

Lesson 3 – Who is Man?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.” – Genesis 1:1, 27

Where did everything come from?

Everyone comes to life wearing a pair of glasses. These glasses, often called our “worldview,” affect the way we understand who God is, who we are, why we are here, and what happens after we die. The question “where did everything come from?” has echoed throughout history as the foundational question every human must ask and answer. Throughout history there have been many proposals to how life originated, but for the sake of time, the following chart summarizes the five predominant categories of non-Christian thought.

WORLD VIEW	TEACHING	NOTEABLE FOLLOWERS
1. Deism	God created but is not active in creation.	Plato, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Voltaire, Universalism
2. Pantheism	“All is God” God is all things and all things are God.	Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, Taoism, Universalism
3. Panentheism	“All in God.” God exists within the created universe and eternally extends beyond it.	Some Hinduism, New Age, Universalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson
4. Process Theology / Open Theism	God is in process, growing in knowledge with His creation. God anticipates the future but is influenced by humans as to how history will actually unfold.	Clark Pinnock, John E. Sanders, Peter Wagner, Roger Forster, many emergent churches, Universalism
5. Naturalism / Materialism	Matter comes from natural processes, without aid from any supernatural entity. All things exist by chance and there is no existence beyond the natural world.	Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Universalism

Each of the above worldviews stand in stark contrast to the revelation found in the Bible.

What Do the Scriptures Say About Creation?

The Biblical creation story reveals that an eternal God is the necessary first cause of all that exists. Matter did not appear out of nowhere, but rather an all-powerful God created all things, material and immaterial. In the Biblical worldview God is both personal and independent of His creation, which He brought about by the power of His Word. This worldview provides the perfect harmony of God’s immanent and transcendent nature.

Each person in the Trinity has unique roles and responsibilities in the creation of the universe. God the Father devised the plan, God the Son orchestrated His plan, and God the Spirit brought it forth with the power of His might. This is why the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus (John 1:3, 1:10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 1:2, 1:10; Rev. 3:14), as well the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6, 104:30; Isa. 40:12–14), created all things.

The Scriptures teach that God, in His sovereign power, created all things. All things come from His hand and exist primarily for His glory. When God created all things, they were “good” and had no flaw in them.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good...on the seventh day God completed His work..” - Genesis 1:1-2:4

“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” - Exodus 20:11

“You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.” - Nehemiah 9:6

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.” - Job 38:4

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” - Psalm 19:1

What Do the Scriptures Say About Humans?

Not only did God create the world and the universe, but He also created man. Man is God’s most glorious creation because unlike the rest of the created beings, we were made in His own image.

Genesis 1:27, 2:7 *“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”*

To be made in God’s image means *two* primary things:

First, it means that we uniquely *reflect* God’s character to all those around us (see *Shared Attributes* section of Chapter 1). We were created to dwell in community as God exists in Trinity. We were created to delight in holiness as God exists in holiness. We were created to declare God’s glory as God declares His own. God made man as a reflection of His glory. Because of this, human life has great dignity, value, and honor.

Second, it means that we *represent* God on the earth. Man was placed on earth to rule and reign over God’s creation as His chief steward (Gen 1:26; Ps 8:6). In ancient cultures, kings placed statues of their image along the borders of their kingdoms so that all who passed by knew who ruled that land. In the same way, man was placed here as an image of God to reflect to all of creation that God reigns supreme.

At the end of Genesis chapter 2 we see a beautiful scene of God’s creation in its fullest glory. All the created order shone with majesty. Man and woman dwelt together “naked and were not ashamed.” At that point humanity rightly *reflected* God’s character and truly *represented* His rule without compromise. The picture of Genesis 2 holds for us an image of the height of human history. Humanity dwelt in glory and harmony with each other and with their Creator. All the universe was at peace. Then...something went terribly wrong.

What was The Fall?

The world of harmony and peace found in Genesis 1 and 2 is not the world we live in today. The answer to the question of why is the world the way it is can be answered by explaining the fall. After placing Adam in the garden, God

commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or he would die (Gen. 2:16–17). The death promised was both a physical death and a spiritual death. Despite God’s command, Adam and Eve rejected God’s word and in rebellion ate the fruit they were told not to (Gen. 3:1-6).

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God sin immediately descended upon them and corrupted all the blessings God had graciously given. Adam and Eve lost their innocence and quickly realized that they were naked and filled with shame (Gen. 3:7). The ones who once graciously embodied the image of God had fallen and now were scarred with the fatal disease. The resident representatives of God had become resistant rebels against God and now paradise was lost.

The curse of sin did not however only affect their own personal lives, but it also brought previously unknown strife and separation between Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:12-13). Ever since Adam blamed Eve for the fall, the chronicles of human history have been filled with murder, rape, hatred, bitterness, jealousy, and pain. The human relationships which were designed to be the reflection of God’s intimate and holy love for His creation were now corrupted and the love of humanity for one another became stained.

The most tragic part of the curse was that the uninhibited relationship Adam and Eve had with their Creator was destroyed. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve once walked with God in the morning and had frequent visits from Him to fellowship with them (Gen. 3:7-11). This once peaceful relationship was destroyed by sin.

What is Sin?

Today our culture does not view sin as a serious issue, and some do not even accept the idea of sin as real. For many, the only sin is intolerance and not allowing people the freedom to do and believe whatever they desire. This however could not be further from the truth. Sin and its effects have haunted every corner of our world since the day it entered the Garden of Eden. The Scriptures are clear that all have sinned against God (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-23, 5:12; 1 Jn. 1:9-10) and that all face the consequences (Ex. 34:7, Nah. 1:3, Rom. 6:23).

Sin is not just a violation of rules and regulations nor just being bad or doing wrong things. Sin is an offense against the very person of God (Ps 51:4; Gen. 20:6, 39:9; 2 Sam. 12:13; 1 Cor. 8:12). Since God is the standard of what is right and what is wrong, to rebel against His revelation is to rebel against Him. Sin is not confined merely to actions but is first and foremost a problem of the heart and its attitudes. Sin shows itself in both passive indifference (not doing what we should) and active disobedience (doing what we should not).

The rebelling act of sin results in an experience of the corrupting power of sin. By sinning against God, we open the door to the deadly disease of sin which destroys all the good things God has made. Many believe sinning against God brings freedom, but that is part of Satan’s design to steal, kill, and destroy all the wonderful things God has prepared for us. Sin, thought it may initially taste sweet, always results in death.

Where did sin come from?

The Bible explains that God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). The Bible is also clear that God does not take any delight in sin (Ps. 5:4), hates and detests sin (Prov. 6:16; Zech. 8:17), and hides His face from sinful people (Isa. 59:2, 64:7). Therefore, God does not in any way cause sin, and sin is a perversion of His good creation and a contortion of His beautiful and perfect works.

Sin Arose Among the Angels

Before sin entered the Garden of Eden, sin entered another part of God's creation. Though the Scriptures do not give us great detail (Is. 14:2, 12-14; Ezek. 28:2, 12-19)¹, it is apparent that after God created the angelic realm in eternity past, a tragic rebellion occurred in heaven. A prominent angel of heaven named Lucifer ("shining one"; cf. 2 Cor. 11:14) was the most beautiful of all the angels (Ezek. 28:17) but became prideful and turned his heart against God in an attempt to usurp the authority of his Creator (Is. 14:13-14).

Lucifer and all the other angels who followed him, were judged by being cast from their privileged place in heaven (Is. 14:12; Ezek. 28:16; Lk. 10:18; Rev. 12:9). They now takes up residence on the earth, with some limited access to the throne of God, where they accuses believers of sin and ask for permission to tempt humanity (Job 1-2). The fall in the Garden of Eden came after the fall of the angelic realm in heaven. God allowed Satan to tempt His children in the Garden and allowed them to follow their free-will.²

What are the effects of sin?

Because of Adam's sin, all of creation is now under the curse of God. When we look at the condition of our planet and human life (including death, suffering, injustice, boredom, miseries, fears, etc.), it is obvious that something has gone terribly wrong. The world in which we live is no longer "good" as God created it to be. This does not mean that the world is as bad as it could be or that it lacks all remnants of goodness. We can still see God's beauty in creation and people, but the world that exists now is not the same as the perfect world of Eden. Romans 8:17-27 explains that right now even the creation is crying out for Jesus to return and save it from the corruption of sin. Every living thing has been corrupted by the fall in Eden.

As a result of Adam's sin, all of his descendants (everyone other than Jesus Christ who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin) are guilty of sin as well (Gen. 3:1-6; Hosea 6:7; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 15:45-50).³ All people (except Jesus Christ) are from conception sinful by nature and corrupted to the very core of their being and therefore incapable of doing anything to earn salvation from God (Psalms 51:5; Rom. 3:10-18; Rom. 8:7-8).

Theologians call this the doctrine of "total depravity."

What is Total Depravity?

The doctrine of "total depravity" does not mean that sinful humans cannot do good things, that people are as bad as they could be, or that all people sin in the same ways. Rather, total depravity teaches that every part of man (his total being) is completely affected by the curse of sin. This includes the mind (Eph. 4:18), the will (Rom. 6:16-17), the emotions (Titus 3:3), and the physical body (Rom. 8:10). As a result, people may still do good things, but they do not do them for the glory of God as they should (Ps. 29:2; Rom. 11:36). Apart from being born again by the grace of God, we are unable to do anything that pleases God or merits salvation.

¹ Both passages are properly interpreted by seeing their primary intent as addressing earthly kings. Isaiah 14:4, 12-15 was addressed to the king of Babylon and Ezekiel 28:2, 12-17 to the King of Tyre. There is great reason to believe there is a secondary meaning in the type (picture) of the one behind their rebellion, namely Satan.

² See the salvation section to learn more about how the rebellion against God has enslaved man's will to sin.

³ It is important to note that sin was not originally found in human nature. Humans were created as good and perfect before God, but sin has corrupted human nature like a spiritual infection and is now transmitted through reproduction.

Romans 3:10-23 *“There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one...their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving...the poison of asps is under their lips...Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness...their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known... There is no fear of God before their eyes...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

1 Corinthians 1:18 *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...2:14 The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them...”*

Ephesians 2:1-3 *“...you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we to all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”*

When righteous things are done for the good of humanity, to appease our conscious, or simply because it's the right thing to do, they displease God (Isa. 64:6). These kinds of good deeds are viewed by God as idol worship which steals the glory that only He deserves. All people, because of their sinful, nature engage in idol worship rather than worship of the true God.

This should give each of us great reason to pause and reflect upon our condition. We are easily tempted to think that because we are not as bad as someone we know that we are better off than them. Though we may not do what they do, we are just as condemned because a self-righteous attitude before God is idolatry of self rather than dependence upon God. In the same way, we may feel that doing religious things like attending or joining a church, giving money to a church, or even inviting others to church makes us right with God. Though these activities are good if done for God's glory, we are easily tempted to do them for appearance sake, to please others, or to appease our conscious. This too condemns us because it shows our idolatry of religion.

Despite the horrible affects of sin upon humanity, humans still have dignity because we are created in the image of God. Though the image is marred by sin, we still possess a unique place of honor above all the rest of creation, and human life should be protected and honored (Gen. 1:26, 9:6; James 3:9).

Why do we sin?

Why do we pursue the lie of sin when God is so wonderful and the consequences of sin are so tragic? Our culture tells us that bad behavior is the result of poor parenting, social oppression, or lack of education. While it is true that these factors may lead to bad behavior, they are not the ultimate source of the world's problems. The source of our rebellion rests deep within our own hearts. The very core of who we are has been corrupted by sin's assault. Many believe that the best way to live life is to just “follow your heart.” This is treacherous advice because sin has taken humanity captive, blinded our eyes to God (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 3:17), and enslaved our hearts to follow after Satan's desires (Rom. 6:16; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

James 1:13–15 *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*

Proverbs 4:23 *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Matthew 12:34 *For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*

Proverbs 20:9 *Who can say, “I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?”*

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

Mark 7:21–23 *For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’*

Luke 6:45 *The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.*

In light of the fact that our heart is the problem, we must realize that behavioral change, political reform, and technological advances will never remedy the human condition. Instead, we need a new heart and a new nature if there is to be any true deliverance from sin. In Ezekiel 36:26 God promises that He “will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...” This new heart is given only through faith in Jesus and rebirth through the power of the Holy Spirit. This magnificent hope will be the focus of next week’s lesson.

How should we deal with our sin?

“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” – Romans 8:13-14

As we have already explained, sin is not something to be viewed lightly. There is a war going on for the devotion of our hearts, and we must be willing to fight in order to honor God with our lives. Mortification is the action taken by the believer to “put to death” the temptations of our flesh by depending upon the Holy Spirit, applying God’s Word, repenting, and walking in grace-centered faith (Hebrews 4:12–13). Fighting sin is something the believer must do until

the day he sees the Lord Jesus. The final section of this lesson deals with how we should fight against the sin that continually creeps up in our lives.⁴

What are Some Helpful Ways to Fight Against Sin?

1. Replace your sinful habit with godly obedience (Eph. 4:28–31). Simply stopping sinful habits without pursuing a deeper fellowship with God will result in repeated frustration and empty victories.
2. Recognize that God has given you everything you need to fight against sin. His resources are countless and include the Holy Spirit, prayer, His Word, and Christian fellowship. Focus on them rather than on your sin. By focusing on your sin you will be consumed by it and neglect God's gracious resources.
3. Clearly identify any patterns Satan has developed to tempt you in the past (tired, hungry, overworked). Write them down and discuss them with another believer who will prayerfully and graciously keep you accountable.
4. Be disciplined in tapping into God's grace. Don't just sit back and expect things to get better.
5. Persevere in faithfulness by confessing and refocusing on Jesus until you see Him.

What Should We Do When We Sin?

1. Conviction: is the recognition of our sin through the ministry of the Spirit and the truth of Scripture. (Jn. 16:7-11)
2. Confession: is agreeing with the Holy Spirit and Scripture regarding our sin. Confession should be directed first to God and then to those whom we have sinned against. (1 John 1:5–9; James 5:16)
3. Repentance: is turning from sin to God, which results in loving obedience. (Lk. 17:3; Act. 3:19, 5:31, 11:18)
4. Restitution: is making amends as much as possible for our sin against others.⁵ (Ex. 22:3; Prov. 6:31; Ezk. 33:15)
5. Forgiveness: comes in human relationships when we ask for grace from those you have sinned against, or giving grace to those who have sinned against you. (Mt. 6:12–14, 18:35; Mk. 11:25; 2 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 4:32)
6. Reconciliation: is the reuniting of the parties to walk again in love and trust. (Mt. 5:24; Eph. 2:14f; 2 Cor. 5:18)

For Further Reading

On Creation

Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record, by Duane Gish

Darwin on Trial, by Phillip Johnson

Scientific Creationism, by Henry Morris

Evolution: A Theory in Crisis, by Michael Denton

On Man's nature

The Bondage of the Soul, by Martin Luther

⁴ This section assumes that one is a believer in Jesus Christ. Apart from him resisting sin is a futile effort.

⁵ Restitution does not bring forgiveness from God, but rather is an act of obedience to Him which blesses those we have sinned against. We do not hold to any form of penance other than accepting the gracious gift of Christ's atonement.

The Problem of Pain, by C.S. Lewis

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey

Created in God's Image, by Anthony Hoekema

Man: The Image of God, by G.C. Berkouwer

The Christian View of Man, by J. Gresham Machen

The Hunger For Significance, by R.C. Sproul

On Sin

Not The Way It's Supposed to Be, by Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Original Sin, by Henri Blocher