

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM

Study 3

THE GREAT HUMAN TRAGEDY

To receive the biblical revelation of the nature and calling of humankind—as we have done in the previous study—is, indeed, a marvellous thing. However, it doesn't take much experience of life to realize that there is, in fact, a great difference between the statement of this calling and what actually happens within us and around us, day by day.

In this third study we are going to examine the reason for such a sad reality. And to do so, we must expose our minds to the most awful event in all of history: *the self-exaltation & death of humanity* that took place at the beginning of time.

Tragedies happen every day, always bringing great personal loss to those who are involved in them. But we will see that what is often called the 'Moral Fall' of humankind in the beginning is, by far, the most tragic event of all time. It is one that has brought *incomparable loss*.

The value of a study like this, is that it clearly states the true nature of our present human situation—and in so doing, answers many of the questions that have stirred in the hearts, and been on the lips, of men and women and boys and girls down through the centuries. Questions like, "Why is the world like it is?" "Why are people like they are?" "Why am I like I am?"

Revelation of the loathsome state of our humanity is not something we find easy to face—and is often strongly resisted! It is, however, an insight that we cannot afford to ignore.

Being made in the likeness of the One who is so unsearchably great in moral purity, it is not surprising that there be a *negative reaction* within us to—what is nothing less than—a statement of 'universal human depravity'. That is, that every person born into the world, has deeply embedded within them a principle of moral corruption. To nakedly face this is an unbearable thing for those who are inwardly pressed, by nature, to be something so much more magnificent.

However, apart from a personal understanding of the present, wretched moral condition of our humanity, it is impossible to know the healing grace—and the personal freedom and fullness—that our Maker is able to lavishly supply.

In the medical realm, many have often failed to receive bodily healing because of refusal to acknowledge a physical condition until it was too late. The bad news of the presence of some sinister disease must be acknowledged, before the good news of a cure can be received. In the same way, the spiritual 'dis-ease' of our fallen-human condition, cannot be dealt with where there is a refusal to acknowledge its presence.

It is good news for us to know from the outset of this study, that **ALTHOUGH THE TRAGEDY OF OUR HUMAN FALLEN-NESS IS, INDEED, GREAT, THE HEALING GRACE OF GOD IS SO VERY MUCH GREATER!!!**

our nature:

(through 'the Fall': the self-exaltation & death of humanity' in Adam)

- rebel children**
- rebel creatures**
- rebel servants (worshippers, rulers, stewards)**

When, as will be seen, humankind rose up against the word of its Maker, our created nature didn't change. We were still, by nature, children, creatures and servants of our Father, Creator and King. The difference was that there was *added* to our nature a pervading and powerful tendency towards rebellion and sin.

1 John 3:4

Sin is lawlessness.

2 Chronicles 6:36

There is no one who does not sin.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

There is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.

Jeremiah 2:29

—*an undeniable fact*

"You have all rebelled against Me", declares the LORD.

We no longer desire to be creaturely children before our Father-Creator, or serve Him as King.

Ezekiel 2:3

[The LORD said: "They] have been in revolt against Me to this very day."

Ezekiel 20:8

"They rebelled against Me and would not listen to Me."

Psalms 78:56

They put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High.

Isaiah 63:10

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 3:19

[The LORD said,] "I thought you would call Me Father and not turn away."

We learned in Study 1 that God is 'slow to anger'. But it must also be understood that His patience is constantly tested—as His Spirit is grieved—by the dark spirit of rebellion in those He has created in His likeness.

Isaiah 59:12–13

Our offences are ever with us: ... rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God.

Treachery is heartless betrayal of the trust of another person. God has entrusted us as His stewards, with all that we are and have. And He has done this so that we may faithfully invest our lives for the fulfilment of His purposes—His unsearchably great and wonderful purposes of love. The rebellion of a human being against God is unthinkable treachery! Such heartless betrayal of our Father, Creator and King's trust is an enormous offence against Him—one that, actually, troubles and unsettles the human spirit day after day.

lifelessly & restlessly enslaved to unrighteousness

In Study 5 we will deal more fully with the historical details of the self-exalting, moral fall of humanity. But at this point our purpose is to focus mainly upon the basic consequences of it, and the bitter fruits these bring: a lifeless and restless enslavement to unrighteousness. That is, a desperate pursuit of *life*, which is against the way of our Maker and the high calling we have received from Him.

So firstly, the basic story of our dramatically tragic human situation.

our Creator's righteous prohibition

At the beginning of history, the first couple was enjoying a free and full humanity, within a specially set-apart garden paradise. They experienced rich happiness in fellowship with their Maker and one another. But this was known, within the context of a particular prohibition that had been communicated to the man, Adam.

Genesis 2:16–17

The LORD God commanded [Adam], "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for [the day] you eat of it you will surely die".

At this time, Adam knew the difference between good and evil on the basis of what God made known to him. This is how a true creature lives in the Creator's world. He was free to enjoy all the delights of the creation, but to set his heart on knowing good and evil apart from the LORD God would, itself, be great evil, bringing instant death.

Adam had communicated the LORD'S prohibition to his wife, Eve, and all was well—until, a subtle and powerful deception took place.

Genesis 3:4–7

—*the intrusion of a false word*

"You will surely not die", the serpent said to [Eve]. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When [Eve] saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened.

The identity of 'the serpent' in this passage will be made clear in Study 4. Just now, we need only to see the terrible fruits of its subtle deception.

humankind's tragic ascent

The first couple listened to the serpent's false word, and disobeyed the word of God they had already received—grasping at the alluring promise of rising up to 'god-like' status. Immediately, they suffered the humanly devastating consequence of their shocking choice.

They both *died!* Not physically—although, that was now to become an inevitable part of the human scene. They died *in relationship to God*. And being dead to Him, they were, in reality, DEAD! They died to God and became wrongly alive to themselves, as creatures apart from Him. THE GREAT HUMAN TRAGEDY HAD OCCURRED!!!

To put it simply, Adam—as God's appointed head and representative of humankind—chose, with his wife, to reject the clear word of God, and plunged the entire race into a realm of sin and death. What was imagined to be a glorious *ascent* was, in fact, a tragic *descent!* That is why this event is referred to as the Fall.

Romans 5:12

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin ... [In] this way death came to all people, because [in Adam] all sinned.

Because Adam was the head and representative of humanity, what he did was done on our behalf. We all participated in his sin, and incurred its consequences. A clearer understanding of this will be gained in a later part of the series, when we see what God has done to reverse it all!

Romans 5:17

By the trespass of the one man, death reigned.

When our representative dared to rebelliously enter the forbidden realm of God-refusing knowledge, the whole of humanity joined him under the reign and rule of death.

Not only did we participate with Adam in His 'original sin', but we also—inheriting his sinful-nature—have, ourselves, lived sinfully before God from birth. This will become increasingly evident as we proceed through our present study.

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death.

Sin never fails to pay its wages. There is nothing more certain than the deadly outcome of service to such a master.

Part of receiving the wages of sin is to experience *personal and relational death*. A LIFE OF DEATH!!! And in this also, there is the experience of personal and relational *unrighteousness*—as we are inwardly *driven* by a restless desperation to gain the *life* that only our Maker can give, but which we insist on attempting to possess apart from Him.

In Study 1 we saw that God's righteousness is His *right action* according to the way, or law, of His own nature as Father, Creator and King—and that as the Righteous One, He enjoys total personal freedom and fullness.

We then saw in Study 2, that to fulfil our holy calling *we* also are to do what is *right* according to the way of *our own* nature as children, creatures and servants—and so also, enjoy the personal freedom and fullness that belongs to those who are the image of God.

But now, dead to Him through rebellion and sin, we have lost the capacity to fulfil our high calling. Living *against* the way of our created nature, we no longer function *rightly*, or know the personal blessedness for which we were made.

Isaiah 48:17–18

This is what the LORD says ... "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to My commands, your peace would have been like a river, your [righteousness and] well-being like the waves of the sea".

No longer is there blessed participation in the life-giving way of God. HUMAN EXISTENCE IS NOW CHARACTERIZED BY A GOD-REFUSING, LIFELESS & RESTLESS ENSLAVEMENT TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. HOW TRAGIC!!!

This study and the next, will tell the sad story of the relentless outworking of such a dark reality—both within and among us. As already stated, this revelation may not be easy to receive. But it is indispensable to an enjoyment of the radical liberation that we all yearn to know!

Ephesians 2:1

You were dead in your transgressions and sins.

This verse from Ephesians tells a dreadful tale. But it also brings a bright beam of hope into the grim picture before us. Here, the writer is speaking to a group of people about the death we have been describing, but in the *past tense*—which means there must be some good news to come!

As our series continues—study after study—we will see what God has done to ‘destroy death and bring *life* and *immortality* to light!’ It will be seen that deliverance from ‘a life of death’—now and in eternity—is for all who trust the Father’s ‘saving word’.

But as has been said, at this point, the grave fact of our human tragedy must be spelt out.

lifelessly & restlessly enslaved to unrighteousness—being:

1) OUT OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

The primary manifestation of sin is rejection of our Maker. Sin is, above all else, a refusal to walk with Him, and then, a refusal to be with Him in His will and way. How hugely different this is to the calling we’ve received: to enjoy intimacy and communion with the Father, and vocational oneness with Him.

our hearts defensive & hardened through guilt, there is:

**** an inner thrust of hostility towards Him***

From the time of humankind’s deplorable rebellion—worthy of the severest condemnation—it has found itself (apart from a liberating assurance of God’s grace) in a perpetual state of guilt and uneasiness before its Creator. This is part of our experience of participation in the ‘original sin’ of Adam.

Romans 5:18

One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people.

The first couple, immediately after they sinned, found that fellowship with God was the last thing they wanted!

Genesis 3:7–8

—*the loss of a clear, untroubled conscience*

They realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

With our inbuilt sense of guilt and uneasiness, we all have—from the womb—an *aversion* to God. In our corrupted condition we are, by nature, ‘on the run’ from Him. To those who know His grace—in the total forgiveness and cleansing of their sins—God’s personal presence is a wonderful thing. But to those who don’t, the presence of ‘the True and Living God’ is an unwelcome intrusion—even terrifying. Any human creature, whose conscience is clear and free from shame and accusation, is able to delight in all that the Creator makes known of Himself. We saw in the previous study that when the conscience is un-condemned, the spirit is free and the heart is pure and, so, *full* in its desire for fellowship with Him.

The problem for sinful human beings is that—apart from grace—they cannot bear to receive what the Holy One reveals of Himself. The conscience now clouded and troubled, causes the heart to reflexively *harden* against God and to resist any further revelation of Him. Unresolved guilt and shame before our Maker, always brings this kind of reaction. Who would want fellowship with ‘the Judge of all the Earth’, when they sense only His condemnation!

This sense of condemnation not only brings *uneasiness* before God, it also causes a powerful reaction of *hostility* towards Him. “Don’t You condemn *me!*” is the angry, fearful and guilt-charged cry. This hostile spirit is often expressed merely as a kind of *sullen indifference*—until, there is an authentic and inescapable confrontation with the Holy One. Then, what is in the heart often erupts to the surface in a fierce rage against Him!

Colossians. 1:21

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

Romans 8:7

The sinful mind is hostile to God.

Hosea 5:4a

Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.

Job 35:9–10

People cry out ... But no one says, “Where is God my Maker?”

Psalms 53:2–3

God looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away.

Sinful human beings do not, of themselves, seek after God—that is, God as He really is. They may be very interested in a god of their own, or another’s, devising: one who accommodates their choices and promises to fulfil their particular desires; or provides a human-centred way of dealing with moral failure and the fear of judgment; or, simply, one whose way appeals to their religious ego. But when it comes to ‘the God who is’, there is—apart from the action of His own great mercy—at best, apathy and disinterest, and at worst, aggression and hostility towards Him.

Isaiah 1:4

They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One ... and turned their backs on Him.

Isaiah 3:8–9

Their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying His glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them.

John 3:20

All those who do evil hate the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

All of this is what the Scriptures call ‘godlessness’. To be godless is to refuse to walk with God, and to live against Him and His will. It has to do with a continual rejection of His presence—the maintenance of a dark attitude towards the One who is worthy of constant, joyous human response. Such a guilt-charged ‘inner thrust of hostility towards Him’ is always, the *key* to an absence of life-giving fellowship with our Maker.

continually rejecting His presence, firstly, with a dark attitude of:

- **disregard**

(‘He is nothing to me’)

When the conscience is pure and free, we are able to delight in the perfections of the ‘God Who Is’—having great, awe-filled and joyous reverence towards Him. But when the conscience is troubled, the heart hardens, and reverence gives way to a settled attitude of disregard. “Why should I honour Him or stand in awe of Him!” is the defensive and hostile reaction of the guilty one.

In Study 2 it was said, from 1 Corinthians 8:6, that the Father is the One ‘*from whom we came*’ and ‘*for whom we exist*’. But now it is clear what our fallen-humanity thinks of this. In our rebellion we say, “No, I *don’t* exist for Him. He is *nothing* to me!”

How arrogantly the sinful human heart asserts itself in the presence of the Holy One. And how tragic and evil it is that this should be so!

Isaiah 26:10

[The wicked] regard not the majesty of the LORD.

Hosea 5:4b

They do not acknowledge the LORD.

Psalms 10:4

In their pride the wicked do not seek Him; in all their thoughts there is no room for God.

Psalms 36:1–2

There is no fear of God before their eyes. For in their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.

Habakkuk 1:7

They promote their own honour.

Our proud, fallen-human heart is always gathering ‘evidence’ of how wonderful we are apart from our Maker. The reason behind this is plain: we figure that the more marvellous we make ourselves to be, the less regard we need to have for the One to whom we must give account. And, of course, the more we ‘flatter’ ourselves, the less we feel that tormenting and demeaning sense of condemnation that plagues the rebellious human spirit.

Daniel 5:23

You [do] not honour the God who holds in His hand your life and all your ways.

Jeremiah 5:21–24

“Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: Should you not fear Me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in My presence? ... But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God’.”

Job 21:14-15

They say to God, "Leave us alone! We have no desire to know Your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should [worship and] serve Him? What would we gain by praying to Him?"

Proverbs 1:29

They hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.

Obadiah 1:3

[The Sovereign LORD says,] “The pride of your heart has deceived you”.

Isaiah 29:16

You turn things upside down, as if the Potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the One who formed it, "You did not make me"? Can the pot say to the Potter, "You know nothing"?

Romans 9:20

Who are you, a mere human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the One who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”

Psalms 28:5

They show no regard for the works of the LORD and what His hands have done.

Jeremiah 44:10

They have not humbled themselves or shown reverence.

Exodus 10:3

[The LORD said,] "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?"

Such is self-exalting humankind’s attitude of *hostile disregard* towards the Holy One.

This first expression of fallen-human hostility towards God can also take the shape of a dark and foreboding fear—one that sees Him merely as a Being to be dreaded and fled from. That He should be worshipped and adored by His creatures is considered unthinkable. It is asserted that such an awful and terrible Being is, surely, to be *disregarded* as a possible source of personal delight. He dare not claim to be a worthy object of human pleasure!

How different this is to the true fear of the LORD: a glorious fear, expressed in a joyous spirit of reverent awe, exalting in the greatness and excellence of the divine perfections—and naturally leading to a joyous spirit of child-like trust, grateful affection and wholehearted obedience. Instead of being fled *from*, He is fled *to*. Rather than being sullenly ignored, He is irresistibly pursued!

Those who have a true and noble fear of the Holy One are not without clear-sighted understanding of the fact that—in the face of all wickedness and rebellion—He is ‘a consuming fire’ (Deuteronomy 4:24). But although soberly aware of His chastening hand upon the wilfully disobedient, they have only one real dread: that of bringing Him grief and displeasure—by sinning against the absolute loveliness and perfection of His Being.

Yes, by comparison, a guiltily disturbed humanity’s attitude of hostile disregard towards its Maker is, certainly, a sad and perverse reality.

continually rejecting His presence, secondly, with a dark attitude of:

- unbelief

('His word is nothing to me')

In the light of all that God has made known to us of Himself—the awesome revelation of His unsearchable greatness—*trusting* Him should, indeed, be a very *natural* thing to do. To have faith in a ‘faithful Creator’ is the most *normal* response any human creature could make. It is only our proud, rebellious, God-refusing nature that makes it a difficult and distasteful thing.

Those who live in unbelief, have to fight every day to keep on rejecting the truth that comes. Some atheistic groups find themselves needing to meet regularly to encourage one another in their unbelieving stand—their faith of unbelief! The sinful human heart is always looking for ‘believable reasons’ why it should not believe in ‘the God who is’.

the truth is there for all to know

The fact is that every person is constantly receiving revelation of God. Apart from 'special revelation'—for example, in the Scriptures—there is the ever-present operation of 'general revelation' through the creation.

Our Father-Creator-King is, all the time, making Himself known in a way that can be understood. The problem is that when we are guilty and uneasy before Him—with a hostile attitude—every revelation is rejected. Why would any person want to know the truth that exposes the dreaded reality of their condemnation?

To live in God's world, in His presence, is to be exposed daily, to the wonder of who He is and what He does—through the 'general revelation' that is before all people, at all times and in all places.

Psalm 19:1–4

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 97:6

The heavens proclaim His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory.

Psalm 65:8

[LORD], the earth is filled with awe at Your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, You call forth songs of joy.

Isaiah 6:3

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.

Psalm 33:5

The earth is full of His unfailing love.

Job 36:25

All human beings have seen [His work].

Romans 1:19–20

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Acts 14:17

He has not left Himself without testimony.

The whole of the creation provides powerful testimony to who God is and what He does. It has the stamp of His nature upon it.

This, of course, doesn't mean that all we need to know of God can be seen from what He has made. We need 'special revelation' to know and relate to Him truly. But the creation is, nevertheless, a ceaseless witness to Him, before the eyes of all people, at all times. It is such that it should result in a relentless seeking after Him—until the deepest needs of heart, mind and conscience are fully met in His presence.

It is not only the creation itself that constantly calls us to seek after the Creator. Our historical and geographical situations have also been structured to draw each of our hearts towards Him.

Acts 17:26–28

From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being.

Psalm 14:1 / 53:1

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

Job 33:14

God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it.

unbelief is a problem of the heart, rather than the mind

Many speak of 'intellectual problems' keeping them from seeking a relationship with God. There may at times need to be a clarification of ideas—particularly where wrong impressions and concepts have been communicated. But what keeps us from knowing God is not problems of the mind, but hardness of heart. Sinful human beings have—of themselves—an inbuilt resistance to the truth.

Romans 1:18

[The godless and unrighteous] suppress the truth by their [unrighteousness].

Ezekiel 12:2

They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.

Jeremiah 6:10b

Their ears are closed so that they cannot hear.

Isaiah 30:11

[They say], “Stop confronting us with the Holy One.”

All who resist the revelation of the truth that comes to them, should hear this urgent appeal:

Hebrews 3:12

“See to it ... that none of you has [an evil], unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God.”

In our sinfulness we can deceive ourselves into thinking that without God’s word, we are able to be and do all that is needed for human fulfilment.

We may proudly exalt our own word above His—even imagining it to have some kind of power, of itself, to create desired outcomes. This is the height of fallen-human audacity and foolishness! We will see as the series progresses that there *is* a power behind such talk—but it is not a power that we should want to have any part in. Ultimately, it is always ruinous.

Unbelief is one of the great evils of our rebellious condition. There is nothing *noble* about doubting our Creator. Neither is there any nobility in the personal anxiety and desperation—or the shallow, puffed up self-confidence—that unbelief consistently produces!

How we all long for the joy, peace and freedom of spirit that righteousness brings. How we need to be restored to the deep simplicity of child-like trust in our Father-Creator-King, in the midst of the many complexities of life. But this is the heritage that rebels refuse.

Many appeal to the inconsistencies of those who profess to know God, as the *reason why* they cannot believe. But while it is tragic that ‘believers’ should fail so dreadfully in their calling, this does not in any way *excuse* anyone from responding to the revelation of God—through both His creation and divine word. The link between bitterness towards others and inability to know the truth, will be explored in later studies.

continually rejecting His presence, thirdly, with a dark attitude of:

- ingratitude

(‘He has done nothing for me’)

The revelation of God’s love in goodness, mercy and grace towards us, should bring a full and joyous response of *grateful affection*. But again, the disturbed conscience—producing hardness of heart—causes us to choose *not* to see the ceaseless actions of His love, but rather, to maintain an attitude of cold indifference and ingratitude.

Grateful affection towards God should be one of the most natural and prevalent of all human emotions. But tragically, it is usually the most rare.

What an incredible situation this is. Human creatures standing in the presence of the One who, Himself, ‘gives all people life and breath and everything else’, and saying, “What’s He done for me?” Such wilful blindness and ingratitude is not only foolish—it is also unspeakably wrong!

dumb in the face of His goodness

We can be so perceptive and brightly responsive in regard to all manner of things—*except* when it comes to recognizing God’s worthiness to be thanked and adored for His goodness!

Romans 1:21

Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him.

Psalms 107:42

The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.

Nehemiah 9:35

Even while they were ... enjoying [His] great goodness to them ... they did not [worship and] serve Him.

Isaiah 5:11–12

—lots of celebration, but no God-ward thanksgiving

They have [much music] at their banquets ... and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of His hands.

Human rebels live every moment within their Creator's amazing world as wholly dependent creatures, constantly enjoying His goodness—yet wilfully denying the honour and thanksgiving that is due to Him!

grumbling

We are not only silent in the face of His goodness, but at times also extremely *verbal* in our ingratitude. So easily we find ourselves grumbling and complaining about the circumstances of our lives—refusing to acknowledge the goodness of a sovereign Father in the midst of them.

Psalms 106:25

They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.

It's in our 'tents'—in our homes—that we do a lot of grumbling, is it not?

Job 38:2

—when it's 'all about us' in the midst of our difficulties

[The LORD said:] Who is this that obscures My plans with words without knowledge?

Numbers 11:20

You have rejected the LORD ... and have [rebelliously] wailed [in His presence].

Numbers 14:27

—the LORD'S patience tested in the face of ingratitude

How long will this wicked community grumble against Me?

A complaining spirit in the presence of the Faithful One is, truly, a mark of personal wickedness.

hostile accusation

This verbal ingratitude, so often, also has a dark tone of hostility attached to it.

Malachi 2:17

You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied Him?" you ask. By saying ... "Where is the God of justice?"

Job 34:37

[The wicked multiply their] words against God.

Malachi 3:13

"You have spoken arrogantly against Me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 2:29

"Why do you bring charges against Me?" ... declares the LORD.

Job 40:8

[The LORD said:] "Would you condemn Me to justify yourself?"

Rather than walk with God, constantly giving thanks to Him for the endless expressions of His love around us and towards us, we instead, find ourselves accusing Him of unfaithfulness: "We are not the unfaithful ones, *He* is!"

the tragic fickleness of sinful-human love for God

The hostility towards God that resides within the fallen human heart is never far from expression. It is such that—left to oneself—any *grateful affection* evoked towards Him is, at best, vacillating and short lived.

Hosea 6:4

Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.

Even those of us who—by the Father's mercy and grace—have responded wholeheartedly to His love, find ourselves so quickly giving way to rejection of His presence, and shameful ingratitude.

continually rejecting His presence, fourthly, with a dark attitude of:

- defiance

('His way & will means nothing to me')

Although God's good purposes and commands are always for our ultimate benefit and pleasure, the rebellious race hates to be subject to them. A muddled conscience causes the heart to harden against any possibility of obedience.

Because of guilt-charged hostility, the fallen mind views the way of God with suspicion. The will of human beings becomes the only thing of any value. The will of God is constantly resisted and His word ignored.

How tragic it is, that the beautiful nature of our Maker's authority—His *authoring* of what is functional and excellent on our behalf—is no longer embraced with great delight.

The Bible refers to sinful people as 'sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2). That is, those whose natural tendency is to disobey. The enormous energy of the human soul is set against God, His calling and His commandments. Some may be outwardly 'compliant', but all are—of themselves—inwardly 'defiant', and intent on pursuing their own purpose, one way or another.

Jeremiah 35:14

[The LORD says,] "I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed Me."

Psalms 50:17

"You hate My instruction and cast My words behind you."

Isaiah 65:2–3

"All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke Me to My very face."

Psalms 36:4

They commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong.

Isaiah 5:24

They have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One.

Isaiah 30:9

These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD'S instruction.

How awful, that God's dearly loved children, creatures and servants should *refuse* to exalt in His good and life-giving teaching. Unyielding resistance to His word, will, and way tragically places human beings outside the realm of the truth—and the blessedness it brings.

1 John 2:4

Those who say, "I know Him," but do not do what He commands are liars, and the truth is not in them.

The first section of this study has certainly brought a *solemn* revelation. We have seen the horrible hostility that is constantly directed towards the One who made us. In the light of this, HOW CLEAR AND URGENT IS OUR NEED FOR THE *GLAD* REVELATION OF OUR CREATOR'S SAVING AND RESTORING GRACE!!!

The second section of this present study will now continue to tell the tragic tale of our human-fallenness—declaring not only rebellious humankind's *alienation* from its Maker, but also its *inability* to reflect His glory.

2) DISHONOURING TO GOD

Study 2 showed that, made in God's likeness, we have been called to reflect His divine glory through our humanity and, in so doing, *glorify* Him. Tragically—apart from joyous, intimate fellowship with the Holy One—the exact opposite is the case. He is continually *dishonoured!*

Romans 2:24

God's name is blasphemed ... because of you.

Ezekiel 36:23

[The LORD says,] "The holiness of My great name ... has been profaned among the nations."

For God's name to be 'blasphemed' and 'profaned' means that it has come to be regarded as a common thing, unworthy of awe-filled esteem.

dishonoured through our continual:

* ***mis-representation of Him***

According to God's holy purpose, to observe human beings in action would be to see exactly what He is *like*—each of us, a glorious reflection of who He is and what He does.

The tragedy of our fallen situation as rebellious children, creatures and servants, is that instead of being glorious reflections of our Father, Creator and King, we become glory-less *mis-representations* of Him. Instead of telling the truth about Him through our humanity, we in fact, tell lies!

Romans 3:23

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Fallen humanity has now clearly lost the *moral capacity* to live as the image and likeness of its Maker.

Romans 3:9–18

[All are] under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Deuteronomy 32:5

They are corrupt ... and not His children; to their shame they are ... warped and crooked.

Romans 1:29

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.

Titus 3:3

We too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Such a terrible misrepresentation of the Holy One is almost too awful to contemplate! Yet now, we must look at the details of how this human catastrophe is expressed.

God is continually dishonoured firstly,
through the intrusion into our humanity of:

- **moral impurity**

(in our inner being: a polluted spring of idolatrous
passion for sensory experience, material things
& personal status—an all-pervasive inner-corruption)

In the absence of true worship, our hearts are full of all kinds of *idolatrous passions*—desiring to *get* from the *creation* what we have refused to *receive* from the *Creator*.

Idolatry is giving ultimate worth to—and seeking to gain life from—something other than God Himself. We will see that this always leads to guilt and increasing frustration—and so, increased *intensity* and *impurity* in desire and action.

Personal impurity has—above all else—to do with idolatrous desire. Outward acts of impurity are simply the fruit of this.

1 John 2:16 (RSV) speaks of three things which characterize the impure drive of the fallen human heart:

- *the lust of the flesh*

a wrong desire for *sensory experience*—‘what I want to *do*’

(godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through the *stimulation* of our senses—what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell)

- *the lust of the eyes*

a wrong desire for *material things*—‘what I want to *have*’

(godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through *possession* of things that catch our eye—so as to gain the sense of identity, security and enlivenment that these promise)

- *the pride of life*

a wrong desire for *personal status*—‘what I want to *be*’

(godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through personal *elevation*—gaining the affirmation, recognition and admiration of others)

It will be clear as the series progresses that an enjoyment of sensory *experience*, material *things* and personal *status* is entirely legitimate. The Father loves to give these to His children. It is only when they are sought apart from joyous fellowship with Him, and desire for Him to be honoured, that they express moral impurity. Then, desire for them becomes within us ‘a polluted spring of idolatrous passion’.

Idolatrous passions are *immediately* present whenever our hearts are hardened towards God and fellowship with Him is lost. They are a reflexive, desperate attempt to *gain life* from people, situations and things—having refused it from the Father, who is the only source of true human fullness.

These desires are at the heart of all fallen human depravity. They declare the tragic *absence* of a life-giving, ‘inner spring of great delight’ in God, and the dark *presence* of an ugly ‘inner thrust of hostility’ towards Him.

Fallen society generally insists that people are basically good. But the word of God declares that we, in our present state, are, of ourselves, basically *corrupt*—at the deepest level of our being. This is indeed, an *all-pervasive* condition, affecting every area of human personality.

fallen-human corruption

Often we hear it said, “Oh, but I have a good heart.” But no—that’s the worst part of us!

Genesis 8:21

—*God’s evaluation of the entire fallen human race*

Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

Psalms 51:5

I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Ecclesiastes 7:29

This only have I found: God made human beings upright [and uncomplicated], but people have gone in search of many schemes [and devices].

Proverbs 14:2

Whoever fears the LORD walks uprightly, but those who despise Him are devious in their ways.

Mark 7:21–22

[Jesus said,] ‘From within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.’

Colossians 3:5

[All this] belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed [or covetousness], which is idolatry.

Romans 7:8, 18 [NASB]

—*the experience of the apostle Paul*

[Sin] produced in me [greedy desire] of every kind. ... I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my [sinful nature].

Mark 10:18

[Jesus said,] ‘No one is good but God.’

Our hearts are, indeed, morally corrupt and sinful, and—left to ourselves—we will desperately seek after anything, except intimacy with our Maker and the honour of His name.

a persistent given-ness to impurity

Idolatrous desire—inflamed by guilt, and the sense of personal deadness this brings—offers a *false promise of life*. But because idolatry never satisfies, it locks us into an endless—and constantly frustrated—pursuit of the life we were created to enjoy.

Ephesians 4:19

They have given themselves over to ... every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Isaiah 1:2, 4

They have rebelled against Me ... a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.

Daniel 12:10

The wicked will continue to be wicked.

Ecclesiastes 9:3

—*the irrational nature of our passions*

The hearts of people ... are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live.

The desperate drive within us to fulfil our God-refusing passions is very powerful. We find ourselves endlessly seeking to *stimulate* sensory experience, *possess* material things and *elevate* our personal status. All this amounts to a kind of 'passion-madness'.

a foreign fountain

1 John 2:16 (NKJV)

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, [are] not of the Father.

The polluted spring of idolatrous passion in the fallen human heart is a horrible—and undeniable—reality. Such inner corruption is foreign to the Father and greatly offensive to Him.

God is continually dishonoured secondly,
through the intrusion into our humanity of:

- non truth

(in our thinking: a view of God, humanity & the
creation which best promises to fulfil our passions)

Earlier in this study we saw that at the Fall, the serpent tempted the first couple to eat of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Refuting the Creator's word it said, "You will not certainly die! For God knows that the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4–5). But they were *already like God!* The false promise being made was, in fact, that they would be *as God*—and so able, of themselves, to say what is good and evil.

We saw that when they gave in to the serpent's temptation and deceit, they died—died to *God*. At that time their eyes were opened to see themselves, one another, the situations of life and things around them, apart from Him.

Of course, the serpent's promise of a new moral and mental capacity never came to pass. Dead to God, fallen humankind was then, and still is, in reality, unable to truly discern between good and evil. What we are sure is good, is often evil in God's sight; and what we are sure is evil, is often good in His sight.

Humanity has not lost its ability to reason, but it *has* lost its ability to reason in accordance with the truth. In guilt, and out of fellowship with our Maker, OUR THINKING IS NOW SHAPED BY WHAT OUR IDOLATROUS PASSIONS DEMAND!!!

All who reject the revelation of God's truth, exercising their mind apart from fellowship with Him, form **a false view of God**—a wrong *theology*. Human beings are incurably religious. Their devised systems of faith are often brilliant. But their view of God is always false and human-centred—certainly not an understanding of 'the God Who is'. The religions of the world fall far short of proclaiming the true glory and wonder of His nature and Being.

All who reject the revelation of God's truth, exercising their mind apart from fellowship with Him, form **a false view of humanity**—a wrong *anthropology*. Again, there is no lack of brilliant thinking in this area. Humankind cannot rest from reflecting upon its own nature, vocation and destiny. But what is embraced is, in the end, always false.

Social sciences—such as psychology, sociology and anthropology—examine the 'facts' of the fallen human situation, and observe certain things that are 'true'. But these disciplines, themselves, can never arrive at *the truth*, that is, what we *are by nature*—what we have been *created and called* to be.

All who reject the revelation of God's truth, exercising their mind apart from fellowship with Him, form **a false view of the world, or the creation**—a wrong *cosmology*. Through endless research and speculation, views of the origin, nature, purpose and goal of the creation are set forth—but a true cosmology is never gained. Such understanding can only be received from above.

fallen-human thinking & law

Very much related to how fallen-ness affects the way we think, is the matter of *law*. In Study 1 it was seen that there is the 'law' or 'way' of God—the way of His own nature as Father, Creator and King. Then in Study 2 it was shown that we—as His image—are called to operate according to the law, or way, of *our* own nature, as His children, creatures and servants.

But as this present study is showing, we have rejected His law, and having done that, are driven—as those created to live by law—to develop our *own*.

So, that's just what we do—creating *do's* and *don'ts* that will enable us to live together as best we can, apart from our Maker. Every culture has its list. Although we hate the law of God, we somehow can't keep ourselves from being 'legal'. Some people claim to be without any law—but, as will be seen in our next study, they never, actually, are.

law & culture

This process of developing law is part of the way that various *cultures* (and sub-cultures) are formed. A group of people become aware of what their most important, or 'core', value is—that is, what will best promote their common experience of human freedom and fullness.

Then that group finds itself structuring a range of laws to fulfil this core value. These are built around three foundational areas of human living which, a future study will show, were established by the Creator at the beginning: *vocational activity, marriage and family life, and rest and recreation*.

We could say that the 'core value' of any group of people is their *cultus*. That is, the thing which is at the heart of their *common worship*—what they give ultimate worth (or 'worth-ship') to, for gaining life (freedom of spirit, personhood, circumstantial security, human fulfilment and, usually, some kind of eternal hope). As we've seen, apart from God's grace, and fellowship with Him, this is always *idolatrous*. The 'laws' that are constructed are the *code* (the code of conduct) that keeps the cultus in place—and secures what it promises.

Culture then, simply put, is all about these two things: cultus and code. Every culture is governed by both of them. Before the Fall of humankind, the cultus was of course, *true worship*, and the code was *God's good, revealed way of living*—that flowed from fellowship with Him.

It doesn't take much observation of humanity, to see that this matter of law is at the heart of every cultural and societal situation. Even if the law is that you must not have any law!

fallen-human thinking & the conscience

One of the most debilitating effects of corruption in the heart and the mind is its impact upon the *conscience*.

Titus 1:15

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

More will be said about this matter of the conscience in other studies. But it is most relevant here, on the subject of fallen human thinking.

Already we've seen how we develop our own laws to enable us to live as well as possible apart from God. But, as our next study will show, we construct such laws *also* in order to calm the conscience—as it makes its unyielding demands upon us.

Generally, *moral codes* are formed that best suit our fallen *moral capacity*. In this way the conscience is 're-educated' to accept behaviour that is reasonably attainable by us. As has been said, the formation of moral codes is common to all cultures around the world—and relates to the three areas of vocational activity, marriage and family life, and rest and recreation.

This then, is how our conscience becomes corrupted. Instead of being informed by God's law, it is governed by fallen-human law. The result is that it then not only produces *true* guilt in relation to personal unrighteousness, but also—educated by wrong thinking—does two things: it makes the conscience sensitive where it need *not* be, and insensitive where it should *rightly* be disturbed.¹

¹ Our next study will show that no matter how much the conscience is 're-educated' at a conscious level, what is written on the heart by *creation*, still seriously impacts it—at least, at a *sub-conscious* level.

the tragic ignorance that fallen human thinking brings

The human mind was created to share, every moment, in the *wisdom* of its Creator, but is *now* arrogantly pursuing its own. However, what is often brilliantly conceived—and very true—is never the truth.

Ecclesiastes 7:23

—an open-hearted assessment of attempted ‘self-wisdom’

I said, “I am determined to be wise”—but this was beyond me.

Daniel 12:4, 10

Many will go here and there to increase knowledge ... [but] none of the wicked will understand.

Those who wickedly refuse to worship their Creator will, often, cover a lot of ground in pursuit of knowledge that may improve their quality of life. But the kind of wisdom really needed, will remain unknown.

In Study 1 we saw from Ecclesiastes 3:11, that “people cannot [search out] what God has done from beginning to end.” But, nevertheless, we try!

The proud, fallen human spirit is relentless in its quest for a self-attained wisdom. The result, however, is only darkness and delusion. Thinking driven by hostility towards the Creator—and shaped by the demands of godless and idolatrous passion—can never arrive at the life-giving wisdom for which we were made.

Romans 1:21–22

[Their] thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.

To refuse the knowledge of God is the most foolish thing a person can do. The result is always a way of thinking that can never bring true human freedom and fullness.

Jeremiah 4:22

My people are fools; they do not know Me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding.

Isaiah 44:9, 18–20

They are ignorant, to their own shame ... Their minds are closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think ... [They] feed on ashes.

2 Timothy 4:3

The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

There will always be the emergence of those who claim to have ‘the truth you’ve been waiting for!’ And those who are seeking a ‘truth’ that will godlessly fulfil their passions will hear them eagerly. Sadly, in such scrambling for ‘another word’, the sound, life-giving wisdom of God is set aside.

Jeremiah 14:14

[The LORD says,] “I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are [speaking] to you ... the delusions of their own minds.”

Heralds of a ‘false word’ are usually self-willed, self-sent individuals, who speak powerfully and with forceful authority. But their message is delusional. It has nothing to do with reality. The truth of God, humanity and the creation is far from their understanding.

Jeremiah 23:36

Everyone’s own word becomes a message from God. And so you distort the words of the Living God, the LORD Almighty.

Many falsely claim to speak in God’s name. They, of course, often use ‘God-talk’—the vocabulary of the Bible—to give the impression that their message is from Him. But what they declare is not the Creator’s powerful, liberating word.

Even those who don’t claim to speak in God’s name, often make use of certain biblical concepts and ideas. They ‘steal the word’, then turn their backs on the One who gave it, speaking it as if it were their *own*—and reshaping it to fit their personal, God-refusing agendas. This happens much more than is often realized.

In our day, most of the highest ideals of godless society have, in fact, been stolen from the Bible. These are things that would not be present apart from biblical revelation—and usually absent from societies not acquainted with it.²

In our fallen-ness we tend to think that we, of ourselves, are ‘the fountain of all wisdom’—an arrogant assertion of our having no need for ‘the only wise God’ (Romans 16:27). How very wrong and foolish this is!

Proverbs 15:26

The LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked.

And, yes, how right that He does! Such thoughts are the wilful expression of fallen-human pride. Those who think them not only bring holy grief and displeasure to God, they also experience the impact of their foolishness within themselves.

Isaiah 2:6

They are full of superstitions.

The more that faith in the True and Living God is rejected, the more fallen human creatures tend to embrace other completely *irrational* ideas. In setting aside the truth, we often open ourselves to belief in the magical effects of all kinds of actions or rituals. This is so demeaning to those who are the image of God!

Ephesians 4:18

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

The process is clear. A heart hardened by guilt, brings ignorance of the truth that is rejected. This then brings the tragedy of darkened understanding and separation from the life of God. The *restlessly desperate* action produced by such a situation is described in this next section.

God is continually dishonoured thirdly,
through the intrusion into our humanity of:

- idolatry & self-service

(in our relationships: striving to *get* from the created
what we have refused to *receive* from the Creator)

With a polluted spring of idolatrous passion in our inner being and non-truth in our thinking, the obvious result is an outworking of these in our relationships.

Created in the image of God, human beings are deeply relational creatures—needing to both receive and express love. Basically, there are only two kinds of love possible as we relate to others:

Firstly, there is **divine love**, which is ‘agape’ (the key New Testament Greek word for God’s love). This is the love that flows out of a wellspring of true worship and moral purity, and is informed by life-giving wisdom from above.

The result is selfless activity on behalf of others—in order that they may be blessed in the truth and, so, fulfil their human calling for the pleasure, glory and praise of God. Such a love—we will see—is what took the Eternal Son of God to the Cross.

Secondly, there is **fallen-human love**. This love flows out of impure, idolatrous desire and untrue thinking, and results in idolatrous and self-serving / human-centred activity towards others.

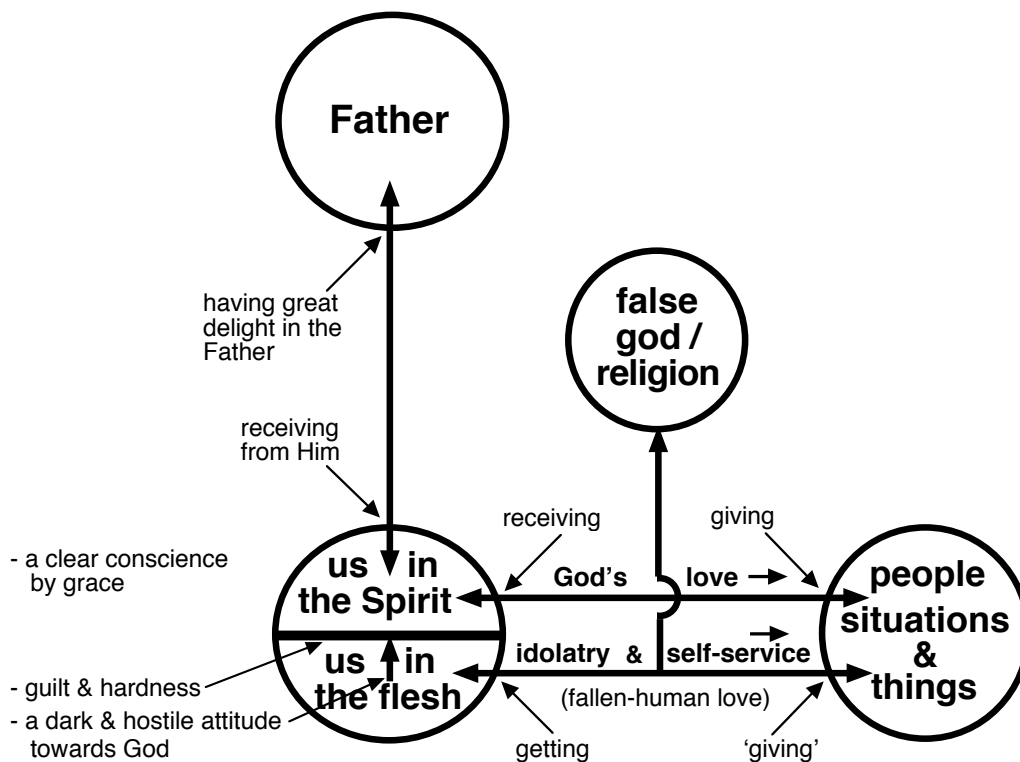
It will *give* generously of time, energy and material resources, but only to *get*—that is, to achieve its own God-refusing goal, of self-validation etc. Sometimes its action is openly self-indulgent, other times extremely self-sacrificial, doing incredibly noble things.

It may be stirred by deep and tender feeling for others, with the intention that they find comfort and ‘happiness’. It may even *die* for the object of its passion! But all this is never toward the end that others fulfil their true human calling, for the pleasure, glory and praise of God. It is *creature* rather than *Creator* centred.

Whatever does not flow out of *delight* in God’s holy love and *desire* for His glory is, fallen-human love—self-serving, seeking *human* rather than *divine* praise. Although passionate and relationally

² There are, of course, some common moral values present in almost all societies, whether they are exposed to biblical revelation or not. These have to do with the law of God written on every human heart, by creation.

intense, such love will never result in the freedom and fullness for which we were created. Above all, it is greatly offensive to the One who made us!



The diagram above illustrates the vast difference between divine and fallen-human love. It refers to terms like 'by the Spirit' and 'by the flesh', which will be explained later in the series. Just now, we need only to understand that life 'by the Spirit' is living in fellowship with God and being *given to* His will, and life 'by the flesh' is living *out of* fellowship with Him and being *against* His will.

Above the line, in the bottom-left circle, is 'us by the Spirit'. Here, having a clear conscience by God's grace, our delight is in Him. Rejoicing in His unfailing love, we are able to then reflect that love in our relationships with other *people*, in the context of life's various *situations* and the *things* around us. This is the horizontal out-flowing of what is enjoyed on the vertical. It is life lived 'by, or according to, the Spirit'.

Below the line, in the bottom left circle, it is a much different thing. The thick horizontal line indicates a barrier of guilt, which prevents fellowship with the Father. This is the situation in which a person who doesn't know God—and is dead to Him—lives every moment of their life. We will see in future studies that they are those who are '*in the flesh*'—who do not have God's Spirit dwelling in them. Such a person's heart is always hard towards God because of guilt before Him, and they *never* have true fellowship with Him. All who are in such a tragic life-long state are in urgent need of receiving God's great grace—having their sins forgiven and made alive to Him forever!

A person who does know God, and has been made alive to Him by His mercy, always—as will be seen later—has the indwelling presence of the Spirit. But also for them, wherever there is unresolved guilt—when the liberating gift of forgiveness is ignored—their heart defensively hardens towards God, His indwelling Spirit is resisted, and fellowship with Him lost. So then, although not one who is '*in the flesh*', they live as though they were! Instead of living 'by the Spirit' ('according to the Spirit'), they needlessly live 'by the flesh' ('according to the flesh'). Again as we'll see later, in such a state, they greatly feel the impact of grieving the Holy Spirit within them—finding themselves under God's chastening hand, until they respond again to His love and relate truly to Him.

So wherever there is unresolved guilt—whether alive to God or still dead to Him—life is lived 'by the flesh'. The *vertical* relationship of joy in God is refused, and we are pressed to find life merely on the *horizontal*. The result is an idolatrous looking to the creation—people, situations and things—for emotional satisfaction and fulfilment.

Idolatry is always very direct and intense. Our hope of gaining *life* is at stake! We are, in fact, trying to find an object—or objects—of affection and devotion worthy of the investment of our energies. All this, or course, is to gain the sense of personal fullness for which we were created.

Unfortunately, when our joy in the grace and presence of the Father is lost, so too is our capacity to relate truly to other people, situations and things. These relationships, being idolatrous and self-serving, have a principle of *frustration* built into them. They promise much, but in reality, deliver much less.

Such relating to others is also usually *contractual*, with various agendas and conditions attached. In it, as said before, there is much 'giving' in order to *get*. Future studies will show why such contractual relationships fall so far short of what our Creator intended for His image.

What must be understood, is that THE PERSONAL FULLNESS FOR WHICH WE WERE *CREATED* IS FOUND, PRIMARILY, IN OUR ENJOYMENT OF THE *CREATOR* HIMSELF!!! The alternative is a desperate—and slavish—expending of our energies and affections in all kinds of directions, in order to *get* from around about us, what has been *refused* from above.

The diagram also shows the intrusion of *another* possible 'vertical' object of worship: a 'false god', or 'false religion'. Devotion to such a deity (god), or spiritual belief-system, is introduced to assist in our pursuit of *life* from people, situations and things—and of course, usually, to also provide some hope of dealing with the conscience, enhancing our sense of personal identity, warding off a sense of judgment within the circumstances of life, and securing hope beyond the grave.

Above the line, our delight is never *directly* in the creation, but in *the Father* on account it. Life is *found* vertically in fellowship with Him and *expressed* horizontally towards other people, in the context of life's situations and the things around us. When we *do receive* from the creation, our joy is primarily in the Father, on account of the pleasure this brings. Everything, then, is enjoyed in His presence!

Below the line, life is sought completely on the horizontal. All the energy of the human soul is directed primarily towards the creation, rather than the Creator. In the light of our high and holy calling, how awful this is!

the horrible matter of idolatry

Idolatry has intruded into every aspect of human history since the Fall. As has already been indicated, human beings don't choose *whether* they will worship, but *what* they will worship. Whatever we *directly* look to for emotional satisfaction, or personal and circumstantial security, is the object of our worship. We are all giving direct 'worth-ship' to *something* all the time! It will be either to the Creator or the creation.

Romans 1:25

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.

Earlier, under the heading of 'unbelief', we saw from Romans 1:18 that the godless and unrighteous *suppress* the truth. Now, we are told that the truth is also *exchanged* for a lie. And, as with all lies, this has to do with false worship.

Exodus 32:8

—*what so frequently happens, even among those who love God*

They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol.

Ezekiel 14:3

[They] have set up idols in their hearts.

Ezekiel 20:16

Their hearts were devoted to their idols.

The outcome of idolatry is that all who look to such false objects of worship—which promise human freedom and fullness—actually become slaves to them.

Galatians 4:8

Formerly when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who are by nature not gods.

Every idol brings with it its own culture—as we've seen, both a cultus and a code. Each cultus has its own 'false promise of life', which requires a legal framework to secure its benefits. But the law of the idol—that demands obedience—is against the way of our Maker, resulting in personal enslavement and the dark and deadening fruits of unrighteousness.

fallen-human love—a sad reality

Human relationships are so important to us all. They are central to, virtually, all that we do in life. But—in rebellion—the love expressed in these falls so far short of the divine love we were created to know and reflect.

Proverbs 20:6

Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?

This is not to say that there may not be a high degree of 'faithfulness' in godless relationships. It is the *nature* of that faithfulness that is the issue. There is a relational faithfulness that is worked out in the midst of *unfaithfulness* to the Faithful One! True relational faithfulness, flows only from *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with Him.

Philippians 2:20–21

—*an unhappy reality, even in a community that professed to know God*

I have [only one] who will show a genuine interest in your welfare ... Everyone looks out for their own interests.

Proverbs 30:15

—*the endlessly demanding action of 'leech love'*

The leech has two daughters, 'Give! Give!' they cry.

Leech love is that expression of fallen-human relationships that is always attempting to 'suck life' out of others. If the desired result isn't attained, this kind of love just sucks harder! If, in the end, the benefit still can't be gained, it simply attaches itself to another 'prospect'. The term 'leech love' is not a very flattering one; but what it describes is, unfortunately, so often the way of mere, horizontal living.

1 Corinthians 1:11

—*the turbulent impact of frustrated 'fallen-human love'*

There are quarrels among you.

James 4:1

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

Jude 16

—*the low level to which we may descend in social conversation*

[They] are grumblers and faultfinders: they follow their own [strong passions]; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

Our relationships can take such a distorted shape when we are seeking to gain life directly from what is created, rather than from our dear Creator. How we need to be free from the *self-absorbed, human-centred desperation* that alienation from Him brings into our lives!

It is clear then, from what has been seen in this second section, that *wrong* desire produces *wrong* thinking, which both, in turn, produce a *wrong* relationship to people, situations and things. This is totally the opposite of what is *right*—the way of righteousness, true freedom and fullness.

no cause for cynicism

Although we have seen the totally unauthentic nature of fallen-human love, this—by no means—opens up the way for a cynical attitude towards those who operate in life out of fellowship with their Maker.

It is certainly fitting to be grieved by all that is done in self-exalting disregard for the Holy One. But to be scornfully critical of the, otherwise, noble actions of others is always completely out of place.

Everything that is done by those who reject the True and Living God is, indeed, *idolatrous*, and—in the sense we have been speaking of—*self-serving*. But in it all, every human being is, nevertheless, operating out of a powerful thrust for *relational wholeness*—one, that is within them by creation. Every good deed and act of compassion, is a *proclamation* of this God-given drive within those who are 'creationally structured' to be His image.

The Creator is certainly dishonoured by all who refuse His call and misrepresent His glory. But He is also—in a very real sense—honoured, by those expressions of human nobility that can never be erased from His creatures, so magnificently created! Such things may be present, even in the midst of what is, otherwise, perverse.

It is very needful to speak of human depravity. But it is also most inappropriate, to be without deep appreciation of the innate glory of every human person. There is so much to be admired in each one.

God is continually dishonoured, fourthly,
through the intrusion into our humanity of:

- futility

(in the investment of our lives: nothing of eternal worth)

To be given to idolatrous and self-serving relationships—out of moral impurity and untrue thinking—is to be one who never participates in the good love-purposes of God. The result is a wasted life.

What a dreadful thing it would be to come to the end of our days, only to find that there has been *nothing* in them of eternal value! And yet, this will—tragically—be the situation for so many.

Proverbs 10:28

The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.

Isaiah 44:9

The things they treasure are worthless.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Habakkuk 2:13

Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labour is only fuel for the fire, that nations exhaust themselves for nothing?

1 Corinthians 13:3

—*the futility of godless self-sacrifice*

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not [divine] love, I gain nothing.

Matthew 5:46

—*the futility of a merely reciprocal love*

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

In Study 2 we saw that every deed done participating in God's love, is eternal. This is not the case with the exercise of 'fallen-human love'. Such relational action produces nothing of lasting significance. For, in spite of all the promise that God-refusing relationships bring, being acts of false worship—false *worth-ship*—they yield nothing of eternal worth!

Romans 3:12a

All have turned away [from God], they have together become worthless.

Not only are idolatrous *works* worthless, the idolaters *themselves* have become worthless—that is, in terms of reflecting the divine glory through their humanity.

Matthew 16:26

—*'getting' the lot, but losing ourselves*

What good will it be for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?

There is so much that may appear to be gained, or accomplished, through a godless, idolatrous and self-serving, human-centred life. But, in the end, it *all* will have been completely futile. Surely no person called to be the image of God should settle for such an outcome! We have been entrusted with just one life for all eternity. The only wise thing would be to invest it truly.

CONCLUSION

Human beings have been magnificently created in the likeness of God, to joyously live in His presence and be human reflections of His divine glory. They are to be those who enjoy the blessedness of both *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with Him, for His pleasure, glory and praise.

How tragic, that we should live in rebellion against our Maker, refusing what may be known and enjoyed. But, of course, it is not only that *we* miss out. THE NAME OF GOD IS DISHONOURED!!! This is great evil.

We were formed to be those who—like God—are *free* to do what is *right* in accordance with our created-nature. But—apart from God's grace—we *no longer* have the freedom within ourselves to act in this way. Now, we may only operate within the limited dimensions of a guilt-charged, rebellious, idolatrous and self-serving humanity. The *boundless* dimensions of *the righteousness of God* are no longer possible. True human freedom has given way to restless desperation, and servitude to strong and futile passions.

This study has certainly exposed the dark, loathsome and hopeless nature of our fallen-human situation. It may not have been easy to receive. No unwelcome diagnosis ever is.

But, as was said in the introduction, we may know that **ALTHOUGH THE TRAGEDY OF OUR FALLEN-NESS IS GREAT, THE HEALING GRACE OF GOD IS SO VERY MUCH GREATER!!!** Further on in the series, the nature of this restoring and transforming grace will be increasingly spelt out.

some comment on the first three studies

Studies 1–3 may have come as a *shocking* revelation, in terms of what they declare about the nature of both God and our humanity.

The *enormous dimensions* of the unsearchable greatness of God's 'perfections', 'the call' we've received, and 'the fall' we have incurred, are much more than we, of ourselves, would have imagined—more than we would have *allowed* ourselves to imagine!

It is, in fact, quite natural for one who is not truly assured of God's grace, to be disturbed by these things—reacting to them, resisting what they make known, and mentally doing battle with them. Or, to just pull down the shutters of the mind—vainly hoping to 'un-hear' what has been heard, and 'un-see' what has been seen.

In being exposed to the revelation of God's awesome glory in Study 1, some may have felt extremely uneasy—inwardly protesting: "That makes Him to be too great!" In this, the tendency is to want to *reduce* the unsearchable greatness of His 'perfections', in order to make Him more *manageable!* He might in that case serve our fallen-human agenda, and require less 'reverent awe'.

Then to see in Studies 2 & 3 the *magnitude* of both 'the calling' we have received and 'the fall' we have incurred, also, may bring a strong inner reaction—being too painful to face.

It may be felt that the call is too *demanding*, and the fall too *humiliating*. The tendency here is to want to reduce the *obligation* of the call to make it more *achievable*, and to reduce the *devastation* of the fall to make it more *respectable*.

In both seeking to reduce the obligation of the call and the devastation of the fall, there is an attempt to *minimize* our *sinfulness* and *maximize* our (self-attained) *righteousness*. The problem is that in doing so, we lock ourselves out of any possibility of truly enjoying GOD'S GREAT GRACE!

An understanding of these first three studies—and the one to follow—is indispensable to our being able to effectively grasp the further revelation to come, as we proceed through the series. One, who refuses to wholly embrace these realities, may only have—at best—a stilted experience of the grace that will be proclaimed. That would be a tragic outcome!

the next study

In Study 4 we will look further into the *dilemma* that our fallen-ness creates, and how we attempt to deal with it. Many 'lights will come on' as we understand more of why we think, feel and act the way we do.

Then, having dealt with what may have felt like the 'bad news' section of the series, the good news will begin in Study 5!