions of the persons are totally obliterated. Roger Olson says he finds it helpful to think of the Trinity as "God is one 'what' and three 'whos'".

The Cappadocian Fathers sought to avoid tritheism and modalism with their concept of the "mutual interpenetration of the persons of the Godhead", preserving the unity of God the Father yet allowing for equal deity among the three. German Protestant theologians like Moltmann and Pannenberg stay away from using the Greek philosophical concept of substance and opt for a social analogy, particular love within a community. Moltmann, for example, focuses on the Trinity as a dynamic community of "interdependence and mutuality". God is a unity but he is also a fellowship of persons

who are relational realities who mutually give and receive love from each other. When we say Trinity, we mean God eternally lives in community. He has a social life as Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As three persons their distinctive identifies arise in their deepest relationship with one another. The Cappadocians said to think of it as the persons indwelling each other or "making room" for each other in a beautiful kind of "trinitarian hospitality". We can say that Trinity is God's name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Jenson in McGrath, "The Doctrine of the Trinity", 33).

The key challenge is a balanced tension that is supported in Scripture. We can affirm the mystery of this great belief even though we admit to Muslims and Jews who deny the reality of the Trinity that we do not totally comprehend or understand what we believe. As Christians we affirm it as an utterly indispensable belief even though we cannot and do not fully understand it. "How one being can be three persons and how three persons can be one being seems beyond comprehension" (Olson, 145). How God is triune may be a mystery to us but *that he is triune, a community of persons bonded inseparable in love together is an affirmation of faith rooted in Scripture and Christian experience.*

In spite of, if not in light of all our theological thought and talk, we still come down to the awesome mysterious of the Trinity. Augustine once said we do not talk about the Trinity to explain it but because some like Arius have said things about it which do not square with Scripture and Christian experience. But I would add that we talk about it for the same reason we talk about our salvation in Christ. God is triune because his way of saving us affirms belief in the Trinity. Scientists find themselves in a similar cerebral dilemma when they try to understand the nature of light. Does light consist of waves or particles of energy? Or both? One physics major remarked to Millard Erickson, "On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we think of light as waves. On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, we picture it as particles of energy" (Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, 68).

IV. How Important Is This Belief in the Trinity?

You might as well ask how important is this particular belief when it comes to the matter of personal salvation? Is Jesus Christ God incarnate? Can we be saved apart from the person/work of the Holy Spirit? Prior to the 20th century, the consensus among orthodox Christians was that it was important to believe rightly. For sure, we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sins. Believing that Jesus is God incarnate and that God is a triune community who draws us into this trinitarian fellowship is "shorthand for salvation" (Olson, 146). What more practical important could this belief have? A Christian physician attending the birth of a child understands the biology involved yet marvels at the mysterious of how we are "wondrously made".

Many in our generation insist that it is not so important any more what one believes, it is how we live together that really counts. But we now see that as a half-truth. It does matter what one believes. The teaching of the Trinity itself illustrates how God has chosen to relate to us. In the cross the triune God answers the question of evil and

suffering. The Son dies on the cross but the Father and the Spirit also suffer vicariously. Trinity belief clearly distinguishes Christianity from other kinds of believers in the world. It makes Christianity different from other monotheistic faiths like Judaism and Islam as well as polytheistic religions. Trinity belief is what gives Christianity its evangelistic and missionary motivation.

Two beautiful churches face each other in Jerusalem. On the side of the one called the Dome of the Rock, is a saying written in Arabic, "God has no son," which you may recognize comes from the Qu'ran. Islam denies that Christ died on the cross. The other building across from it is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in sight of the blood-stained pavement where Christ walked to the cross. One church building proclaims that God doesn't need a son; the other tells the story of God the Son who suffered, died and rose again (George, 122).

V. Theological Summary

Timothy George, "In simplest terms we can say this: The doctrine of the Trinity is the necessary theological framework for understanding the story of Jesus as the story of God; or put otherwise, it is the exposition of the Old Testament affirmation 'God is One,' and the New Testament confession 'Jesus is Lord' neither of which can be understood apart from the person of the Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:3, "The Trinity and the Challenge of Islam," 114).

Bruce Shelley insists we can unreservedly say "In summary, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. The result is not three gods, but one. What they share equally and completely is deity. At the same time, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Father. The distinctions are real. The 'Persons' are within the one personal deity (unity). Beyond that summation, perhaps the best Christian response is praise in song--precisely what we do in our churches. "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty...God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!" After all, genuine love always moves beyond descriptions to the wonder of reality" (*Theology for Ordinary People*, 136).

Part II: The Christian Belief in Humanity

I. Introduction

We can say that we humans are a mystery to everyone but God himself. We were created to be rational yet we often live so irrationally. We have God-given abilities to be so compassionate yet we can be so murderous. We are created free yet we so often are caught in the bondage of our own undoing. Shakespeare put it, "what a work of art" we are. The Bible and Christian theology both attest to the goodness AND the fallenness of humanity. There is clearly a "both/and" perspective about our humanity: God creates us and smiles on the humanity he himself has made in Gen. 1-2; then we turn the page to Gen. 3 and see human fallenness. The human story begins with God's creation and his placing within us his image and quickly moves to the reality of human sinfulness. Mark Twain quoted the Psalmist who said we were created a little lower than the angels, and then added, "we've been getting lower every since." The atheist Christopher Hitchens has surmised that "the fantastic idea that the cosmos was made with humans in mind strikes (him) me as the highest form of arrogant self-centredness." The psalmist a long time ago asked basically the same question: Psalm 8 :4 but in a much more humble and appreciative way.

One of the key distinctions between us humans and the rest of the animal world is our need and ability to ask questions. We are self-transcendent in that we can see beyond ourselves and wonder: Who am I? How did I get here? What's wrong with me and my world? And where is there a remedy for what's wrong? Animals apparently are not concerned with these kinds of questions.

Humanity is a topic that gets lots of attention these days. But be warned, there are a number of false understandings being pushed today. We do well to recognize them and learn how to answer from a biblical perspective. In recent centuries the traditional understanding of human nature has been challenged. Today some question if there really is a reality called "human nature" or at least if the traditional biblical interpretation of it is accurate. These contrary claims represent a clash of worldviews with the teaching of Christianity.

One of the most current is that humans are only animals. This view is stressed by contemporary sociobiologists like Harvard zoologist Edward Wilson. Our commonality with the rest of the animal world consists in our common need to reproduce. Sociobiologists see the sexual drive to get our genes into the next generation as the full and only necessary explanation of "who are we?" Inability to bear children it is claimed explains much of the contemporary discontent in societies. The creation story in Genesis does speak of God's command that humans reproduce and populate the earth and of animals as having souls. But animals have no sense of self-transcendence or afterlife as humans do. Animals are important and partly point to the glory of the Creator but only humans are said by Genesis to have a personal relationship with God. Only humans are created as God's image to the world.

Another is the idea that humans are like computers. This view claims we are like machines who are far more complex than any other species in the animal kingdom. This is a sort of “genes are us” idea. We are what our DNA makes us. Geneticists point out that chimpanzees do share almost all of our DNA. Yet, it also needs to be said that the variation within human DNA is “actually larger than the variation between humans and chimpanzees” (Joel Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life*, 39). Recently, some neuroscientists have claimed our brains do everything that traditionally is claimed for the human soul. Thus, they conclude the idea of the “soul” in humans is scientifically obsolete. Recent successful attempts to place silicon chips in the bodies of stroke victims which then trigger electrochemical changes enabling them to communicate are hailed as a long step toward creating the first fully bionic human. Such remarkable advances in biotechnology prompt many to ask if God is really necessary any longer with all the abilities humans have now to self-create! Christian theology stresses life as sacred because it is God himself who holds the patent on creation. Think of it this way, of God stamping the following disclaimer in red ink on our backside at birth, “remember you can and will be recalled some day by your Maker!”

Still another non-Christian perspective is secular humanism which is anti-God, humanly-centred and puts reason over faith and humanistic values over God values. This is a thoroughgoing humanistic, positive philosophy of existence that has no room whatsoever for God. It allows for no depravity and no spirituality; it is very utilitarian (greatest good for greatest number). Total reliance is given to the central position of humanity as “the greatest good”. Genesis teaches that humans as created by God are good, but that they are also fallen. We have the latitude of freedom. But this ability to choose is not the source or reason of our essence. That source is in God’s creative purpose that we glorify him.

Evolutionary naturalism is yet another view that has no place for a Creator God. It is possible to hold to limited evolutionary views that do not contradict Christian understanding of human nature. In other words, many Christians who are professional scientists believe in a Creator God who may have chosen to use evolutionary processes to some degree. This is different however from naturalistic evolution which is a direct denial of a Creator God. Steven Pinker of Harvard states this view: “Like all living things, we are outcomes of natural selection; we got here because we inherited traits that allowed our ancestors to survive, find mates, and reproduce” (cited in Gushee, 30). I don’t agree with this idea. At the same time, I personally do not see the need for putting science and theology in conflict. I think scientists can help us understand many of the things about how God *may* have created. But scientists do not try to answer questions like “Why” or “Who”. Christian theology affirms the Who as God and the Why as involving his creative-redemptive purposes.

A similar non-Christian approach is the one which sees humans as blank slates. No two humans have the same nature because our lives are exclusively made up of the result of choices we personally make or others make for us. Interestingly, Steven Pinker rejects this view. He insists we all experience a sort of internal programming that allows us to develop an “unlimited set of thoughts and behaviour” (cited in Gushee, 32). Yet he

clearly rejects the Christian belief of a soul or self, opting instead for cognitive neuroscience. So Pinker is small comfort in helping us affirm God as the source of human essence. He insists what Christians call the "soul", science sees as the "brain". His understanding has no place for God's creation of humans, selfhood, or any kind of spiritual relationship with God. Genesis clearly teaches us that God made us special but above all, it teaches that the source of our identity AND our essence have their origin in God.

There are many other views which contradict biblical teaching about human origins. The last one I'll mention is the one perhaps the most challenging of all because it has untold challenges for human nature as well as the planet. It is the burgeoning field of biotechnology and its developments including genetics, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, and cloning. Humans are plunging headlong into visions of designer babies, mixing animals and machines, and the like. At what point do we remake ourselves in ways which transcend the humanity God intends? Is it always the case that what is technological possible is what should always be done? When do we cross the line and start trying to either "play God" or "replace God"?

While some of these non-Christian views about humanity have partial truth, all of them at some point deny or distort the biblical teaching about God being the source of human essence, identity and purpose. Plus, a major part of our humanity they either ignore or distort is that God created us for community, preeminently with him but also with each other and the rest of creation. This community under the reign of God is the biblical trajectory throughout the story of God's plan for creating humans. It is in this truth affirmation that Christians believe the questions Who are we? Why are we here? What's wrong with us? And what has God done about it? all find their most meaningful answers.

In this study of the Christian belief of humanity, we will think about 3 major aspects of our human nature in God's purpose. (1) We have a biological (animal) AND a spiritual dimension (often called soul). (2) We are distinctive within the animal kingdom because we have been made in God's image. It is this being created in God's image as distinct from the animal kingdom which gives us both our "special dignity" and a God-given assignment to be his image in the world. (3) Our original sin and "total depravity" originated with our original parents and was passed to us (we'll study different interpretations how this possibly happens). The question of "original sin" is multi-faceted: For whose sin does God hold us accountable-- Adam/Eve's or our own or both theirs and ours? Overall, caution must be taken to avoid speculation where the Bible is not clearly precise in its teaching. We neither want to overstate biblical teaching nor do we want to understate it. Let's begin the main part of our study by looking at God's creation of our humanity. Humanity is the necessary term to avoid leaving out either half of the human race.

II. Humans Created by God as Good

Gen. 1:26-31: *Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl the earth. So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth. God also said, 'Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth, and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This food will be for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls upon the earth—everything having the breath of life in it. (I have given) every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw all that He had made, and it was very good (HCSB).*

1. Created by God in His Image (who am I, why here?)

What does it mean to be “distinctively human”? Creation of humanity by God is a distinct, special act. In the story of creation in Genesis 1, we see how we as humans are similar to the rest of the animal kingdom and also how we are different. Both animals and humans are by God’s design to reproduce and fill the earths and seas. But only humans are given the obligation to “subdue”, “to have dominion over the entire earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). This means a God-given task, not a human excuse to exploit and destroy God’s good creation. This involves creation care, a God-assigned stewardship of responsibility. Plus, only humans are created in God’s likeness, his image; only with humans does God have direct communication. This divine likeness is clearly the most distinguishable feature of human creaturehood. It means that the essential nature and essence of humans has been "standardized" by God if you please. Cultures are different but human nature is the same the world over because we've all been created in God's image. He has created us independently of himself yet with God-given capacities to relate to him. This "earth community" is sacred made for all creation to share together. Yet in all creation only humans are made in the image of God. The most distinctive quality of being human is having been created in God's image: But what does “being created in the image of God really mean?” We will see that it while it means we have kind of likeness to God, it does not mean we have an identity with God. We are not divine.

Explicit references in the Bible are few but the idea is pervasive throughout the Bible. Specific references are found in (Genesis, Paul and James) Gen. 1.26-27; 5.1; 9.6; Paul: 1 Cor 11.7; 2 Cor 3.18; Rom 8.29; Jas 3.9. Yet none of these actual Scriptures explicitly explain or define “image of God”. a. Is it something we possess by virtue of our humanity? b. Is it our relationship with God? c. Is it present, future or both? d. Is it only symbolical? Is it static or dynamic? e. How does it relate to “being in Christ?” Is it a physical resemblance? Mormons think so, so do many New Agers. Or does it refer to our ability to stand upright, something also common to certain animals? Some think it relates to God’s assignment to humanity to “have dominion” over creation but none of the references to image of God clearly make this connection. The image of God means humans are created with a special status, divine image bearers in terms of purpose, that we are to be like God, involving growth and transformation, which will be completed

eschatologically (Daniel Migliore - "Being created in the image of God is not a state or a condition but a movement with a goal: human beings are restless for a fulfillment of life not yet realized." But in the end we will be completely God's image.

I like Roger Olson's definition it is "a multifaceted, diverse collection of Godlike qualities in humanity that together may, with proper qualifications be called personhood. While "image" and "likeness" in Gen. 1:27 are an example of double emphasis or Hebraic parallelism and do not have separate meaning, "image of God" does relate to God's design for us. We are to mirror for the sake of the creation, the nature of our Creator. We are to be "like God" to the world. Like the Roman soldier bearing the image of Caesar where ever he went in his Graeco-Roman world, we represent our God on this earth. That is a high calling and responsibility. We often fail in being true image bearers of God; that is why it is important to relate this concept to Paul's teaching of Christ as the perfect image of God.

Christ is the image of God in both redemption and creation. Hebs 1.3b implies Christ being like God in his deity and humanity, see also Col. 1.15. The image of God in Christ which is bestowed upon the believer develops in the dynamic process of transformation in salvation. It means: (a) We are recipients of God's special love; (b) We have special worth in God's sight; (c) Having special responsibility to Creator involves a managerial function. We are his representatives; only He is sovereign; we are His stewards. It involves both a process and a future goal in our progressively becoming the image of God through Christ in us. God expects all persons to mirror His nature but only Christ is fully and completely the image of God (see 2 Cor 4:4; Col. 1:15); He alone brings us to participate in His image of God. As we submit to his Lordship, Christ is progressively realizing God's true image in us. One of the things we can look forward to when he returns is that he will restore completely the image of God in us that will truly glorify God and honour our Lord. In summary, we can say that the concept of "image of God" is relational; it involves our covenant participation with God to be his image bearers on this earth. To be created by God in his image means he has called us to be "covenant partners" with him.

Finally, Christian belief of the image of God in humans helps explain why humans are innately religious and crave an object of worship. The belief of the image of God affirms that humans, in spite of their sin, are valuable in God's sight and worthy of being redeemed. Accepting the affirmation of being made in the image of God makes one dissatisfied with any reductionist view of humanity, such as: a Marxist view of humans as economic animals with class struggles; b. Freud's view of humans as essentially sexual drives; c. Totalitarianism's view of humans as political tools of civil states d. Naturalism's view of humans as the outcome of accidental collection of atoms. Rather, we belong to God because we bear the divine image. Since Jesus is the full image of God, He is to be our pattern for being created in the image of God. We only experience full humanity when we are properly related to God, and in Christ we experience that special standing with God. It involves a special relationship with Him. The image of God is universal in humans.

2. Embodied Persons

Let's turn now to another pivotal passage in the creation story, Gen. 2:7: *Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being* (HCSB). This brings up the question again, "Who am I?" The Greek philosopher Plato long ago taught that we humans have an immortal soul that is only temporarily housed in a despicable body. The goal of life is to be rid of the body and our soul be released to experience its purity in eternity. Some today say that this so-called "immortal soul" is our self as a real person. There are several problems with this kind of thinking about who we are. First, we do not have an immortal soul by virtue of being born. The Bible does NOT teach us that within every person is something that never dies. Paul says that *only* God is immortal (1 Tim. 1:17). More significantly, this idea of an immortal soul in every person is too narrow a view of what Paul in 1 Cor. 15 describes as immortality as given *by God*. It is God who *gives* immortality to the resurrection bodies of Christian believers. Non-Christians experience what the Bible calls an everlasting *death* and eternal separation from God. This does not mean that they are completely destroyed in hell and have no further existence; it does mean they NOT have immortal *life*. We'll come back to this when we talk later about the Christian belief in last things near the end of our course.

Is there a better way of describing who I am rather than as an "immortal soul"? There are several aspects to consider. Am I a body or am I a body that has a soul? Where's the real me? Is who I am centered in my soul? Maybe I am a body that has a spirit. Can I say "I am a soul" (not have a soul), that my physical body is the visible form of my personal identity? What if I am a body that has a soul and a spirit? Gets confusing doesn't it? It gets even more complicated. Am I a body with a soul now but before I was born I was only a soul and when I die I'll only be a soul again? As you might expect, there's much disagreement. Most would agree, however, we live in a physical organism called a body, but what's inside us and what's the best way to describe our human makeup? That's the rub and the challenge.

Are we body and soul? Some think this makes the most sense. Our physical dimension is a body and our spiritual dimension can be called our soul. Jesus said don't fear anyone who can destroy the body but fear God who has the capacity to destroy both soul and body (Matt. 10:28). Paul *seems* to have talked about a dualism of soul and body: *For in this bodily tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling... We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord* (2 Cor. 2:5, 8). But Paul was not disparaging the significance of human body. He was not saying the soul which we cannot see is more important than the body we can see. Seeing ourselves only as a body-soul dualism may sound appealing to many yet raises some troubling questions. First, if we are body-soul, how do we appreciate both without shortchanging the other? Secondly, much is said in Scripture about the God-intended goodness of our physical bodies. To see body and soul as a dualism, as two separate entities within us, obscures the interaction that happens in us as we have experiences like pain, sex, and joy which affect both our body and soul.

Are we body, soul and spirit? This is the perspective we have a body, but we also have another dimension made up as soul and spirit. Paul prays for the Thessalonian Christians, that their *spirit, soul and body be kept sound and blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess. 5:23). Also, the writer of Hebrews talked about the way God's Word can pierce the soul and the spirit. (Hebs. 4:12). The soul is thought of as the seat of our personality, mind and emotions, while spirit is our capacity for relating to God, ourselves, our neighbors and also is made up of our will. Why would there a difference between the soul and the Spirit? In the creation story we find that animals also have souls, but they are not able to relate to God as humans do. We have a spiritual dimension that animals do not have. Our spirit then is part of our being created in God's image and gives us the capacity for spiritual experience with God. Now it may strike you that all this talk about separate parts of our humanity leaves us rather fragmented as persons. Is that true? Can we understand ourselves as holistic persons even though we may have different dimensions or aspects of our humanity? I think that is indeed the case.

We are holistic, embodied persons. Some evolutionary scientists like Steven Pinker claim they can clear up our dilemma in a hurry. We only need to understand ourselves as having NO spiritual dimension at all. We are only biological creatures with a brain that does everything that Christians claim the soul and spirit do. If that were true, we as humans would indeed be most pitiful. But that's not the way God made us. I think the Bible teaches that we are a "single embodied self" that is responsible for all our thoughts and actions. The phrase is a bit heavy, but we are a "psychosomatic unity". When we die, we trust God will reanimate our bodies as spiritual bodies which are capable of living in eternal relationship with Him. But where does this leave us with the terms like soul, body, spirit which are all biblical terms? I think we can best see these as facets, aspects or dimensions of how God has made us. We studied how the Trinity is the One God in three persons, not as separate individuals, but One God who is tri-personal as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Similarly, God has made us one self but in three dimensions: body, soul and spirit. These three dimensions are fully integrated, if we're healthy in all categories! These three facets interweave and intertwine. We can say we are both oneness and threeness. I like the way David Gushee puts it: "We are embodied souls and ensouled bodies; we are embodied spirits and inspirited bodies; likewise, we are ensouled spirits and inspirited souls" (53).

Thinking about who we are as persons helps answer the familiar question when do we get our soul? Mormons and some Eastern religions think all souls pre-exist and the sooner they're born into human bodies the better. Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and many Reformed believers opt for creationism, that is, God creates the individual soul sometime between conception and birth (see Eccl. 12:7; Isa. 42:5; Heb.12:9). Lutherans believe we get our souls biologically through our parents. The name for this is "traducianism". See Gen. 46:26; Heb. 7:9-10; Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15: 22; Eph 2:3. . At what "point" does an embryo/fetus become a living soul (human)? What constitutes human life? How valuable is it to God? What about "designer babies?" What implications does this have for Jesus' identity and his own humanity? What implications does this have for human sinfulness? How one answers these and similar questions has

huge implications for what he or she may believe and do about abortion, eugenics, etc. My personal view is that we become human at conception even though we do not realize full personhood and self-awareness until after birth.

Summary: The most important features about God's creative purpose for humanity are: (1) We are clay (natural, physical) and have spiritual capacity (self-transcendence). (2) God has made us in his image/likeness. (3) Yet we have perverted God's creative purposes by our volitional sinfulness; thus, we are fallen. But where does sin come from in the first place? Why do we sin? Are we sinners because we must sin or because we do sin?

III. The Fallenness of Humanity: the Reality of Sin

Jean Bethke Elshtain says as she looks back on the Christian heritage, the consensus seems to be that we humans are characterized by two "D"s - our dignity and our depravity. How else could a cold-blooded killer like Jeffrey Dahmer who tortured, killed and cannibalized his victims, and the likes of a Wilberforce, John Wesley, or Mother Teresa live in the same human family? The human story clearly shows we are good (as God made us) yet we are also fallen (as we unmake ourselves). The key biblical word for our undoing of God's creative design of ourselves is called *sin*. Never has a 3-letter word had such depth and range. Perhaps no word in the English language is more controversial. In Mandarin Chinese the word for "sin" is "crime" and that is probably how most people prefer to see it, at least those who have not been caught and convicted.

In this final section on humanity we will try to answer several questions: How does the Bible define sin? What does total depravity mean and what does it not mean? What is original sin and how does it affect us? What are the main results of sin?

1. Biblical Definitions of Sin

Genesis 3 is the original story of human fallenness. We find that human sinfulness did not enter the world by means of a design flaw in the way God made us. God made us free and accountable to him, capable of obedience and disobedience. Our original parents disobeyed God and so do we. God is not responsible for our being sinners; we accomplish that by ourselves with Satan's help. The only perfect human without sin was our Lord and Saviour. The Bible mainly defines sin in both Old and New Testaments as "missing the mark" or "transgressing against God". There are many other Hebrew and Greek terms describing a whole litany of human rebellion against God. Sin can best be summarized most simply as human failure, failure to be what God expects and enables us to be, both by acts of omission as well as commission. Above all, the Bible describes sin as a heart problem, especially in Jer. & Ezek., Jer 17.9 *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt*. Ezek. 11.19: David prayed for a new heart in Ps 51. Paul described our hearts as "foolish" (Rom. 1:21) and our minds as "corrupt" (1 Tim. 6:5). It is very important to remember that it is God himself who defines what sin is in Holy Scripture. James says we do not get away with blaming God for our sin, it is our own inside job: *No one undergoing a trial should say, 'I am being tempted by God.'* For

God is not tempted by evil, and he Himself doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death (James 1:13-15, HCSB).

2. Total Depravity

In his autobiography, called *Confessions*, Augustine told how he and some other adolescents stole some pears from a neighbor's vineyard, not because they were hungry but because they knew it was wrong. "I chose to steal not because I was compelled to by poverty or hunger, but just from a belly full of sin...I didn't take pleasure in what I stole--I just enjoyed stealing and sinning." G. K. Chesterton was fond of saying that the most indisputable Christian belief is human depravity. Following Augustine, the great Catholic theologian of the 4th century, the Protestant reformers like Luther and Calvin, stressed this belief. Basically what it means is that we cannot save ourselves. It does not mean that we are nothing but terrible, hopeless sinners. Above all, it means that only God can save us. It is utterly impossible for us to merit our salvation by living a life that is without sin, because we don't. So this idea of "total depravity" relates to the Reformation affirmation that we are "saved only by grace".

3. Original Sin

What is meant by original sin? The term itself is not in the Bible as such but the Bible has many descriptions of it. It is not just the acts of sin we do but our condition as sinners. You could say that the "most original sin" was committed by our original parents, Adam and Eve. But we call their sin "original" because we do what they did in our own rebellion against God's authority. Pelagius denied the reality of original sin as do Muslims and others today. Instead, we are born with a blank slate; if we follow the good example (Jesus) and not the bad one (Adam), we won't sin. Augustine replied this idea: "nice try, Pelagius" – that may have been possible BEFORE the Fall, but not any more. Then Augustine went on to develop a theology of infant baptism which "washes" away the taint of original sin for babies. (Not a part of Christian consensus!) Yet we are born with the "sin disease" for which at some point in the future we will put our "own stamp of approval" and be "accountable before God" for our individual sinfulness. Wesley said original sin is "not imputed" or "charged" to infants; however, they are accountable for their own personal sin which they will commit eventually.

Genesis answers the question, "How did sin come into the world? "Through one man" (Adam). In Romans 5.12, Paul says this is why "in Adam (we) all die" (1 Cor. 15.22 repeats this idea). There have been different interpretations in Christian history explaining how we are connected to the sin of Adam and Eve. (1) Augustine thought we are connected by means of the natural headship of Adam; in other words that we were incipiently there at the fountainhead of the human race. (2) John Calvin saw our connection in a representative kind of way. Adam and Eve decided for the rest of the human race to sin against God and thus we all were incriminated by their sin. This is called the federal headship view. You may be having difficulty assimilating all of this.

That's quite understandable. The Bible clearly teaches we are sinners. But the question at hand asks, when do we become sinners ourselves by sinning like our parents did in the garden?

While it is easy to affirm the universality of sin, it is difficult to understand clearly the relationship between sin of Adam and Eve and *our* sin. Paul seems to begin such an explanation does NOT finish the sentence he starts in Rom 5.12. He does NOT explain **how** Adam's sin leads to all becoming sinners. Neither does he explain **how** we participate in Christ's righteousness. Rom 5.12-21 does NOT clearly and unequivocally declare all persons inherit guilt directly because of Adam's sin (Grenz). Yet ...a. There must be a place for a sinful nature as well as sinful deeds; b. Sin is both individual and social; c. We must accept individual responsibility and consequences for our own personal sin (sins); d. The doctrine of original sin stresses the universality of sin, not biological transmission of sin; e. The semi-Pelagian view asserts that all humans are tainted by Adam and Eve's sin and thus are inclined toward evil, but humans are neither totally unable to do good nor are they directly involved in the guilt of Adam.

In the Augustinian-Lutheran-reformed perspectives it is explained this way: at birth the will is in bondage to pull of sin – “in Adam’s fall we sinned all”; all (including infants). This view is still held by RCs, Lutherans, Anglicans and Reformed. The Anabaptist tradition takes a different approach. (They were the radical reformers who were erstwhile followers of Zwingli who later parted company with him). The Anabaptists said “no” to “inherited guilt” but did accept the view that inherited depravity would eventually actualize in personal acts of sin; thus infants are innocent *until* they “become actual sinners”. All who have normal intelligence do eventually sin; all have the propensity (inclination toward sin), and are held accountable for committed sin before God. Thus Anabaptists denied infant baptism as necessary and biblical. Personally, I believe the Anabaptists are right about our not having inherited the guilt of Adam and Eve, though we certainly give evidence of the tendency and ability to sin. That happens when we realize *before God* we sin against him.

Carlyle Marney was once asked, “Where is the Garden of Eden?” Marney replied, “215 Elm Street, Harriman, Tennessee.” “You’re lying,” the person said. “It’s supposed to be someplace in the Middle East.” “Well, you couldn’t prove it by me,” Marney said. “For there on Elm Street, when I was but a boy, I stole a quarter out of my Mama’s purse and went down to the store and bought me some candy and ate it, and then I was so ashamed that I came back and hid in my Mama’s closet. It was there that she found me and asked, ‘Where are you? Why are you hiding? What have you done?’”

Questions to consider: Do we have a sinful nature? Pelagius said “No”. He said we could live a perfect life simply by following the perfect example of Christ instead of Adam. All others have said “Yes”! Am I accountable for sinful deeds which come from a nature or context I inherited? Those who follow imputation say yes; others, no. Am I guilty of sin of Adam and Eve *plus* my own? Realists say yes because of common nature Federalists say yes because of covenant of works with Adam; others say it is mediated through our depravity.

It was the Christian philosopher Pascal in the 17th century who remarked, "we don't understand what original sin is, but without it we don't understand anything about ourselves." I think he was acknowledging there are some things about original sin we don't understand, like how did it get from Adam to us? Yet if we don't acknowledge the presence of our *own sin*, we cannot begin to understand ourselves.

4. Major Results of Sin

One of the main results of sin is that it **enslaves** us. Sin becomes addictive and we cannot extract ourselves from its grasp without God's redeeming grace and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Sin becomes like a spiral or addictive cycle that draws us deeper and deeper into the power of sin over us. The impact of our fallenness penetrates every aspect of our lives.

Sin's enslavement is directly related to the reality of our **estrangement** and **alienation** from God. It also brings about alienation from others as well as ourselves.

Condemnation before a righteous God is another result. But what about infants or persons who do not have normal intelligence? Are they also condemned? It is true that everyone is born with a sinful disposition or propensity to sin but only those through their fallen nature who make wrong moral choices will be condemned by God. Children who have not yet reached a level of moral accountability before God are safe in God's hands until they reach that stage when God holds them responsible.

Still one other result of our fallenness is **depravity** which we have already seen is our total helplessness to save ourselves from our sin. The problem of sin is so radical, so deep within us, that only God can remedy our sin.

Thus sin is not merely violating a moral code set up in human societies or cultures. Sin is a personal disruption of our fellowship with God. It is a violation against God. As David prayed, "Against you, O God, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). The results of personal and corporate sin are devastating to humans and the creation. We cannot solve our sin problem ourselves. We cannot remedy sin's condemning, enslaving, depraving, estranging impact over us. Only a merciful God can do that.

IV. Theological Summary

Sondra Wheeler offers a check point list of the major aspects of humanity as seen by Christians: (1) We are human persons specifically created by God. This we come from God and do not make our own human essence. God has decided that. (2) We are embodied persons who live in (3) community because we have social needs. (4) We are sinners because we of our own free will choose the bad instead of the good. (5) We are mortal and thus we will die. (6) But God offers his redeeming grace so that we may live with him eternally (cited in Gushee, 21).

The sin of our first parents did irreparably alter and corrupt the human nature they passed on to us; thus we do inherit a "depraved nature" or a "fallen disposition" from our ancestors. This is the solidarity of the human race. (a) We personally sin as we act out our corrupted humanity which is ours by heredity and socialization. (b) This is precisely why we must hurry on to Christology: identity and mission of our redeeming Lord Jesus Christ. Such a dark picture of what we become because of our personal sin and our total inability to save ourselves helps us more than anything see the urgency of turning next to the One who can and will save us. Next week we study the Christian beliefs in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.