

**Theology for Life**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church**  
Lesson 6: Humanity and Sin

Opening Discussion:

- Why does it seem like people who have rejected God and live a sinful lifestyle can also seem kind and generous?
- How do we talk about sin to a culture that has largely rejected concepts like “good” and “bad”? How can we share the gospel without these categories?

*Image of God/Image of God*

Missing this balance can have devastating results.

From *Designed for Dignity*:

“The police found a desperate note left on the nightstand. ‘Don’t cry for me,’ the wrinkled paper said. ‘I’m not even human anymore.’ ...Just a few floors below, advocates of the New Age Movement gathered in the convention center. After several rousing talks, a well-known celebrity led the crowd in a unison chant, ‘I am God!...I am God!’”

Pratt writes, “*Few people take the desperate step of suicide; not many openly worship themselves. But to one degree or another, **all of us tend toward** pitiful or grandiose self-images. In some instances, we even go in both directions at the same time.*”

**What does it mean to be human? Some contemporary views:**

A. We are Autonomous Beings

1. Humanism has taught for years that man was the center of all things and the supreme end.
2. Descarte believed that man was the starting point for all knowledge. Reason, observation, measurable evidence are highly valued because they put man as the supreme arbiter of truth.
3. Enlightenment philosophers taught that the individual had natural rights, one of which is self-government.
4. Nietzsche believed that man was motivated by striving to overpower others and become something greater. Others say man’s goal is to seek pleasure.
5. Ethical Implications? Good? Bad?

B. We are mere organisms and part of a larger ecosystem

1. On the other end of the spectrum, some say we are descended from apes, a product of biological chance.
2. We share the planet with other organisms and have no privileged status. Peter Singer: all beings capable of suffering are worthy of equal consideration.
3. Ethical Implications? Good? Bad?

C. Postmodern disillusionment: can we know?

1. C.S. Lewis identifies this disillusionment with years of rejecting God and elevating self. He makes the point that because we are created to know God and be in communion with him, then with the death of God comes the death of man.
2. In losing the connection with God we lose our identity.

#### Westminster Confession of Faith 4.2

*"After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures."*

What stands out to you about this definition of humanity?

#### Sin and the Fall

*WCF 6.1. Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.*

*2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.*

Is man fundamentally good or fundamentally bad? This question obscures the issue, if we think of sin in human terms. We frequently meet people who reject God, yet seem virtuous in many respects.

We need to understand human sin and culpability from God's perspective.

#### **What is Sin: Act or Identity?**

In most non-Christian religions, if they have a concept of sin, sin is an act (something that is committed). Only in Christianity does the concept of sin refer to a state of being. You are sinful so you commit sins. It starts with the heart and flows to the actions.

A. The 5<sup>th</sup> century heretic Pelagius argued:

*"All depravity is voluntary-- consisting in voluntary transgression... O! the darkness of that view of depravity which exhibits it, as something lying back, and the cause of all actual transgression."*

1. Sin is only in the deliberate choice of evil.
  - a. This denies a spiritual inability. Man, he says, is neutral.
  - b. It presupposes knowledge of what is evil
  - c. It assumes man has the full power of choosing or rejecting it.
2. Salvation is not a rescue of helpless man from sin, but a reward for virtuous living.
3. What role is left for Christ to play?

B. On the other hand you have the heresy of Gnosticism: which states that created matter evil.

1. This denies choice. You were made evil, or you have a wicked body, so you do wicked things.
2. The Bible says we are created good and in the image of God.
3. What would your hope of salvation be?

### Original Sin (Imputation of Sin and Corruption of Nature)

*WCF 6.3. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.*

### **Imputation: Legally Guilty**

How is being credited different than being corrupted?

Romans 5:12–21

*[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—[13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. [14] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of **Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.***

*[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if **many died through one man's trespass**, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For **the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation**, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] **For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man**, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

*[18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as **by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners**, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. [20] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21] so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Paul is making a point about Christ's atonement, but from this we have a lot of quick summary statements about the nature of Adam's sin. We can make several conclusions:

1. Like Christ, Adam stood in as a **covenant representative**; as Adam goes, so goes the rest of humanity. Verse 14 is backed up by 1 Corinthians 15:22 "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

There is a covenant relationship, and we are identified with that covenant head. As part of the human race we enter into this legal covenant with Adam as our head, and we are faced with the penalty of a broken covenant which is death.

2. We face the **legal punishment of a broken covenant**. V. 15, Many died by the trespass of the one man...judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation...condemnation for all men.

### **Corruption**

*WCF 6.4. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.*

It is not just guilt from our legal record as humans "in Adam," our nature is now corrupted.

- Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.
- Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

### Universality

- 1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- Romans 3:12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."
- [5] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:5
- [3] we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:3

*WSC Q. 18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*

*A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.*

What do these passages teach us about sin?

We often think about this in terms of morality, but this isn't saying that people are as bad as they possibly can be. It also isn't saying that there are no nice, kind, generous, helpful, etc. people in the world.

Examine these other passages that illustrate the effects of sin.

*[14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **1 Corinthians 2:14***

*[7] For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **Romans 8:7***

*[17] Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **Ephesians 4:17-18***

What do these passages teach us about sin? What is this saying and not saying about an unbeliever? What are the implications for evangelism?

Theologians call this the noetic effects of sin. Sin not only affects our morality (behaviors, emotions), but it also affects our intellect and our will.

### **Inconsistencies**

Non-Christians can say and do things that are wise, virtuous, and intelligent, sometimes more so than Christians. Why is this?

Even after the fall, people still retain the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9).

Because of the Image of God and common grace, non-Christians can live inconsistently with their own fundamental principles.

Likewise, Christians can say and do things that are far from their fundamental principles. This leads to experiences that can be misleading.

WCF 6.5. *This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.*

Can you uncritically accept any Christian author (movie, music, counselor, teacher, etc.)?

The culture war has made us reject anything secular and tend to accept anything “baptized” with Christian terminology?

### **Regeneration: Effect of Being Born Again**

[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

[5] Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. John 3:5

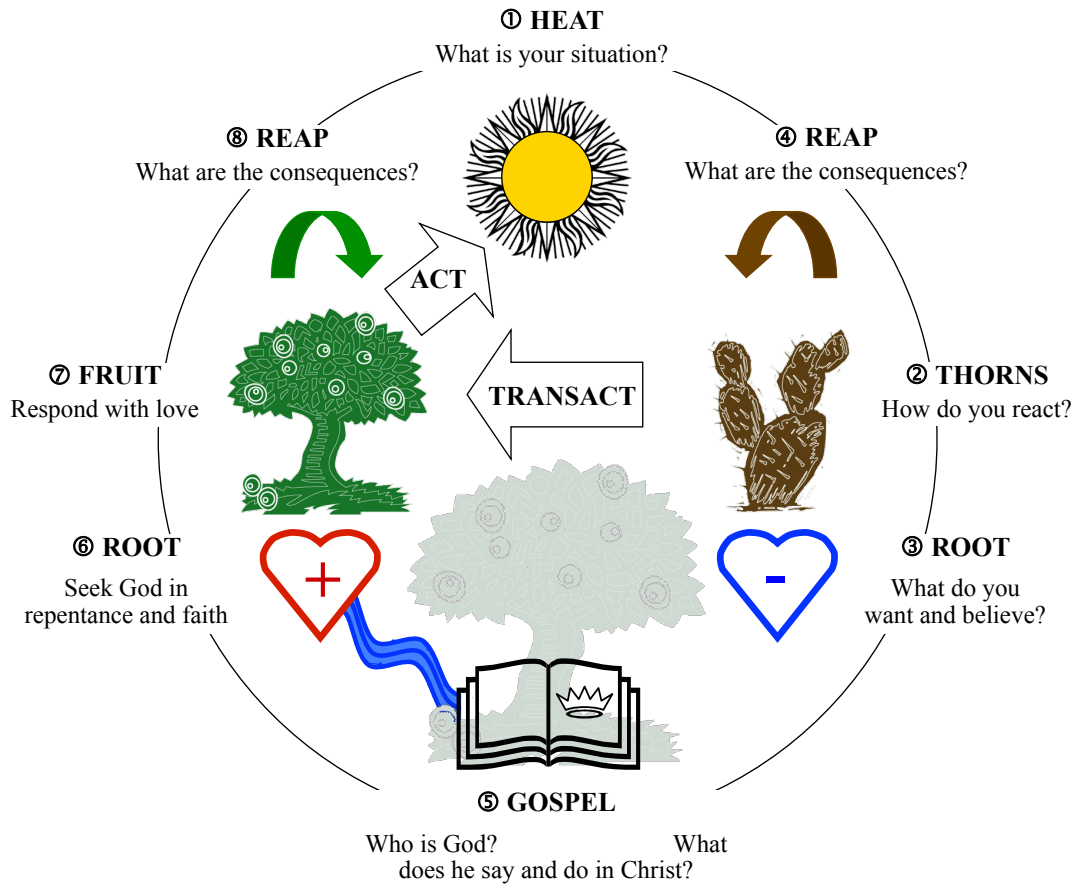
[10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Colossians 3:10

What effect does being born again have on us?

We can still sin as a Christian, but we also can resist sin. There is no circumstance you will face that will necessarily result in your sin.

The gospel not only deals with our legal guilt, it also actively battles sin's corruption of our hearts.

The following image from Tripp and Powlison illustrate this point:



### Condemnation/Hell

*WCF 6.6. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.*

Who sends someone to eternal condemnation?

*"We want to choose and go our own way (Isaiah 53:6.) This is no idle 'wandering from the path.' As Jeremiah puts it, 'No one repents . . . each pursues his own course like a horse*

*charging into battle. (8:6)' (We want to get away from God-but, as we have seen, this is the very thing that is most destructive to us. Cain is warned not to sin because sin is slavery. (Genesis 4:7; John 8:34.) It destroys your ability to choose, love, enjoy. Sin also brings blindness-the more you reject the truth about God the more incapable you are of perceiving any truth about yourself or the world (Isaiah 29:9-10; Romans 1:21.)" Keller, "Importance of Hell"*

*"If the thing you most want is to worship God in the beauty of his holiness, then that is what you will get (Ps 96:9-13.) If the thing you most want is to be your own master, then the holiness of God will become an agony, and the presence of God a terror you will flee forever (Rev 6:16; cf. Is 6:1-6.)" Keller "Importance of Hell"*

C.S. Lewis: *"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it" (The Great Divorce, p.72).*

God is said "to pass by" the reprobate and "to give them up" to their own desires.

Reprobation brings God's sorrow: *"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11).*

In the context of punishing sin Paul in Romans 1:24-28 says "therefore God gave them up" three times.