

# 301: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I

## Week 3 - Creation + Biblical Anthropology TEACHER NOTES

Two weeks ago we talked about how everyone is a theologian. We all subscribe to some worldview, or understanding of the world to build their lives on. We talked about how the Bible is the most trustworthy and authoritative book to build your life on.

Last week we looked at Genesis 1:1, and talked about how the most foundational building block in understanding systematic theology is looking at who God is and what makes Him so unique. So we talked about the arguments for God and His Trinitarian nature - you know, real light stuff.

So let's continue building out our theology and pick up where we left off. Genesis 1:1

### **Genesis 1:1**

In the beginning God (ok check) created

Ok stop right there.

Created. What's that mean? This is similar to last week, for thousands of years people had no problem believing in a higher power and that this higher power created everything you see. But in the last 100 years or so, living in the secular West, we need to build this out a little bit more. There is an assumption or "tension" that you can't hold to belief in the Bible and science.

So today we're going to play a little defense again, and then press into what makes the Bible so unique when it comes to this topic.

Part of what makes this topic so tricky is there's some cultural history tied to this whole thing. So to start, we got to go back to where this tension arose in the first place. 1925. Dayton, Tennessee

In this small town there was a substitute high school science teacher by the name of John Thomas Scopes who violated the Butler Act. The Butler act said you could not teach evolution in public schools but only Intelligent Design. He taught evolution anyway, was fined for it and sent to trial.

In the larger cultural context, science vs religion seemed to be clashing and once news media caught wind of this story, this became a huge cultural event. Who would win? Would the courts side with religion or science? Once this trial made national news, two well-known lawyers got involved: William Jennings

Bryan was the prosecutor (who defended Intelligent Design/The Butler Acts) and defendant Clarence Darrow (who defended the teacher Scopes).<sup>1</sup>

So the trial began and while witnesses were being called to the stand and evidence was given there was a bit of a twist. The defendant, Darrow, called to the witness stand the prosecutor, Bryan. Darrow's whole purpose for putting him on the witness stand was to grill him about stories in the Bible and, "to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible" Darrow grilled him for two straight hours asking him questions like, "Do you really believe God made Eve out of Adam's rib?" "Where did Cain get his wife?" And "How many people lived in Ancient Egypt?" Bryan was not a Bible scholar and didn't really know how to answer these questions and thanks to the national media covering this story, the whole nation bore witness to it.

So how did the trial end? Bryan won the case, Intelligent Design was upheld in the schools but Darrow, by ridiculing Bryan publically, won the culture war. From then on, the culture viewed Christianity as out of touch with modern times and science.

What was the response of Christians at that time? Rather than create rational arguments for how to balance religion and science, Christians retreated from culture altogether. This mass cultural retreat by Christians sparked what is known as "fundamentalism." Fundamentalists view taking all parts of the Bible literally and treating all doctrines as primary (fundamental) issues. Rather than engaging culture, fundamentalists stuck to themselves and created their own subculture. The surrounding majority culture thought them out-of-touch and ignorant.<sup>2</sup>

Fast forward 100 years later and fundamentalism has its pockets in America, but fundamentalism eventually died down and made way for evangelicalism. For evangelicals, this means we treat all of the Bible as God's Word, *and* we understand that some things are not as fundamentally important as others. Some doctrines are of primary importance, others are secondary, while others are tertiary. In other words there are some things especially worth arguing for (like the person of Jesus, that God is Trinity) but they are other points that, because the Bible doesn't make as big of a deal of it, we shouldn't either. We would view the topic of creation at Midtown as a secondary/tertiary issue, meaning, we should have an understanding of the doctrine (because there is some mention in the Bible) but this is not something we should ever divide over.

However, that's not how culture tends to paint Christians. We're still seen as fundamentalists who don't like science.

And so today we want to explore that whole range of beliefs regarding the creation account. We want to recognize that there are things that all Christians must believe, there are things that Christians must reject

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<sup>1</sup> "The Scopes Trial, Evolution, and the Age of the Earth"

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/the-scopes-trial-evolution-and-the-age-of-the-earth/>

<sup>2</sup> "The Most Important Legacy of the Scopes Trial"

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/the-most-important-legacy-of-the-scopes-trial/>

in regards to their creation doctrine, and there are things where there can be disagreements based on Biblical interpretation, AND THEN get into what the creation account is really all about.

But before we do that, let's first just look at the Genesis account and look at the context surrounding Genesis 1.

In the Ancient Near East there were other pagan religions with their own version of how everything came into existence. Their creation stories were meant to showcase who their god really was and what life was really about.<sup>3</sup>

The most prominent *Enuma Elish*, also nicknamed the Babylonian Genesis. The god, Marduk, was at war with another god. Marduk slayed the other god, ripped them in two and one part of their body became heaven and one part became earth. Marduk is viewed as a violent war god that accidentally brought creation into existence. So what's the theology behind it? That life is all about violence and war.

And then you get to Genesis 1 and contrast those other creation stories to this one. What do you notice? God is not at war with anyone. We later find out in the Scripture, He's in loving harmony and community within His Trinitarian nature. And out of the overflowing love He has, He creates. Not out of war. Not out of want. Not out of need. He creates because He is good and loving. Self-sufficient.

Side note: This means God does not need you. God was not lonely, looking for friends to hang out with. Some of us grew up with bad Sunday school theology.

When you look at Genesis 1, what an ancient Israelite would notice is how this stands in stark contrast with the other gods vying for their hearts at the time. This God of the Bible is far different. He's a God of love calling people into loving partnership and friendship with Him.

So here are the two things all Christians are called to believe about creation, and then we can sweat the technicalities and come to different opinions and conclusions.

### **1. God is main agent in creation**

The first "must believe" for all Christians is that God created the universe out of nothing. The often quoted Latin phrase for this "out of nothing" is *ex nihilo*.

### **2. God created everything as good**

The brokenness we experience now was not how God originally created the world to be. We see in Scripture that before Genesis 3, God's original creation was very good. The Hebrew word Shalom.

#### **Genesis 1:31**

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

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<sup>3</sup> For a wider snapshot of these other stories, check out "Mesopotamian Creation Myths."  
[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/epic/hd\\_epic.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/epic/hd_epic.htm)

Genesis 1-2 tells that you are no cosmic accident but were thought up and created by a God who loves you immensely. God in His Triune-self creates out of overflow of His love.

So these are some basic building blocks when we think about creation. These are primary doctrines that we have to affirm as Bible-believing Christians. What becomes tricky is when we ask - ok, so how does this specifically play out? As we said before, while we should have some educated guesses when it comes to specifics we should have a persuasion but hold it loosely and celebrate other Christians who we have different views. Unity not uniformity.

I thought this helpful when I first heard this in college - Augustine in his commentary on the book of Genesis said that God “wrote” two books - He created/wrote the Bible and He created/wrote all of creation. Both have their origins in the same author and if that’s the case then they don’t contradict one another. We may find “tension” between the two but only because we are finite and there’s only so much God has revealed to us in Scripture.

And in this creation, like I said, we can have a spectrum for disagreement but we also want to know where “the line” is as far as what’s biblical and what’s not:

Now before we look at the different creation theories - these two facets are where we draw the line in the sand. If we want to hold to the authority of the Bible, we would reject the opposite of those two statements we made previously.

**1. If God is the main agent of creation, then we must reject Darwinian Evolution or any theory that does not have God as actor and agent in creation**

Any creation or evolutionary theory that does not have God as the central figure - that He created all things and for His glory is unbiblical. It directly contradicts truths of Scripture that we can understand regarding the creation account. If God is not the active agent over creation then He ceases to be sovereign and omnipotent. And if He ceases to be sovereign and omnipotent then He’s not someone to be trusted and worshipped.

**Gen 1—according to their “kind.”**

**Colossians 1:16**

**John 1:3**

Now should Christians still believe in evolution? Depends on how you define that. Do we believe in species adapting over time? Yeah. Do we believe that God was absent from the evolutionary process and everything was just random circumstances and chance? No.

**2. If God created everything good, then we must reject creation was originally broken.**

This is a contradiction of Genesis 1:31 - where God says creation was “very good.” The secular creation story not only has God absent but we see the universe being brought up out of death and chaos (coincidentally, that is similar to the other Ancient Near East stories we talked about earlier.) Rather, we

see in Genesis 1-3 that the brokenness and sin of our world entered in after Adam and Eve sinned against God.

### **Genesis 1:31**

Think about the implications of that for a minute. If the universe was made by random circumstance, chaos, and death - then that means there is no overarching meaning for our lives. We can invent "truth" or "meaning" to give shape to our lives but at the same time, if God is absent from creation, then whatever meaning we give ourselves is a total construct.

I love how author Wendell Berry puts it  
"To treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it."

At the same time, people who go against the idea of God behind creation, once again, is this presupposition of anti-supernaturalism. The supernatural cannot exist therefore it does not exist. Similar to what we encountered on week 1 when it came to arguments against the Bible.

It's this worldview, or dare I even say a religion of Scientism.

That says if you are to believe anything it needs to be tested and observed and analyzed. But you need to realize that is a faith statement.<sup>4</sup> "Everything needs scientific proof to be believed." Can you give me scientific proof to prove that?

Put another way, there is no experiment for testing the statement "No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible."

So as Christians, of course we're all for science. The Church has been filled with brilliant minds over the last 2,000 years that hold to the authority of the Bible and view science in the proper place: Kepler, Galileo, Pascal, Newton, the list is overwhelming<sup>5</sup>

AND

We need to put it in its proper place, to understand science as a gift from God who created all things.

So how does this work out exactly? How does the creation narrative work with scientific discovery? Here's some theories, and again, they're open handed. (Primarily because Genesis isn't written like a science text book.)

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<sup>4</sup> "...when studying a natural event, the scientist must always assume there is a natural cause. That is because natural causes are the only kind its methodology can address...There would be no experimental model for testing the statement: 'No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible.' It is therefore a philosophical presupposition and not a scientific finding." Tim Keller. The Reason for God.

<sup>5</sup>

<https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/the-rich-historic-roll-call-of-great-christian-thinkers-and-scientists/>

## **Young Earth Theories**

Young Earth Theories are creation viewpoints held by those who typically date the earth between 10,000-20,000 years old, rejecting modern dating systems as inaccurate and flawed.

**1. Mature Creationism** - Literal seven days. God made everything “look” old

**What:** The original creation was created with an “appearance of age”. When you look at Genesis 1-2, God creates Adam and Eve as adults, he doesn’t make them as babies. The same when he creates everything else. He creates mature trees and other plants and animals. If God can create aged humans, trees and everything else then it’s very easy for Him to create along with it, an aged Earth.

**Evidence For:** The adulthood of Adam and Eve is strong evidence for this position. Also The Flood in Genesis 7 and the curse in Genesis 3 are other means by which the Earth looks aged.

**Evidence Against:** Many say this view makes God deceptive in His creation. Why would He make everything looked so aged? Plus, how do we reconcile fossils? Did God create the earth with fossils already placed?

**2. Flood Geology** - Literal seven days. The flood made everything look old

**What:** The flood at the time of Noah in Genesis 7 drastically altered the landscape of the earth. Prior to the flood dinosaurs walked with human beings but then the flood deposited their fossil remains deep into the earth and the flood created much of the geographical landscape we see today. (This view has gained a lot of traction of recent by Ken Hamm and his Creation Museum --- AND --- it’s just one theory of many that faithful Christians have held to over the years.)

## **Old Earth Theories**

Old Earth Theories are creation viewpoints held by those who age the earth with science at 4.5 billion years old and a universe of about 15 billion years old.

**1. Day-Age View** - Seven days not literal but sequenced

**What:** In Genesis 1 the Hebrew term for “days” is “aeons.” One way of rendering that word is “day” another way of rendering that word “epochs” or “ages.” The Day-Age view says then that seven “days” actually represent seven stages of creation. In other words, the days of Genesis 1 are extremely long “ages” of time.

### **2 Peter 3:8**

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

**Evidence For:** Agrees with the current scientific estimate for an Earth 4.5 Billion years old is correct, it explains how the Bible is consistent with this aging.

**Evidence Against:** The greatest difficulty is Genesis 1's chronology. It puts the creation of the sun, moon, and stars (Day 4) millions of years *after* the creation of plants and trees (Day 3). It also puts the creation of birds and flying insects (Day 5) after the creation of plants and trees, but many plants and trees rely on insects to help them pollinate.

**2. Literary Framework View** - Seven days not literal, not sequenced

**What:** The events of Genesis 1 are not intended to indicate a chronological sequence of events, but are rather a literary "framework" used to teach us about God's creative activity. Days 1-3 are days of forming. Days 4-6 are days of filling. Use of six "days" is simply to teach us that God created everything. They are different pictures of creation, with nothing to do with time.

**Evidence For:** This framework avoids any conflict between Genesis 1 and 2 or with the age of the earth in modern science. Gives clarity to **Genesis 2:5**.

**Evidence Against:** Much of the correspondence between the two sets of days has to be suggested/IMPLIED and is tough to see. Genesis 2:5 is simply to be understood as an explanation of the general time frame in which God created man. Genesis 1 seems to imply a chronological series of events.

**3. Theistic Evolution** - Seven days not literal, God steps in at points

**What:** God let evolution happen but then came in and intervened in the process of evolution at three distinct points: (1) the creation of matter at the very beginning, (2) the creation of the simplest life form, and (3) the creation of man. God still spoke the world into existence, but his speaking initiated the evolutionary process.

**Evidence For:** Reconciles many of the evolutionary theories of the present while recognizing God as creator.

**Evidence Against:** This position seems to contradict God's purposefulness and intentionality in His creation, that He simply intervened in a larger game of chance and fate. (It's almost like the people that spin plates. God caused things spinning but then only steps when the plates got wobbly.) Also, Scripture seems to paint a picture of immediacy following God's speaking, not a delayed process that then begins. God's intricate design for the world contradicts the randomness that theistic evolution seems to portray.

**4. "Gap" Theory**- Seven days not literal, the Bible steps in at points

**What:** There is a gap of millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. During this gap, there was a rebellion by Satan and other fallen angels, and so God judged the earth so that "it became without form and void." God then used the chaos of this First Fall to create the physical realm. (an alternative translation of Gen. 1:2). Genesis 1:3 and following is the account of God's Second Creation.

**Evidence For:** The description of the earth was without form and void, as well as full of darkness, in Genesis 1:2 could indicate punishment. This also affirms evolutionary creation theory that thrives on disorder and death in order for life to adapt.

**Evidence Against:** The alternative translation of Genesis 1:2 is not very persuading or accurate. God looked at creation in Genesis 1:31 and declared it very good. If this was His second creation that experience the effects of rebellion, judgment, and darkness, it would be hard for him to declare it very good. A number of Scripture's later references to creation say that God created "everything", in the gap theory he had already created the world prior to this account.

#### **5. Poetic View - Seven days not literal**

**What:** Genesis 1 is meant to teach abstract theological ideas about who God is, not tell us specifics about how creation was made. Genesis 1 is in some ways a poetic song about a historical reality. To some degree this is similar to the literary framework theory but much more abstract.

**Evidence For:** Genesis 1 has a lot of rhythm and repetition similar to an ancient near East poem, also ancient near east poetry and text does not always emphasize chronology. Elsewhere in the Bible we see poetry/song based off of a historical events in the Bible. Examples include Exodus 15 and Judges 5. This view doesn't take a stance on any of the other theories and still remains biblical viable option. Tim Keller in the book *The Reason for God* advocates this position.

**Evidence Against:** Some view this as taking a "Christian agnostic" stance towards the whole topic. Also the examples of historic poems in the Old Testament are so rare and when they occur it is very overt that they are poems. In Genesis 1 we don't see an overt signal that we are meant to take this as poetry.

Before I give you my opinion on it, let me just repeat, this is not a make-or-break issue of Christianity, I don't spend too much time dwelling on it. If someone were to debate with me on their biblical creation view, they would win. I hold this loosely.

But think about the nature of the Bible. It's an amazing collection of literature, but not all of it is to be taken literal. How can you tell? You look at the context. Some parts of the Bible are obviously poetic. You can tell by its context.

So when I see Genesis 1, the repetition and structure works like a poem. So my opinion is, I think Genesis 1 is poetic, so the author is not trying to be scientific. I would even say, he's not even all that interested in chronology. What he is interested in is theology. God created. It's good. Mankind is in His image. So I don't know how to define that...Literary framework. Old Earth? I guess.

But here's what's crucial, and this is what we want to dial in on and spend the rest of our time: what is the last thing God makes? Humanity. This becomes the focal point of the entire Bible because what goes down in the first three chapters of the Bible is woven all through the rest of it.

If you don't understand creation biblically, you won't understand humanity biblically.

This is what's known as biblical **anthropology**. What does the Bible say about humanity.



As we get into this, one of the most important passages in beginning to understand this is Genesis 1:26-27

### **Genesis 1:26-27**

Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

(Quick aside, God created two genders in the fabric of human existence. Literally thousands of years, no question. Now we live in a world where people are outraged baby gender reveal parties.)

### **Image of God (or Imago Dei)**

Being made in the Imago Dei means a few things

#### **1 - Humanity shares some attributes of God**

We got into this last week. The communicable attributes are the things we have in common with God because we are made in His image. He's loving. We are able to love. He is wise. We are able to receive wisdom. God creates, we too are able to create.

I don't know about your experience but this was mine growing up in youth group. The Image of God meant that you are like God in some ways. Yes that's true but there's way more to it than that.

#### **2 - Humanity is the pinnacle of creation**

We know this because this is the last thing God creates. Once He creates them He calls it all very good. It's almost like humanity was the last piece of this complex puzzle God was creating. Once mankind was made, that was it. Perfect.

This means that humanity has rights over creation.

It's on us as good stewards to manage creation because we've been put in charge. This means your dogs are not the boss of you. You are the boss of them. (I think this gives us biblical precedent to care about their environment as well. Being in God's image does not give us license to do whatever we want on creation, but to care for it so that we can create environments for human life in the same God did for Adam and Eve in the Garden.

It also means all human life has dignity, value, and worth

Racial reconciliation - it goes against the Imago Dei to believe some people are less than others

Rights for the unborn

Disabilities - did you know you if pregnant you can get tested to see if your baby has down syndrome? Most upon hearing the news will terminate their child. We cry out against that because all life is of value and worth.

Elderly - most strong-group cultures see it as an honor to care for our elderly, not ours. We diminish their humanity because they're not as "useful" to society  
STC - this is why we put so much time, money and effort into loving and serving "the least of these." They're human beings made in the Image of God.

How backwards and twisted it's become that we've redefined the very idea of life. Life is based on what you do and how much freedom you can have. If life harms your freedom or if life doesn't seem valuable, we can disregard it. But we see with the Imago Dei, all life is important and valuable. They are all human beings with souls.

**C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory***

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare...There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

### **3 - Humanity is a representative for God**

In the Ancient Near East, an "image" was a statue or a symbol for the king that ruled in that area. When you saw the king's image, it served to remind you that this was their territory. The Egyptians were pros at this. They embodied their pharaohs into enormous statues in order to remind their people who ruled them. It's with this imagery that Imago Dei is used. Human beings are made bearing the mark of the King as a reminder over all of creation that God is in charge.

Anyone remember what the second commandment is of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20? The second command was not to make an image of God. Why? In part, because those already exist. Human beings are made in the image of God, we are in some sense his representation. Our presence as his image bearers indicates God rules and reigns over his creation.

This is what's known as the **cultural mandate**.

**Genesis 1:28**

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

This means Adam and Eve's job, humanity's job was to create Image Bearers similarly to how God created the first Image Bearers. They are to tend the Garden and spread the Garden that God originally made for Adam and Eve.

It was mission - God wants every fabric of creation to sing His praises. With His Image Bearers claiming their dominion on all of it.

So think about it: Everything was perfect. AND they had work to do. The mission still needed to get done.  
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Another interesting note before we move on. When God created humanity, He doesn't just speak. He gets His hands dirty. Genesis 2 says God made Adam from the dust of the ground. From the dirt He creates him.<sup>7</sup>

Even the name Adam is a play on words. Adam means man. Adamah mean dirt. I always thought that was weird. Dirt? Really. But I only think that way because my experience with dirt is it's gross, it's where things decay. But in the creation narrative, there's this mysterious connection that the author wants to show us between humanity and creation. Between us and the planet.

#### **4 - Humanity is made for relationship with God.**

In Genesis 3:8, God is walking through the garden looking for Adam and Eve. This picture of what was going on before sin entered the world. God and humanity hand-in-hand working and creating together. Exactly how human life was designed for. To be in the presence of God fully.

When sin enters the world, we still retain what it means to be made into the Image of God, but now it's all warped.

##### **Gen. 2:16–17 –**

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die

This is a shadow of what's to come with the Law. God establishes relationship with human beings and creates a Law as a way to say, "This is how you stay in relationship." So God sets for them one rule to follow in keeping step.

##### **Genesis 3:1-5**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

More on him next week.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Interesting note. God did not say you can't touch it.

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

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<sup>6</sup> This is partly what the author is getting at in the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. When looking through the cultural mandate lens, humanity is using their God-given abilities to stay in one spot rather than spread out.

<sup>7</sup> Side note: where did the dust come from? The Garden. The place where God would walk with humanity in a perfect state. Man was made out of holy ground. Genesis 2 is showing that even in our creation, there is holy, divine significance to our humanity.

The serpent appeals to Eve's disordered desire. She wants to be like God. And the serpent appeals to that want.

**6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Adam was not off in the Garden tending to something. He was with her. The man and woman sinned against God.

Later in Genesis 3 we get the divine curses from God. We are separated from God now. We aren't allowed back into the Garden. There will be relational tension between spouses, between genders, between other people.

The ground is cursed now. Because Adam is cursed, so is the adamah. It's like once humanity, the pinnacle of creation goes wrong, everything else in creation spirals out of control too. Natural disasters, disease and death are all brought into the world because creation once good has gone wrong.

Not only that Scripture says this desire to sin is now embedded in all of us. We've inherited that from our ancestors. All humanity, while being made in the Image of God, at the same time is marred by sin to always choose sin.

And if you're like, "Well I'm a pretty good person" Scripture would say:

**1 John 1:8**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

we have all failed to live up to God's perfect design

**Romans 3:10–18**

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

**Romans 3:23**

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

No one is good, all have sinned. How are we defining good? We mentioned this last week, God is the one defining good, not you. If you were defining good, then the scale would be pretty tame. Don't kill anyone. Don't lie all the time. Do your best. If by good we mean compared to others, then sure, you can always find someone worse than you.

But when the Bible says that no one is good, its comparing us to how God calls us to live. God is the one defining good and it's a holy holy holy goodness. Loving him with heart, soul, mind, strength and loving neighbor as ourselves.

So when someone says “I think of myself as a good person.” You don’t have to say “no you aren’t. The bible says no one is good!!!” Just ask what their standard of goodness is and keep the conversation going.

**Mark 7:21-23**

**21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

**Jeremiah 17:9**

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Side note: This Jeremiah verse is huge. Your heart. Your feelings, waver. Don’t trust feelings alone. Feelings can be helpful but they make a terrible authority.

Sin comes out of our hearts, everyone sins by breaking God’s holy laws because they are sinners by nature and we are just showing our hearts. It’s not just our actions. It’s our hearts. Our actions are just a byproduct of our hearts. So of course I sin if my heart is sinful. If I am ever gonna stop sinning, then I am gonna need a new heart.

This means, I am spiritually separated from God. Where the ideal was for us to rule and reign with God in perfect relationship with Him, now we are all sorts of messed up. In light of God’s holiness, me even at my very best is nothing compared to the sheer and utter holiness of the Triune God of the Universe.

**Isaiah 64:6**

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away

It’s so bad that even when we do something that seems good and right, God views it like a dirty menstrual pad. Not real impressive.

**Ephesians 2:1-3**

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** 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— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**Romans 2:21-25**

**21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they

(referring to all of us)

became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

(there's that breakdown in creation. Man was at the top, then they describe animals in the air, the earth, in the sea. Three-tier creation. Working backwards. Sin is devolving us.)

**24** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, **25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

We worship created things rather than the Creator.

**John Calvin**

...man's nature is a perpetual factory of idols

A couple of theological terms here:

**Original sin** - Because of Adam and Eve, we are born into sin.

**Psalms 51:3-5**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

**Total depravity** - Sin has infected and affected every part of our lives.

This means every part of you has been tainted with sin. Your motives, your desires, your thoughts, your actions, your decision making, even your sexuality - every facet is impacted by sin in some way. It just manifests itself in different ways

This means none of us is more sinful than someone else. We all have an even playing field.

Side note: When you look at Paul in the New Testament he sees his own sinfulness all the time. In fact the further along in ministry he was, the longer he walked with Jesus, the more he saw his sinfulness:

**1 Timothy 1:15**

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

This was towards the end of Paul's life too. He had decades of ministry under his belt. Now some people are shocked by this statement of Paul's. How can that be? Is it because he still feels shame about what he did before he became a Christian? No, because Romans 8:1. But once again, if the standard is God's perfect and holy character then no one is exempt.

One author talks about it like this. The more you walk with Jesus, the more aware you are of God's holiness. The more aware you are of God's holiness, the more aware you are of your sinfulness. So, the

more you walk with Jesus the more you see your sin.<sup>8</sup> If someone says “Well I’m mature and I don’t have sin to confess,” there’s Bible for you that says you’re wrong.

At the same time, total depravity does not mean utter depravity. Utter depravity is the idea that we always only do the worst possible.<sup>9</sup>

Like a bottle of water with drops of contaminant.

On our LG Guides, when we provide application questions about sermons, we often ask direct questions that assume we are sinning. We’ve had people say to us, “you guys always assume the worst about people. You ask questions like, “In what ways are you sinning in regards to this scripture?”

And my response to that is, we don’t assume the worst but we do assume we’re sinners. We are not utterly depraved, we’re totally depraved.

**Malcolm Muggeridge -**

The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact.

**G. K. Chesterton:**

Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the one Christian doctrine that can really be proven... empirically verifiable and validated by [thousands of] years of human history.

Just look at the news. Human beings don’t like each other, as a general rule. Guy kidnapping and murdering the young woman in 5 points. Terrifying what we do to each other. Something is wrong with us. I see that as one of those times that God pulls back the curtain a bit to reveal just how profoundly broken we truly are. The sin that caused chaos in that guys life and then through his life is the same sin at war against me. He and I have the same disease. We’re no different.

Whereas the secular narrative of the west that says we have an inner self that is neutral if not good, and the only reason we experience problems in life is because of limits and restrictions placed upon us from outside. The rules, societal expectations, obligations are our real problems and if we can just be free from all of that stuff and really find our true inner self, that child like inner self before people started hurting us and life brought expectation and obligation...then I can be free and happy.

And like any good heresy, there is partial truth in it. Yes we should get rid of unnecessary restrictions. But our problem runs deeper. Our problem is that we’re sinners.

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<sup>8</sup> The Gospel Grid from *The Gospel-Centered Life*.

[https://www.amazon.com/Gospel-Centered-Life-Study-Guide-Leaders/dp/1942572913/ref=asc\\_df\\_1942572913/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312115051380&hvpos=1o2&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=1125539515237189020&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9051960&hvtargid=pla-520738814822&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/Gospel-Centered-Life-Study-Guide-Leaders/dp/1942572913/ref=asc_df_1942572913/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312115051380&hvpos=1o2&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=1125539515237189020&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9051960&hvtargid=pla-520738814822&psc=1)

<sup>9</sup> “To be utterly depraved is to be as wicked as one could possibly be. Hitler was extremely depraved, but he could have been worse than he was. I am sinner. Yet I could sin more often and more severely than I actually do. I am not utterly depraved, but I am totally depraved. For total depravity means that I and everyone else are depraved or corrupt in the totality of our being. There is no part of us that is left untouched by sin. Our minds, our wills, and our bodies are affected by evil. We speak sinful words, do sinful deeds, have impure thoughts. Our very bodies suffer from the ravages of sin.” R.C. Sproul  
<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sproul/depravity.html>

Our favorite way to talk about this is, “Do you have keys?” Why? Who are you trying to keep out? Not animals. They can’t open door knobs. Door knobs are the strategy for animals. Locks are the strategy for other people. Why don’t you want people in your house? If people are by nature good, and you woke up in the middle of night and heard someone downstairs in your house, your thought would be “i bet someone broke in so they could clean my house and bake me a pie.” Is that what you would think if you heard someone in your house in the middle of the night? It is not. Because you actually believe in total depravity, you just don’t like how it sounds to say it out loud.

This has a thousand applications. I’ll give you one quickly.

Understanding that people are sinners made in the image of God...

You can celebrate good things people do while still acknowledging their flaws.

- Politicians can be applauded for what they get right while still acknowledging what they are wrong about.
- Does not have to be sainthood or demonization.
- Theologians who made beautiful contributions but got race really wrong. We don’t have to worship them and we don’t have to act like they don’t have great quotes worthy of reading.
- King David was a man after God’s heart who was a murderer.
- We can have Paul, who calls himself the chief of sinners, and also write inerrant Scripture empowered by the Spirit

And you will find that this is true of you. You are made in God’s image with all sorts of good beautiful contributions to make. And you are sinners who have real flaws and problems.

That's the doctrine of man. We are sinners in the image of God.

And, here's what we need in light of sin and depravity: **redemption**. The solution to humanity’s biggest problem is not better education, not better healthcare, not better politicians. Those aren’t the biggest problems. The Bible says we are the biggest problems in the world.

### **G.K. Chesterton**

What’s wrong with the world? I am.

Those things can help fix symptoms but it doesn’t fix the core issue. It’s like putting a bandaid on when what you need is a surgery.

Here’s what else we need: **regeneration**. We can’t approach God on our own, God needs to draw Himself to us.

You need a total rewiring of your soul, you need something to fix the sin problem at war within you. The Bible says you need to be made into a new person.

This is why one of the key motifs in describing placing your faith in Jesus is called New Creation. Everything about you is tainted with sin, you need to be born again.



This is in part why Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit, not by the seed of man. To point back to Genesis 1 - God creating something out of nothing. Pointing back to creation and how Jesus was bringing about new creation.

This is in part why the virgin birth is so important, Jesus is free from original sin. He's not born into sin the way you and I are.

This is why Jesus came as a HUMAN. Creation, because of Adam and Eve, fell into disarray because of humans. But now God is bringing about new creation through a new human, named Jesus, who is redeeming people are new humans to fully usher in God's rule and reign like He always intended way back in Genesis 2.

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Cut for time:

Anthropological monism - you are not made of separate parts - spirit and soul. To quote C.S. Lewis, "You do not have a soul, you are a soul."

Dichotomous man - you are made up of both body and spirit.

Trichotomous man - you are made up of both body, soul and spirit.

While this is a nuanced theological bit - the implications more fully play themselves out in soteriological questions. Those questions include:

- How exactly are we spiritually dead according to Ephesians 2:1? The dichotomous view says our spiritual nature is dead. The trichotomous view says our spirit is dead but our soul remains intact.
- What happens immediately after death? Monism would say your body stays dead and then when Jesus returns, we experience a resurrection from the dead. (This is what's known as "soul sleep" although this is a misnomer considering monism does not hold to two separate parts.)  
Dichotomous/Trichotomous view would say your spirit/soul goes into an intermediary state detached from your body to be with God, and then Jesus returns to restore your spirit/soul with your body.